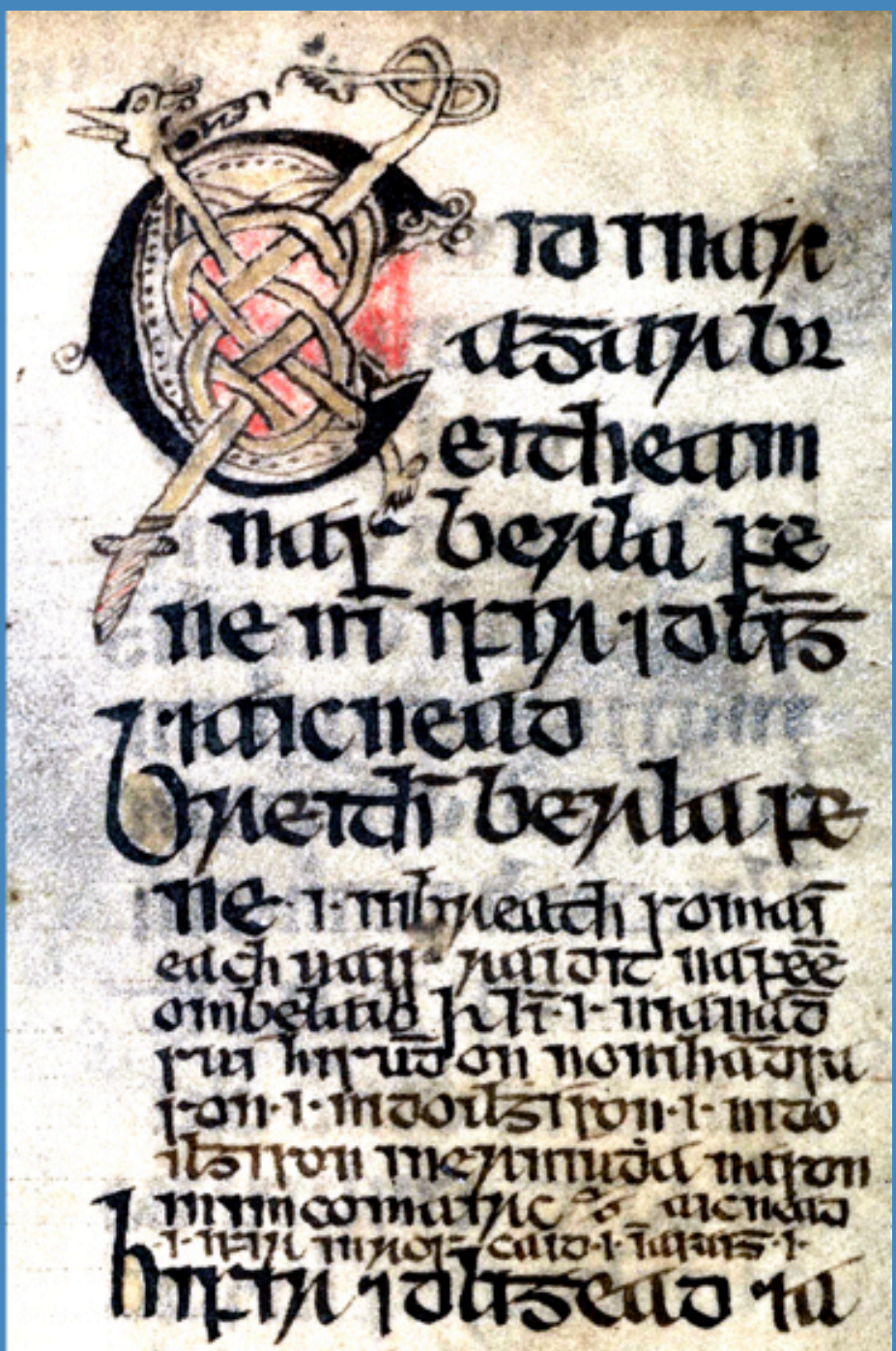
MEDIEVAL IRISH LAW



TEXT AND CONTEXT

Towards the Linguistic Dating of Early Irish Law Texts*

DAVID STIFTER
National University of Ireland, Maynooth

I. INTRODUCTION

THERE is a consensus that the main body of Early Irish law texts was written in the century between c. 650 and 750 (Charles-Edwards 2005, 331; Kelly 1988, 232: 7th and 8th centuries). This period of primary law production saw the transition from Early Old Irish (mid-6th to the end of the 7th century) to Old Irish (c. 700–900), using the timeframe defined by McCone (1996, 127).[1] The entire time-span including that of the immediately following Middle Irish period (c. 900–1200) can be referred to as Early Irish. For the fullest interpretation of a text, the knowledge of its exact historical context is indispensable, so being able to zoom in on the timescale within this period of approximately a hundred years is highly desirable. However, only for very few Early Irish law texts is a precise or almost precise date known; usually arrived at by external, historical triangulation. Sometimes a relative chronology can be established by references to other texts (Breatnach 2005, 354–355). In such a situation, deriving chronological clues from the observable changes of the language over time can theoretically be a way to narrow down their date of composition. All modern editors of Early Irish law texts, as indeed editors of any early medieval Irish text, have paid attention to linguistic variation in order to extract clues as to the positioning of those texts along the chronological continuum of the 7th and 8th centuries, and sections on date and language are indispensable and indeed standard components of any modern introduction to law and narrative texts. But can we be more precise and, for example, specify a decade

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[1] In fact, it could be said that the present study concerns itself mainly with the differences between Early-Old Irish and early Old Irish.

in which a text was composed, rather than just state non-committedly that a text is Old Irish or Early Old Irish?

To approximate an answer to this question, a series of linguistic or language-related areas that are potentially significant for dating purposes will be set up deductively. These are linguistic areas that under a universal point of observation are known to be subject to variation and change over time. The survey will then continue inductively by looking at each of those areas separately to see if and what concrete dating criteria have been proposed for Early Irish before, which criteria can be used in addition to them, and what are their respective merits and defects. Since linguistic dating is a burning question not only in the study of early Irish law, occasional use will also be made of editions of non-legal literature. Because of the vast amount of available material this selection is confined to only a few texts.

II. Non-linguistic dating

In order to be able to date texts linguistically at all, it is necessary to have some chronological reference points first for what the language looked like at a specific date. For this, a core body of externally dated texts is required. Unfortunately, such texts are few. Only a tiny number of the extant law texts can be dated by extra-linguistic means (see Breatnach 2005, 354–355; see Breatnach 1996, 74–76 for a survey of dating of verse texts), for example by references to historical events about which independent information is found in historical sources like the annals, or by reference to people whose biographical dates are known. However, in many cases such references are only relative and provide no more than a *terminus post quem*, like, for example, the mention in *Bechbretha* 31–32 of the blinding of Congal Cáech, king of Tara, who died in 637. It is unknown now how long after the mentioned event the law text was composed. It can only be concluded indirectly that little time may have elapsed because Congal Cáech's kingship of Tara, if indeed it was historical, was rather soon removed from public memory. *Críth Gablach* 523–524 contains two historical allusions, one to an English raid in Brega in 684 and one to the *Cáin Adomnáin* which was promulgated in 697. In both instances,

the way in which the author refers to them suggests that he thought of them as important recent events, so it can be surmised that *Críth Gablach* was compiled not long after the year 700 at the latest. Likewise, *Cáin Domnaig* mentions *Cáin Adomnáin* and can therefore be dated relative to it.

Only in the rarest instances are precise dates available. This is the case with *Cáin Adomnáin* 'The Law of Adomnán' whose initial promulgation occurred in Birr in 697. The date coincides with the centenary of the death of Colum Cille, founder of the monastery of Iona, whose seventh abbot Adomnán was the instigator and probably author of the law that bears his name, thus adding corroboration to the date of composition. However, the transmission of the *Cáin* in two very late manuscripts, compounded by the noticeable revisions that must have been made over the course of time, lessens its immediate evidential value. When one wants to use the *Cáin* as a linguistic guiding line, its different layers have to be sundered first (see the second part of this article, pp. 199–204). The Latin *Vita Columbae* 'Life of Columba', most likely written in the 690s by the same Adomnán (between 688 and 704, according to Anderson & Anderson 1961, 96) is of potentially great importance in this context. Unlike *Cáin Adomnáin*, it survives in an almost contemporary manuscript, the one from Schaffhausen, which was written by Adomnán's pupil Dorbéne in 713. The *Vita Columbae* contains archaic spellings of Irish names and sometimes of other words, thereby serving as a first quick guideline to what the language looked like at the end of the 7th century. But since it is a fundamentally Latin text only interspersed with fragments of Irish, *Vita Columbae* offers us no exploitable information regarding syntax, semantics or vocabulary. Still, its Irish elements provide a point of comparison for the *Cáin Adomnáin*, in that they may highlight to what extent the *Cáin*'s language has been modernised by later reworkings. But see further below for a call to caution against the unguarded use of any of these texts as a mirror of the linguistic situation at the end of the 7th century.

This largely unsatisfactory state of affairs in regard to datable legal texts becomes none the better when we leave their arena. Of the three great contemporary manuscripts that preserve Old Irish language material, that is, the fundamentally Latin manuscripts with Old Irish glossing from Würzburg, Milan and St. Gall, all contained in the

Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus (*Thes*), a precise year of 851 has been suggested only for the St. Gall manuscript (Ó Néill 2000), but this is beyond the timeframe of the present survey. This date only refers to the compilation of the manuscript as such, but the glosses themselves represent an accretion of material from many different strata. The dates for the other glosses are only estimates: Cambrai Homily (end of 7th c.), Würzburg glosses *prima manus* (700), Würzburg glosses main hand (750), Milan glosses (beginning of 9th c.).

Among Irish narrative tales for which a date, however approximate, has been suggested, reference shall be made to one special group of texts. The tales that are thought to have been contained in the lost manuscript *Cín Dromma Snechtai* 'The Booklet of Druimm Snechtai' belong to the earliest stratum of surviving Irish narrative literature and seem to stem roughly from the same time as the law texts; some of them apparently from the earlier part of that period, some from the later. The first 27 paragraphs of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* 'The Vision of Conn Cétchathach', which indeed have a particularly archaic appearance, have been assigned by an internal historical reference to the reign of Fínṡnechta Fledach who was king of Tara from 675–695; the final six paragraphs to c. 720 (Bhreathnach 2005, 61–62). This later date is compatible with the Classical Old Irish appearance of the bulk of identified *Cín Dromma Snechtai* texts. The linguistically mixed character of *Cín Dromma Snechtai* texts—some exhibiting features of Early Old Irish, most conforming largely to the standards of Classical Old Irish—suggests that this manuscript was compiled from a variety of sources probably in the early 8th century; some texts may be original compositions by the compiler.

