

# Old Irish Etymology through the Ages<sup>1</sup>

David Stifter

Department of Early Irish, Maynooth University, Ireland

## Abstract

The etymological study of Early Irish began in the Old Irish period (c. 700–900 A.D.), under the influence of Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*, and, because of its flexible hermeneutic potential, it enjoyed great popularity in the middle and early modern period. It is only with the rise of modern comparative linguistics, especially of Indo-European linguistics in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that the art of Irish etymology has attained scholarly rigour. Over the past 150 years, paradigm shifts in Indo-European studies (laryngeal theory, accent/ablaut classes of inflection, derivational morphology) and the development of modern technology (digitisation of texts, eDIL, ISOS) have repeatedly changed the methods and the course of Irish etymological studies. The impact of some of these external factors will be illustrated with examples.

## Keywords

Etymology of Celtic languages; etymology of Old Irish; OIr. *ubull*; OIr. *cauru* (*cáera*) ‘sheep’; OIr. *\*cóennae* ‘moss’

The history of lexicography of the Irish language, especially of Old Irish, has been treated in a recent survey article (Griffith et al. 2018). As the focus in that survey was on dictionaries and word-lists of the language as it is attested in manuscripts and, in the case of Modern Irish, in speech, etymological research and etymological dictionaries of Irish and related languages only received cursory attention. However, Irish etymological lexicography from its very peculiar beginnings – peculiar from our modern scientific point of view – and the impact that progress in the comparative method and in the wider field of Indo-European studies had on it over the past two centuries deserves separate and closer attention. Paradigm shifts in Indo-European studies and, more recently, the development of electronic research technology have repeatedly changed the methods and the course of Irish etymological studies. This article will trace how the state of research in Irish represents the state of art in the wider ambit of diachronic linguistics: where it lags behind and where it is up to date with other philologies. In addition, I will underline my points with new etymological proposals for several lexemes of Old Irish.

As a starting point, it is useful to position etymological research in Old Irish in relation to etymological resources available for the other Celtic languages. The situation is, generally speaking, sad. Given the very fragmentary nature of their evidence and the difficulties besetting even the simplest attempts at assigning meanings to the lexemes, all dictionaries of the extinct Celtic languages of antiquity, namely Celtiberian, Gaulish and Lepontic, have a more or less strong etymological component. Xavier Delamarre’s dictionary of Gaulish (Delamarre 2003) is built on a solid basis of up-to-date Indo-European linguistics, even though older suggestions are not consistently transferred into modern i.e. laryngealistic notation. Given the nature of the evidence, a large part of the dictionary is based on onomastic material. Some caution is required as Delamarre is inclined to suggest over-optimistic, speculative explanations, and in cases of doubt he prefers to analyse words, especially names, as Celtic, even when these names are found far away from the core Celtic regions. Dagmar Wodtko’s dictionary of Celtiberian (Wodtko 1999, reflecting the state of the art of 1997) is a scholarly piece of work of the highest standards, but, before the backdrop of the rapid turnover of scholarship in Celtiberian, and the constant addition of new material, it is already outdated twenty years after its publication.<sup>2</sup> My own online database *Lexicon Leponticum* (Stifter et al. 2011), an online edition plus etymological dictionary

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<sup>1</sup> Contact David Stifter [david.stifter@mu.ie](mailto:david.stifter@mu.ie)

ORCID-ID 0000-0001-5634-9912

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. my remarks in Stifter 1999.

of the ancient Celtic languages of Northern Italy, namely Lepontic and Cisalpine Gaulish, is still under construction. The initial project application was too optimistic, and therefore too short, to be able to finish the database. Its completion is dependent on the acquisition of further research funds.

It can be said of all ancient Celtic languages that, given the very limited amount of data that survives in the form of primary written evidence such as inscriptions, and in the form of *Nebenüberlieferung* of personal names and placenames, their direct relevance for Old Irish etymology is small. Although these languages contribute crucially to the diachronic understanding of Old Irish, their dictionaries are only of limited use for the etymology of Old Irish.

When we turn to Insular Celtic languages, the situation is even bleaker. For the oldest stages of the British Celtic languages, Old Welsh, Old Cornish, and Old Breton, the same is true as for the ancient Celtic languages of the Continent: because the evidence is so fragmentary and essentially non-literary, there is no need for dictionaries of the conventional type, which are chiefly used to look up meanings of words. Instead, all dictionaries for the earliest language stages of British Celtic have a strong comparative and etymological component in addition to recording the entirety of the small corpus of evidence. The earliest dictionary, by Joseph Loth (1884), is entitled *Vocabulaire vieux-breton*, but, as the introduction makes clear, what is meant is not just the Old Breton language as currently understood, but all Old variants of the British-Celtic branch. Loth does not indicate in the lemmas to which language the words belong. Occasionally even Old Irish material is included, which since then has been removed from the corpus. In the past five decades, Loth's book has been superseded by separate dictionaries for each of the three languages. Sasha Falileyev's glossary of Old Welsh is very useful, but also very concise (Falileyev 2000). For Old Cornish, there is Enrico Campanile's dictionary in Italian (Campanile 1974). In the case of Old Breton, a dictionary in French and English has been compiled by Léon Fleuriot and Claude Evans (Fleuriot 1964; Fleuriot & Evans 1985). Unlike Old Irish, the corpus of the Old British languages is too small to provide a broad foundation for Celtic etymology in general.<sup>3</sup>

For Welsh and Cornish, no etymological dictionary for any of the younger stages of the languages exists. *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, the standard dictionary of Middle and Modern Welsh, contains very brief comparative remarks at the beginning of each headword, but they are of very uneven quality. Albert Deshayes' etymological dictionary of Modern Breton (Deshayes 2003) is of some use for modern borrowings, but it is of little value and often misleading for the older stages of the language. It suffers from a misconception shared with other etymological dictionaries of modern spoken languages: the methodology for the historic period, when written records are readily available, is very different from that for prehistoric stages where one has to operate with language comparison and reconstructions. A solid familiarity with the techniques of historical linguistics and with the subject matter of Indo-European linguistics is a *sine qua non* to be able to make meaningful prehistoric reconstructions for Celtic languages, but such a familiarity is lacking in Deshayes' dictionary.

Old Irish is frequently cited in these works, but for none of them has original research been undertaken on Old Irish. In the following, the focus will only be on publications that are relevant to Old Irish, which, from the point of view of comparative historical linguistics, is the most important Celtic language – because of the amount of material surviving and because of its often archaic morphology.

