

*Córus Bésgnai. An Old Irish Law Tract on the Church and Society.* Edited by Liam Breatnach. Early Irish Law Series 7. Dublin: School of Celtic Studies. Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. 2017. ISBN 978-1-85500-232-6. € 40.-.<sup>1</sup>

Liam Breatnach's edition of the Old Irish law text *Córus Bésgnai*, a title that can be translated roughly as 'customary system', is the first new edition of this tract since it was printed in the *Ancient Laws of Ireland* in 1873. It forms the seventh volume of the School of Celtic's Law Texts series. *Córus Bésgnai* is a constituent part of the *Senchus Már*, the largest compilation of medieval Irish law. The core text is Old Irish, dating to c. 660–680 (Breatnach 2011: 19–42), accompanied by Old Irish glosses and Middle Irish commentary. *Córus Bésgnai* is about societal relations in general, with a special focus on the Church in medieval Irish society. The author of the tract derives the Church's special position from a more general consideration of the necessity of contractual relationships with reciprocal obligations in order for society to function.

This book has seen a long gestation period, and the scholarship of many years, in fact of many decades, is evident on every page. Professor Breatnach first read the text in a seminar in Trinity College Dublin in the 1980s. Later, it formed the basis for a seminar in the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies in 2003–2005. In addition to Prof. Breatnach's own scholarship, this book also bears witness to the high quality of the evaluation process that books that are published by the School of Celtic Studies undergo. On many occasions, the author refers to substantial feedback received through the review process (e.g., "A reader, however, pointed out that..." [79]; "A reader notes that... The same reader suggests that..." [83], etc.).<sup>2</sup>

To say that this is a meticulous edition of the text would be a gross understatement. The traditional way of doing editions of ancient or medieval texts was codified in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As paper was a valuable commodity at the time, the methods of editing were optimised to save as much space as possible in printing. For instance, the way critical apparatuses are laid out and how information about variant readings are presented in a most concise manner (not infrequently, however, leading to the omission of information that was deemed as irrelevant at the time, but turned out to be crucial only much later) is a direct consequence of the need to economise printing space. Since such economic factors are no longer (and not yet again) a concern in the process of editing, the condition of the text can now dictate the form of the edition, and not the other way around.

The present edition permits itself the luxury to be as circumstantial as possible. The text of *Córus Bésgnai* is given in a normalised Old Irish form first (ch. 2; 25–119), which is then followed by a

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<sup>2</sup> Since the input of the three referees (ix) is undeniably of considerable academic weight, I wonder if it would not be a service to the readers if a way could be found to acknowledge their contributions more directly. Where reviewers contribute fundamental insights, and when substantial sections of a publication, substantial either in extent or in importance, are based on their recommendations (without, in any way, detracting from the author's extraordinary accomplishment), the concept of the single-authored work reaches an aporia. Also, the abstract notion of the double-blind review process may work well in large disciplines such as history, medicine or physics. In a small field like Early Irish law it is practically impossible to execute in its intended sense. The pretence that perfect anonymity can be maintained, and that author and/or reviewer will not immediately be able to recognise each other's individual's styles or areas of work, is an institutional delusion, and a sort of comedy in which the prime actors participate voluntarily or involuntarily. The one party that is left in the dark in this 'partnership' is the reader. Most of the audience will not be able to connect a specific suggestion with a person, unless they are told by readers who are themselves active participants of the scholarship and who have no difficulty in divining the referees. After a generation, or so, however, the oral tradition of this knowledge will have disappeared, and later scholars will be left with a situation where – potentially important – insights can no longer be attributed to their original authors. I do not have an easy solution to this conundrum, but I believe that the present situation is unsatisfying.

separate edition of all four manuscript witnesses (chs. 3–6; 121–305).<sup>3</sup> Shorter extracts are printed in Appendix 2 (314–8). Each witness is awarded a diplomatic edition plus a translation and extensive notes specific to that witness. The normalised edition contains only the Old Irish text of *Córus Bésgnai* with a translation, while the editions of the individual witnesses are accompanied by a much more literal rendering of their text (3–4). The extensive commentary and glossing that accompanies the core text in the manuscripts is treated separately, and as evidence in its own right for the period in which they were composed, in the edition of the individual witnesses.