In the extra-linguistic dating of texts, caution must be applied in accepting traditional ascriptions of texts to authors. There was a tendency in the medieval Irish tradition to put especially poems into the mouths of celebrated poets of the past. For example, the famous *Amra Choluim Chille* 'Elegy for Colum Cille', said to have been composed by Dallán Forgaill, chief-poet of Ireland, at the death of Colum Cille in 597, has long held a venerable place in Irish literature for its alleged archaic nature, although its chronological placement within the framework of the developments of the Irish language did on occasion cause problems for previous scholars (e.g. Carney 1989, 53). The poem has recently been pushed off its ancient pedestal. Instead of

belonging to the late 6th or 7th century, a linguistic study has revealed that in its present state it belongs to the Late Old Irish period (Bisagni 2009, 8–10), even though it is not inconceivable that its core is considerably older.

An indispensable, although in many respects outdated tool for the calibration of linguistic dates is Tomás Ó Máille's study of the language of the *Annals of Ulster* (Ó Máille 1910). Because the entries in the annals were added year after year from the 6th century onwards, they are a potential treasure-trove for subtle changes especially in Irish phonology. Ó Máille's book would be even more invaluable if its data could be wholeheartedly trusted, but not all of its contents withstand the test of time. More than a hundred years after it was written, it would be worthwhile to revise the collection and to re-evaluate its findings, armed with the current knowledge of the historical phonology of Irish and with greater insights into the nature and working of soundchanges in general, and with a better edition of the textual source.

III. Datable linguistic areas

Variation can be found in these linguistic or language-related areas:

1. phonology
2. orthography
3. morphology
4. syntax
5. lexicon
6. semantics
7. style
8. metrics

This variation can be diachronic (over time), diatopic (between different places) or diastratic (between different social layers). Since only little evidence has been identified that would point to diatopic or diastratic diversity in the medieval Irish corpus, the considerable amount of variation in the above-mentioned areas that can indeed be

observed in medieval Irish texts is best taken as the reflection of diachronic change. A systematic study of the variation can therefore potentially serve for dating purposes. As a complicating factor, in medieval Irish most of these areas are intimately intertwined with others, so that an examination of one of them can typically not be undertaken in separation from others. Still, for the purpose of the present initial survey, an approach will be followed whereby each of the areas will be discussed in isolation, by first giving a general assessment of its applicability to dating, of the weaknesses of the respective approaches, followed by concrete examples, mostly gathered from modern editions of texts. Since this is meant as a survey of the method, only the first areas will be discussed in some detail, while the others will be subjected to a more cursory visit.

Linguistic dating criteria have been used in medieval Irish philology for a long time. There is a core set of criteria that is repeated in most works, to an extent that makes them largely predictable. Some of them, like the evidential value of certain deviant syntactic constructions, were defined at an early period of the discipline, when the understanding of these features was very different from what it is today. Caution must therefore be applied in each case when a criterion is taken from early scholarship, and its validity must be re-examined in the context of current insights into language change and language use. As a methodological axiom it must be kept in mind that linguistic dating can never be done by highlighting a single feature and awarding it undue prominence. To modify the words of Kim McCone (1997, 163), only the 'cumulative and consistently accurate presence [of chronological pointers] in a text can provide reasonably convincing grounds' for assigning it to a specific period.

A common application of linguistic dating is to determine initially whether a text belongs to Old Irish or to a later stage of the language, typically Middle Irish. The present approach differs from this in that it is assumed here that the early, i.e. Old Irish, character of a text has already been established by some means. The aim is then to arrive at a narrower date within the wide chronological range of Early Old Irish and the early phase of standard Old Irish. The present discussion will be mostly confined to variation that can be placed confidently or with good reason in or around the period between 650 and 750. Well-known Late Old Irish and Middle Irish developments like the gradual

decrease in the quality of word-final vowels (*GOI* 62; Ó Máille 1910, 79–89; Carney 1983, 196–198) or the assimilation of homorganic voiced obstruents to preceding nasals (*GOI* 93–94; Ó Máille 1910, 90–94, 105–113) will not be examined here.

In a survey like this only a random collection of texts can be picked to produce a representative list of features. It would be tedious to refer for each feature to every mention of it in the literature. Secondary literature will therefore only be quoted on an exemplary basis or where it offers special insights beyond what is generally known. This survey cannot be more than a draft of what should be done to build a chronological framework of dating criteria. The ultimate goal is a *Chronologicon Hibernicum*, a database that assembles all relevant information about all datable Early Irish texts of whatever genre. In such a database, all previous attempts would be collected, which could then be scrutinised, synchronised and formalised, with a higher degree of precision and reliability for the establishment of the chronology of changes than can be achieved currently.

1. Phonology

Of all the linguistic areas mentioned above, it is the diachronic variation in phonology that is theoretically best understood and studied. Historical linguistics has established beyond any doubt a coherent sequence of developments that gradually transformed the Irish language from its archaic state in the 6th century down through the ensuing centuries. So it seems most natural that the most reliable guiding line for dating should be found in the series of Irish soundchanges. However, a serious practical difficulty lies in the fact that in spite of their well-defined chronological sequence hardly any precise dates have been suggested for those soundchanges. It is no surprise that the best overview of the phonological changes of Irish is entitled *Towards a Relative Chronology of Historical Phonology of Ancient and Medieval Celtic Soundchanges* (McCone 1996). It is easier to talk about the relative sequence of events than about their exact place in a timeline.

This lack of precision is not due to the inability of scholars to come up with dates, but rather the impossibility of arriving at precision is

inherent in the task. Ascribing a phonological change to a particular year or even decade would be misleading for several reasons. In any speech community, at any given point in time, there are not only dialectal differences in language usage between the regions, but also diastratic divergences between the generations and within the generations between the social and intellectual strata. So, even if it was assumed for argument's sake that Early Irish legal writing originated from one compact intellectual class with uniform school training in one dialectally coherent region, subtle linguistic variation, in writing and in pronunciation, must still be expected between an aged person, using obsolescent forms, and a young person, who at the very same time could display the progressive forms only. If in such a case we relied on the chronological significance of phonological differences, the method would inevitably assign such texts to different periods, perhaps several decades apart, even though they were written at the same time by two persons of diverging age.

It is a truism in historical linguistics that the earliest recorded evidence of a soundchange does not show the first seed of a new speech habit, but more often than not it can effectively be taken as an indication that the change has already taken place in the spoken language of a certain speech community. Written language is more conservative than its spoken twin, so residual archaic spellings are no watertight proof that the old forms were still in use in the living language of a particular period, when evidence for progressive forms exists at the same time. At the same time, the presence of younger forms does not preclude the possibility that older ones were still current in specific styles or sociolects.

A concrete example for this is Adomnán (627/8–704) whose writings in the last decade of the 7th century were mentioned above as one of the few cornerstones of Early Irish linguistic dating. In fact, a fair share of caution is in place. Adomnán was around 70 years of age when he wrote his *Vita Columbae* (*VC*). The Irish forms in this life contain numerous archaisms, especially in phonology. Effectively, Adomnán's idiolect may be representative of the state of the language when his own speech habits were formed, that is of the middle, rather than of the end of the 7th century. Biographical information therefore needs to be taken into account if precisely datable texts are to be used as a guideline for dating other texts. Unfortunately, the authorship of

most texts remains unknown. The evidence of *VC* may be further skewed by the possibility that Adomnán took some of the names in the narrative from Iona records that were contemporaneous with the time of Colum Cille, that is, more than a hundred years old. Still, *VC* remains the first and best point of orientation for the end of the 7th century, for the simple reason that there is nothing else of comparable quality and comparably precise dating.

Attention also needs to be paid to the fact that the chronology of soundchanges of Early Irish is intricately interwoven with and partly indistinguishable from orthographical variation. All available phonological information is encoded in a written form that sometimes rather conceals than reveals subtle differences of speech. For example, through the voicing of dentals at unstressed word-boundaries, /t/ in such positions became /d/ around 700. But in a subgroup of affected instances, this left no trace in the written record because the spelling *-t* was used for both /t/ and /d/ in specific contexts (see McCone 1981). It is not always clear whether a particular deviation from the norm belongs to orthography rather than to phonology. In the present section, all variant writing practices that may reflect changes in the sounds will be included. However, in any given instance the variation may rather be based on the graphic fancies of an author, scribe or later copyist. Wherever this can be demonstrated to be the case, the evidence must be discarded. And finally, given that all texts in the legal corpus have only been transmitted in much younger manuscript copies, orthographic variation may fool the modern interpreter into seeing changes which in fact are only grounded in spelling conventions of several hundred years later. An example can perhaps be seen in Ó Máille (1910, 27) where the variation '**ea** for **e**' in annalistic entries at the beginning of the 9th century may be due to later scribal practices, not necessarily to changes at the time when the entries were made (but cf. *GOI* 57).

Assessing the significance of archaic forms and spellings, it is important to observe how scribes of younger periods perceived and rated the older forms. Their attitudes, which may and in fact do vary from instance to instance, have repercussions on what kinds of archaising or modernising practices will be found in the extant manuscripts. These attitudes can only be inferred indirectly from the statistics of spelling practices, with a high frequency indicating a

popular feature and a low frequency or even lack of a feature reflecting a dislike for, or even lack of awareness of, the feature. Relative frequencies must be viewed *cum grano salis*, since any new discovery may alter the figures, especially in the case of items of rare occurrence.

A priori, it can be expected that archaic spellings which incurred no serious ambiguity in regard to the phonology they encoded and which therefore remained readily intelligible, may enjoy more popularity than spellings that can be mistaken for something else in younger orthographic conventions. The classic example for the first type are spellings in *-th*, which, even though the sound /θ/ no longer existed on the word-boundary after unstressed syllables, but had been replaced by /ð/ towards the end of the 7th century (McCone 1981), were still unmistakable because there was nothing else they could stand for. To introduce an unscholarly, but sociolinguistically apt term, such spellings may have been perceived as 'cool' by subsequent generations. Another contributing factor is the frequency of a specific spelling in absolute numbers. Since *to·* and *-th* occur in a very great number of grammatical categories, spellings of this sort gain salience as well.