## The Past

It could almost be said that lexicography lies at the beginning and at the heart of medieval Irish literacy and literature. One impulse for engaging with the native language on a reflective level was the exposure, from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, of the Irish intellectual elite to a foreign written language, namely Latin, which they had to learn from scratch, typically with the help of glossaries. The impact that Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, an encyclopedic lexicon with a strong interest in the origins of words, had on the native intellectual climate and on the cultural production of Ireland, cannot be overestimated. Soon after its publication in Spain around 623, Isidore's work was known in Ireland, where it was given the honorific name *Cuilmen* 'Culmination of Knowledge'. In the tale *De Fáillsigid Tána*

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. also Schrijver 2011, where the author offers a profound discussion of the evidence for the Old British languages, and for their delimitation from each other.

*Bó Cúailnge* ‘How the *Táin* was found again’, one of the *rémscéla* ‘foretales’ of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* ‘Cattle-Raid of Cooley’, it is said that knowledge of the *Táin*, purportedly the most venerated text in Ireland, had been lost in Ireland because the poets had traded in its only manuscript against a manuscript of the *Cuilmen* (Kinsella 1969: 1–2). It is also worthy of note that the production of written texts in the vernacular language of Ireland started just around that time, in the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The claim that etymological interest in the language, and antiquarian and literary interest in the prehistory of Ireland went hand in hand, can hardly be called an exaggeration.

Lists of obscure words and glossaries of earlier stages of the Irish language have been compiled in Ireland almost since the beginning of the written tradition. The purpose of these lists was as much to explain the meaning of rare and uncommon words, as it was to derive their meaning by reference to words in one of the scriptural languages Latin, Greek and Hebrew, or language-internally within Irish. In his recent edition (Moran 2019), Pádraic Moran has provided linguistic evidence that the core of *De origine scotticae linguae*, which is better, but wrongly, known as *O’Mulconry’s Glossary*, may have been compiled as early as the late 7<sup>th</sup> century. The legal tradition in particular sparked off an extensive activity of glossing throughout the middle ages and the early modern period (Breatnach 2005: 99–159, 338). Lexical lists are typically anonymous and side products of the study of other texts. They often lack an original title. Unless there is some conventionally agreed-upon title, as in the case of the text just cited, it is the practice to refer to the lists by their initial lemma, for example *Irsan* (Moran 2019). The lists served as a primary source for synchronic Irish lexicography right up into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Moran 2011: 179).

Extensive work on the glossaries and the modes of work of the glossators has been undertaken by Paul Russell; references to his works are usefully collected in the bibliography section of Russell et al. (2009–). The occurrence of the term *Sengoídelc* ‘old(er variant of) Irish’, not only in glossatorial texts such as *Sanas Cormaic* ‘The Whispering of Cormac (Úa Cuilennáin, king-bishop of Cashel)’ from around 900 (Meyer 1912; Russell et al. 2009–), or *Cóir Anmann* ‘The Fitness of Names’ (Arbuthnot 2005–7: ii 65, nr. 253), but also in ostensibly narrative texts such as *Táin Bó Cúailnge* ‘The Cattle-Raid of Cooley’, illustrates an awareness of diachrony and of language change already among the medieval Irish. However, the approach in these collections is pre-scientific. The standard method was to make a connection between words by surface similarities. Occasionally, sound equivalences that are still a mainstay of Irish etymology were noted by the medieval linguists. For instance, Cormac úa Cuilennáin makes reference to the correspondence between Irish *c* and British *p*, or between word-initial Irish *f* and Latin *v* (Moran 2011: 182). Insightful as they may be for us in many other respects such as about the intellectual and cultural environment in which they were made, the analyses offered by the medieval etymologists must not be mistaken for profound linguistic insights authenticated by native language competence, and where they make statements about the origins of words, they cannot be valued above modern analytic work.<sup>4</sup>

Edward Lhuyd’s *Archaeologica Britannica* (Lhuyd 1707) established Irish language comparison with the British languages, as well as the concept of the close genetic relationship among the Celtic languages, on a scientific basis. The comparison with languages outside of Celtic lagged behind this early sophistication. Etymological attempts during most of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century were characterised by amateurish forays into the dictionaries of foreign and exotic languages that continued the medieval, Isidorian practice described above, in that they paid no attention to linguistic phylogenetics or to regularities of sound correspondences, the backbones of modern language comparison and etymology (Moran 2011: 179–182).

The first etymological dictionary for Celtic that complied with modern comparative linguistic standards as established by the Neogrammarians in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *Wortschatz der keltischen Spracheinheit* (Thesaurus of Celtic Linguistic Unity), was not to appear before 1894.<sup>5</sup> It was

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<sup>4</sup> Further references to editions of medieval and early modern glossaries and to secondary literature can be found in the *Bibliography of Irish Linguistics and Literature* (BILL; URL: <https://bill.celt.dias.ie/>), which consists of three printed volumes (Best 1913, 6–9; Best 1969, 3–4; Baumgarten 1986, 109–110), and one electronic database for works since 1972 where they are covered under the classification D1.1.1 ‘Native lexicography’.

<sup>5</sup> A word must be said about the title of this work. It is commonly referred to as *Urkeltscher Sprachschatz* (Proto-Celtic Language Hoard) in the 4<sup>th</sup> edition from 1894 (e.g., BILL I, 21). However, the “Vierte Auflage” (4<sup>th</sup> edition) refers to August

not meant specifically for Old Irish, but for the Celtic language family as a whole, put together by the leading Old Irish scholar at the time, Whitley Stokes.<sup>6</sup> Adalbert Bezzenger, a prominent Indo-Europeanist, translated it into German and redacted it according to the standards of the series of etymological dictionaries for all Indo-European languages of which it forms part. Even at its time it must have been felt outdated, a recurring theme in Celtic etymology. Most noticeable for modern users is its non-alphabetic order. It follows the ancient standards of Indo-European linguistics whereby words are not simply recorded under their headword, but are grouped in roots, whose arrangement follows the model of Sanskrit dictionaries, not that of the Latin alphabet. Derivatives have to be looked up under the root which they contain, which adds a further layer of difficulty when using the book.<sup>7</sup> Due to the lack of an ordinary index, it becomes a challenge to find a word, especially because Stokes and Bezzenger assigned words to roots which are either no longer recognised as such by modern Indo-European linguistics, or to roots from which they have been removed in the meantime. A large portion of the proposed etymologies have been superseded by reconstructions that are based on much more advanced knowledge of Celtic and Indo-European historical phonology and morphology. The book's lack in prominence may also be due to the fact that it is in German. Despite all these adverse circumstances, it is surprisingly still in print today.