In the Introduction (1–23), B. describes the sources (manuscript copies and quotations in other texts), and sets out the principles of his edition and the structure of the text. The text preserves, as may be expected for a text going back to the late 7<sup>th</sup> century, a number of early linguistic features, but there is no MS support for such eye-catching archaisms as the Cambrai Homily’s *tu-thegot* (21–22). Probably half of the original text has been lost or is only extant in fragmentary quotes (16). The only manuscript which preserves a continuous text, MS A in the present edition (TCD MS H 2. 15A), has not been digitised until now, but the other three witnesses, which contain excerpts of the text, are available online.<sup>4</sup>

Although written in prose, “flashes of poetic language” (22) appear in the text. Beside the syntactic features that B. enumerates (preposed genitives, hendiadys, chiasmic ordering of elements), it is noteworthy that several other devices of rhetorical ornamentation are observable that operate on the sound level, such as rhyme (*sochor* : *dochor* §2; *báeth* : *gáeth* §4; *fri rubae* : *fri fubae* §23) and half-rhyme (*fri dúnad* : *fri slógad* §23). One could almost say that the boundaries between prose and poetry are fluid. In enumerations, rhythm is a factor. Elements are ordered according to Behagel’s Law of Increasing Members, e.g. they exhibit an increase of the number of words in the third phrase in *réchúaird duinebad, túaradliae cotho, fúaslucud cor mbel* (§11; cf. also §23); or increase in syllables in the third phrase in *fled déodae, fled dóendae, fled demundae* (§19).

The most striking ornamentation, however, is the omnipresence of alliteration. In the first 15 paragraphs, 82 alliterating pairs are found among 413 stressed words, i.e. almost 20% of the words participate in alliteration. This compares, for instance, with 17.9% in §§25–28 of *Críth Gablach* (Binchy 1979: 14–17). I have argued at a talk at the DIAS School of Celtic’s Tionól 2018 that in plain, natural prose, random alliteration between stressed words is expected to occur with a frequency of *c.* 10.2%, a prediction that is neatly borne out by a sample from the Milan Glosses (ff. 50–55), which has 10.1%, and by the tale *Scél asa-mberar combad hé Finn mac Cumail Mongán* (White 2006: 73–74) with 10.4%. On the other hand, the two poems of Blathmac (Barrett 2017: 198–228) have a frequency of 16.7%, which means that alliteration seems to be less common in this composition in a syllabic metre than it is in slightly older legal prose. In view of such numbers, the question arises whether there is a sharp distinction at all with regard to how alliteration is employed in prose and poetry, or if differences in its use and in its frequency rather run right across the genres. *Córus Bésgnai* contains also more complex types of alliteration than just alliterating pairs (‘narrow alliteration’), for instance tripled alliteration X Y X Y X Y, e.g. *córus flatho, córus fine, córus fêne* (§15), or the already quoted *fled déodae, fled dóendae, fled demundae* (§19), where the phrases are also held together by anaphora and homoioteleuton. The opening paragraph is framed by the pair C B: *córus bésgnai* in the onset, *cuir bél* in the coda, and *coraib bél* in the centre.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This arrangement compares very favourably to another recently published edition of an Old Irish legal tract, *Anfuijell* (Eska 2019). In the latter, no normalisation has been attempted for the Old Irish portion, even though the surviving fragments are very short and pose no major difficulties in understanding. Not even macrons, which do not tamper with the orthography as found in the manuscripts, have been introduced, neither into the Old Irish tract nor the Middle Irish commentary.

<sup>4</sup> MSS B (TCD MS H 3. 17) and C (MS TCD H 3. 18) can be viewed at <https://www.isos.dias.ie/>. MS D (MS Oxford Bodleian B 506) is available at <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/p/1021f6d4-8327-4021-909b-3e13b7b57315>.

