

## A SIXTEENTH-CENTURY IRISH COLLECTION OF REMEDIES FOR AILMENTS OF THE MALE REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This article presents an edition, translation and discussion of an Irish collection of cures for ailments of the male reproductive organs. The collection, now preserved in RIA MS 23 N 29 (467), originally formed part of a much larger medical treatise found in RIA MS 24 B 3 (445), a composite codex written primarily by the North Connacht physician Conla Mac an Leagha in the early sixteenth century. While most of the therapeutic remedies examined here simply call for different herbal and animal ingredients, the text also includes verbal incantations and other instructions that might be described as ritualistic in nature, some of which are of interest for their wider literary resonances. This material is significant not only for the insight that it provides into the transmission of late antique medical learning in premodern Ireland, but also for our understanding of the relationship between medical remedy collections compiled in various medieval vernaculars.

**T**HE subject of male sexual dysfunction has to date received considerable attention in studies of medieval European society, due in no small part to its significance in a legal context. The inability or otherwise of a man to produce offspring played an important role in determining the legitimacy of claims to succession and inheritance, and impotence was recognised in both Roman and ecclesiastical law as an acceptable ground for seeking divorce.<sup>2</sup> The close association between impotence and magic in the European Middle Ages has likewise been explored in depth through a range of legal, theological and medical works.<sup>3</sup> Engagement on the part of medieval Irish scholars with these wider intellectual currents has not gone unnoticed: for example, Jacqueline Borsje has examined the evidence for ‘love magic’ in Irish hagiographical, penitential and legal texts, where verbal charms or material objects are sometimes portrayed as effective aphrodisiacs, even if the extant sources reflect conflicting views regarding the acceptability of employing such methods for the purpose

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<sup>2</sup>James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, 1987), 115 and 144.

<sup>3</sup>See especially Catherine Rider, *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2006).

of arousing desire.<sup>4</sup> Particular attention has been paid to the surviving Irish law-texts, which underscore the extent to which impotence was considered a highly public matter, applicable to ‘the legal world of contracts, obligations and ultimately, theoretical social order’.<sup>5</sup> Thus Brónagh Ní Chonaill has noted the stipulation given in the Old Irish law-text on sick-maintenance, *Bretha Crólige*, that compensation would be owed to a woman if her husband was physically incapacitated through injury and therefore rendered unable to engage in sexual intercourse — a rule which provides testimony, as Ní Chonaill argues, ‘to the importance of a person’s right to procreate, if so desired.’<sup>6</sup> A similar view is evidenced in a fragmentary Old Irish law-text dealing with various legal disputes that might arise in a marriage, where it is stated that if a husband deceives his wife by deliberately entering into a marriage knowing that he is impotent, she may obtain a divorce, with forfeiture of the bride-price.<sup>7</sup>

The influence of medical learning on such legal doctrine is often manifest. For example, Fergus Kelly has drawn attention to sections of the aforementioned text on marriage disputes that relate specifically to medical and gynaecological matters, including the procedures to be adopted if a wife or husband becomes ill before or after marriage; the legal issues that arise if a wife suffers from a condition called *lecc díúce* (lit. ‘an incurable stone’); and the consequences of intercourse during menstruation, which in the Middle Ages was widely believed to cause male sterility.<sup>8</sup> A similarly striking example of the confluence of legal and medical learning in an Irish context is found in a section of *Bretha Éitgid* concerned with bodily injuries, where brief mention is made of wounds affecting the male reproductive organs. There it is specified that full injury payment was due for removal of the left testicle, since it was an organ of particular importance for procreation. This stipulation, which may reflect an increasing concern with the legal implications of castration in the Middle Ages, would appear to be an inversion of the view expressed in many contemporary medical sources — themselves ultimately drawing on classical medical doctrine — according to which the ‘warm right testicle’ was considered to be the origin of the male sex, while the colder left one gave rise to females.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Jacqueline Borsje, ‘Rules and legislation on love charms in early medieval Ireland’, *Peritia* 21 (2010), 172–90; eadem, ‘Love magic in medieval Irish penitentials, law and literature: a dynamic perspective’, *Studia Neophilologica* 84 (2012), 6–23; and eadem, ‘The power of words: sacred and forbidden love magic in medieval Ireland’, in A. Berlis, A-M. Korte and K. Biezeveld (eds), *Everyday Life and the Sacred: Re/configuring Gender Studies in Religion*, Studies in Theology and Religion 23 (Leiden, 2017), 218–48.

<sup>5</sup>Brónagh Ní Chonaill, ‘Impotence, disclosure and outcome: some medieval Irish legal comment’, online at <https://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/scottishstudies/articles/LegalConcern.pdf>, 1 (accessed 21 July 2021).

<sup>6</sup>Ní Chonaill, ‘Impotence, disclosure and outcome’, 3; for an edition of the law-text in question, see D. A. Binchy, ‘Bretha Crólige’, *Ériu* 12 (1938), 1–77.

<sup>7</sup>Fergus Kelly, *Marriage Disputes: A Fragmentary Old Irish Law-text* (Dublin, 2015), 5.

<sup>8</sup>Kelly, *Marriage Disputes*, 10–12.

<sup>9</sup>Ní Chonaill, ‘Impotence, disclosure and outcome’, 17–18. The passage in question and the topic of castration more broadly are also discussed by Charlene Eska, ‘“Imbrued in their owne blood”: castration in early Welsh and Irish sources’, in Larissa Tracy (ed.), *Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2013), 149–73, at 167–9.

## NEW EVIDENCE FROM AN IRISH MEDICAL TREATISE

This contribution seeks to add some further evidence to these wider discussions of sexual dysfunction in premodern Ireland by bringing to light a previously unpublished collection of remedies for ailments of the male reproductive organs. The collection forms part of a much larger Irish medical treatise that was written in the early sixteenth century and consists of over 920 herbal remedies, charms and prayers for various bodily afflictions, broadly arranged in the text following the head-to-toe order typical of medical manuals throughout the classical and medieval periods. The treatise in question might thus be classified as a *receptarium* or ‘receptary’, a very popular genre of medieval medical text that lists remedies culled from various sources, but usually omits any substantial discussion of diagnosis or other aspects of medical theory.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the many interesting features found in its chapter on cures for the male reproductive organs, the Irish *receptarium* considered here is a significant survival due to the fact that it is a unique example, in an Irish medical context, of a prosimetrical work: to date, some 43 separate didactic medical poems, mostly versified remedies, have been identified in its contents.<sup>11</sup> The compilation clearly draws on a wide range of different sources, including many works by authors of the classical and late antique periods, but it is especially noteworthy for its numerous allusions to aspects of the wider early Irish literary tradition. One salient example of this is the fact that, although the majority of cures in the collection are transmitted anonymously, several remedies or passages of medical doctrine are attributed to members of the Tuatha Dé: most frequently the healer-figure Dían Cécht, but also his children, Míach and Airmed.<sup>12</sup>

The main scribe of this remedy book was Conla Mac an Leagha (fl. 1496–1512), who is known from extant manuscript sources of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to have belonged to the hereditary family of medical practitioners of that name active primarily in the region of North Connacht during the late-medieval period. References in the surviving Irish manuscripts to members of the Mac an Leagha family and the written works they produced were first documented by Paul Walsh, who noted that Conla appears to have

<sup>10</sup>Klaus-Dietrich Fischer, ‘Dr Monk’s medical digest’, *Social History of Medicine* 13/2 (2000), 239–51, at 242.