Alexander Macbain's<sup>8</sup> *Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language* 1896 takes Scottish Gaelic as its starting point, but regularly quotes Old Irish material as comparanda. Unsurprisingly, it is derived from Stokes' work, since this was the major reference point available at the time. His death in 1907 prevented Macbain from completing the second revised edition of his dictionary, which appeared posthumously and in an unfinished state in 1911. As an etymological dictionary, it is again replete with hopelessly outdated explanations. Nevertheless, it is still worth consulting for the attested forms, especially because unlike other the authors of other lexicons Macbain paid attention to Manx cognates as well. The dictionary still enjoys some popularity outside academic circles, not least because of its early digitisation, and it is commonly cited among non-academics as a resource for Gaelic etymology. A digital version in plain ASCII was produced by Caoimhín Ó Donnáile who was so kind as to supply me with a first-person account of this undertaking. He manually typed in the book in 1990 when he was working for the Forestry Commission near Edinburgh. Four years later, when he had moved to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on the Isle of Skye, he made the book available as a text file on the infant internet. A Californian, John McCranie, converted it into HTML, a form in which it is available to this day. Macbain's Gaelic Dictionary must thus be one of the earliest digitised dictionaries for any language.<sup>9</sup>

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Fick's *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der Indogermanischen Sprachen* (Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-European Languages), which was edited by Adalbert Bezzenger, August Fick and Whitley Stokes, not to the Celtic lexicon. Of this 4<sup>th</sup> edition of Fick's dictionary, Stokes' Celtic dictionary forms the second part. On the page that provides information about the series, the title for this second part is given as *Wortschatz der keltischen Spracheinheit*, of which Stokes and Bezzenger are equally named as authors. On the title page of the book itself, immediately facing that for the series, the title is *Urkeltischer Sprachschatz*. Stokes is named as its author, followed by the statement that Bezzenger translated, redacted, and edited it. In the currently available 5<sup>th</sup>, unmodified edition by the publishers Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in Göttingen from 1979, the title *Urkeltischer Sprachschatz* appears nowhere. It is exclusively called *Wortschatz der keltischen Spracheinheit*, and it is registered as such in the Deutsche Bibliothek. Stokes and Bezzenger are equally given as authors.

<sup>6</sup> On the life of Whitley Stokes, see Boyle & Russell 2011.

<sup>7</sup> A comparable arrangement is also found in the index to Thurneysen's *Grammar of Old Irish* (Thurneysen 1946). There, compound verbs are alphabetically ordered not according to their roots, but according to the initial letter of the stressed part of the verb.

<sup>8</sup> More biographical information about Alexander MacBain at <http://tarbh.smo.uhi.ac.uk/webtrees/individual.php?pid=I1&ged=AlexanderMacBain>.

<sup>9</sup> Based on an email (2 Feb 2018) from Caoimhín Ó Donnáile, the person responsible for this work. Because it is also of historical interest for the beginning of the internet, his personal account of the digitisation process is here reproduced in full:

“Scríobh mé isteach don ríomhaire é idir 1990-03-14 agus 1990-10-10, nuair a bhí mé ag obair ar ríomhaireacht don ionad taighde de chuid an Forestry Commission in aice le Dún Éideann. Ba sin an bhliain sula dtáinig mé go Sabhal Mòr Ostaig agus ní raibh Idirlíon nó WWW nó HTML ann, fiú amháin ag na seirbhísí ríomhaireachta ag na h-ollscoileanna.

Fuair muid ceangal Idirlín ag SMO i 1993 agus bhí freastálaí gréasáin ag obair againn i 1994 agus chuir mé foclóir MacBain ar WWW mar chomhad téacs. Chonaic fear i gCalifornia é, John T. McCranie, ríomhchláiríthoir. D'iarr seisean cead, chuir sé cruth HTML air, rinne sé gléas cuardach – rud an-nua ag an am – agus chuir sé ar WWW é, áit a bhfuil sé go fóill i ndiaidh breis agus fiche bliain, cé nach bhfuil an gléas cuardach ag obair anois: <http://www.ceantar.org/Dicts/MB2/>.”

One of the major conceptual advances between the amateurish etymologists before the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the scientifically solid historical linguists of the Indo-European and especially the Neogrammarian tradition from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward is the rise of the principle that attention needs to be paid to the earliest attested forms of languages, and of words, and that the full range of available morphological information has to be exhausted. In order to do so, historical linguists have to be philologically competent in the languages that they work with. When one operates only with dictionary headwords, chances are that one will be led astray, or that one misses essential points.

#### Excursus 1: OIr. *ubull* ‘apple’

Even today better etymologies can be achieved when these principles are adhered to. The Old Irish word for ‘apple’, *ubull*, is treated in Stokes’ dictionary under the Proto-Celtic headword *\*aballo-* (Stokes & Bezzenger 1894: 11). From the way the matter is presented it is not clear whether this represents the protoform of the word for the fruit or rather for the tree. Macbain (1911: 385) must have understood it as the word for the fruit because he cites Stokes’ reconstruction under the headword *ubhal* ‘apple’. Notwithstanding the fact that according to today’s understanding of the Irish sound laws it is phonologically impossible to derive *ubull* from *\*aballo-*, the meagre information given by Stokes seems to indicate that he considered the word to inflect as an *o*-stem. The standard non-etymological *Dictionary of the Irish Language* explicitly labels it as a neuter *o*-stem (Quin 1983 = DIL U 45.64; Toner 2013 = eDIL dil.ie/42847), while the standard etymological dictionary, *Lexique étymologique de l’irlandais ancien*, says nothing about its stem class, apart from the fact that it differs from that of the name of the tree (Vendryes 1978 = LEIA U-12–13). What has been overlooked so far is the earliest attestation of the word in Irish, namely its genitive singular *aublo* in the Annals of Ulster for the year 632. This establishes unambiguously that the word inflected as a *u*-stem in the earliest period of attested Irish, and that it was transferred to the *o*-stems only during the Old Irish period. As for the Proto-Celtic reconstruction of the word, an *o*-stem *\*aballo-* is in consequence ruled out. I argue elsewhere (Stifter 2019, esp. 27–34) that the most economic way of reconciling the attested Irish form with the Indo-European proto-form, the amphikinetic noun *\*h<sub>2</sub>ébōl* (Wodtko et al. 2008: 262–266), is not to operate with a morphologically ill-motivated *u*-stem *\*\*ablu-* at the Proto-Celtic stage, but to assume a direct continuation of the Proto-Indo-European word, with only the regular Celtic phonological changes, which resulted in Proto-Celtic *\*abūl*. For reasons internal to the phonotactics of late Primitive and Archaic Irish, such a form had to be reinterpreted as a *u*-stem after apocope had removed all final short vowels from the language, that is in the period shortly before the written attestation of Irish sets in. At that stage, unstressed *u* in the nominative singular before the final consonant of a noun would almost exclusively be restricted to *u*-stems, where the *u* was normally caused by *u*-infection. This explains the unequivocal *u*-stem inflection of *aublo*, but it also shows that the word for ‘apple’ must have switched its inflectional class at least twice in Irish (first, from consonant stems to *u*-stem, then from *u*-stem to *o*-stem).