<sup>5</sup> One should not overstretch the analysis, but there may be a more complex and more ordered principle underlying the alliterative arrangement of the initial paragraph, involving mirroring on an even higher level: **C B A C B B A C B**. Only the first three letters of the alphabet come into play here. The fourth letter D is only introduced in the second paragraph. Note here also the legal text *Anfuijell* whose beginning *Anfuijell breath brangaire catha* (Eska 2019: 66) has the structure **A B B C**.

Appendix 1 (306–13) discusses the orthography and the editorial principles (emendations, normalisation). This is followed by several short appendixes. The Indexes (329–335) contain not only, among other material, a list of words, proper names and passages from CIH discussed, but also a list of “Ghost-words in DIL” (332) whose only *raison d’être* had been the authority of the *Ancient Laws of Irish*. The Bibliography occupies pages 337–46.

This book is a major achievement, both in its philological expertise and practice, and in advancing the understanding of Early Irish law. In the following, besides making comments on specific points of the edition, I will also take the opportunity to entertain a few speculations and develop ideas that arise from the edition.

§1: Throughout the entire book, the author revisits critically the meanings of Old Irish words. He strives to define their semantics as closely as possible, not only on the basis of their attestations in the present text, but also with quotes from a large pool of other texts. This starts in the commentary to the very first paragraph where B. provides numerous additions to the definition of the term *bésгнаe* as currently found in DIL (eDIL).

Another case in point is the verb *do-essuirg* in §65. The meaning of this verb according to eDIL is ‘to save, rescue’, but in the present text, and in Meyer (1912: 315.21; verbal noun *tesurguin*), it occurs in contexts where it must mean ‘to take away’ – a major semantic difference at the first glance. Given the meaning of the simplex *orgaid*, namely ‘to kill, slay, despoil’, it would be advisable to retain a connection with the underlying violent semantics by setting up the primary meaning of the compound *do-essuirg* in the dictionary as ‘to wrest away’ (Germ. *entreissen*). From this, the most common meaning ‘to save’ can be easily derived via the idea of ‘wresting somebody away from harm, from a disease’ (especially if the latter is personified as a malevolent spirit or the like), while ‘taking away’ required by the context in *Córus Bésгнаi* is not more than a semantic shade of ‘wresting away’.

§4: In the relative clause *ara-finnathar a saithiud* ‘who is aware of his obviously unequal bargain’, the 3sg. deponent verbal form is an emendation for MS *arafindtar/arafinntar*, which looks like a passive verb. B.’s rationale for the emendation is that a passive verb would result in a “convoluted” expression ‘that one is aware of its obviously unequal bargain’ (50). Contrary to B.’s objection I do think that the MS reading, i.e. *ara-finntar*, can be retained and yield a satisfying meaning that can be rendered in a non-convoluted way. Several examples of *saithiud* show that it construes with a personal object. A variation on the maxim *ro-fitir cach sochonn a saithiud* ‘every intellectually capable person knows his overreaching (= knows when he is cheated)’ occurs in a variety of sources (see eDIL dil.ie/36069). The possessive *a* in this maxim clearly refers to the personal subject of this sentence, *sochonn*. In the clause in §4, it is therefore unlikely to refer to the contract, as in B.’s hypothetical translation of the clause, but it can be read more smoothly as a genitival relative clause with reference to *gáeth* ‘whose overreaching is known beforehand’. The function of the impersonal verbal form *ara-finntar*, instead of the more common active expression *ara-finnathar*, could be to indicate that this refers to a case where the overreaching is obvious to everybody, not only the *gáeth*. A possible parallel is found in *nach sochond ar findtar a saithiud* (CIH ii 351.21), from a commentary on §8 of the Introduction to *Senchas Már*. This looks like a paraphrase of the present passage from §4 of *Córus Bésгнаi* (note that §§6–8 of the Introduction to *Senchas Már* are slightly adapted citations from §§1, 11–12 of *Córus Bésгнаi*; cf. Breatnach 2005: 13), and furnishes a third witness to the passive verbal form.