<sup>11</sup>This figure, as well as that given for the total number of remedies included in the text, are based on a draft transcription of the full treatise that was completed for the MIMNEC project by Dr Siobhán Barrett, for whose input I am very grateful. The prosimetrical content of the treatise was first identified by Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha, ‘Early Modern Irish medical writings’, *Scéala Scoil an Léinn Cheiltigh/Newsletter of the School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies* 4 (1990), 35–9, at 36. For editions of six of the poems in the text, see Deborah Hayden, ‘Three versified medical recipes invoking Dían Cécht’, in Anders Ahlqvist and Pamela O’Neill (eds), *Fir fesso: A Festschrift for Neil McLeod*, Sydney Series in Celtic Studies 17 (Sydney, 2018), 107–23; eadem, ‘Attribution and authority in a medieval Irish medical compendium’, *Studia Hibernica* 45 (2019), 19–51, at 32–4; eadem, ‘A versified cure for headache and some lexicographical notes’, *Keltische Forschungen* 8 (2019), 7–22; and eadem, ‘Medieval Irish medical verse in the nineteenth century: some evidence from material culture’, *Irish Historical Studies* 45, no. 168 (2021), 1–19.

<sup>12</sup>This topic is treated more thoroughly in Hayden, ‘Attribution and authority’. For discussion of another allusion to Irish literary tradition in the text, see Siobhán Barrett, ‘Varia I. The king of Dál nAraidi’s salve’, in *Ériu* 69 (2019), 171–8.

been the brother of Máel Eachlainn Mac an Leagha, an *ollamh* in medicine to the Mac Donnchaidh lords based in Ballymote and Tirerrill, Co. Sligo.<sup>13</sup> Conla himself is known to have been a practising physician in the service of the Mac Diarmada family in the nearby lordship of Magh Luirg, located in what are now the baronies of Boyle and Frenchpark, Co. Roscommon. He appears to have moved around several different locations in that area while writing, apparently for his own use, both the material examined here and the other contents of the manuscript to which it originally belonged, namely RIA MS 24 B 3 (445).<sup>14</sup> A recent codicological study of this manuscript has demonstrated that some of its leaves became separated from their original codex at an unknown point in its transmission, with the result that the 32 vellum leaves comprising the majority of the *receptarium* are still found in their original location (RIA MS 24 B 3 [445], pp. 33–[90], 90a, 90b and 91–3), while a further 8 paper leaves are now bound up as part of a second, composite codex, namely RIA MS 23 N 29 (467), fols 1–4 and 6–9.<sup>15</sup>

The chapter of the *receptarium* published here is found in the latter of these two codices, on fols. 8v–9v of RIA MS 23 N 29, and can be dated to 1509 on the basis of a scribal colophon.<sup>16</sup> Much like the rest of the treatise, the content of this chapter is very practical in nature in so far as it consists exclusively of remedies written in the terse syntactical pattern typical of medical receipts in many different languages, succinctly characterised as ‘for x, take y and do z with it’.<sup>17</sup> Such recipes nearly always include elements such as an indication (i.e. a list of complaints and disorders for which the remedy is deemed efficacious), the composition (an enumeration of the ingredients and their proportions or quantities), and instructions for preparation and administration. They also commonly conclude with some kind of ‘efficacy phrase’, or stock formula that asserts the value

<sup>13</sup>Paul Walsh, ‘An Irish medical family — Mac an Leagha’, in Colm Ó Lochlainn (ed.), *Irish Men of Learning* (Dublin, 1947), 206–18, at 210.

<sup>14</sup>Walsh, ‘An Irish medical family’, 214; Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha, ‘An Irish medical treatise on vellum and paper from the 16<sup>th</sup> century’, in Pádraig Ó Macháin (ed.), *Paper and the Paper Manuscript: A Context for the Transmission of Gaelic Literature* (Cork, 2019), 111–25, at 113.

<sup>15</sup>Nic Dhonnchadha, ‘An Irish medical treatise’, 111. The author notes (p. 116) that fol. 5 of RIA MS 23 N 29 does not form part of the prosimetrum text, but ‘is in Conla Mac an Leagha’s hand and is similar in texture and dimensions to the eight prosimetrum leaves with which it is bound’. The folio contains the earliest extant copy of Tadhg an Ghadhraigh Mac Aodhagáin’s poem on the Shannon, *Bérad breth na himrisna* (see Brian Ó Cuív, ‘The poetic contention about the River Shannon’, *Ériu* 19 (1962), 89–110), followed by a short prose account concerning the murder of Mág Raghnaill, ‘chief of his name’; the taking of Leitrim castle; and the capture of Mág Raghnaill’s ‘celebrated ship’. The latter text has recently been edited and translated by Mícheál Hoynes, ‘The assassination of Mág Raghnaill and the capture of his ship in 1502’, *Studia Hibernica* 46 (2020), 53–66. I am grateful to Dr Hoynes for sharing a copy of his article with me in advance of publication.

<sup>16</sup>Nic Dhonnchadha, ‘An Irish medical treatise’, 115–16; cf. Walsh, ‘An Irish medical family’, 215–17.

<sup>17</sup>See e.g. Debby Banham, ‘Dun, Oxa and Pliny the great physician: attribution and authority in Old English medical texts’, *Social History of Medicine* 24/1 (2011), 57–73, at 58, and also Ruth Carroll, ‘Middle English recipes: vernacularisation of a text-type’, in Irma Taavitsainen and Päivi Pahta (eds), *Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English* (Cambridge, 2004), 179, citing eadem, ‘The Middle English recipe as a text-type’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 100 (1999), 27–42.

of the treatment.<sup>18</sup> In many *receptaria*, some or all of these elements are simplified or even omitted; this is also frequently the case in our Irish text, where the instructions for preparation are often extremely vague and do not detail any specific quantities or measurements with regard to the ingredients to be used. Presumably information regarding dosage would have been known to experienced practitioners, who would in many cases have compiled such collections of cures to serve as reference manuals for their everyday work.<sup>19</sup>

Given the early sixteenth-century date of the sole extant manuscript witness for Conla Mac an Leagha's remedy collection, one might naturally compare the contents of his chapter on ailments of the male reproductive organs with discussions of similar subject-matter found in many widely circulated *practicae*, or therapeutic manuals, that were composed in Latin during the late-medieval period. It has been observed that the authors of such works, which were commonly translated into various European vernaculars (including Irish), were 'generally university teachers of medicine and they often claimed to be writing for their students, but *practicae* also found a readership among other well educated men who had not necessarily been to university'.<sup>20</sup> Medical conditions associated with the male reproductive organs were a common point of discussion in such texts. Thus Luke Demaitre has shown that the manuals written by figures such as the Salernitan physicians Gariopontus (fl. 1035–50) and Platearius (d. 1161), the English physician Gilbertus Anglicus (c. 1180–1250), the French doctor Bernard of Gordon (fl. 1270–1330), and the Italian friar Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98) discuss the definition, cause and cures for ailments ranging from 'satyriasis' and 'priapism' (defined as a lasting erection of the penis with or without libido, respectively), to incontinence, hernia, 'gonorhea' (the latter explained as 'a repeated, copious, and uncontrolled emission of sperm') and 'aproximeron' ('impotence' or an 'inability to perform a sexual act').<sup>21</sup>

There are significant differences between these sources and the chapter on ailments of the male reproductive organs in Conla Mac an Leagha's *receptarium*, however, not least of which is the general lack of theoretical content accompanying the remedies in the latter work, such as any discussion of symptoms or diagnosis. While the opening line of the Irish text suggests that the chapter will deal with multiple afflictions (*gallra*) of the 'male member' (*ball ferrda*), the cures that are subsequently listed by the scribe — or at least the vocabulary used to explain their purpose — is far more limited in scope than what is found in the Latin *practicae*. Thus 9 of the 20 remedies in Conla Mac an

<sup>18</sup>On the components of medicinal receipts, see Tony Hunt, *Popular Medicine in Thirteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1990), 2–3 and 16–24, and Jerry Stannard, 'Rezeptliteratur as Fachliteratur', in William Eamon (ed.), *Studies on Medieval 'Fachliteratur'*, (Brussels, 1982), 59–73.

<sup>19</sup>A similar observation is made by Stannard, 'Rezeptliteratur', 62.

<sup>20</sup>Catherine Rider, 'Men and infertility in late medieval English medicine', *Social History of Medicine* 29/2: 245–66, at 250–1.