The opposite, that is spellings which potentially caused undue ambiguity, may have been perceived as 'uncool', 'obsolete', 'square', and would have been avoided, either by silently modernising them in the process of copying, or by not including them in the list of show-off items for deliberate archaisation. An example of the latter type is old long *ē* < **eį̂* before non-palatalised consonants. There was no point in continuing to write it ‹e› after it had been diphthongised to *ía*, because this letter could also stand for the frequent sound /e/ and for /ē/ which had arisen from compensatory lengthening. In practical terms, the uncool spellings, those which by their nature are rare and avoided, possess higher chronological significance than the cool ones which, like anything cool, tend to be obnoxiously common, obtrusive and after a while smack of a lack of refinement.

1.1. Voicing of voiceless stops and fricatives in unstressed syllables on the word boundary

A phonological development that falls right into the middle of the period under scrutiny is the voicing of voiceless stops and fricatives in unstressed syllables on the word boundary (McCone 1981; *GOI* 82–83). The two items most frequently affected by this change are the preverb *to·*, which thus becomes *do·*, and final *-th* > *-d* /ð/ in a wide range of morphological categories. This is a long recognised feature, and it is almost by standard used by editors to assess the age of a text, although the serious difficulties besetting it are widely acknowledged.

1.1a. *-th* [θ] > *-d* [ð]

Ó Máille (1910, 114–116) notes the first, although very sporadic, instances of *-d* in *AU* already in the late 650s (*Dunchadh* 658, *Cinngaradh* 659, *doirad* 679), but they seem to become preponderant only from the end of the first decade of the 8th century onwards. It is likely that these isolated, early instances are due to later scribal interference. The older spellings with *-th* remain very common well into the 730s, but from the 770s onwards, as well as throughout the entire 9th century, such spellings recur regularly. Using the forms cited in Ó Máille's study, from 700–740 the ratio between forms with *-th* vs. those with *-d*, not counting abbreviated words, is an almost evenly balanced 11:12 in *AU*; between 770 and 845, the ratio is 14:48, which means that *-th* still accounts for about a fifth of the instances. In this late period, they are doubtless nothing but archaising spellings (Ó Máille 1910, 115–116; McCone 1981, 42[42]). However, while it is almost certain that the change in the *spoken* language had been carried through at the beginning of the 8th century, for almost the first two generations during the century it is hard to be certain as to which of the two spellings should be regarded as the *orthographic* norm, and even thereafter authors apparently had the choice. From this it emerges as a fundamental methodical postulate that comparanda from *AU* do not so much allow us to tell when a change took place but rather when the more progressive forms became preponderant in spelling.

1.1b. *to·* > *do·*

As for pretonic *do·*/*du·*, the earliest example with *d* in *AU* that can lay some claim on credibility is found in 653 (*Du Chuae*), and these spellings are the rule from the late 680s onwards (*Do Chumai* 686, *Do Cinni* 688 etc.), although the absolute number of examples is relatively small. If the slight chronological difference between the emergence of *do·* vs. *-d* is not due to the small sample or a difference in scribal habits, it may be taken as an indication that the change occurred in different environments at different times, spreading from pretonic to posttonic position. There is a noticeable lack of examples of pretonic *to*/*tu* in the *Annals*, with the one exception of *Tu Enog* in 662. On the other hand, *t-* is alliteratively established for the poem *Tiughraind Bhécáin* which may belong to the middle of the 7th century (Kelly 1975: 66–67), and the alliterative evidence of the non-legal tale *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* attests to retained *t-* even for the time between 675/695, the *terminus ante quem non* for the tale (Bhreathnach 2005, 61–62). McCone (1981, 44) originally proposed a date of either the first half of the 8th or possibly the second half of the 7th century for this change; later he preferred the late 7th century (McCone 1996, 133; *GOI* 111). If weight can be attached to the evidence of *AU*, the earlier dating seems more realistic for the change in the *spoken* language, as opposed to the written tradition.

Especially in the case of the preverb *to·*, awareness of the earlier spelling standard survived among the educated class and was supported by the fact that in the tonic position of verbs *to-* remained as such, e.g. *do·icc* vs. *·ticc*. In consequence, it could be utilised with ease to create recurringly the impression of archaism. Its artificial nature can be extrapolated from occasional errors when the preverb *di·*, which in pretonic position became homophonous with *to·* (in standard Old Irish *do·*), is also, but wrongly, written *to·*.

For present purposes, it is important to realise that no weight for dating can be awarded to pretonic spellings with *to·* and final spellings with *-th* in a text at all, unless they occur in an etymologically consistent pattern and unless they are accompanied by other, less ostensible signs of age, or unless the phonetic presence of /t/ in *to·* is backed up metrically by alliteration, as in the example of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*. Irrespective of what actually happened in the spoken language, for the greatest part of the studied period both spellings

were valid orthographical representations of equal standing, and after that period they were retained as conscious archaisms. The case of *-th* and *to·* is probably the most blatant in the present material, but it is a model for what can be expected for any phonological and orthographical change in Early Irish. To judge by the popularity that both spelling variants enjoyed in later periods, this was a 'cool' archaism, it was immediately absorbed into the realm of stylistics, and it is therefore of relatively little help for dating.

This first example of a soundchange was discussed in detail to illustrate the method. The discussion of the following changes will be more cursory.

1.2. Breaking of *ē* > *ea* > *ía* before non-palatalised consonants

Another well-noted change that falls right into the middle of the studied period is the breaking of long *ē* > *ía* before a non-palatalised consonant (*GOI* 36–37), via the intermediate stage *ea*. All stages of this chain are attested in various texts (*AM* xxx). *AU* is of no use here to calibrate the change because *ía* is written invariably there from the later half of the 6th century onwards (Ó Máille 1910, 71–72), that is, from a time when the change cannot possibly have taken place yet. There can be no doubt that earlier and widespread *é* in this text must have been systematically modernised by later copyists, perhaps in a deliberate effort to eradicate an 'uncool' archaism. However, the inverse spelling *Dermato* for correct *Diärmato* (with a hiatus < **dī-formait*) in 703 may indicate that the change had taken place by then.[2] The testimony of *VC* is of special interest in this respect (Ó Máille 1910, 72): the young manuscripts of the *Vita*, chronologically far removed from the composition of the text, all contain the archaic spellings with monophthongal *e* which thus must have been original to

[2] Thus Ó Máille (1910, 71). It is not clear to me why a hypercorrect <e> should be introduced into a text which was otherwise purged of all true archaic <e>'s for /ē/. Therefore, *Dermato* may find a different explanation. Its <e> could represent a short /e/ that is the regular outcome of syncopated disyllabic **io*, while the usual form of the name with hiatus or with a hiatus contracted to a diphthong, *Diarmait*, would then be due to analogical recomposition.

the text. This is far from saying that such forms with /ē/ were necessarily still current in the spoken language of the time, since Adomnán's personal style could be conservative and lagging behind developments, as argued above. The oldest extant manuscript of the *Vita*, on the other hand, the Schaffhausen copy from 713, written approximately 15–20 years after the composition of the life, has replaced the *e*s by digraphs like *ea*, *ie* and *ia*. Dorbéne, its scribe, was apparently aware of the ongoing breaking of the monophthong, which, moreover, had not fully completed its development towards *ía* yet at his time (the end-point of the development would, of course, not be known to Dorbéne). While modernised spellings with *ía* prove nothing for the date of a text, because they may be silent later corrections of the 'uncool' earlier state of affairs as in *AU*, preserved monophthongal *é* seems to be a good indicator of a provenance before 690/700, while the intermediate stage *ie*/*ea* possibly narrows down the chronological window to between 690–710. I could find no reference to the use of this feature for archaising purposes.

1.3. Breaking of *ō* > *oa* > *úa*

Even though by its nature the breaking of archaic long *ō* to diphthongal *úa* is the exact back-vowel counterpart of *ē* > *ía*, the chronology and the path of events are somewhat different. While *ē* remained as such before palatalised consonants, but was broken before non-palatalised ones, *ō* seems to have been insensitive to the presence or absence of palatalisation in the following consonantal segment. Instead, *ō* seems to be resilient against breaking especially before guttural fricatives and *mm*, but may remain in other, less clearly defined contexts as well (*GOI* 40). Since in some contexts and some dialects the change never took place at all, there is no point here asking when the change was completed. Possibly, it was never wholly carried through at all. The evidence of *AU* is unreliable here. Spellings with *ō* and with *úa* stand side by side from the 7th to the 10th century. The very early occurrences of *úa* cannot be authentic because *ō* is still the standard in *VC* and other early Old Irish texts which are traditionally believed to originate from the decades around 700. Since therefore early *úa* in *AU* must be due to later scribal interference, it is

impossible to say when spellings with *úa* actually start to reflect a real change in the language. Ó Máille (1910, 76) concludes that the general change may have taken place in the early half of the 8th century. This is probably as close as we can currently get to a dating.

1.4. Final *-o* > *-a* in gen. sg. of *i*- and *u*-stems

A relatively late development is the one affecting unstressed *-o*, preponderantly in the genitive singular of *i*- and *u*-stems. This *-o* ultimately falls together with *-a* (probably by becoming -[a]). Even though both spellings occur in *AU* side by side from the first years of the 8th century, they continue to co-occur for another 250 years. From the end of the 8th century, spellings with *-o* are confined to familiar and frequent names like *Áedo* (Ó Máille 1910, 65–66). This indicates that while the merger first occurred in the spoken language around 700, it was completed in all registers only two or three generations later, and therefore only shortly after the chronological limit of the present study. It cannot be inferred from the foregoing that finding an *-a* as the gen. sg. ending of an *i*- or *u*-stem would be indicative of the text's provenance from after 700. In texts written at an earlier date, it could be a mechanical substitution for the regular ending at any stage during the later history of transmission. On the other hand, the positive presence of etymologically correct *-o* in the manuscript tradition, even in a single witness against all others, should be taken seriously. The use of this feature for the artificial creation of archaicity is common, but it is relatively easy to detect. Because old *-o* was confined to the genitive singular of *i*- and *u*-stems, any appearance of final *-o* instead of *-a* outside these two categories is a clear indicator of hypercorrection. The chances for a 'mechanical' archaiser to have gotten it wrong are large because *-a* is a frequent ending in many other categories.