§14: *rechtge*: In the commentary, B. rejects Wagner’s (1970: 38–9) etymology of *rechtgae* as a compound of *recht* + *\*gusis* ‘choice, option’ (59), but he makes no reference to an alternative. Since the opposition between *-che* and *-ge* is frequently neutralised after *t* (cf. *itche*, *itge* ‘request, petition’, or *fortche*, *fortge* ‘rug, cushion’, ‘the framing of law; administration of law and justice’), a *ǰā*-stem abstract from the adjective *rechtach* ‘just, equitable, law-giving’ is the most obvious candidate (cf. Meroney 1958: 196; Breatnach 2005: 174). *Nota bene*, the adjective *rechtach*, which is a necessary intermediate step for this derivation, is only very weakly attested.

§15: Regarding the etymology of *con-tethaig* ‘to participate in’, see Schumacher (2004: 631–634).

§22: *cobodlaib*: B. points out that the word *cobodail* ‘sub-division’, a compound of *com-* + *fodail* ‘division’, is always trisyllabic in the nominative singular, but shows variable syncope patterns with overt endings, e.g. *cobfodlaib* in MS A and *cobdaile* in MS C for the present passage (66–7). Unpredictable behaviour with regard to syncope appears to be more common with words of the basic structure

CVCVC, and may have to do with the unusual status in the Old Irish system of morphophonotactics that may have led to insecurity on the part of the speakers as to the appropriate synchronic syncope rules. The structure CVCVC arises either through analogical avoidance of syncope, like in the case of *cobodail* < *com-* + *fodail*, where the ‘simplex’ *fodail* exerts influence; or through the fact that regular syncope had reduced a hiatus sequence into a single vowel, e.g. *fulumain* ‘fluttering’ < \**fu-luʃmain* < *fo-* + *luämain* ‘movement, flight’; or because the synchronic third syllable had arisen through anaptyxis after the operation of syncope, e.g. *arathar* ‘plough’ < \**araθr* < \**aratrom*. *Fulumain*, for instance, has the unexpected plural *fulmaini* (*Thes.* i. 3.33), which is parallel to the behaviour of *cobdaile* in MS C of the present text.

§28: *dírithi*: The lack of syncope in this word, which comes from \**dī-rītiio-*, the participle of *do-ren* ‘to pay a fine’, is noteworthy. It seems that participles and verbals of necessity of compounds of *renaid* regularly escape syncope. This is probably first of all due to analogical influence from the simplex, whose participle is *ríthe*, but avoidance of the reduced allomorph *-rth-*, whose connection with the present stem *ren-* would lack transparency, may also be a factor. eDIL records the following relevant forms: *eirrithi* (*Cáin Adomnáin* 41), *erraithe* (O’C. 2160 (Eg. 88, 4(5)b)), *erithe* (O’Don. 939 (H. 3.17, 659a)), and the etymological gloss *dī-errethe* (Corm. Y 417) from *ar-ren* ‘to pay on behalf of another’. No relevant forms are attested for *as-ren* ‘to pay, expend’ and *in-éren* ‘to compensate’, although eDIL has the already mentioned *eirrithi* from *Cáin Adomnáin* as a headword for the verbal of necessity of *as-ren*, in addition to citing it under *ar-ren*, where it properly belongs.

As Schumacher (2004: 552) argues, the Celtic root \**rī-* ‘to count’ is best derived from the PIE root \**h<sub>2</sub>rejH-*. This root is not included in LIV, but it has been adopted with the meaning ‘to count’ in Kümmel 2011 for future editions of LIV. *Rím* ‘number’ is a nominal abstract of this root, viz. \**rīmā* < \**h<sub>2</sub>riH-meh<sub>2</sub>*, which in turn furnishes the base for a new denominal verb, *rimid* ‘to count’.