<sup>21</sup>Luke Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine: The Art of Healing, from Head to Toe* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2013), 303–13 (where the terminology for diseases of the male reproductive organs used by these Latin authors is summarised in a table on p. 304).

Leagha's chapter are simply said to be for *leme* (defined in *eDIL*, s.v. *leime*, as 'weakness' or 'impotence'), while a further three are stated to be for *lemad*.<sup>22</sup> The latter term is defined in *eDIL*, s.v., as the 'act of rendering impotent (by means of spells)' on the basis of three citations, one of which is a charm that is also attested in our text with the heading *ar leme* (§20).<sup>23</sup> While one attestation of the word *lemad* in our text involves a verbal incantation (§16), the other two remedies that contain this word in their headings do not, and it is unclear whether the term was in some cases considered synonymous with *leme*. From a modern pathological perspective, of course, it is difficult to know precisely what ailment was meant in either case, but presumably reference is being made to some kind of inability to perform a sexual act.

Other remedies in the collection, while apparently intended to treat ailments other than impotence, are equally ambiguous as regards their precise purpose. For example, the cure in §6 simply begins *leiges an boill ferda* ('a cure for the male member'), while two others (§§14 and 15) are succinctly described as being for one or more 'lumps' (*cnū* and *cnocc* respectively) in the testicles.<sup>24</sup> In one case (§13) the term *tumaig magrall* ('hernia of the testicles') is explained simply as a type of *at uirged* ('swelling of the testicles'). A more expansive definition of the affliction known as *tumtuigi* (lit. 'dipping') can be found in a chapter from the Irish translation of John of Gaddesden's *Rosa Anglica*, although none of the cures suggested there correspond to the remedy prescribed in our text:

Herrnia adhon is edh is irrnia and .i. tumtuigi; & is eslainti sin ina mbrisind in sicne (&) le n-abur sifacc, no ina leathnuidter no ina sinter he: & ar a són sin tuitid na inne i sparan na n-uirgid; no attaid siad isin fordronnd maille teinnes, & bacuid siubal do nech. Et tuic co fuilid moran do gneithib arin eslainti so .i. gne o gaothmairecht, & gne o uisgiamlacht, & gne doniter o lennuibh, & gne doniter o feoil, & gne ele doniter o cuislennuibh, & gne ele ona h-hindibh [...]

'Hernia i.e. Dipping (?): Hernia is a disease in which that part of the peritoneum called siphac breaks, or is stretched, and widened, and because of this, the intestines fall into the scrotum, or swell in the groin with pain, and prevent a man from walking. Note that there are many varieties of this disease; a form caused by flatulence, another caused by wateriness, one produced from humours,

<sup>22</sup> §§16, 18 and 19. The latter two begin with the heading *ar lemada*, while the first begins *ar ic lemta* ('for healing of *lemad*').

<sup>23</sup> On this passage, see further the discussion below, pp. 258–60 and 275–6. For the dictionary definitions of *leime* and *lemad*, see *eDIL*: dil.ie/29794 (*leime*) and dil.ie/29874 (*lemad*). These and all following references to entries in *eDIL* were checked on 30 June 2021.

<sup>24</sup> For discussion of these terms, see below, pp. 273–4.

and one from flesh, another from varicose veins, and another from the entrails [...].<sup>25</sup>

The advice offered in §4 to prevent impotence (*leme*) by avoiding horse-riding no doubt had fairly practical origins: one might compare, for example, the warning given in the *Rosa Anglica* that impostumes of the testicles might be caused by this particular activity.<sup>26</sup>

At least two of the cures in our text (§§10 and 11) are evidently intended not to prevent impotence, but to curb libido.<sup>27</sup> The first of these begins *eōlus do dīcur toile ō macaib ecluisi 7 ō dainib arcēna* ('a prescription for getting rid of desire from clerics and other people'), while the second is stated to be *ar aislingib collaidhi* ('for [protection from] visions of carnal things'). The explicit reference to clerics in the former suggests that these remedies may have been considered to be of particular use to members of Irish ecclesiastical communities, whose avowed chastity to God would have naturally resulted in attempts to maintain abstinence in sexual matters. A similar preoccupation is evidenced in late-medieval Latin medical commentary, where the ailment referred to as 'satyriasis' is specifically associated with the forbidden desire for coitus amongst clerics. One Latin writer even devoted a distinct chapter of his medical treatise to the subject of 'extinguishing libido and removing the wish to have sex', where he referred specifically to the needs of individuals 'in various monasteries and religious places'.<sup>28</sup> Such teaching can be situated within the wider context of theological discussions concerning chastity and the repression of sexual desire found in sources across early medieval Europe, including Irish penitential texts that detail methods of counteracting the temptations of fleshly lust and stipulate penances for clerics of various ranks who transgress their vows of celibacy.<sup>29</sup>

#### SOURCES AND PARALLELS

Much of the medical material found in Conla Mac an Leagha's collection of remedies for ailments of the male reproductive organs can ultimately be traced to Latin sources of the late antique period. This is evident, for example, from the predominance in this chapter of references to animal parts, including those

<sup>25</sup> Winifred Wulff (ed. and trans.), *Rosa Anglica seu Rosa Medicinae Johannes Anglici: An Early Modern Irish Translation of a Section of the Mediaeval Medical Text-book of John of Gaddesden*, ITS 25 (London, 1929), 236–7.

<sup>26</sup> Wulff, *Rosa Anglica*, 214–15.

<sup>27</sup> The remedy in §12 purports to give the same cure as is found in the two preceding sections, but does not state its purpose explicitly, and calls for an ingredient (the 'testicle of a stag') that appears to be prescribed as an aphrodisiac in §7. It is possible that §§10 and 11 are interpolations. For further discussion of §11, see below, pp. 260–1.

<sup>28</sup> Demaitre, *Art of Healing*, 309–10.

<sup>29</sup> On the wider European context for theological approaches to subjects such as chastity, abstinence and clerical celibacy, see e.g. Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*, 3rd ed. (New York, 2017), 36–78. For examples from the Irish penitential tradition, see E. J. Gwynn (ed. and trans.), 'An Irish penitential', *Ériu* 7 (1913), 121–95, at 139–46, and Ludwig Bieler, *The Irish Penitentals*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 5 (Dublin, 1963), 258–77.

derived from the boar, cock, goat, stag, badger, wolf and spider. The use of animal organs or excrement for internal and external application in a medical context, commonly designated *Dreckapotheke* (lit. ‘dirt therapy’), is a feature of many ancient medical traditions, including the works of widely known authors such as Galen, Dioscorides and Pliny the Elder: the *Historia naturalis* of the latter has been described as ‘the starting-point for the diffusion of medico-magical lore to the Middle Ages in the West by way of Sextus Placitus’s *Liber medicinae ex animalibus* and Arab writers’.<sup>30</sup>

The influence of Pliny’s work in particular can be identified in various sections of Conla Mac an Leagha’s *receptarium*, and the chapter edited below forms no exception to this.<sup>31</sup> For example, the very first two cures listed (§§2 and 3) recommend that fennel be boiled in either wine or whey (*medg*) and then drunk in order to heal impotence (*leme*). This teaching may ultimately derive from the following observation by Pliny:

Geniturae abundantiam quoquo modo haustum facit, verendis amicissimum, sive ad fovendum radice cum vino decocta sive contritum in oleo inlitum.