1.5. Short non-final unstressed vowels

A large body of potentially significant material is provided by the treatment of unstressed short vowels. While in the classical Old Irish

language only two short vowels, neutral schwa and *u*, were allowed in unstressed, internal syllables,[3] in the preceding Early Old Irish stage non-final unstressed short vowels still possessed qualities of their own so that all five short vowels could be present in this position, even though they may already have been unstable. Due to the nature of Early Irish orthography, mainly the letters *e*, *o* and *a*, and those only in restricted contexts, are possible indicators of age, when they stand for the corresponding short vowels in positions where those sounds could not appear in classical Old Irish (see below). It has emerged in the last few years that the interpretation of pre-classical vowel spellings is far more complex than previously assumed. There are many obscuring extra factors to consider, which decisively impact on the evidential value of such spellings. Because of the complexity of the matter, here only very general remarks can be made about this potential field of chronological pointers.

1.5a. Unstressed *e*

Unstressed short *e* is often met with in archaic sources in etymologically expected positions: e.g., the infixed pronoun *-de*^{N} 'her' for later *-da*^{H} < **-de-si̯am*, *oec* 'young' for *oac*, later *óc* < **i̯ou̯enko-*, *toceth* 'chance' for *tocad* < **tonketo-*, *toreth* 'fruit, produce' for *torad* < **toreto-*. Nevertheless, Charles-Edwards & Kelly warn of occasional instances of archaising spellings of *e* in the Old Irish period proper (*BBr*. 9). As for narrowing down the time of the loss of *e*-quality, one guiding star is the observation that the Würzburg *prima manus* still shows the old spellings, whereas the main hand adheres to the younger phonological system. The evidence for the loss of colour from *AU* is rather contradictory (Ó Máille 1910, 47–55). Examples for weakening of older *e* to *a* occur from the mid-6th century on, but on the other hand *e* is preserved in many spellings far into the 9th century, no doubt due to a conservative attitude. Ó Máille concludes that 'there are no significant instances […] to show that the change of *-ĕ-* to *-a-* (between non-patalal consonants) did not take place very early in the

[3] Unless a different vocalism was introduced analogically, e.g. in the second element of compounds.

eighth century' (1910, 55). In any case, the late examples of *e* indicate that this spelling had an archaising stylistic potential. It is conceivable that linguistically aware speakers could infer the historic presence of **e* in some words for syllables where syncope produced palatalisation, e.g. cf. the difference in the middle cluster in *torad*, dat.pl. *toirthib* < **toreto-* vs. *mórad*, gen.sg. *mórtha* < **mōrātu-*.

1.5b. Unstressed *o*

As for the related treatment of unstressed *o*, the case is less certain at first sight. *AU* only rarely shows examples of the completed change from the beginning of the 8th century onwards, at least in Ó Máille's collection, while examples of preserved *o* remain dominant for half a century and recur frequently far into the 9th century. Even if obvious examples of archaising spelling and of secondary labialisation in contexts conducive to rounding are discounted, the number of remaining early spellings is astonishing. Yet Ó Máille (1910, 60) notes that the first hypercorrect spellings of internal *o* appear in *AU* in the 720s, which is a good indicator that by then the change had completely eradicated the original distinction. Apparently the use of *o* could be exploited for stylistic purposes from the middle of the 8th century onwards.

1.5c. Second vowel of hiatuses

The second vowels of hiatus sequences, especially when the first vowel is *i*, show considerable variation in the period under scrutiny (e.g., *io*/*ie*/*iu* > *ia*; cf. Ó Máille 1910, 56–57), variation which is a potential chronological indicator. However, a comprehensive account of those vowels requires preliminary studies of individual problems first, e.g. how etymological vowels are represented in various positions and in which ways do hiatuses merge into long vowels or diphthongs. Until more progress is made in these fields, not a lot can be said with certainty about the dating value of hiatus spellings. For the treatment of hiatus as such see 1.15 below.

1.6. Rounded vowels in open, pretonic syllables

A hitherto neglected development, the details of which still need to be worked out, relates to the treatment of rounded vowels in open, pretonic syllables. The distribution of forms ending in *-o* vs. *-u* follows a multiplicity of factors that subtly change over time. Despite having inherited two different vowels, *-o* and *-u*, in this position, in Early Old Irish sources (Cambrai Homily, Würzburg *prima manus* and other early manuscripts) the original rationale for the distribution of the vowels had already been lost and they are in free variation. In the glosses of the Würzburg main hand it seems that *-o* had been generalised for all preverbs, but *-u* was its allophon if a pretonic preverb was preceded by another particle like *má* 'if' or *cía* 'although' (where the preverb 'has the minimum amount of stress', *GOI* 63). In the Milan glosses, *-o* and *-u* are in free variation in all positions. This situation is again reversed by the time of the St. Gall glosses where *-u* has been given up almost completely, except for those positions of minimal stress mentioned above. Preliminary observations can be found in Stifter forthc., and future research may result in a detailed chronology. At the moment it looks as if the chronology extractable from the available evidence applies mainly to the 8th and 9th centuries, but perhaps it will be relevant for the early period as well. Because of the general state of flux in the representation of pretonic rounded vowels, the original distribution of spellings is particularly prone to have become obliterated in the case of this feature.

1.7. Complementary distribution of word-final velar fricatives

In standard Old Irish, the distribution of word-final velar fricatives is complementary: palatalised fricatives appear as *-ig* /ɣ'/ (but in stressed syllables, *-ich* /χ'/ is also possible), non-palatalised ones as *-ch* /χ/ (*GOI* 82–83). The distibution in the earliest period was free, i.e. all four variants *-ch* [χ], *-ich* [χ'], *-g* [ɣ], *-ig* [ɣ'] were possible, but the system was re-arranged in the early 8th century, perhaps in conjunction with the voicing of final voiceless fricatives discussed above (McCone 1996, 133–134). Nevertheless, older forms can still appear as late as the 9th century (e.g. *pecthich* Ml. 57d1), be it for archaising, stylistic

reasons, or under analogical influence from within the paradigm, e.g. nom.sg. *pecthach* in the example from the Milan glosses.[4]

1.8. Depalatalisation of proclitic elements

Proclitic elements were depalatalised probably during the first half of the 8th century (*GOI* 105–106; McCone 1996, 135), e.g. *amail* in the Würzburg *prima manus* (Wb. 21c10, 22c14; also *CG* 461), while the usual form in the OIr. glosses is *amal* (Wb. 6a30). In the Milan glosses, the word is commonly abbreviated *am-*, but note *amal* in Ml. 90a10, 107c8, 118d13, always before a following non-palatalised consonant. The Cambrai Homily shows a fluctuation between proclitic elements with and without palatalisation, but non-palatalised forms could have been introduced into this text during a later redaction (Uhlich 2009).

1.9. *au* > *u*

The OIr. diphthongs *au* (from **a* by *u*-infection) and *ai*/*au*/*e*/*i* (from **a* by infection and umlaut before **ü*?, cf. Stifter 2001: 227[2]) become *u* and a short front monophthong respectively in the Old Irish period (*GOI* 50–52; Greene 1976, 28–29; Uhlich 1995: 39; McCone 1996, 139). Ó Máille (1910, 69–70) cannot be used for the elucidation of these developments because he mixes several different, independent phenomena; a new study of the phenomenon is necessary.

1.10. *mr-, ml-*

Late manuscript variation in early medieval legal texts between *ml*/*mr*, intermediate *mbl*/*mbr* and ultimate *bl*/*br* is not indicative of anything. Since *mr-* and *ml-* are fully and—by the looks of it—correctly retained

[4] Kelly (*AM* xxxi) must be in error when he says that 'in *AM* […] historical *g* is preserved in […] *oenagh*'. Surely, this word goes back to earlier **oi̯nāko-* which should show up as *-ch* in historical spelling.

as late as the Milan and the St. Gall Glosses (the only instance in the latter is *mrechtrad*, however), *a fortiori* no change is expected for the period between 650–750. If progressive spellings are found in manuscripts of law texts, they must have been introduced by later scribes.

1.11. Assimilation of *ln* > *ll*

The primary cluster *ln*, which had been inherited from Proto-Indo-European or which had arisen in Proto-Celtic, had already been assimilated to *ll* at a much earlier, independent step. Where the two sounds had come into contact by syncope in Archaic Irish or through the secondary re-introduction of *n* after *l*, they, too, were eventually assimilated to *ll* by the time of the Milan glosses (*GOI* 95). If the material for secondary *ln* > *ll* in Ó Máille (1910, 101–102) can be trusted (in fact, rather diverse and sometimes non-relevant forms are collected there), the change may have occurred towards the middle of the 8th century, i.e. after the period of production of law texts. However, lack of *-n-* in such clusters, that is, forms with assimilation, in texts transmitted in later manuscripts are of little evidential value since they could have been introduced during the textual transmission. The loss of *n* sandwiched between two consonants (found for the position after *l* already in the Cambrai Homily, *dilluth*; cf. McCone 1996, 137) is a separate and earlier phenomenon.

1.12. Assimilation of *ld* > *ll*

The assimilation of *ld* > *ll* is also likely to have taken place after the main period of legal composition. The hypercorrect spelling *·reildisem-ni* (Ml. 63d15) for *·reillisem-ni* < *·reilnisem-ni* indicates that the change had taken place by the time of the Milan Glosses in the early 9th century (*GOI* 95). Apart from this one tell-tale instance, the scribe of Milan, who must have been very well trained in old-style spelling, got all his *ld*'s etymologically right.

1.13. *mb* > *m(m)*, *nd* > *n(n)* in proclitics

The assimilation of voiced obstruents to preceding homorganic nasals (i.e., *mb* > *mm*; *nd* > *nn*) probably did not occur before the 9th century and is therefore beyond the radar of this survey (*GOI* 93). On the other hand, Ó Máille (1910, 113) seems to be inclined to set the change of *nd* > *nn* very early at the beginning of the 8th century. He must almost certainly be wrong in doing this because the sounds are still kept apart rather faithfully in the much later glosses.[5] The most probable solution is that the early instances of confusion of *nd* and *nn* which he quotes are due to later scribal interference. However, the similar development in pretonic, unstressed elements must certainly have taken place at an early date (*GOI* 93). This mainly affects disyllabic forms of the article and the preposition and preverb *imb* > *imm*. Since examples for the unassimilated variants are so rare in the extant sources (e.g., *indá* Wb 20d5, *inda Thes* II 47.24, *dundaib Thes* II 247.12 (Cambrai Homily), *dendibh AU* 727.3), no precise chronological information can be derived from it at the moment.