The word for ‘apple’ also illustrates another point about reconstructions that go back further in time than Proto-Celtic. In older literature, *\*abol-* or similar forms are found as the pre-Celtic or Indo-European reconstruction of the word. According to modern Indo-European practice (‘modern’ means at least half a century in this case), this should be written as *\*h<sub>2</sub>ebol-* with a laryngeal at the beginning (cf. Wodtko et al. 2008: 262–266). Unfortunately, in many handbooks, either because they are so old, or because their authors lack the specialist knowledge, laryngealistic standards are not adhered to, which then can create the impression that Celtic etymology as a whole is not fully up to date. The publication of Nicholas Zair’s study of the reflexes of laryngeals in Celtic (Zair 2012) was an important step forward in bringing Celtic historical phonology in line with the rest of Indo-European studies.

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(“I typed it into the computer between 14 March 1990 and 10 Oct 1990 when I was doing computational work for the research unit of the Forestry Commission near Edinburgh. This was the year before I came to [the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture at] Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, and there was neither internet, nor WWW, nor HTML, even at the university IT services. We got an internet connection at SMO in 1993 and we had a web server operating in 1994 and I put MacBain’s dictionary as a text file onto the WWW. A man in California, John T. McCranie, a programmer, saw it. He asked for permission, turned it into a HTML, created a search function – something very new at the time – and he put it onto the WWW, where it is still after more than twenty years, even though the search function doesn’t work now: <http://www.ceantar.org/Dicts/MB2/>.”)

## Excursus 2: OIr. *cauru* ‘sheep’

Another example where close philological attention to the evidence opens up unexpected doorways into the semantic motivation of lexemes is the word for ‘sheep’. The commonly employed headword for this lexical item in dictionaries and wordlists of Old Irish is *cáera*, but the *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (dil.ie/7645) and *Hessen’s Irish Lexicon* (Hessen et al. 1933–40: 125) also cite “c(a)ura” and “(cúra)” as alternative forms. Even they are wrong. Forms ending in *-u*, sometimes spelt *cauru*, sometimes *curu*, are the preponderant spellings of the nominative singular in the early sources. They, as the *lectiones difficiliores*, must be awarded a higher evidential value than the seemingly regular form *cáera*. The stem starting with *cáer-* belongs to the rest of the inflection, which, as can be seen from forms such as gen. *cáerach*, or dat.pl. *caírchaib*, is a guttural stem,<sup>10</sup> i.e. it continues an earlier form *\*kajrāk-* (in fact, the reconstruction of the first syllable will be further refined below, and the length of the vowel of the second syllable will be discussed there).

The allomorph *cáer-* must have been adopted into the nominative singular by paradigmatic levelling, in order to create a uniform-looking paradigm. The earliest attestation of nom.sg. *cáera* appears to be in *Uraiccecht Becc* (CIH v 1610.18), a law text that could date as late as the 9<sup>th</sup> or even 10<sup>th</sup> century and that was possibly written in Munster (Breatnach 2005: 316). The variation among the three forms of the nominative singular with medial *u*, *cauru*, *curu* and *cura*, is easily accounted for. Diachronic phonological considerations favour the precedence of *cauru* from which the other two forms derive through standard sound changes of Irish. *Curu* shows the regular Late Old Irish monophthongisation of the short Old Irish diphthong *au* to *u*. The third variant *cura* must be due to later copyists for whom all final unstressed vowels had become schwa.

The oblique stem *cáerach-* has a manifest cognate, but without the guttural suffix, in the first element of the Welsh compound *caeriwrch* ‘roe-buck’, of which the second element *twrch* on its own signifies the ‘roe-deer’ (cf. Gaul. personal name *Iurca*, OCorn. *yorch*, OBret. *iorch*, NBret. *yourc* ‘h’ ‘roe-deer’). It is not a sheep, but the roe-deer has still some superficial similarities with ovines. Outside of Celtic, the stem *cáer-* is cognate with Latin *caper*, Old Icelandic *hafr*, Old English *hafer* ‘he-goat’ Greek κάπρος ‘boar’ etc. < PIE *\*kapro-*. Celtic is the only branch of Indo-European that unequivocally attests to ablaut in the suffix of this word, namely *\*kaper-*. To this may be added the name of the Germanic tribe of the *Caeracates*, once mentioned by Tacitus (Tac. Hist. 4, 70), whose name appears to be of Gaulish, i.e. Celtic origin. The vowel quantities of *Caeracates* are unknown. If the etymology proposed here for Old Irish ‘sheep’ extends to *Caeracates* as well, the *a* of the second syllable was probably long.

Thus, by comparison with other Indo-European languages, the proto-form *\*kaφerāk-* is arrived at for the oblique cases of the preform of ‘sheep’ in Irish (Stifter 2011: 563). Neither the Germano-Gaulish ethnonym nor Irish provide information about the original quantity of the vowel in the oblique cases. Celtic *\*kaφerāk-* yields erstwhile trisyllabic *\*ka.erāχ-* in Old Irish. The hiatus *\*a.e* must have merged into the diphthong *\*aj* early enough to be treated as a single syllable at the time when syncope applied. But what about the nominative singular *cauru*? The final *-u* of Old Irish leaves no choice as to start with the Proto-Celtic reconstruction *\*kaφerūχs*. In order to derive from this the attested form, it needs to be assumed that in Primitive Irish *\*ka.erūh* the final *\*ū* exercised its epenthetic effect – traditionally called *u*-infection – on the preceding short *\*e* before the hiatus *\*a.e* was merged into a diphthong. It has to be further assumed that the attested Old Irish *cauru* arose from the resulting *\*ka.e<sup>u</sup>rūh* by syncope, but that the *u*-offglide survived syncope, yielding the Early Old Irish sequence *au*, which later became short *u* – unlike Early Old Irish *áu* < *\*au* that was soon monophthongised to *ó*. To my knowledge, this is the only word where this particular sequence of soundchanges all occurs together, depriving us of the possibility to check the explanation independently.