‘In whatever way [the fennel plant] is taken it creates an abundance of seed, being very soothing to the privates, whether the root be boiled down with wine for a fomentation, or the plant be pounded up and applied in oil.’<sup>32</sup>

Many cures from sources such as the first-century *Historia naturalis* and the fourth-century *Liber medicinae ex animalibus* reflect belief in the so-called ‘Doctrine of Signatures’ or ‘sympathetic magic’, which was premised upon the axiom *similia similibus curantur* (‘like is cured by like’). This theory held that perceived likenesses (or ‘sympathies’) between the qualities or visible properties of particular natural substances (plants, animal parts or minerals) and a symptom or abnormal condition of the human body meant that a given substance might, under the appropriate circumstances, be employed to effect magical therapy on that part of the body.<sup>33</sup> In our Irish text, this concept is evidently what underlies the relatively frequent advice to use animal testicles to combat impotence — the idea evidently being that an ailment affecting

<sup>30</sup>Francis B. Brévert, ‘Between medicine, magic, and religion: wonder drugs in German medico-pharmaceutical treatises of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries’, *Speculum* 83/1 (2008), 1–57, at 42. For a general survey of medieval and modern *Dreckapotheke*, see Loren C. MacKinney, ‘Animal substances in materia medica: a study in the persistence of the primitive’, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 1/1 (1946), 149–70.

<sup>31</sup>For examples drawn from other chapters of the remedy book, see James Carney and Maura Carney, ‘A collection of Irish charms’, *Saga och Sed: Kungliga Gustav Adolfs Akademiens Årsbok* (1960), 144–52, at 147–8, and Deborah Hayden, ‘Téacs leighis ó thuaisceart Chonnacht: comhthéacs, foinsí agus struchtúr’, in Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh (ed.), *Comóradh an Leathchéid: Téamaí agus Tionscadail Taighde*, Léachtaí Cholm Cille 50 (Maynooth, 2020), 60–84.

<sup>32</sup>W. H. S. Jones (ed. and trans.), *Pliny: Natural History Books 28–32*, Loeb Classical Library 418 (Cambridge, MA, 1963), 150–3 (XX.96).

<sup>33</sup>Jerry Stannard, ‘Medicinal plants and folk remedies in Pliny’, *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 4/1 (1982), 3–23, at 14; Brévert, ‘Between medicine, magic, and religion’, 45–6.



the testicles of a man might be cured by consuming the corresponding part of a particularly fertile animal. Thus §4 calls for the testicle of a boar, §5 for that of a cock, §§7 and 12 for that of a stag; in all cases, the practitioner is instructed to either burn or boil the testicles and to then serve them to the patient in a drink (usually of wine). Nearly identical remedies can be found in both the original Latin text of Sextus Placitus's *Liber medicinae ex animalibus* and in its later Old English translation, e.g. the suggestion there that the dried testicles of a stag might be drunk in order to arouse coitus (*cerui testiculos siccus, aliquam partem potam, concubitus excitat*).<sup>34</sup>

Similar parallels exist for other cures in our text. The instruction in §14 to mix the brain of a wild boar (*incind tuirc allaid*) with honey and apply this to the testicles to cure a swelling of some kind (*cnú*, lit. 'nut') is reminiscent of a cure *ad carbunculos in ueretro* ('for carbuncles in the private parts') that occurs in the work of Sextus Placitus.<sup>35</sup> Two further recipes (§§6 and 17, in fact simply variants of a single cure) call for the dung of a goat, which is to be combined with 'sediment' or 'dregs' (*descad*) and the inner bark of a holly tree (*etursnam cuilind*) to form a poultice that is then applied to thighs. Animal excrement is a commonly cited ingredient in both late antique and medieval medical sources, and indeed a short Irish tract on the medicinal uses of dung from various animals, much of which is based on information contained in the second book of Avicenna's widely circulated *Canon of Medicine*, has recently been brought to light from a separate manuscript.<sup>36</sup> None of the remedies in that source, however, is prescribed specifically for ailments of the male reproductive organs. A closer comparandum for the advice given in §§6 and 17 of our text is the section on the uses of medicinal ingredients derived from goats (*Medicina de hirco et capra*) in the *Liber medicinae ex animalibus*, which similarly recommends applying a salve made of goat's dung either to the thighs in order to relieve pain in that part of the body (*ad femorum dolores*), or to heal a carbuncle that has appeared in the 'private parts' (*ad carbunculum, qui in ueretro nascitur*).<sup>37</sup>

As the existence of an Old English translation of Sextus Placitus's work clearly demonstrates, medical learning of the late antique period continued to circulate widely in the Middle Ages through the medium of various vernaculars. Thus the advice given in our text to use the dung of a goat to cure genital swelling also occurs in a French manuscript dating to the first half of the thirteenth century, where it forms part of a collection of medical receipts similarly arranged in topical order.<sup>38</sup> The instruction in §10, which suggests that one

<sup>34</sup>E. Howald & H. E. Sigerist (eds), *Antonii Musae De herba Vettonica liber, Pseudoapulei Herbarius, Anonymi De taxone liber, Sexti Placiti Liber medicinae ex animalibus*, *Corpus Medicorum Latinorum IV* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1927), 237; cf. Hubert Jan de Vriend (ed.), *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de Quadrupedibus*, *Early English Text Society Original Series 286* (Oxford, 1984), 242–3 (no. 13).

<sup>35</sup>Howald and Sigerist, *Sexti Placiti Liber medicinae ex animalibus*, 258; de Vriend, *Old English Herbarium*, 260–1.

<sup>36</sup>Ranke de Vries, 'A short tract on medicinal uses for animal dung', *North American Journal of Celtic Studies* 3/2 (2019), 111–36.

<sup>37</sup>Howald and Sigerist, *Sexti Placiti Liber medicinae ex animalibus*, 254 and 256.

<sup>38</sup>de Vriend, *Old English Herbarium*, 258–9 (§19); Tony Hunt, 'The beginnings of medical instruction in medieval France', *Romania* 131, no. 523/524 (3/4) (2013), 409–51, at 443 (§121): *Pour*

might ward off excessive desire by preparing a drink from the seed of nettle (*ros nenta*) mixed with pepper, is very close in content to a cure found in a medieval Welsh medical text that was probably first compiled around the thirteenth century, but has been argued to draw on much earlier material.<sup>39</sup> The Welsh version contains no specific reference to clerics, however; rather, it is embedded in a passage on the virtues of the nettle-plant, and indicates that the cure in question is applicable to both men and women (*gwr neu wraig*):

[...] cais had y ddynhaden a bwrw ynghyd a phupur, a thymhera nhwy a gwin neu fêl, a dyro i yfed, ag er gwyllted fo corph gwr neu wraig ai hyfo, ef a fydd cyn ddofed a'r dofa oll.

‘[...] take the seed of the nettle, mix with pepper, and temper with wine or honey. Let it be given as a potion, and however untamed the body may be, it will completely subdue it.’<sup>40</sup>

The question of the extent to which the remedies in Conla Mac an Leagha’s *receptarium* might have either derived from Latin texts, or rather made their way into Irish via other vernacular intermediaries, is one that demands further research. It is probable, however, that this process of transmission began long before the composition of the extant sixteenth-century manuscript witness of our text, whose scribe may have had a number of earlier, but now lost, manuscript exemplars to hand when compiling his collection.

#### HEALING CHARMS AND OTHER RITUAL REMEDIES

Links between the content of Conla Mac an Leagha’s remedy book and vernacular literature of the early medieval period also emerge from an analysis of the numerous cures in the text that involve verbal incantations or other ritual practices. Previous research has demonstrated, for example, that some of the blood-staunching charms in Conla’s collection of remedies for nose ailments bear comparison to material found in the Old English medical tracts compiled between the ninth and twelfth centuries.<sup>41</sup> Three of the cures in the chapter edited below (§§9, 16 and 20) feature oral elements, while those in §§8 and 11 incorporate other kinds of ritualistic practices. A number of these point more or less directly to a connection between male desire and sexual capacity on the one hand and the magical or curative effects of water on the other.<sup>42</sup> All of

*oster l'enfleure du membre ou du fondement: Prenez fiens de bouc, triblez avec miel, si le metez sur le mal.*

<sup>39</sup>Morfydd E. Owen, ‘Meddygon Myddfai: a preliminary survey of some medieval medical writing in Welsh’, *SC* 10/11 (1975–6), 210–33, at 221 and 228.