1.14. Aphaeresis (loss of initial vowels in unstressed disyllabic words)

In several instances whether a particular phonological development belongs to the original language of a text transmitted in late manuscripts can only be determined from the evidence of metrical texts. Most of these developments have to do with the syllabic count of words. One such development is aphaeresis, that is the loss of initial vowels in unstressed disyllabic words, very common in the article *inna* > *na* (*GOI* 71). This starts at least as early as the main body of glosses in Würzburg (*na teora persana* Wb 9c30, *na cétne tuisten* Wb 21b4). McCone (1984, 46) is even prepared to take the manuscript evidence for monosyllabic *na* at face value in the case of

[5] But note, for example, *chlain* and *chláinn* 'offspring' in Ml. 23d12 and 9b17 respectively, against forty occurences of the word with *-nd* in the same manuscript, and the inverse spelling *ambus* (75d8) against etymologically correct *ammus* (91c6). This attests to a certain degree of instability in the case of the Milan scribe, who nevertheless must have learnt the older spelling very well.

Bechbretha, a text which is probably considerably earlier than the Würzburg glosses. One must not lose sight of the fact, though, that the deliberate or inadvertant replacement of disyllabic forms by monosyllabic ones could have occurred very easily in the course of transmission, so the diagnostic value of *na* in copied, non-metrical texts should not be overestimated. For this very reason, *AU* cannot tell us a lot here either (Ó Máille 1910, 123), even more so as it does not contain many relevant forms. It is remarkable that *Immram Brain*, which is a potentially early text from around or shortly after 700, displays a number of instances of metrically verified *na*. James Carney (1983, 199–200) led the way in research in this area by producing statistics of the ratio of *inna* vs. *na* for a number of datable metrical texts. His figures reveal that from a monolithic 100% in the 7th century 'the graph of *inna* falls slowly and regularly […] to zero from about 900 onwards'. If further research can corroborate Carney's findings and if, furthermore, the decline over this period can be demonstrated to be roughly linear, the easily computable ratio of *inna* vs. *na* in a text might prove a possible dating criterion.[6]

1.15. Hiatus

The presence of hiatus, which, unless its contraction is accompanied by a decisive change in spelling, normally can only be diagnosed in verse, is a potential chronological indicator, albeit one beset with several difficulties. For the early Old Irish period, hiatus is expected to have been retained, so absence of hiatus *per se* is a strong indicator of late composition or later interference with the text. But the reverse is not true: on the evidence of Middle Irish poetry it is evident that poets were trained in and capable of producing correct and occasionally hyper-correct hiatus forms to meet the requirements of the metres, even at a period when such forms had surely gone out of spoken use in Ireland. The distinction is therefore between a period when correct hiatus forms were obligatory, because they reflected ordinary speech, and when they had become an option for stylistic, metrical purposes.

[6] Widmer 2012 applies a very similar method to the linguistic dating of Middle and Early Modern Breton texts.

Furthermore, loss of hiatus need not have occurred at the same time for all words. Already in Old Irish, hiatus was regularly transformed either into a long monophthong or a diphthong when another syllable was added to a disyllabic form with hiatus, e.g. *coïr* 'proper, correct, right', but dat.pl. *córaib* < **coär-aib* or abstract *córae* < * *coär-e*. In words with such an alternation between paradigmatic forms with and without hiatus, the hiatusless allomorphs may have seen earlier generalisation than in words without alternation. Thurneysen (*GOI* 71–72) also draws attention to the difference between the treatment of disyllabic vowel sequences in stressed and unstressed syllables, which may have taken place at different times. Carney (1983, 194–196) observes for the poems studied by him that while the retention rate of hiatuses in the 7th century is 100%, they start to decline in the 8th century, and he notes the first examples of false hiatuses, implying contraction, towards the end of this century.

1.16. Hyposyllabicity

So far, the survey has been concerned with changes during the period in question or towards and shortly after its end. In his studies on the linguistic dating of verse texts, James Carney (1971, 1979, 1989) discussed two phenomena that potentially predate this period. He suggested that linguistic features of Primitive or Archaic Irish before the 7th century could be identified in certain archaic-looking poems. One observation concerns poems that occasionally contain disyllabic forms where the rules of versification require three syllables (Carney 1989, 50–51, 54–55). Carney concluded that those texts had been composed before the operation of the important Primitive Irish rule of syncope which eliminated the vowel of every second, non-final syllable. He dated this development to the beginning of the 6th century; McCone (1996, 127) positions it rather in the middle of the century. Several problems beset Carney's hypothesis (Corthals 1990; Breatnach 1996, 75–76). Disregarding his further idea that syncope actually consisted of two independent and chronologically separate rules, an idea that he himself abrogated at the end of his life (1989, 54–55), the hypothesis is compromised by the fact that the basis for his observations are not syllabic metres, but accentual verses. It is true

that the poems he adduced occasionally contain trisyllabic cadences, but the disyllabic exceptions are phonologically predictable and can be explained as the artificial product of poetic licence. It is conceivable that the poets had been trained to regard disyllabic words of the structure $\sigma C_{[+len.]}.C_{[+len]}\sigma$ as metrically equivalent to trisyllabic ones. To verify this alternative explanation, it would be necessary to find hypercorrect examples of such pseudo-trisyllables, that is, disyllabic words in trisyllabic position with an inherited consonant cluster in the middle which did not come about by syncope. In any case, poems displaying Carney's aberrant feature need not go back to the pre-syncope period, but can contain a stylistic element of the poetic craft of, for example, the early 7th century, but this requires further study.

1.17. Hypersyllabicity

Carney also made the exactly reverse observation about instances where an Old Irish word occupies a position where the metre, again the cadence of accentual verse, requires a syllable count of one less. These cases of hypersyllabicity may have a greater claim to age than the preceding type of hyposyllabicity. Whereas in those hyposyllabic forms a phonetic feature on the surface of the words, the presence of a medial cluster of usually lenited sounds, may mark them out as continuing an originally longer form, thus facilitating their 'correct' metrical use even by poets after the operation of the relevant sound-change, there is nothing in the surface representation of, e.g., *domuin* < **doμn'* < **dubnī* 'of the world' that will synchronically reveal a different prehistory from, e.g., *samuin* < **saμon'* < **samonis* '1st November'. In *samuin*, the second syllable continues an earlier syllabic nucleus, whereas in *domuin* the second syllable is due to the Primitive Irish rule of anapytxis, the insertion of a vowel into a group of consonant + tautosyllabic resonant. McCone (1996, 127) dates anaptyxis immediately after the roughly mid-6th century syncope. When examples of hypersyllabicity are confined to forms where anaptyxis is etymologically expected, this is surely significant, since such a distribution is inexplicable if the feature were the result of poetic licence in the post-anaptyxis period. Carney (1979, 426–427)

only cited etymologically correct examples in support of his hypothesis, and Lindeman 1984 added a few more. If examples of hypercorrect use could be encountered, this feature, too, would prove artificial and would lose its dating force. If, however, Carney's hypothesis is indeed correct, it would attest to a truly old age for texts with this feature, more than a century before the beginning of the written Irish tradition.

1.18. Pre-compensatory lengthening

The final feature to be discussed in the section on phonology was again identified by James Carney (1989, 45–46). In order to arrive at correct rhymes in early poetry, sometimes word-forms have to be restored that reflect the state of the language before the loss of fricatives before resonants (mid-6th c., McCone 1996, 122–124), e.g. for *mál*, **magl* has to be read to rhyme with *Sanb*, for *brón* read **brogn* to rhyme with *tomm*. It is theoretically conceivable that some of this usage formed part of the linguistic training of the poets, but it is rather unlikely that it could have continued for long without entailing a large number of false archaisms.

2. Orthography

Determining chronological criteria for early Old Irish from orthographical variation[7] is hindered by the fact that only a limited amount of texts from the period in question survives in contemporary manuscripts, all collected in *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*. This handful of texts, which even among themselves show considerable fluctuation in orthographic practice, are the main guiding lines for comparing the writing habits in the countless specimens of literary production of this period, including all legal writing, that have been transmitted in much younger manuscripts, and have usually undergone various types of orthographic adaptation and modernisation in the

[7] For the rules of Old Irish orthography, which are rather complex even in their main outlines, see *GOI* 18–111; Ahlqvist 1994, 26–33.

process of transmission. In practical terms this means that only spellings that deviate from later medieval and early modern writing practices can be of evidential significance for making inferences about the chronology of texts. And even in those cases it must be determined first if the deviant practice is really an archaism or is not rather due to the idiosyncratic writing styles of late scribes. Scribes in the early modern period mix Old and Modern Irish orthographic habits, and introduce deliberately archaic spellings. A well-known case in point is the spelling *to·* for the pretonic preverb which in Classical Old Irish had certainly already become *do·* (see the preceding section on phonology). Nevertheless it keeps recurring in the manuscript tradition of Irish. Educated scribes were able to re-introduce it etymologically correctly into deuterotonic verbal forms on the basis of the prototonic alternants. This specific problem is further aggravated by the graphic similarity of the letters *to·* and *do·* in some manuscript hands (*AM* xxx). In a similar fashion, the preverb *di-* can be re-introduced for 'sprachwirklich' contemporary *do·* (*AM* xxx).

2.1. Absence of the *a*-glide

An example of an orthographic change, which is not the reflex of a phonological change,[8] is the absence in the earliest period of the *a*-glide, that is, the letter *a* as an orthographic marker of non-palatalisation of the preceding consonant, whereas its use became more regular later on; cf. Wb. 13d33 *gabalib* against the later practice in Ml. 54b25 *gabalaib*, for the same sequence of sounds. However, even within the Würzburg and Milan glosses there is considerable fluctuation in the practice. When looking at early sources, it is indispensable to assess every apparent instance of an *a*-glide in its own right. On superficial inspection, spellings like *amail* (Wb. 21c10, 22c24) or *dasachtaich* (Wb. 19b3) in the Würzburg *prima manus* could erroneously be thought to contain the *a*-glide. But in fact these spellings rather contain instances of the inherited *a*-vocalism of unstressed syllables before a palatalised consonant. In other words, the

[8] Unless the orthographic variation reflects a phonetic development whereby actually a non-palatal on-glide arose on the sub-phonemic level.