The alternation between *\*ū* in the final syllable of nom.sg. *\*kaφerūχs* and *\*ā* in the non-final syllables of the oblique stem *\*kaφerāk-* is reminiscent of the different treatment of inherited *\*ō* or *\*oH* in Celtic, namely *\*ū* in final syllables, *\*ā* elsewhere. Accordingly, I draw the conclusion that the Celtic oblique stem must have been *\*kaφerāk-*. This paradigm can in turn be projected further back in time to pre-Celtic or Proto-Indo-European *\*kaperō-h<sub>3</sub>k<sup>u</sup>-s* and *\*kaperō-h<sub>3</sub>k<sup>u</sup>-* respectively, i.e. a compound of

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<sup>10</sup> Beside the guttural inflection, there are also occasional examples of a *iā*-stem inflection found, e.g. dat.pl. *cairib* (Thes. ii 239.19) and nom.pl. *caire* (Laws iv.96 y). From the etymology proposed here, it follows that *iā*-stem forms must be secondary.

\**kapero-* ‘he-goat’ and the zero-grade of the root \**h<sub>3</sub>ek<sup>u</sup>*- ‘to see’ (Kümmel et al. 2001: 297–298). In a variety of morphological shapes, this root occurs as second compound member in a wide range of formations that refer to physical configurations, abstract relationships, or to the facial appearance of things or people (Wodtko et al. 2008: 370–383). The semantic starting point would therefore be something like ‘having the appearance or facial expression of a goat’, which, of course, is true of sheep.<sup>11</sup> This formation also explains the unusual vowel alternation in the suffix. The sequence PIE \**oh<sub>3</sub>* resulted in erstwhile \**ō*, which regularly developed into Celtic \**ū* in the athematic nominative singular, but into \**ā* elsewhere, leading to the suffixal split in the paradigm of this word. The final question that needs clarification is the quality of the suffixal consonant. PIE \**k<sup>u</sup>* should have become \**p* in Gaulish. If the ethnonym *Caeracates* is indeed Gaulish and contains the etymon under discussion here – none of which is beyond doubt – the expected \**p* must have been replaced by \**k* under analogy from the nominative singular where the phonological distinction between all non-dental stops had been neutralised in favour of a plain guttural before \**s*.

The unique paradigm of the Old Irish word for ‘sheep’, whose allomorphy between the nominative singular and the rest of the paradigm is abnormal not only from the point of view of synchronic inflectional morphology of Old Irish, but also from that of Proto-Celtic, is only elucidated when all attested forms receive their due attention and when the underlying compositional morphology, which turns into derivational morphology in Celtic, is understood. Whether these extraordinary alternations in the Old Irish paradigm of ‘sheep’ are related to the exceptional pronunciation of the stressed vowel of ‘sheep’ in the dialects of Modern Irish (cf. O’Rahilly 1932: 27), or whether this has something to do with later developments in the dialects of Irish, lies outside my expertise.

#### The Present

There are only two modern publications from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and later that are concerned with Irish etymology on a comprehensive level. The only etymological dictionary exclusively dedicated to Old Irish is *Lexique étymologique de l’irlandais ancien*, initiated in 1959 by Joseph Vendryes, and continued after his death by Edouard Bachellery and then by Pierre-Yves Lambert (LEIA = Vendryes et al. 1959–). The duration of publication, extending now over almost six decades, and the long gaps between the instalments are reminiscent of the history of DIL (cf. Griffith et al. 2018: 5–6). Only the letters A–D and M–U have appeared so far. The latest volume, the letter D, came out in 1996; it is unclear when the series will be continued. The fact that the core of the lexicon builds on work done by Joseph Vendryes around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century entails that its contents are of disparate quality and the notation of the reconstructed forms, for instance as regards the laryngealistic notation of the reconstructions, and secondary literature are not always up to date, as can be seen from the extensive additions suggested in review, for instance in Schrijver 2000b or Falileyev 2003.

Ranko Matasović’s *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic* (Matasović 2009) forms part of a series of etymological dictionaries for all Indo-European languages published under the aegis of the Department of Indo-European Studies at Leiden University, and intended as an updated version of the *Indo-germanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Pokorny 1959). In addition to the printed versions, the series is also available as an online resource.<sup>12</sup> Whereas other contributions to the series concentrate on the lexicon that individual branches inherited from Proto-Indo-European, Matasović’s dictionary looks at the reconstructable lexicon of Proto-Celtic, including a good deal of *Sondergleichungen*. *Sondergleichungen* are etymological cognates within a branch, for instance Celtic, that are not shared by the wider language family, in this case Indo-European. Especially when they show phonological or morphological peculiarities, this may be an indication that they are loans from a third language. Still, Matasović’s dictionary achieves completeness in neither area, neither in the inherited lexicon, nor in the special lexicon, and therefore leaves many gaps. Additions and corrections have been published online (Matasović 2011). The reception of the dictionary has been rather critical (cf. Stüber 2010, Balles 2011).

<sup>11</sup> According to personal communication from archaeologists, it is near impossible to distinguish phenotypically between the bones of goats and sheep in archaeological excavations.

<sup>12</sup> URL: <https://dictionaries.brillonline.com/iedo> (accessed 2 May 2019; access needs to be purchased). Some information about the project at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-European\\_Etymological\\_Dictionary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-European_Etymological_Dictionary).

In addition, one toponomastic lexicon deserves to be mentioned. *Foclóir stairiúil áitainmneacha na Gaeilge / The Historical Dictionary of Gaelic Placenames*, begun in 2003 in Cork by Pádraig Ó Riain, Diarmuid Ó Murchadha and Kevin Murray, is not an etymological dictionary as such, but it collects early attestations of Irish placenames (Ó Riain et al. 2003–). These are accompanied by brief explanations of the names. Letters A–*Drongán* have been published in seven fascicles so far.

Much of the important modern work on Old Irish and Celtic etymology is not collected in dedicated etymological dictionaries, but is discussed in morphological and phonological studies, articles and monographs. I restrict myself to citing the most important monographs in the past quarter of a century.

For the primary verbal roots, reference must be made to Stefan Schumacher's *Die keltischen Primärverben* (2004 = KP), which arranges primary verbs by their Proto-Celtic root. Karin Stüber's *Verbalabstrakta des Altirischen* (Stüber 2015) is an extensive collection of original citations that feature verbal nouns of predominantly strong verbs, but it also provides concise diachronic morphological analyses of the verbal nouns, and implicitly of the verbal stems to which they belong. Kim McCone devoted a book to the study of aspects of verbal formations in an Indo-Europeanist light (McCone 1991).

In the field of nominal formations, Karin Stüber's *Historical Morphology of n-Stems in Celtic* (1998) and Britta Irslinger *Abstrakta mit Dentalsuffixen im Altirischen* (2002) are concerned with formally defined classes of words, while the subject matter of Dagmar Wodtko's *Sekundäradjektiva in den altirischen Glossen* (1995) is functionally defined. The most comprehensive approach, drawing widely on earlier literature such as LEIA (Vendres et al. 1959–), is attempted in Patrizia de Bernardo Stempel's *Nominale Wortbildung des älteren Irischen* (1999). Peter Schrijver (1997), finally, focussed on the *History of Celtic Pronouns and Particles*. Although it is primarily concerned with Middle Welsh, Stefan Schumacher's *The Historical Morphology of the Welsh Verbal Noun* (2000) also contains considerable information relevant for Old Irish etymology.