<sup>40</sup>John Williams (ab Ithel) (ed.) and John Pughe (trans.), *The physicians of Myddfai: Meddygon Myddfai* (Llandoverly, 1861), 265 (text) and 443 (trans., slightly altered).

<sup>41</sup>See e.g. David Stifter, ‘A charm for staunching blood’, *Celtica* 25 (2007), 251–4, and Deborah Hayden, ‘Old English in the Irish charms’, *Speculum* 97/2 (forthcoming April 2022).

<sup>42</sup>For a more detailed treatment of this theme, see Deborah Hayden, ‘From the “king of the waters” to curative manuscripts: water and medicine in medieval Irish textual culture’, in M. Cesario, H. Magennis and E. Ramazzina (eds), *An Interdisciplinary Study of the Elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air*, 4 vols (forthcoming 2021–2).

them have resonances in early Irish texts from other literary genres, including narrative, penitential and hagiographical works.

In §9, the practitioner is instructed to recite an incantation beginning with the words *tonn tonn tuinde, fonn fonn fuinde* seven times over water (*a n-uisci*, glossed as *fírthiprait* ‘a pure source’). While the rhetorical features of this incantation resemble patterns found in charms from other linguistic traditions, the meaning of at least some of its lexical elements — in particular *tonn* and *fonn* — are not inconsequential ‘gibberish’ in this context; the first can mean ‘wave, outpouring, sea, abundance’, while the second can mean ‘desire, fondness, pleasure’.<sup>43</sup> It is not unusual for charm incantations to invoke references to bodies of water, natural physical rhythms and flowing liquids on the principal of sympathetic correspondence (such imagery is common, for example, in blood-staunching charms), and the use of the word *tonn* here may therefore constitute an allusion to the expulsion of semen that is a typical result of sexual activity.<sup>44</sup> The association between water and desire evoked in the incantation itself is also inherent in the ritual instructions that immediately follow it, where it is specified that the enchanted liquid should be placed in a yew-wood vessel and shaken over the individual afflicted with impotence (*leme*) morning and night for a period of nine days. This remedy bears a striking similarity to an episode from the Old Irish *Life of Brigit*, in which the eponymous saint is visited by a man seeking help to prevent his wife from leaving him. The man asks for a spell or charm (*epaid*) for this purpose, whereupon Brigit blesses some water that the man then sprinkles over his wife, immediately causing her to love him passionately. Jacqueline Borsje has suggested that the saint’s action of sprinkling water on the woman might be interpreted as ‘an exorcism of the woman herself’, intended to heal her and restore her feelings of love for the man by purifying an interfering substance or presence, and thus ridding it of ‘magic’ or demonic disruption.<sup>45</sup> The Christian context of the cure is less explicit in the version from our medical text (where, moreover, the enchanted water is presumably to be sprinkled over an afflicted man rather than a woman), but the ultimate intended effect of the cure — that of restoring proper sexual relations — is the same in both cases.

The charm in §20 has been the subject of some previous discussion on the basis of a separate version of it found in a blank space on col. 672c of Dublin, Trinity College MS H 3. 17 (1336), a sixteenth-century composite codex that otherwise consists mainly of legal material. That copy, which includes a line

<sup>43</sup>See *eDIL*, s.vv. 1 *tonn* (*dil.ie/41386*) and 2 *fonn* (*dil.ie/23253*). The rhetorical and semantic features of the incantation are discussed further in Deborah Hayden, ‘The context and obscure language of medical charms in a sixteenth-century Irish remedy book: four case studies’, in Chantal Kobel (ed.), *Obscuritas in Medieval Irish and Welsh Literature* (Dublin, forthcoming).

<sup>44</sup>For examples of comparable imagery in the context of blood-staunching charms, see e.g. Rebecca Fisher, ‘The Anglo-Saxon charms: texts in context,’ *Approaching Methodologies* 4 (2012), 108–26, esp. 111–16, as well as the discussion in Hayden, ‘Old English in the Irish charms’ (forthcoming).

<sup>45</sup>Jacqueline Borsje, ‘Celtic spells and counterspells’, in Katja Ritari and Alexandra Bergholm (eds), *Understanding Celtic Religion: Revisiting the Pagan Past* (University of Wales Press, 2015), 9–50, at 30–1. The episode is also discussed in Borsje, ‘Love magic’, 7; for the text, see Donncha Ó hAodha (ed. and trans.), *Bethu Brigte* (Dublin, 1978), 32.

of alliterative ‘gibberish’ language not found in our version, was first edited by R. I. Best, who only offered a partial translation of the charm and noted that ‘the text seems corrupt and the true rendering is very doubtful’.<sup>46</sup> Analyses and translations of the H 3. 17 copy of the charm were subsequently offered by John Carey and Jacqueline Borsje; the former sought to situate it within a literary context, while the latter read the text in relation to late antique and medieval binding spells.<sup>47</sup> Carey suggested that the charm may be ‘of relatively early date’, and argued that the meaning of its heading (*eólas do lemad fhir*) was ambiguous, allowing for translation into English either as ‘a charm for rendering a man impotent’ or as ‘a charm for [healing] a man’s impotence’. While the directions for its use (which include the words ‘let the cross of God be made over the man’s thighs’) suggested to him the latter interpretation, he nonetheless acknowledged that ‘the jingling lines at the heart of the charm itself clearly have a hostile magic as their intention’. Borsje leaned more firmly towards interpreting the text as a spell for causing impotence and suggested that it might be understood in relation to *lorica* prayers that could be used by monks to exorcise feelings of lust.

Carey’s edition and translation of the first part of this passage, which emends the Irish slightly,<sup>48</sup> are reproduced here as follows:

Fo-rriug (*MS* *föriug*) do lüth,  
fo-rriug (*MS* .ii.) do läth,  
f[o-rriug] do nert,  
f[o-rriug] do thrächt,  
f[o-rrig] b[en] drüth  
dam tuli i n-äth.

‘I bind your vigour,  
I bind your passion,  
I bind your strength,  
I bind your force.  
A wanton woman binds  
a ‘stag of flood’ (*dam tuli*) in a ford.’<sup>49</sup>

Carey argued that this charm was reminiscent of early Irish literary accounts in which ‘sexually active or demanding women, associated or identified with the waters of rivers or the sea, pose a threat to men in general and to the heroic warrior in particular’.<sup>50</sup> Drawing attention to the phrase *dam tuli* ‘stag/ox of flood’

<sup>46</sup>Best, ‘Some Irish charms’, *Ériu* 16 (1952), 27–32, at 32. Best did not acknowledge the fact that another copy of this charm is preserved in Conla Mac an Leagha’s *receptarium*, although he did make reference to a charm for safe childbirth included in the collection of remedies for gynaecological ailments from this text (p. 77 of RIA MS 24 B 3). It may be the case that Best was simply unaware that the paper leaves preserved in RIA MS 23 N 29, on which the impotence charm is written, in fact formed part of the larger *receptarium* in the 24 B 3 manuscript.

<sup>47</sup>John Carey, ‘The encounter at the ford: warriors, water, and women’, *Éigse* 34 (2004), 10–24; Borsje, ‘Celtic spells and counterspells’, 31–7.

<sup>48</sup>For a discussion of this emendation, see the textual commentary below, pp. 275–6.