‹a› in those instances may still represent the full vowel /a/, or a reduced variant of it, viz. < **(s)amali-* and **dāssaχtākī*. However, even in the early sources the quality of the inherited vowel need not find graphic expression; compare for example the difference between *tolaib* < **tolābis* and *pecthib* < **pekkātu/abis*[9] in the Cambrai Homily (*Thes* II 245.9, .10), or *laubir* < **labūrin* against *laubair* < **labūrī* in the same text (*Thes* II 247.5, .20). Examples of the difference in usage are plentiful in the extant texts (e.g., *AM* xx f.). Not infrequently, the earlier usage is preserved in a single manuscript against the standard usage in all other sources, e.g. MS B[1] of *Audacht Morainn* against the rest. In such cases, it is reasonable to start from the working hypothesis that the *lectio rarior* is the *lectio uetustior*, and to let it take precedence of significance over the standard usage.

2.2. Absence of *i*-glide

Likewise, early sources are less consistent in their use of the *i*-glide to mark the palatalisation of the following consonant. However, there is a fundamental difference between the *i*-glide and the *a*-glide, in that the former already appears quite regularly in the earliest sources, whereas the latter has a slow start, as argued in the preceding paragraph.

A special sub-group among the instances of the *i*-glide is formed by monosyllabic words with the vowel *e* and a closing patalised consonant, where palatalisation may find no graphic expression: *ben* for acc. sg. *bein* 'woman', *·ber* for *·beir* are well-noted examples of this (McCone 1996, 58–59; differently *GOI* 358); the manuscripts of *Bechbretha* contain several instances of *bech* for plural *beich* 'bees' (*BBr* 3). However, since even as late as the Milan Glosses 3sg *·ber* has an equal standing beside *·beir*, this feature is not necessarily indicative of great age.

[9] Unless the ‹i› of *pecthib* represents the allophon [ʏ] of **u* before a syllable containing a front high vowel in **pekkātubis*.

2.3. *i*-diphthongs

Throughout Irish history, there was considerable variation in the spelling of diphthongs[10] (in addition to genuinely phonetic developments like *au* > *u*, dealt with above). One that is relevant for the present dating purposes is the change in the representation of *i*-diphthongs. In early Old Irish, they were written *ai*/*oi* in all positions, i.e. both before non-palatalised and palatalised consonants, but in some school traditions a differentiated system was introduced in the 8th century whereby *ae*/*oe* came to be written before non-palatalised consonants, but *i* was retained for pre-palatalised positions. However, to complicate matters, some scribes extended *ae*/*oe* also to pre-palatalised positions. And finally, some scribes used compromise spellings which included all letters, e.g., *oei*. The chronology is less than straightforward. The Würzburg glosses, traditionally assigned to the middle of the 8th century, tend—though far from consistently—towards the differentiated system, whereas the considerably later Milan glosses (traditionally dated to the beginning of the 9th c.) display almost exclusively the older system with *oi* everywhere. At roughly the same time, around 800, the scribes of the Book of Armagh and of the Stowe Missal are far more progressive and go so far as to introduce spellings with *e* even into words where the *i* did not indicate a diphthong, but was the graphic off-glide used to indicate a following palatalised consonant (after Uhlich 2009): *buachaele* for *búachaille* 'cowherd' (*Thes* II 239.13), *saele* for *saile* 'spittle' (*Thes* II 250.10), *fuel* for *fúail* 'urine' (*Thes* II 250.13). This practice has been called orthographic diphthongisation (Uhlich 1993, § 27); Ó Máille, who cites examples from *AU* from even the 7th century, believes that those cases are due to mistakes in the transmission from the older to the newer system (Ó Máille 1910, 21–22). The mixed presence of early, progressive and compromise spellings in the Cambrai Homily has been taken by Uhlich 2009 to indicate a revision of this text, perhaps in the 8th century. To take *Bechbretha* and *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* as examples, texts written in the 7th century, but transmitted only in much later manuscripts, cannot be expected to adhere to the original system of writing the diphthongs; during their transmission the

[10] On diphthongs in Early Irish in general see Greene 1976.

diphthongal spellings may have been completely replaced by younger systems like writing *óe* or, even younger still, *ao* for them.

3. Morphology

The practical value of morphological change as an indicator of a precise date is smaller than that of phonology. Since phonetics and phonology operate at a deep, unconscious level of linguistic competence, they are largely impervious to conscious manipulation. Morphology on the other hand includes rules that, depending on the type of morphology,[11] regularly or occasionally need to be applied actively in the correct formation of words, especially of rare ones, and it is therefore more open to deliberate, conscious interference by speakers. When speakers have to make a decision between several morphological possibilities, suggested to them by conflicting rules and patterns (analogies), morphological change can ensue or archaisms can be deliberately retained. Since variation of this kind can be much more individual than phonological variation, morphology is better suited to distinguish between stylistic preferences of authors and/or texts, than between chronological differences. Older and newer forms can exist side by side for a much longer time, depending on style and the linguistic training and awareness of the author. At the same time, in morphology innovations based on productive patterns can more easily come into existence independently of each other at different places at different times. All of this conspires to make morphological variation a much less reliable instrument for dating than phonology is. Of course, there are broad tendencies over time, but on the microlevel of an individual text they are unlikely to be applicable for a precise dating. Since in morphology there are even less clear-cut changes than in phonology, relative ratios of conservative vs. progressive forms could be a useful device in assessing general tendencies. Of course, in order to be statistically significant, such ratios can only be applied to features that occur in significantly great numbers in texts.

[11] The presupposition here is that paradigmatic forms of central, frequently used items of speech are stored and retrieved as separate words, whereas only rarely used words are actively formed according to the grammatical rules of the speaker.

The following list is meant as entirely impressionistic as to what kinds of variation might be the object of more detailed investigations, and it lays no claim at all to exhaustiveness.

Inflectional morphology:

- long vs. short forms in the dative/accusative singular of *ī*-stems (e.g. *blíadnai* vs. *blíadain*);
- short and long datives in consonant stems (e.g. *oíntu* vs. *oíntaid*, *Ére* vs. *Érinn*);
- *-u* vs. *-a* in the accusative plural of consonant stems (e.g. *aradu* vs. *ascada*);
- accusative *bein* vs. *mnaí*;
- short vs. long neuter plurals (e.g. *cenn* vs. *cenna*);
- loss of the neuter gender;
- *-a* as general plural marker in adjectives;
- feminine nominative *téoir* vs. *téora* '3';
- feminine *di* '2' vs. *da*;
- loss of inflectional marking after numerals

etc.

At the interface between morphology and syntax, there is the use of suffixed vs. infixed pronouns, personal numerals restricted only to men in the early time vs. their wider use for any kind of persons in the later language, or, in the area of verbs, the spread of the *ro*-forms in the past. A curious instance on the border between morphology and the lexicon is the use of *-sa* as the 3sg. masculine *nota augens*, occasionally found in the glosses, but really prominent in some narrative texts in the *Cín Dromma Snechtai* collection (Carey 1995, 81–82). This distribution could perhaps be more dialectal than diachronic.

A potential and obvious treasure trove for morphological change can be found in the verbs, both in inflectional morphology (e.g. the spread of the 1sg ending *-(a)imm* at the expense of *-u*; or the decline of the deponent inflection), but even more so in the area of stem formation with its enormous amount of material evidence for variation (McCone 1997). However, precisely because of the very complexity

of Old Irish verbal morphology and the resulting enormous amount of variation, I deem its practical worth almost nil for dating purposes. Since so many rules interacted and counteracted, 'correct' (according to a Platonic ideal of Old Irish grammar), progressive and hyper-correct forms can appear, disappear and re-appear in the sources without recoverable correlation with chronology.

4. Syntax

Syntax is a minefield in linguistic dating. Older editions of Irish law texts (to cite only one representative example: *BrDC* 3–4) abound in syntactic criteria that are regarded as good evidence for early composition: independent datives, verb-final constructions (tmesis and Bergin's Law constructions), absence of connectives, especially absence of *ocus* (Mac Cana 1972, 110–113), absence of the article,[12] to name the most prominent. In fact, most of these features can be regarded as purely stylistic since they could have been learned in schools and mechanically applied in those genres which required appropriately 'archaic' language. Unless additional evidence can be found that places a text in the early period, the mere presence of these features makes a text not archaic, but archaising. Ground-breaking research in this respect was undertaken by Breatnach (1984, 1986, 52, 1996, 72–73) and Corthals (1989, 1996, 1999). Corthals in effect even questions the validity of the concept 'archaising' for some of these

[12] The absence of the article can hardly lay claim on particularly old age. The morpho-phonology of the article reveals that its presence in the language must be ancient, because otherwise the allomorphy between forms of the article with and without initial *s* cannot be explained (e.g., acc. *in* 'the' vs. preposition + acc. *isin* 'into the'). By comparison with the similar behaviour of related forms in other Celtic languages like Gaulish and British, the loss of the *s-* of **sindo-* in proclitic usage must go back to the first millennium BC. Since the combinations of certain non-leniting prepositions with the article, e.g. *cosind* < **kom+sindū*, do retain the *s*, they must have been created before the loss of proclitic *s-*. It follows from this that a preform of the article, probably in demonstrative use, was already in existence in Irish in the first millennium BC, and its absence in archaic style is due to conscious suppression, maybe in imitation of Latin, and not to an archaic usage. It is therefore a stylistic device.

features, but regards them as plainly artificial. He thinks that Latin grammar may have provided the model for the creation of these syntactic patterns.

Where syntactic variation is more likely to have a dating value is in relation to individual forms or constructions, that is in those areas where there is an overlap with vocabulary. Even though the absence of *ocus* as such in archaising style is easily explicable as a stylistic device, it may have some relevance to dating if in its stead the archaic connectives *sceo* and enclitic *-ch* occur. Especially the latter, which is very rare, may be a guiding fossil, because it is not only a lexical substitute for *ocus* (such a substitution could be made almost mechanically), but it entails a non-trivially different phrasal or clausal structure. The same is true for the rare negative connector *nach* (*EICL* 233–234; *BBr*. 13; McCone 1986, 34). Binchy 1960 dates its obsolescence to before c. 700.

5. Lexicon

The area of change in vocabulary encompasses two different phenomena. One is that of loanwords. It has been claimed by previous generations of scholars that the older Irish texts are, the less Latin influence they show (e.g., *BrDC* 3–4). This assumption builds on the tacit presupposition that some of the texts may go back to pre-Christian times, or at least to times when native law schools were bravely and consciously resisting the influx of foreign ideas and words. Damian McManus's 1983 study of loanwords has dealt a blow to this by showing that Latin words came into Irish constantly from a very early point of time onwards. The idea that texts might go back orally to pre-Christian times or that there had been intellectual centres of resistance against Christianity, has gone out of fashion (cf. *EICL* 117–118). The presence or absence of Latin loanwords as such can be no practically valid chronological indicator for texts at all because the bulk of loans entered the Irish language long before the composition of the written Irish texts. It is theoretically conceivable that there was a conscious reluctance to use recognisably Latin words in specific genres, but such a decision would have been a stylistic one, with no chronological implication.