While all these studies look at a subset of the lexicon from a morphological perspective, Nicholas Zair's (2012) *Reflexes of the Proto-Indo-European Laryngeals in Celtic* takes a phonological approach, being interested only in those Celtic words that can shed light on the complex question of reflexes of laryngeals in the Celtic languages. By necessity, a hoard of etymologically relevant information can be found in other broad studies of the phonological history of Irish and other Celtic languages, e.g. in McCone 1996 and Schrijver 1995.

A semantic approach underpins Martina Lucht's PhD-thesis of 2007 which examines the core hundred items of the Swadesh list in Old Irish from an etymological point of view. Likewise semantically delimited are Uhlich 1993 and Ziegler 1994 who study Old Irish compound personal names and names on Ogam inscriptions respectively.

One must not underestimate the amount of important Celtic etymology that is only accessible in handbooks of comparative Indo-European linguistics, both in classical works, and in up-to-date handbooks. The most important are Julius Pokorny's *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Pokorny 1959) and its three modern successors, namely *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben*, initiated by Helmut Rix (Kümmel 2001 = LIV, LIV<sup>2</sup>), but now approaching its third revised version under the aegis of Martin Kümmel (2011); *Nomina im indogermanischen Lexikon* by Dagmar Wodtko, Britta Irslinger and Carolin Schneider (Wodtko et al. 2008 = NIL); and *Lexikon der indogermanischen Partikel und Pronominalstämme* by George Dunkel (2014 = LIPP). What all these handbooks have in common, apart from being in German, is that they are devoted to the entirety of the Indo-European languages. Celtic material is only incorporated where it is relevant for the overall objective. *Nomina im indogermanischen Lexikon* stands out among this group in that two of its three authors are specialists in Celtic.

These dictionaries and handbooks preponderantly study the vocabulary inherited from Proto-Indo-European. A different approach is taken in studies that try to uncover the non-Indo-European portion of the vocabulary, i.e. the *Sondergleichungen* mentioned above, and potential layers of loanwords from pre-Celtic languages on the British Isles. Such loanwords are commonly clustered around specific semantic fields, for example the local fauna and flora, or placenames. From the past decades, one can mention especially the works by Peter Schrijver (for instance 1997b, 2000a, 2005; but see also the

critical comments by Isaac 2003), and by myself (Stifter 2010,<sup>13</sup> forthc. a, forthc. b). Since in these cases Irish words are compared with unknown entities, an especially high degree of methodological care is required. Instead of operating with lexical equations, as is the norm in etymological studies, structural anomalies are used as arguments, i.e. phonological and morphological peculiarities that set the relevant words apart from what inherited Celtic words should look like.

Excursus 3: OIr. *cóennae*\* ‘moss’

Indo-European morphology, inflectional and derivational, is a complex field and requires a huge amount of specialist knowledge. This has already emerged from the discussion of the word for ‘sheep’ above. Here is another example that illustrates the importance that a proper understanding of the rules of Indo-European derivational morphology has for piecing together in one coherent etymon what look like disparate items in Celtic. Focussing exclusively on the non-trivial phonological developments alone would not be enough to make sense of the evidence.

*Coinnich*, glossing *muscosi* ‘mossy’ (Philargyrius Florence 11a51), Modern Irish *caonna* (var. *caenda*), *caonach*, *cúnach* ‘moss’, Scottish Gaelic *còinneach* ‘moss’, Old Breton *ceuni*, glossing *muscus* ‘moss’, Middle Breton *queffny*, Modern Breton *kevni*, var. *kivni*, *kinvi* ‘moss, down’, Cornish *kewny* ‘moss’, Anglo-Cornish dialectal *kewny* ‘mouldy’, display manifest formal and semantic similarities and clearly must belong together, but the precise details of their relationship have not been satisfactorily elucidated. This is due to the fact that not only are there rare sound developments involved, but that the underlying protoform is also morphologically complex.

Despite the outward similarity to *coinnich* in the Philargyrius Glosses, one other early item has to be kept separate from the above group of words. Because of its semantics, the Old-Irish-Latin bilingual phrase *cóenna nucis*, which glosses *putamen nucis* ‘nutshell’ in the Carlsruhe Priscian 36b1, has to be connected with the rare OIr. word *cenn* ‘skin, hull’ and its singulative *cenne* ‘scale’ (Greene 1975: 175). The former is only attested in *hua cheinn* (Sg. 52b2) and *ceinn* (Sg. 52b8) as a gloss for Lat. *testa* ‘shell’, and in the satirical phrase *cenn for sallaib* ‘a scum on flitches of bacon’ (McLaughlin 2008: 160 §64, 243); the latter occurs in the plural *cenni* in the Book of Armagh (176b, Thes. i. 497.1). In British Celtic, these words are related to Old Welsh *ceenn* ‘murex, purple dye made from the juice of the purple-fish’, Welsh *cen*, Middle Cornish *cennen*, Old Breton *cennenn*, Middle Breton *quenn*, Modern Breton *kenn* ‘skin, film’, all from Proto-Celtic *\*kenno-* < PIE *\*(s)kend-no-* ‘skin’. The unusual Old Irish spelling *cóenna* in the Carlsruhe Priscian must be due to an error or an – admittedly unparalleled – hypercorrect spelling for the monophthong *e*.

Given the age of the testimony, the Old Irish vocalism with *o* in the Philargyrius gloss has to be taken seriously. Younger spelling such as *cáenna*, which form the basis of eDIL’s headwords (dil.ie/7636, dil.ie/7637, dil.ie/7638) have no significance compared to them. The vocalism *ú* and *ò* of some of the modern Gaelic variants is unexpected, but they have all appearance of being due to developments internal to the later varieties of Gaelic.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, the Old Irish form of the word must have been *\*cóennae*. Nevertheless, Matasović’s (2011: 23) Proto-Celtic reconstruction “*\*koynnV-* ‘foam’”, which would be fine as a mechanical transposition of the Irish form, is unsatisfying since *\*oj* does not result in a *u*-diphthong in British, nor do the British forms exhibit a geminate *nn*.