This warrants a brief excursus, with no immediate connection to the book under review here, on the etymology of *áirithe* ‘certain’. It has been suspected in the past (LEIA A-46) that it is a participle of a verb such as *ad-rími* ‘to count’, but where the *m* of the stem had been lost in some unspecified way. Such an explanation is unsatisfactory. Instead, *áirithe*, which is first attested in Middle Irish, is formally reminiscent of the participles just cited. This means that it must be the participle of yet another compound of *-ren*. The only one that yields an initial *á-* is *ad-ren*. The *r* should have regularly stayed unpalatalised, i.e. \**áraithe* (cf. OIr. *áram* ‘counting’ < \**ad-rīmā*), but it probably acquired palatalisation under influence from paradigmatically related forms, perhaps even from the regularly syncopated, but ultimately abandoned form \**áirthe* (cf. later Irish *áirem* with palatalisation from the genitive *áirme*). The meaning of *áirithe* must originally have been ‘paid for, i.e. agreed upon, fixed, determined’. From commercial contexts, where it would have referred to goods or services that had already been paid for and thus secured for oneself, its meaning must then have been extended to ‘that which I know belongs to myself’ and further to ‘secure, certain’.

At the moment, the verb *ad-ren* is only set up with a question mark in eDIL dil.ie/545. It is suggested there that it be only a sporadic variant of *as-ren*, just like *ad-roilli* and *as-roilli* or other verbs with the preverbs *as-* and *ad-* often alternate with each other without discernable difference in meaning. Together with the handful of forms mentioned under the headword *ad-ren*, the lexicalised verbal adjective *áirithe* creates a strong case for accepting *ad-ren* as a real verb.

§29: “*doda-fét*” with a fada must be an error. The verb is *do-feith*, its root is \**uet-* (Schumacher 2004: 675–9), the form should therefore be *doda-feith* or, if it behaves like S1d verbs, *doda-fet*.

§30: From the manuscript readings *coneirgedtha*, and from *comairiged* in §37, B. emends the verbal form *con-airged(a)*, for which the contexts suggest a meaning ‘to combine’. He notes other attestations, unconnected with the present text, in *Bretha Nemed Toísech* and *In Tenga Bithnua* (75). B. is uncertain what the 3sg. present of this verb would be. It is clearly a weak verb and it is formally reminiscent of *do-áirci* ‘to cause, produce’. Perhaps we should operate with a related compound *con-áirci*\*? The relationship between *do-áirci* and *con-áirci* could be comparable to that between Latin *efficere* ‘to make out, bring to pass, cause, effect’ and *conficere* ‘to make ready, bring about, complete’.

§30: *recht aicnid*: ‘Natural law’ means different things to different people. While in a medieval Christian context it means innate knowledge of divine law, in modern legal theory ‘natural law’ refers to the innate human understanding of what is right or wrong behaviour in society, without any religious

overtone. While mediievally educated readers will have no difficulty in assigning the correct meaning in the case of *Córus Bésgnai*, it would be beneficial to discuss in the introduction what is meant in the text. Without such an exposition, readers from outside Celtic studies, for instance with a purely legal background, could be put on the wrong route.

§33: See Schumacher (2004: 469) for a discussion of the verb *moigid*.

§35: *toch-airrchechnatar*. The manuscripts spell the middle cluster as *-rrc-* without lenition. While it cannot be excluded that the graphic expression of lenition has simply been omitted, as B. suspects, this spelling is reminiscent of a variation found in the Milan Glosses. Forms in *-airch-* and *-airc-* occur side by side in Milan, e.g. 3sg. preterite passive *donairchet* (35b9) vs. *duaircet* (24d5).<sup>6</sup> Since the Milan Glosses represent lenited voiceless stops in general consistently with a *h*,<sup>7</sup> it is conceivable that the distinction indicates that we are actually looking at two different verbs with very similar form and meaning, namely *do-aircain* < \**to-are-en-can-* and *do-airchain* < \**to-are-can-*, both ‘to prophesy’. The first of these could perhaps have undergone formal influence from the semantically related *do-airngir* ‘to promiss, prophesy’ < \**to-are-in-gar-*. *Tairc(h)etal* and *tairngire* were both activities of the *fáithi* ‘prophets’. Blathmac’ Poems l. 231 (after Barrett 2017) illustrates the equivalence of the two terms: *do-rairngertat primfáithi* ‘that the chief prophets have prophesied’ (l. 926), and, with reference to the same prophecies, *inunn rún a taircetail* ‘the mystic meaning of their prophecy is the same’ (l. 928).