Occasionally, however, Latin loans may have some dating relevance if the borrowed item deviated from standard Latin, by having undergone some dialectal or regional variation before it came to Ireland or by being itself a recent coinage. Since Latin is the better known and better attested language, changes in its vocabulary can be expected to be more easily datable, and will thus indirectly allow inferences for Irish (e.g., the case of *mortalitas*/*mortlaid* in *AM* xxxix). Another not yet well-researched area is that of loanwords from the British languages. Depending on the phonetic shape of the British words, they can be positioned within the chronological framework of British soundchanges.[13] However, the number of such loans into Irish is not large, and, as in the case of Irish, the relative sequence of British soundchanges is better known than their absolute dating.

In the field of inherited vocabulary, the chronological significance of variation is of a different type. In all languages of the world, new words are constantly being coined, for example to meet the requirements of changing conditions of life, but sometimes for no other reason than for the fashionable modification of speech habits, while others go out of use. Therefore, there must have been a body of lexemes that had been there in prehistory, but were no longer in use in Old Irish. At the same time, in every literary tradition, be it written or oral, there is an inherent awareness of the obsolescence of expressions, an obsolescence which can then be practically utilised to create the semblance of antiquity. Since the only picture we can get of the medieval Irish language is the one that has already passed through the filter of the literary tradition, it will in practice be hard to distinguish between a rare word that owes its rareness to an inherently low token frequency or to its sporadic employment for archaising purposes. At least lexicographic collections like Cormac's Glossary give us a hint of some words that appear to have been considered unusual at the time of its composition, c. 900, but only a very loose chronological network can be established that way. Progress in this area, if indeed there is room for progress here at all, can only be achieved by detailed diachronically-driven research in lexical fields. From a practical point of view, monographic studies of individual words across a wide range

[13] Research on this is currently carried out by Bernhard Bauer from the University of Vienna.

of texts will be required to see if lexemes can be used as dating devices in any meaningful way at all.

For the reason that the use or disuse of words is such a conscious part of human speech and therefore entirely open to deliberate variation, probably the best candidates for lexical items which could have chronological significance are those where the variation is as far as possible on a subconscious, i.e. grammatical level, and where the variation could also be described as one of phonology or morphology. To cite only a few illustrative examples: the change from earlier *már* to standard OIr. *mór* 'great, big' is such an unmotivated change, or the use of *fil* in main clauses to mean 'there is' instead of *at·tá*. Sometimes, lexical variation is linked up with syntax because, due to the structure of Old Irish, a difference in functional words may entail a difference in the overall phrasal or clausal construction, as in the case of *fil* vs. *at·tá*. Another example is *acht*, which survived in Irish mainly as the adversative conjunction 'but' and in several special constructions (*GOI* 560–561), but went out of use as a preposition meaning 'except', governing the accusative, probably during the 7th century (de Vries 2010).

6. Semantics

The criterion of semantics is largely inseparable from the preceding one. When the meanings of words change over time, an unusual or anachronistic usage may reveal something about the history of a text, but the depth of focus of this method is extremely shallow. A practical limit to this approach is that too little is known about the semantic range of words in the pre-literate period, and that variation cannot only be between periods, but also between dialects or genres. An example for the latter, the specific meaning of a word in a clearly circumscribed group of texts, is discussed by Fergus Kelly in relation to the term *nemed* (*AM* xix). In law-texts of the so-called *Bretha Nemed* school, *nemed* has a wider application than in texts from outside this school. In practice, it will normally not be possible to distinguish between stylistic, diatopic and diachronic variation of semantics.

7. Style

In the preceding discussion, specific variations in features have been often referred not to age, but to style. However, even stylistic preferences change over time. It is therefore theoretically possible to study stylistics as a meta-criterion, thereby multiplying, of course, all the complexities and problems involved. To name one example: Charles-Edwards (2005, 344–346) has proposed a rough chronological grid defined by style where the main criterion is the influence of Latin devices of composition (question and answer, enumeration, etymology). These devices make themselves felt, according to Charles-Edwards, from c. 700 onwards.

8. Metrics

Aside from the fact that a lot of what conceptually falls under the heading 'stylistic' is intricately tied up with specific metrical forms, the use of varying modes of versification like rhythmic and alliterative poetry was regarded as an impeccable indicator of old age, in tandem with the syntactic peculiarities mentioned above (e.g. *BrDC* 3). The fallacy of this idea was established in a classic article by Breatnach 1984 (cf. also Breatnach 1986, 52; McCone 1986, 26–27), and more evidence has been adduced in subsequent studies e.g. by Corthals (1989, 1996, 1999), so that the idea is no longer maintained by scholars today. Although the employment or non-employment of the two types of medieval Irish versification is therefore no chronological indicator, technical changes within each of the two types may reflect metrical developments over time, e.g. changes in the rhyming rules in syllabic poetry or differences between the various types of non-rhyming poetry (Breatnach 1996, 66–72).

9. Conclusion

On an abstract level, any change is by necessity a function of time and carries therefore chronological information. Except for rare cases, however, the lack of sufficiently plentiful sources of Early Irish does not permit us to establish the point or stretch of time when the change

took place. Independent of this, the mapping of originally chronological differences onto the stylistic plane follows almost by implication: any kind of diachronic variation that is perceptionally, cognitively salient and recognisable, can be re-deployed to achieve stylistic effects. This is as much true for medieval Irish authors as it is for modern writing. Stylistic re-employability most obviously relates to the choice of lexemes and their meanings, but also to deviant syntactical patterns, and of course to obsolete sound patterns and their graphic representations. Therefore most of the variation described above has had to be qualified as being potentially or likely stylistic, which is disappointing from the point of view of the initial chronological question that informed the present investigation. The method is perhaps more effective for distinguishing between chronological layers within a text or across texts than for pinning those layers to a specific time.

There is no need to be dejected about this, however. A practical application of stylistics is that style varies from author to author. Instead of telling us something about time, the detailed scrutiny of texts in regard to the above-mentioned criteria is likely to reveal something about authorial persons. But despite the mainly stylistic significance of variation, there is still a core of features that may carry concrete chronological information, the more subconsciously embedded in grammar the more usable. Many of the potential chronological indicators in phonology, orthography, morphology etc. are well-known; more, I am convinced, can be identified in appropriate studies. What is needed is a reliable referencing system for chronological indicators, a *Chronologicon Hibernicum*, where all available information about securely dated texts and about datable changes is collected and harmonised in a reproducible fashion. By checking texts against a wide range of criteria, not just a few select ones, so as to avoid individual outliers distorting the picture, a statistical spread may be achieved which may enable us in the future to anchor the texts more reliably in a tightly-knit chronological network.

IV. CÁIN ADOMNÁIN

In the following, the theoretical framework developed in the first part will be applied to a concrete text, *Cáin Adomnáin* 'The Law of Adomnán'. This is the only law text for which the precise year of publication is known, 697. This fact alone warrants us to have a closer look at it, but another factor renders it an even more suitable starting point. There is general agreement that the core of *Cáin Adomnáin* was written by the man whose name it bears, St. Adomnán of Iona, or that he at least had strong influence on the text. With this text we are in the fortunate position of possessing a small corpus of other writings by the same man, most notably *De Locis Sanctis*, a treatise on the geography of the Holy Land, and the *Vita Columbae*, the Life of his predecessor St. Colum Cille. Even though those two works are fundamentally written in Latin, the *Vita* contains a considerable number of Latinised Irish names and a few other Irish words. The spelling, the phonology and the morphology of those words has long been recognised as reflecting an archaic stage of Old Irish, wholly in accordance with the likely date of composition of the text at the end of the seventh century. It can also be speculated that the entries in the Annals of Ulster between 679 and 704, when Adomnán was abbot of Iona, were written by himself and may thus add a little bit of extra evidence for his linguistic habits. These other texts provide welcome points of comparison with the language of *CA*, in a literary tradition that otherwise offers few opportunities to compare the style and language of one author across several works.[14] In the following, however, I will restrict myself to an exclusively internal study of *CA*.

Although the text can be dated quite confidently to the years shortly before 700, it can by no means be taken for granted that its language reflects the usage of its days. The author, Adomnán, was around 70 at that time, so that his writings could rather be typical of general language usage several decades before the end of the 7th century.

[14] When the author is unknown, the identity of authorship of texts must be inferred from circumstantial evidence. Thus it has been suggested that the law texts *Bechbretha* and *Coibnes Uisci Thairidne* were written by the same author (Binchy 1955, 54; *BBr*. 12–14, 27–28).

What has come down to the present time under the title *Cáin Adomnáin* is a conspicuously composite text.[15] Some of the textual sections and junctures are fairly obvious. The four main constitutive parts of the extant texts were first identified by Ryan 1936; Ní Dhonnchadha (1991, 28–42) distinguishes even as many as nine different strata (*a–i*). The first, and by far the largest, section of the text is devoted to a piously bizarre account of the circumstances in which the law came into existence (§§ 1–27). Its language and legendary character give it away as a wholly Middle Irish composition, dated to the 10th or early 11th century by Ní Dhonnchadha (1991, 115). Since the text survives possibly only because it received special reverence in the church of Raphoe (Charles-Edwards 2005, 337), this section may have been added during a redaction there (Ní Dhonnchadha 1991, 42). The next section consists of the very long and historically important guarantor list of the law and the disposition and sanction-clauses (§§ 28–32). On internal historical grounds, this section can be dated to 697, perhaps with a revision in 727 (Ní Dhonnchadha 1991, 37; 1982). Then follows a Latin interlude, words of an angel to Adomnán (§ 33). The remaining paragraphs (§§ 34–53) constitute the fourth section. They contain the *Cáin* proper, Adomnán's law on the treatment of innocents, said to have been promulgated in 697. The following discussion will only focus on this final section, and because of the limited space, the argument will not be gradually developed, but the results of the investigation will simply be presented.