Vendryes et al. (1959–: C-7) report an old suggestion by Rudolf Much (1898: 169) who wanted to connect this with Latin *caenum* ‘dirt, filth, mud’.<sup>15</sup> Pokorny (1959: 628) makes no reference to the Celtic words at all, but he connects Lat. *caenum* with Old Norse *hvein* and dialectal Swedish *hven* ‘wet, muddy field’. He derives them from Indo-European *\*k̑wojno-* ‘mud, dirt’. Again this cannot be the preform of the Celtic words, since it should have resulted in something beginning with *p-* in the British Celtic

<sup>13</sup> The Basque component of this *Sondergleichung* has been refuted by Ariztimuño & Egurtzegi (2013), but the Celtic side of the proposal still stands.

<sup>14</sup> In Stifter (2009: 162–163), independently of the present item, I speculated if the alternation *ao~ú~ó* in modern variants of Gaelic was found in such contexts where Primitive Irish *\*oui* was reflected. The etymology proposed below would support this assumption. Note, however, the discussion of ‘ao’ in O’Rahilly (1932: 27–38) which suggests that the different outcomes could be due to the divergent treatment of any *áe/óe* in the various dialects.

<sup>15</sup> Contrary to what Vendryes et al. (1959–: C-7) say, Much did not mention the preform *\*k̑wojno-* at all. In fact, his allusion to our word is only in the most unspecific way.

languages, nor does the semantics fit. Pokorny further connects it with Lat. *inquināre, conquināre* ‘to pollute, besmirch’ < Proto-Italic *\*k<sup>u</sup>ināje/o-* < *\*k<sup>u</sup>ino-*, with *cūnīre* ‘to defecate’ < *\*k<sup>u</sup>oinje/o-* < *\*k<sup>u</sup>oino-*, and with Latvian *svīnīt* ‘to soil oneself’. Schrijver (1991: 265) and De Vaan (2008: 81, 154) express their reservation against making a connection between these words, since the length of the *u* of *cunire* is unknown.

However, Pokorny’s preform *\*k<sup>u</sup>oino-* points in the right direction for a solution. Although *\*k<sup>u</sup>oino-* as such is as incapable of explaining the entirety of the Celtic forms, as are all other older suggestions, different ablaut grades in the word produce a more promising preform. A Proto-Celtic reconstruction *\*ko<sup>u</sup>ino-* would provide a satisfactory starting point for all the attestations in the Celtic languages. For this, a Proto-Indo-European preform *\*k<sup>u</sup>einó-* can be set up effortlessly and more or less mechanically. Formally, this is an appurtenative *vṛddhi*-derivative of the aforementioned *\*k<sup>u</sup>oino-*. Its meaning is ‘belonging to the mud/wet field’, which is a reasonable semantic fit for ‘moss’. Appurtenative *vṛddhi*-derivatives form a small group in Celtic that have not been widely recognised in the past. Morphologically they are characterised by the insertion of *e* after the initial consonant, zero-grade elsewhere, and by appending the thematic vowel to form the new stem. The vowel *e* in the first syllable can undergo various colourings depending on the surrounding consonants. Other such formations in Old Irish include *cúan* ‘litter of dogs’ < PC *\*ke<sup>u</sup>no-* < PIE *\*k<sup>u</sup>einó-* ‘belonging to the dog’ (Schindler in Eichner 1995: 217), cf. PIE *\*k<sup>u</sup>ō(n)*, *kunés* ‘dog’; *bilar* ‘water-cress’, from PC *beruro-* < *\*b<sup>h</sup>eruró-* ‘belonging to the well’, a derivative from *\*b<sup>h</sup>re<sup>u</sup>or-* ‘well, spring’ (Stifter 2005: 165–166); or *sál* ‘sea’ < *\*seh<sub>2</sub>lo-* ‘belonging to the salt’,<sup>16</sup> derived from PIE *\*sh<sub>2</sub>el-* ‘salt’.

Proto-Celtic *\*ko<sup>u</sup>ino-* would regularly give disyllabic *\*cuān* with a hiatus in Old Irish. When another syllable was added, be it an inflectional ending or a derivational suffix, hiatus was given up in Early Irish and the two vowels merged either in a long vowel or in a diphthong. This is what must have happened in Irish. All of the attested Irish and Gaelic forms have actually further syllables added to the stem, so the absence of hiatus is unremarkable. However, the syncope of *\*ko<sup>u</sup>ino-* should have regularly yielded *\*coín-* with a palatalised single *n* in Irish. One possibility to account for the geminate, non-palatalised of *\*cóennae* is to postulate an *n*-stem *\*ko<sup>u</sup>inon-* as an intermediate stage, which then underwent further suffixation by *-e* < *\*-jo-*. This suffix triggered an additional syncope at a stage when the suffixal vowel still possessed its individual quality, i.e. schematically *\*ko<sup>u</sup>in'on-e* > *\*cóennae*. This sequence of events is by necessity speculative; one parallel for the double application of syncope is found in the steps necessary to arrive from *\*ka.erāk-* at forms such as the acc.pl. *cáercha*, in the etymology of the word for ‘sheep’ proposed above.

The Southwest British, i.e. Breton and Cornish evidence, can be readily derived from PC *\*ko<sup>u</sup>ino-*. It underwent regular internal *i*-affection, which produced the intermediary stage *\*ke<sup>u</sup>en-*. In Southwest British, a special syncope deleted vowels in second syllables of the structure *\*-uVn-*, yielding erstwhile *\*ke<sup>u</sup>n-*.<sup>17</sup> The simplex ‘moss’ is not attested as such in the British languages, only a collective noun with the suffix *-i*. This is reflected in Old Breton *ceuni*, Middle Breton *queffny*, Modern Breton *kevni*, and Cornish *kewny* ‘moss’. In some varieties of Breton, the addition of *-i* triggered secondary umlaut to *\*kivni*. This then underwent sporadic metathesis to *kinvi*, which is found beside the unmetathesised forms such as *kevni*. The metathesis is paralleled by the behaviour of *danvez* ‘material’ < *\*davnez*, cf. MBret. *daffnez*, Old Irish *damnae*, Welsh *defnydd* ‘id.’ < *\*damnijo-*.

In this complex way, all Celtic forms of the word for ‘moss’ can be derived from a single Proto-Celtic pre-form, which in turn finds a morphologically and semantically attractive Indo-European starting point. However, even the Indo-European starting point could not be properly understood before the derivational type, the *vṛddhi*-derivative, and the formal principles that govern the ablaut degrees was fully understood.

## The Future

<sup>16</sup> SnaST 27 (11.5.2018), URL: <https://twitter.com/ChronHib/status/994823029967458304>.