§49: B. emends *na már* ‘any great amount’ for *nach mar* in the MS. While *na* is expected as the neuter form of the indefinite adjectival pronoun (cf. *nammór* ‘nothing great’ Ml. 63d5), and occurs so regularly in the Würzburg Glosses, *nach* is found as a sporadic alternative neuter form already in the Milan Glosses (Ml. 32a1, 101a5).<sup>8</sup>

§54: *gaire*: Since all manuscripts exclusively write *gaire* for the abstract ‘filial duty’ of the adjective *gor* ‘dutiful’, B. adopts this spelling for the edited text and does not emend it to the older *goire*. I want to use the opportunity for an excursus about how the change *goire* > *gaire* may have come about as such. It is well-known that Old Irish *o* and *a* merge in many positions by the Middle Irish period, but the motivation and mechanics of this development are less obvious. The present word may offer a clue towards a better understanding. The process may have been part of a trend towards getting rid of ‘awkward’, i.e. rare phonotactics.

The earliest sources of Old Irish have forms with *o* for *goire*, as well as for the structurally similar *coire* ‘cauldron’, namely *goiri* Wb. 28d19, 24, *góire* 29a10, *find choriú* Ml. 126c16, *findchoire* 17. From the point of view of the Old Irish phonotactic system, words of this shape are very uncommon. Through raising, all inherited sequences of the structure \**oC*<sub>[+voice]</sub>*l-*, i.e. stressed short *o* followed by a single voiced consonant and *i* in Celtic, had become *uC*<sub>[+voice]</sub>*e* in Old Irish. In stressed position, *o* could only remain when the voiced consonant was followed by a vowel that did not cause palatalisation. The only exceptions to this rule are words where the *o* arose secondarily after raising had taken place. The only process that is capable of creating such a secondary *o* is the rounding of short *a* after the Primitive Irish labiovelars \**u*, \**g<sup>u</sup>* and \**k<sup>u</sup>*. While in all other contexts inherited \**aC*<sub>[+voice]</sub>*l̥i-* yielded *aC*<sub>[+voice]</sub>*e* in Old Irish, after the labiovelars this sequence was exceptionally represented by *oC*<sub>[+voice]</sub>*e*. There are not many etymons falling under this rule; apart from *goire* and *coire*, the only other example I can think of is *foirenn* ‘group’ < \**uarinā*. These three words therefore stood isolated among countless examples of *-aire* and *-uire*, and this may have exerted pressure to merge the rare specimens with the more frequent type. Maybe *a* was phonetically closer to the *o* of the three words so that it won out over *u*. Note

<sup>6</sup> Forms with *-rch-*: present stem *do-airchain* etc. (Ml. 15d10, 21a7, 19b11, 54c24, 111d4), preterite stem *do-airchechain* etc. (64c22, 66c12), preterite passive *do-airchet* etc. (35b9, 38c9), verbal noun *tairchital* etc. (64c22, 89b10, 94a10). Forms with *-rc-*: preterite stem *do-aircechain* (64c22), preterite passive *do-aircet* (24d5), verbal noun *taircital* etc. (19b10, 54c30, 122d7). Note that the short gloss 64c22 contains the two variants side by side. Given that the difference is only found in past tenses, one could speculate that a secondary distinction between unaugmented *do-aircechain/do-aircet* and augmented *do-airrchechain/do-airrchet* had been created in the language. But such a hypothesis falls short of explaining the variation in the verbal noun.

<sup>7</sup> No such variation is found in case of the superficially similar-looking verbs *do-áirci* ‘to cause’ (incl. verbal of necessity *táircidí* and verbal noun *táirciud*) and *do-airchomraici* ‘to amass, assemble’.