<sup>49</sup>Carey, ‘Encounter at the ford’, 19.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

— which appears in other sources as *dam díleinn* or *dam díli*, and designates ‘a creature notable for its size, strength and ferocity’, and by extension ‘a warrior’ — he connected the incantation to a narrative scene from the death-tale of the Ulster Cycle figure Fergus mac Róich, in which the eponymous hero, while exhibiting his strength in the lough in Mag nAí, was approached in the water by a desirous Medb. The latter’s husband Ailill urged his brother Lugaid to cast a spear at the trysting couple, and Fergus was dealt a deadly blow. Carey suggested that the allusion to this narrative in the H 3. 17 impotence charm, whereby Medb might be interpreted as the ‘wanton woman’ (*ben drúth*) who binds or overpowers a formidable male (the *dam tuli*) in a ford, indicated that the charm might have been used ‘both to render a man sexually incapable and to deprive a fighter of the power of movement.’<sup>51</sup>

The exorcistic function of water in matters pertaining to carnal lust is also evidenced in other remedies from our text. For example, it is specified in §11 that a man might ward off ‘carnal visions’ (*aislingi collaidhi*) by ‘bathing his feet in a well morning and evening without speaking’ (*būalad a cos a tibraid maiden 7 fescur gen labrad*). The use of the phrase *aislingi collaidhi* here calls to mind an anecdote from the Old Irish ecclesiastical document known as the ‘Monastery of Tallaght’, which details how the Clonmacnoise anchorite Laisrén, described as ‘quite naked and free from sin, with nothing on his conscience’, but also ‘infirm with disease’ (*imnoch t indilmáin cen ní for a cubus...hi luibri galair*) is taken home by a clerical student who puts a cloak under him. That night Laisrén sees a ‘carnal vision’ (*aislingi coildnidi*) for the first time in his life. As he subsequently performs a penitential vigil, an angel visits him and explains that this sinful vision resulted from the fact that the cloak he slept upon had not been washed since it was used by a wedded couple: ‘for any cloak that is taken from a lustful couple, a demon accompanies it so long as it is not washed’ (*ar nach brat berair do áos étraich conamteit demmun airet nat negar 7 cetera*).<sup>52</sup>

Ritualistic actions are a common feature of medieval medical recipes; although their precise rationale is usually left unstated, they were clearly thought to enhance or reinforce the curative virtues of a medicament.<sup>53</sup> For example, the specification in §11 of our text that the washing of one’s feet should be carried out in silence is echoed in several remedies from Old English medical sources, which include instructions such as to ‘bid an immaculate person silently fetch half a jar of running water against the current’, ‘take the left ear and pierce it in

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 20. For further discussion of this charm, the term *dam tuli*, and the figure of Fergus mac Róich as a paragon of male fertility, see Phillip A. Bernhardt-House, ‘The Old Irish impotence spell: the *dam díli*, Fergus, fertility, and the mythic background of an Irish incantation’, *Journal for the Academic Study of Magic* 4 (2007), 304–24, and Bernhard Maier, ‘Beasts from the deep: the water-bull in Celtic, Germanic and Balto-Slavonic traditions’, *ZCP* 51 (1999), 4–16.

<sup>52</sup>Edward J. Gwynn and W. J. Purton, ‘The Monastery of Tallaght’, *PRIA* 29 (1911/12), 115–79, at 155. The phrase also occurs in the Irish translation of John of Gaddesden’s *Rosa Anglica* in reference to the causes of imposthumes of the testicles: see Wulff, *Rosa Anglica*, 214–215. I am grateful to Dr Sharon Arbuthnot for drawing my attention to this latter example.

<sup>53</sup>Stannard, ‘Rezeptliteratur’, 67. For a broader study of such rituals, see Armand Delatte, *Herbarius: Recherches sur le cérémonial usité chez les anciens pour la cueillette des simples et des plantes magiques* (Brussels, 1961).

silence’, and write something ‘in silence and silently put the words on the left breast’.<sup>54</sup> In many cases the rituals that form part of medical remedies are identical to, or resonant of, liturgical practices. This may well be the case with regard to the remedy in §11, since the practice of foot-washing is widely evidenced in other medieval sources as a symbol for the healing of physical and spiritual ailments. This is clear from the early Irish vocabulary itself, where the term *osaic* or *fosaic* (derived from Latin *obsequium*) could have the specific sense of ‘a service; in religious lit[erature] washing of the feet (of the poor, strangers) as a ceremonial or religious duty [...] later as an act of hospitality’.<sup>55</sup> A. T. Lucas has argued that ‘The custom [of foot-washing] among clerics may have been looked upon by those practising it as a pious imitation of Christ washing the feet of his apostles, having the symbolic overtone which personified Christ by the stranger guest.’<sup>56</sup> In her analysis of the medieval depictions of Christ the Physician (*Christus medicus*), the Divine Healer of mankind’s spiritual diseases, Carole Rawcliffe has similarly drawn attention to the topos of washing the feet or ulcerated bodies of lepers that is widely attested in sermons, homilies and hagiography from other medieval literary traditions.<sup>57</sup> It is thus probable that the remedy for ‘carnal visions’ in §11 similarly reflects an understanding that washing the feet, in so far as it symbolised the piety and chastity of Christ, might help to free an individual from the kind of sinful visions deemed undesirable amongst clerics. Further evidence in favour of this interpretation is found in another passage from the aforementioned text known as the ‘Monastery of Tallaght’, where the cleric Colccu is said to have claimed that *indhí notegtis isna husciu is do traothad 7 damnad hi tole 7 ind accobur fogníd leó nó is tormuch saothair dano cena* (‘those who used to stand in water did so for the purpose of crushing and subduing their desires and longings: or else simply as an additional labour of piety’).<sup>58</sup>

§8 of our text offers the similarly ritualistic, but also considerably more dramatic, advice that one might cure impotence by writing the name of the afflicted man on a stick of elm (*lemán*) and beating him with it. There may be an element of sympathetic magic, or at least of medieval etymological association, underlying these instructions, for the name of the object intended to effect the cure (*lemán* ‘elm’) bears a formal similarity to the adjective *lem* ‘weak, impotent’, of which the name of the affliction to be treated (*leme* ‘impotence’) is an abstract.<sup>59</sup> Consideration of the wider context of medieval medical and literary source-material concerning love magic may point, however, to a deeper ritual significance for the cure in question. For example, Richard Kieckhefer has drawn attention to an aphrodisiac in a fifteenth-century English manuscript, where it is stated that a woman might be aroused to sexual desire if a man writes

<sup>54</sup> Godfrid Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague, 1948), 94–5.

<sup>55</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. *osaic* (dil.ie/34052).

<sup>56</sup> Lucas, ‘Washing and bathing’, 87.

<sup>57</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2006), 142–4; see also the discussion in Hayden, ‘“King of the waters”’ (forthcoming).

<sup>58</sup> Gwynn and Purton, ‘Monastery of Tallaght’, 161. The editors suggest (pp. 173–4) that the Colccu in question is ‘probably Colcu úa Duinechda, d. 789, author of the *Scúap Crábaid*’.

<sup>59</sup> This has also been suggested by Nic Dhonnchadha, ‘An Irish medical treatise’, 118.

the obscure words ‘*pax + pix + abyra + syth + samasic*’ on a hazel stick, and then hits her on the head with it three times before immediately kissing her.<sup>60</sup> A similar Gaelic charm, which forms part of a miscellany of literary and medical material compiled by the Beaton physicians of Mull, likewise states that if a man writes certain letters on a rod (*slat*) and beats a woman with it, she will be inspired to love him.<sup>61</sup>

The rationale underlying such a violent approach to arousing sexual desire (or, as the problem is framed in our text, to curing impotence) is not explicitly elaborated on in any of these examples. A few further clues can be gleaned, however, from an examination of other medieval sources concerning ‘lovesickness’, a condition that was understood in both the classical period and the Middle Ages as a pathological illness that could be treated by medical means.<sup>62</sup> The transmission of this teaching in an Irish context is evidenced by a vernacular adaptation of a fragment from the section on diseases of the head (*De passionibus capitis*) in Bernard of Gordon’s fourteenth-century *practica*, known as the *Lilium medicinae*. The Irish text begins by describing lovesickness as follows:

De Amore Hereos Adon don gradh re nabar hereos ⁊ is inann hereos asin Greig ⁊ generous asin Laidin ⁊ is inann generous asin Laidin ⁊ uasal isin Gaedilg, oir is gnathach tiaghaid na baruin ⁊ na daine uaisli annsa neaslainti so tri acfuind ⁊ a ninnmasa [...] oir sanntaighi an meidi sin i innus co creidinn gurab i bean is fear foirm ⁊ fighair ⁊ bésa ⁊ geanmnaigeacht isin domun hi, oir do truaillid an brigh inntsamlaightach co mor aige ona smuaintigib melangcoilica innus gur treig a deghoibrighthi ⁊ a trocaire co huilidhi acht smuaintighthi na mna amain ⁊ bidh amail duine cuthaigh do reir Ouidius, noch adeir; Omnis amans cecus, non est Amor arbiter ecus .i. ni breitheamh comthrom in gradh ⁊ in neach aga mbi bidh dall.