Of the two manuscripts that have preserved the text (MSS Rawlinson B 512 = R; and Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale MS 2324–40 = B), all 53 chapters are only present in the B version. The last four are missing from the R version, and there is nothing that indicates a textual lacuna. The text of the *Cáin* proper that is common to both manuscripts is clearly good Old Irish, and there is no reason not to call its author Adomnán. The language looks rather early, but not as archaic as one might expect given its traditional year of composition. A close reading of the final four chapters in the single manuscript witness, however,

[15] All references are to the paragraphs of Meyer's edition of 1905. Other editions and translations of the text are Ní Dhonnchadha 1991, Ní Dhonnchadha 2001, Márkus 1997, Ó Néill & Dumville 2003.

reveals a range of linguistic and stylistic deviations from Adomnán's first sixteen paragraphs:

- While most instances in the initial part are ambiguous,[16] there is just enough evidence to prove that *banscál* 'female person' was inflected there as a neuter *o*-stem noun (§ 41 nom.sg. R *na banscál* 'any woman'). In its first occurrence in § 50 in the final part, it inflects as a feminine *ā*-stem (§ 50 gen.sg. B *banscaile*). This is an instance of a morphological change.
- § 50 has the rather young form *nonacrios* (= *nó 'na cris*) 'or in her girdle' with aphaeresis of the initial vowel of *ina* 'in her' (phonological change).
- § 52 contains the re-analysed variant *mor seiser* 'seven men' for older *mórfeisser* (a lexematic change on the phonological level).
- The feminine numerals show progressive signs in § 53: nom. sg. *teora aitire* for older *téoir aitiri*, and dual *da eitiri* instead of *di aitiri* (morphological change).
- § 52 has one certain attestation of *fil*, the relative form of the substantive verb. A second token of *fil* in the same section is unclear. This form is otherwise absent from the *Cáin* proper; instead Adomnán, being very discreet in his choice of words, uses the habitual form of the substantive verb in such contexts (§ 34 *bíte*, § 36 *bís*), perhaps to underline the timeless character of his provisions. This is not a change as such, but a stylistic difference in usage on the morphological-lexematic level.
- The noun *fíach* 'fine' is construed with the preposition *i* 'in' to express its causation in the *Cáin* proper (§ 35 *lethḟíach ind*; § 42 *lethḟíach ind*; § 46 *féich … ind*); in § 52, *lánḟíach de* is

[16] § 34 acc.pl. R *banscala*, B *banscala*; § 41: nom.sg. R *na banscal*, B *nach banscal*, nom. sg. R *banscal*, B *bansgal*; § 42: nom.sg. R *banscal*, B *bansgal*; § 43: acc.pl. R *banscala*, B *banscala*; § 44: nom.sg. R *nech banscál*, B *neach bannscal*; § 45: dat.sg. R *banscail*, B *banscc-*; § 50 gen.sg. B *banscaile*; § 52: gen.pl. B *bansgal*, nom.sg. B *bansgal*; § 53: gen.pl. B *bansgal*.

construed with a different preposition (lexematic-syntactic change).

- While in the first part of the *Cáin* proper the numerous plural forms of *cumal* after the numeral '7' are correctly construed according to Old Irish grammar, i.e. nom.pl. *cumala*, gen.pl. *cumal*,[17] in §§ 50 and 52 we find instances of the later Irish usage whereby the unmarked form occurs after the numeral even in the nominative plural, i.e. *.uii. cumhal* (morphological change).

Not included in this list is the variation between the archaic gen.sg. *Adomnán* (regularly without palatalisation of the final consonant) and the standard form *Adomnáin*, because forms with and without palatalisation occur with unmotivated distribution in all manuscripts in all parts of the text. If the original distribution was such that *Adomnán* belonged to the original stratum of the text, whereas *Adomnáin* was introduced in a later revision, this distribution can no longer be proven.

These deviations taken together point, first of all, to a different author from the first part of the *Cáin* proper, and secondly to one who wrote considerably later than the Early Old Irish period. In addition to these purely linguistic arguments, a number of observations regarding the choice of vocabulary have linguistic as well as extra-linguistic significance.[18]

- In §§ 50–51, the unspecified term *ungae* 'ounce' is prominent as a central unit of currency. It occurs five times, whereas in

[17] § 35: nom.pl. B *.uiii. cumhala*, gen.pl. R *trí cet chumal*, B *tri cet cumhal*; § 43: nom.pl. R *.uii. cumala*, B *secht cumalu*, gen.pl. R *leth chumal*, B *let cumal*, gen.pl. R *leth .uii. cumal*, B *leth secht cumal*; § 44: gen.pl. R *leth .uii. cumal*, B *leth secht cumhal*; § 47: gen.pl. R *leth .uii. cumal*, B *let .uii. cumal*; § 50: gen.pl. B *leth .uii. ccumal*, acc.pl. B *for secht cumal*, nom.pl. B *.uii. cumala*, gen.pl. B *leth secht cumal*; § 51: nom.pl. B *.uii. cumhala*, gen.pl. B *let seacht .uii. cumal*; § 52: nom.pl. B *.uii. cumhal*.

[18] Some of these observations have also been made by Ní Dhonnchadha (1991, 42).

the first part it only occurred once, or possibly twice, in § 44 as a small sub-unit, qualified by the term *argait* 'silver'.

- Several specialised terms for mistreatment of women occur in §§ 50–51 (e.g., *forcor*, *meblugud*, *ríagad*, *imdergad*) which are not used elsewhere in the text; in fact, the preceding sections of the *Cáin* are in no way as specific in listing types of mistreatment. This love of penal detail is reminiscent of the *Canones Hibernenses*.

- § 51 makes distinctions in the honour-price of women, based on their husbands' status (*aire désa*, *muire* (?)). This is reminiscent of a text like *Críth Gablach*; in Adomnán's text, status distinctions play no role at all.

- § 53 specifies the types of *aitiri* 'hostage-sureties' required for the enactment of the *Cáin*, whereas in § 39 the exact configuration of the *aitiri* had been left open.

- § 52 alludes to the ahistorical idea of women being forced to go to war, which coincides with the theme of the legendary Middle-Irish introduction of the text (§§ 1–27). Maybe the final section was therefore composed in conjunction with the introductory legend in the 10th or 11th century.

Why is the younger age of the last four paragraphs so significant? They are specifically concerned with misconduct against women. In the preceding sixteen paragraphs, words for 'woman' occur twelve times, i.e. on average 0.75 times per paragraph.[19] Only the final four paragraphs show specific concern with women. There we find seven instances of 'woman' or 'girl' altogether, more than 1½ per paragraph, i.e. they occur twice as frequently as before.[20] When the final section is disregarded, women shift drastically out of the focus of the *Cáin*:

[19] § 34: *banscála*, § 41: *banscál* (2×), § 42: *banscál*, § 43: *banscála*, § 44: *banscál*, *ban*, *ban-*, § 45: *mná* (2×), *ban-*, *banscáil*.

[20] § 50: *banscáile*, *ingine*, § 51: *mná*, *ben*, § 52: *banscál* (2×), § 53: *banscál*.

41% of all references to women as victims, and no less than 50% of all paragraphs devoted to women as victims are thus removed from the text.[21] At the same time, clerics and boys gain considerably in proportional weight. They are mentioned fifteen times as victims in the first sixteen paragraphs, slightly more often than women; four out of five paragraphs are devoted to crimes against them (§§ 35–36, 40, (43), 44) against three paragraphs concerned with women (§§ 41–42, 44). Clerics and young boys can thus be regarded as forming the *Cáin*'s principal interest. My hypothesis is that the original version of *CA* was geared towards clerical interests; women played a subordinate role. At a later stage the law was revised, perhaps as soon as on the occasion of its second promulgation in 727. Subsequently, material specifically concerned with women was added at its end. I can only speculate about the reasons: throughout all ages, church leaders have used women as a willing channel to exert more influence in society. Maybe it was realised that by winning over women to their side, the church could better secure the implementation and success of *CA*, which at the same time meant a non-negligible source of revenue for the church. In order to achieve this, women were given a more prominent role in the law, and a fanciful legend was concocted that even introduced women as the narrative starting-point of the law.

Perhaps at the same time the original Early Old Irish portion of the text was reworked and brought in line with more standard Old Irish spelling practices, thus explaining the rather non-archaic appearance of the language, which I alluded to earlier. Ultimately, the fourth section can be demonstrated to be composite as well, consisting of at least two separate parts, as already noted by Ní Dhonnchadha (1991, 42). McLeod (2002, 128) hinted at the possibility that even core paragraphs of *Cáin Adomnáin* proper could be composite texts. This possibility can indeed not be excluded. Perhaps in a revision process not only were four paragraphs added at the end, but material was inserted into the pre-existing paragraphs (now §§ 33–49) as well.

[21] §§ 41–42, 44, 50–52 are specifically concerned with crimes against women; § 34, the introduction of the *Cáin* proper, has not been counted, and even though it lists women as victims, this is a very general, unspecific statement; § 45 treats women mainly as perpetrators of crimes, and even though there is no explicit mention of women in it, § 46 may also be so understood.

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The image on the front cover appears courtesy of the National Library of Ireland. It is taken from manuscript G3 f 26vb.1–16 and shows the opening section of the law tract *Uraicecht Becc*. The editors wish to thank the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies for faciliting its reproduction through Irish Script on Screen (*www.isos.dias.ie*), and Professor Neil McLeod for the following transcription (cf. *CIH* 2256.13–16) and translation:

CID I N-ARAGAR BREITHEAMNAS BERLA FENE NĪ I FIR ⁊ DLIG*IUD* ⁊ AICNEAD

BREITH*EMNAS* BERLA FENE .i. in breath somai*n*-each uais raidit na fe*n*e o mbelaib Nī .i. ni ana*n*d sui hi su*n*d on no ni ha*n*dsa son .i. ni doilgi son .i. ni doilgi son in erniudha na son in imcomairc

HI FIR .i. i fir in roscaid ⁊ DLIGEAD .i. i*n* [f]asaig ⁊ A[ICNEAD] .i. aicnead [...]

IN WHAT IS THE JURISPRUDENCE OF TRADITIONAL IRISH LAW BASED? NOT DIFFICULT: IN TRUTH AND ENTITLEMENT AND NATURE. THE JURISPRUDENCE OF TRADITIONAL IRISH LAW, i.e. the precious noble judgement that the Irish utter from their mouths. Not difficult, i.e. because an expert does not fixate upon that utterance [but fixes rather on its sense], or that is not difficult, i.e. that is not hard, i.e. no harder is the utterance of the explanation than the utterance of the inquiry.

IN TRUTH, i.e. in the truth of a maxim. AND ENTITLEMENT, i.e. of a precedent. AND NATURE i.e. nature [...]