<sup>8</sup> In the manuscript of the Poems of Blathmac, the neuter of the indefinite pronoun is *nach* in both of its occurrences (ll. 547, 760). Since this could be due to modernisation during the textual transmission, no conclusion can be drawn about the poet’s own practice.

that these considerations do not apply to the sequences  $oC'_{[+voice]}\#$  and  $oC'_{[+voice]}\dagger C'_{[+voice]}e$  (where  $\dagger$  stands for syncope). There were more opportunities for  $o$  to occur before a voiced consonant in these contexts in Old Irish. But over the course of time and through analogy, the merger of  $o$  and  $a$  extended even to these contexts.

It is worth noting that, according to eDIL, *coire* ‘cauldron’ is frequently represented by *caire* in law texts. Either the neutralisation of  $o$  and  $a$  in this position occurred particularly early in the variety of Irish in which the *Senchas Már* was written, or, what is more likely, the text went through a later redaction where this change had taken place.

§61: A minor point: if *im-fuich* ‘contests’ is a compound of *fo-fich*, as is likely, then hiatus is expected. Since hiatus is elsewhere orthographically indicated by a diaeresis in this edition, it should be written in *im-fuïch* as well. The hiatus is supported by the spelling of the passive of *fo-fich*, *frisa fuachar* ‘against whom trespass is committed’ (CIH ii 408.14).

§92: The curious infixed pronoun in the twice-occurring phrase *co haimsir rod mbé* and *rod bé* (with suppression of the nasal between consonants, cf. p. 112) ‘until the time that there be’, which cannot have dative force since the passage is not about possession, could be due to syntactic influence from *fil* ‘there is’ whose subject is expressed by the accusative (GOI 479). Although *fil* functions most commonly as a suppletive stem of *attá* in specific syntactic contexts, it also occurs as a defective verb in its own right in the meaning ‘there you see, there is’. Since this verb has no forms outside the present indicative, the author of the present text may have felt that its subjunctive should be supplied by the root *bi-* ‘to be’, but he retained the original construction with accusative subject. Accusative (or rather oblique) subjects are even found with the stem *tā-* when it serves as the copula, namely *nímtha firiún* ‘I am not righteous’ (Wb. 8d24) and *nímtha laám* ‘I am not a hand’ (Wb. 12a21).

The word *aimser* ‘time’ is followed by a leniting relative construction here, formally expressed by the lenited *d* of *rod*. Wb. 5c10 *robói aimser nadrochreitsid* ‘there has been a time that ye have not believed’ may be another example of this, but more common is relative nasalisation, e.g., *bieid aimser nad creitfider* ‘there will be a time when it will be disbelieved’ (Wb. 28c14) or *indaimser dundicfitis assair* ‘at the time when the Assyrians were to come’ (Ml. 68a1); or a prepositional relative clause headed by *i* ‘in’, e.g. *isindaimsir sin hiforcomnuicir* ‘in that time at which it came to pass’ (Wb. 28b6). Given the growth of syntactic differentiation over time, the leniting relative construction may be the oldest, which was then supplanted by the more specialised nasalising construction and the lexically more explicit prepositional one.

§92: The  $\bar{a}$ -stem nominative *feb* ‘excellence’ in the maxim *siniu feb áes* ‘excellence is senior to age’ is emended for MS *feib* (317). This attestation, as well as that in Blathmac’s Poems l. 421 (MS *febh*; cf. Stifter 2019: 211), disproves Pedersen’s claim in VKG 1, 75 that the nominative of this word is absent from Old Irish. As a side note I would like to remark that the spirit of this maxim would fit nicely in the series of three-word maxims in *Briathra Flainn Fína* (Ireland 1999: 80–90), the first word of each of which is the comparative *ferr* ‘better’. In the present phrase, *siniu* ‘senior’ is a stylistically more elaborate equivalent of *ferr*.

#### Abbreviations:

GOI = Rudolf Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish* (Dublin 1946).

LEIA A = Joseph Vendryes et al., *Lexique étymologique de l’irlandais ancien*. Vol. A (Paris – Dublin 1959).

LIV = Martin Kümmel und Helmut Rix, *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben. Die Wurzeln und ihre Primärstammbildungen. Zweite, erweiterte und verbesserte Auflage* (Wiesbaden 2001).

VKG = Holger Pedersen, *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen*, 2 vols. (Göttingen 1909–1913).

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