‘De Amore Hereos i.e. concerning the love that is called hereos; for *hereos* in Greek is the same as *generosus* in Latin and *generosus* in Latin is the same as *noble* in Gaelic, for the barons and the nobility are wont to fall into this disease through their wealth and their riches [...] For so greatly does [the man afflicted with this disease] desire [the woman] that he thinks she is the woman of the best form and figure, habits, and chastity in the world, for the power of comparison is so destroyed in him through his melancholy thoughts, that he forsakes his good actions and his mercy entirely and only

<sup>60</sup>Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), 83. The passage is found on fol. 33v of Bodleian Library MS Wood empt. 18, a late-fifteenth-century codex written in English that includes several ‘love potions’ among a collection of charms and recipes beginning on fol. 30.

<sup>61</sup>Edinburgh, NLS Advocates MS 72. 1. 2 (‘Gaelic II’), fol. 33r8–9. For a more detailed discussion of the transmission and variant versions of this remedy, see Hayden, ‘The context and obscure language of medical charms’ (forthcoming).

<sup>62</sup>Mary F. Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and its Commentaries* (Philadelphia, 1990), 7.

(retains) thoughts of the woman alone, and becomes like a madman, according to Ovid, who says: *Omnis amans caecus, non est Amor arbiter aequus*, i.e. love is not a just judge and he who has it is blind.<sup>63</sup>

Following a description of the signs of this disease (e.g. lack of desire for food and drink, little sleep and wasting of the body), the Irish adapter sets out several methods for curing the affliction, depending on whether the patient is considered ‘rational’ or ‘irrational’. In the latter circumstance, the following is advised:

[...] bointer a edach de 7 gabthar air do sgiuirsihib co ger no cndergadh a croicinn 7 no co ngabad crith a baill 7 dentur bagar uilc is mo na sin air dfagbail dho. [...] Et muna leighester é ona neichib so adubrumar curthar cailleach midealba ina fiagnaise maille re drochcruth 7 re drochedach 7 tabradh le edach ara mbia fuil idir a gluinib 7 abradh na briatra so re fer an gradha .i. is olc an ben tsuirghi ut ata agatsa, oir ata si meascamail brenalach 7 ata epilepsia uirri [...] 7 muna labra se re, tairngedh an tedach ara fuil an fuil asa gaba[i]l 7 buaileadh he ina edan 7 abradh ris do guth mor: is mar so ata do ben tsuirghisi. Et muna leighester uada sin é ni duine ata ann acht diabal corpurda 7 ni leighester é co brath.

‘[...] let his clothes be taken off him, and let him be beaten with scourges sorely till his skin redden, and trembling seize his limbs, and let him be threatened that he will get worse evils. [...] And if he is not cured by what we have said let an unsightly hag be sent into his presence, of evil appearance and with wretched garments, and put a cloth on which is blood between her knees and let her say these words to the man of love: That is a bad love-lady you have, for she is bibulous, stinking, and she has epilepsy, [...] and unless he speak to her, pull the cloth on which is the blood from her<sup>64</sup> and strike it in his face, and say to him in a loud voice: This is your love-lady. And if he be not cured by this he is not a man but a devil incarnate, and he will not be cured for all eternity.’<sup>65</sup>

The medical notion of ‘wasting sickness’ caused by unrequited love, as is attested in this excerpt from an Irish medical text, is also apparent in a number of early Irish literary tales that similarly recount, albeit in narrative form, the course of the affliction in terms of its *causa* (e.g. contemplation of the physical beauty of a lady through a vision); *signa* (e.g. the lover ceases to eat, sleep, or

<sup>63</sup> Winifred Wulff (ed. and trans.), ‘De amore hereos’, *Ériu* 11 (1932), 174–81, at 177–80.

<sup>64</sup> The phrase *asa gaba[i]l* may well merit a less modest translation than that offered by Wulff, who shows some hesitation about its meaning in a glossary entry that explains the noun as either *gabhal* ‘the fork of the body’ or *gabhail* ‘holding, grasp’. Most likely it is the former; the positioning of a bloody cloth between the woman’s thighs may symbolise the common association between menstruation and sterility in the Middle Ages.

<sup>65</sup> Wulff, ‘De amore hereos’, 178–81.



drink); and *cura* (e.g. the lover recovers by removal of the spell or by union with the beloved).<sup>66</sup> The particular motif of beating the afflicted individual, however, is perhaps most conspicuously paralleled in the tenth- or eleventh-century Irish narrative *Serglige Con Culainn*.<sup>67</sup> There the titular warrior, having failed to shoot down a pair of birds for his wife, dreams that he is approached by two mysterious women who horsewhip him until he is on the brink of death. The remainder of the tale as it has come down to us recounts how Cú Chulainn then lies sick in bed for a year, during which time he is approached by an emissary from the Otherworld who informs him that he is desired by the Otherworldly woman Fand — a figure whose name, though defined in the text itself as meaning ‘tear’, might also be interpreted, not inconsequentially, as meaning ‘weak’ or ‘helpless’.<sup>68</sup> The intervention of this Otherworldly woman naturally arouses the jealousy of Cú Chulainn’s wife, who shames him for lying in bed impotently for the love of a woman.

In her analysis of this narrative, Mary Wack compares the ‘beating episode’ at the beginning of *Serglige Con Culainn* to a story from Odo of Cluny’s (d. 944) *Collationes*, in which a certain Hukbert of Sens, ‘given to the sin of luxury’, is one night pursued by phantasmic women; upon taking refuge in a church, their queen orders them to seize and whip him.<sup>69</sup> As Gregory Toner has shown, moreover, the attack on Cú Chulainn is reminiscent of other examples of physical assaults recorded in ecclesiastical lore, including eschatological texts that depict angels wielding scourges and rods as they attack sinners.<sup>70</sup> Both scholars view female agency as being key to the interpretation of the assault depicted in the opening section of *Serglige Con Culainn*. Thus Wack argues that the Otherworldly women who approach the warrior ‘may be seen as doubles for [Cú Chulainn’s] wife: they punish him as he fears or imagines she would, should she give vent to her wrath’, while Toner suggests that

‘The *serglige* which in other warriors is a manifestation of the strength and depth of their love for their lover is here transformed into something quite different. Cú Chulainn suffers the same symptoms of other love-struck men but he does not appear to be in love. The *serglige* does not emanate from within himself, therefore, but

<sup>66</sup>Sarah Michie, ‘The lover’s malady in early Irish romance’, *Speculum* 12/3 (1937), 304–13, at 308.

<sup>67</sup>Myles Dillon (ed.), *Serglige Con Culainn*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 14 (Dublin, 1953).

<sup>68</sup>The citations given in *eDIL*, s.v. *fand* ‘tear’ ([dil.ie/21291](http://dil.ie/21291)) derive in the main from the passage in *Serglige Con Culainn* where Fand’s name is explained on the basis of that of her father, Aed Abrat, itself analysed in the text as ‘fire of eyelash’. The meaning ‘tear’ associated with ‘Fand’ may therefore simply be a consequence of this definition, although the text explains that she was so called as a result of her purity and beauty (Gregory Toner, ‘Desire and divorce in *Serglige Con Culainn*’, *Ériu* 66 (2016), 135–66, at 146 n. 18). Word-final *-nd* and *-nn* are common orthographic variants in medieval Irish texts; for the well-attested meaning of the adjective *fann* as ‘weak, helpless, lacking strength or power’, see *eDIL*, s.v. 2 *fann* ([dil.ie/21294](http://dil.ie/21294)).