<sup>17</sup> Cf., for example, OCorn. *naun*, MCorn. *nown*, MBret. *naffn* ‘hunger’ vs. W *newyn*, OIr. *naunae*, *núna* ‘id.’ < *\*na<sup>u</sup>an(i)o-*; MNret. *nauntec*, NBret. *naontek* < *\*na<sup>u</sup>ʔndegan* < *\*na<sup>u</sup>am-dekam* ‘19’; Bret. *eontr* ‘uncle’ vs. OCorn. *euitor*, W *ewythr* ‘id.’ < Brit. *\*a<sup>u</sup>ontir* < pre-Celt. *\*a<sup>u</sup>on-tēr* (Schrijver 1995: 360, 366).

The best that can be said about the state of the art in Irish etymology, as well as about that in any Celtic language, is that despite a well-established tradition of lexicography in the major Celtic languages, and less so in the smaller, its etymological lexicography still has a lot of potential for improvement. An ideal etymological dictionary would contain all forms that are significant for the assessment of the synchronic and diachronic morphology of a lexeme, information about its language-internal derivative relationships, information about its cognates in other languages, and reconstructions of prehistoric stages of the lexeme, in order to illustrate and clarify potentially ambiguous morphological and phonological points. Where it is relevant, several prehistoric stages should be reconstructed. In the case of Old Irish, these include, but are not restricted to, Early Primitive Irish, Proto-Insular Celtic, Proto-Celtic, pre-Celtic or Proto-Indo-European.

The unsatisfying status quo creates a bottleneck situation that obstructs the flow of information in both directions. On the one hand, historical linguists outside Celtic have to work with obsolete or flawed data, which may then lead to the impression that the Celtic data is not particularly interesting in the first place; on the other hand, there are few experts within Celtic studies who can translate the progress in the wider field of Indo-European and historical linguistics into something that is of relevance for Celtic historical linguistics. Or, as Patrick Sims-Williams (2018: 117) has recently put it: “Celtic evidence is under-represented in etymological dictionaries, partly because already discovered Celtic etymologies get overlooked and partly owing to a lack of systematic searches for new ones.”

What, then, are the practical tasks and future direction of Old Irish and Celtic etymology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? A number of tasks, small and huge, that require urgent attention are self-evident:

1. Checking the reliability of the existing material. A lot of the published information uses dubious source material that would allow for alternative interpretations.
2. Improving and adding formal precision to previously proposed etymologies, as exemplified above by the word for ‘apple’.
3. Revising the existing resources according to the above-mentioned list of requirements of an ideal etymological dictionary.
4. Proposing etymologies for hitherto obscure words, like my suggestion for the Celtic word for ‘moss’. There are still large swathes in the lexicon of Irish and of the other languages that have not been systematically investigated.
5. Creating etymological resources for those languages, that do not yet have adequate resources. The most blatant case is Middle and Modern Welsh, two stages of the Welsh language which for practical purposes can easily be treated together. Creating a new etymological dictionary from scratch is an undertaking that requires the concerted effort of many capable minds, supported by large-scale funding.

But the tasks do not end here. Not only the etymologies as such have to be ever improved and kept up-to-date to the standards of the wider discipline, but also the modes of presentation and publication of the existing material and of new findings has to evolve constantly in step with the newest media standards. Several years ago I wrote review of Dagmar Wodtke’s combined synchronic and diachronic dictionary of Celtiberian (Stifter 1999) that, at the time, seemed like a piece of science fiction. There, I made the point that the era of printed etymological dictionaries was drawing to a close, and that the future lay in the flexible electronic format. I argued that electronic dictionaries were much more suited for constantly changing information, their data could be linked, they were easily accessible and affordable for everybody, they were automatically searchable, they were adaptable to individual preferences, and online databases could be updated within moments every time new material is added to the corpus. This was in 2002, in the idealistic spirit of the early internet age. There were no social media at the time, and there was no talk of various standards of Open Access.

In the meantime all of this has come true and reality has overtaken my dreams. Not everything, however, turned out the way I imagined it. In one respect I erred massively: Open Access for academic publishing is not cheap. In fact, free online publications are extremely expensive for the author. This is not so much because of the maintenance costs of hosting data on a server, but because the big publishing houses, always being several steps ahead of the academics, managed to bring home their harvest before

legislators even realised that there was a crop in the field. The currently unsatisfying situation is reinforced by funding agencies that require scholars to publish in recognised repositories, and to implement quality control in the form of peer-review, thereby curtailing the possibilities of independent publishing. However, these limitations are only a hampering factor if one submits to these demands. Private initiatives, especially on social media, allow one to publish in non-conventional ways off the ‘beaten track’. I want to introduce briefly two such opportunities.

Wiktionary, the dictionary sidekick of Wikipedia, contains currently over 1,800 Old Irish forms, brief etymological annotations of a generally good quality included.<sup>18</sup> The wiki format allows one to see the entire edit history of the entries, but given the nature of Wiktionary, only the editors’ nicknames are displayed and it is impossible to say which real persons stand behind the entries. From the point of view of traditional academic practice, where information is ideally linked to a concrete person and a concrete source, this distracts from the suitability of Wiktionary as a resource.

In order to explore the potential of the media, I started an etymological series about Old Irish on Facebook and Twitter, namely *SnaS Sanas na Sengóidilce* on Facebook,<sup>19</sup> and its more compact sibling *#SnaST Sanas na Sengóidilce i Trírig* on Twitter.<sup>20</sup> In these squibs, I publish in irregular intervals new etymologies that are nowhere available in printed form. Guto Rhys is doing similar things for Welsh on the Facebook group Celtic Linguistics.<sup>21</sup> Because of the lack of an etymological dictionary for Welsh, he uploads screenshots, taken from *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, of words for which no etymologies can be found in the standard handbooks and invites the ‘hivemind’, as it is called, to make suggestions or contribute ideas. However, there are some practical weaknesses to these platforms. These initiatives do not conform with the current standards of peer-reviewed publishing. A more serious technical issue with Facebook and Twitter is that they were created for ephemeral purposes, not for long-term storage. They are not easily and systematically searchable, unless special software is programmed for the purpose. Therefore they are no adequate alternatives to dedicated etymological websites. A fully developed digital etymological resource of Early Irish that can be interlinked with eDIL remains a desideratum at the moment. Still, like in Stifter 1999, I am convinced that the future lies in online publishing.

Notes on contributor:

David Stifter is Professor for Old and Middle Irish at Maynooth University, Ireland. His research interests are grammar and philology of the ancient and medieval languages, esp. Old Irish, Gaulish, Celtiberian, and Lepontic.

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<sup>18</sup> URL: [https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Category:Old\\_Irish\\_language](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Category:Old_Irish_language).

<sup>19</sup> On the Facebook account of the *Chronologicon Hibernicum* project, URL: <https://www.facebook.com/chronhib/>.

<sup>20</sup> On the Twitter account of the *Chronologicon Hibernicum* project, URL: <https://twitter.com/ChronHib>.

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