<sup>69</sup>Wack, *Lovesickness*, 28–9, paraphrasing the account from Odo of Cluny in Monica Blöcker, ‘Frauenzauber — Zauberrfrauen’, *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Kirchengeschichte* 76 (1982), 1–39, at 14–15.

<sup>70</sup>Toner, ‘Desire and divorce’, 139–41.

is depicted as being imposed on him from the outside. His turmoil and torpidity are the result of a beating delivered by his would-be lover. The tale, therefore, seems to deliver a stark warning about love, and more particularly the love of women. Love is an assault upon men that is intended to deprive them of their vitality and to imprison them within the bonds of female lust. Women are not docile beauties who capture men's hearts with their charm or their guile, but active agents who can violently ensnare even the most powerful of men and rob them of their masculine vigour.<sup>71</sup>

This interpretation recalls the depiction of Medb in Fergus mac Róich's death-tale as a 'wanton woman' who ensnares and threatens the masculinity of the heroic warrior as he bathes in a lake, an account which, as we have seen, is in turn reflected in the charm incantation of which a copy is found in §20 of our medical text. According to Toner's analysis, however, the beating would seem to be the cause of Cú Chulainn's lethargy, whereas in the examples from the medical tradition cited here, the act of striking the man is clearly understood as a remedy for this lethargy: it is seemingly intended to return the patient to a state where he is capable of experiencing physical desire for another. The underlying rationale for the remedy in §8 of our text, and of its parallels in other manuscripts, may thus instead have been that of exorcising a demonic force from the afflicted individual. In this sense, the ritualistic act of beating the patient may have served a similar purificatory purpose as that of water in several other cures from the same collection.

Numerous ambiguities, both linguistic and contextual, remain to be deciphered through further analysis of the herbal remedies, charms and ritualistic cures preserved in Conla Mac an Leagha's *receptarium*. The foregoing discussion has sought to make progress in this direction by focusing on an analysis of the remedies included in just one relatively short chapter of this collection. It is argued, however, that even this small corpus of material serves to highlight the value of examining the intersections between premodern Irish medical writing and other aspects of medieval Irish literary culture.

#### TEXT AND EDITORIAL METHOD

The following edition is based on a single witness, RIA MS 23 N 29, fols 8v30–9v8.<sup>72</sup> In the presentation of the text below, expansions are indicated by italics, missing letters are supplied in square brackets, and length-marks, where not found in the manuscript, are marked using a macron over vowels. Word-division and punctuation are editorial, and textual or semantic ambiguities are discussed in the notes.

<sup>71</sup>Toner, 'Desire and divorce', 146.

<sup>72</sup>The manuscript can be viewed on the *Irish Script on Screen* website ([www.isos.dias.ie](http://www.isos.dias.ie)) (accessed 30 June 2021).

TEXT	TRANSLATION
1. Is iat gallra in boill fernda roc[...]e lem [...]lemd[a] gilla cailti ō nach gein cland γ tumaiḡhe magrall.	These are diseases of the male member: [...] caused by a castrator, as a result of which offspring do not issue, and rupture of the testicles.
2. Ar leme .i. lus na croiche do bruith ar fīn γ a ōl γ īcaid.	For impotence, i.e. boil fennel in wine and drink it, and it heals.
3. Eōlus ar si[n] .i. in luib cétna do bruith ar medg γ a ōl γ īcaid galar na slīasta γ a leme īar naomaide.	A prescription for that, i.e. boil the same herb in whey and drink it and it heals an ailment of the thighs and his impotence after nine days.
4. Ar leme .i. uirge cullaig do loscad γ a lūaith d'ōl ar fīn γ gan feōil muicci do fromad γ gan dul ar ech.	For impotence, i.e. burn a boar's tes- ticle and drink its ashes in wine, and do not taste pig's meat, and do not go on a horse.
5. Ar leme fōs .i. uirge coilig do bruith ar fīn γ a ōl.	Also for impotence, i.e. boil a cock's testicle in wine and drink it.
6. Leiges an boill ferda .i. cac gabar γ descad γ etursnam cuilind; donīter cerīn de γ curtur uime ōn trāt go ar aile γ bentur de ar na bārach γ téid gu fīruisci, γ bīd gurob lethmarb ann γ curtur air arīs in cerīn cétna γ dēntar mar sin fā sech gurub slán.	A cure for the male member, i.e. goat's dung and dregs and the in- ner bark of a holly-tree; a poultice is made from it, and it is put around it until the same time the next day, and it is taken off the next day, and he <sup>73</sup> goes to fresh water, and let him be there until he is exhausted, and the same poultice is put on it again, and that is done alternately until he be healthy.
7. Ar leme: nī d'uirgib doim allaid do bruit tre fīn γ a ōl.	For impotence: boil one of the tes- ticles of a stag in wine and drink it.
8. Ar in cétna .i. ainm an fir do scrībad tre ogam a crand lemāin γ in fer do būalad de.	For the same, i.e. write the name of the man in Ogam on a stick of elm and beat the man with it.

<sup>73</sup>i.e. the afflicted person.

- | TEXT  | TRANSLATION  |
|---|--|
| 9. Obaid ar leme ann so: ‘tonn tonn tuinde. Fonn fonn fuinde. Grían. Grían uime. Sceo teo leo tim tim tinde terad rínde fit fit fiat funde’ a cantain a n-uisci fo 7 .i. fíirthípraid, 7 a cur a soítec íbhair 7 a crathad ar in duine ar a mbí in dochnách maiden 7 fescur gu cenn naomaide.   | A charm for impotence here: recite ‘tonn tonn tuinde. Fonn fonn fuinde. Grían grían uime. Sceo teo leo tim tim tinde terad rinde. Fit fit fiat funde’ seven times over water, i.e. a pure source, and put it in a yew-wood vessel and shake it on the person upon whom there is misfortune morning and night for nine days.  |
| 10. Eölus do dīcur toile ō macaib ecluisi 7 ō dainib arcena .i. ros nenta 7 salann 7 píbur do bruit ar medg 7 a ōl.   | A prescription for warding off desire from clerics and from other people, i.e. boil nettle seed and salt and pepper in whey and drink it.  |
| 11. Ar aislingib collaidhí .i. bualad a cos a tibraid maiden 7 fescur gen labrad 7 brechtān do ceram forro.   | For carnal visions, i.e. bathing his feet in a well morning and evening without speaking, and put a plaster of (?) on them.  |
| 12. Urge daim allaid do thabairt ar dig don duine 7 dobeir a leigus comlīn dó.  | Give the testicle of a stag in a drink to the person, and it gives him the same cure.  |
| 13. Ar at uirged re n-abur tumaig magrall .i. duillebar scīach do chocnam 7 gelán uige <sup>74</sup> trīt 7 a sūathad 7 a cur ar scrait līn im na huirgib, 7 fuil do lēgen a haigtib a lurgan 7 snāiti do cur tarsna fuithib ar in letar tana 7 slánaigidh sin an tumaigi, 7 mad i sēin raib ann, as héicen ligen uirre, 7 mina raib lind a fogus inti, curtur losa guir uirre. | For a swelling of the testicles that is called <i>tumaigh maghrall</i> (‘hernia of the testicles’), i.e. chew the leafage of a whitethorn and [stir] the white of an egg through it and mix them and put it on a linen rag around the testicles and let blood from the surfaces of his shins, and put a thread across the bases [of the testicles] on the thin skin and that heals the hernia, and if [the hernia] is there, it is necessary to release it, and if liquid is not near it, herbs [to treat] inflammation are to be put on it. |
| 14. Cerīn ar cnū bīs a n-urgib .i. incind tuirc allaid 7 mil do cur umpu.   | A poultice for a carbuncle (lit. ‘nut’) that is in the testicles, i.e. put the brain of a wild boar and honey around them.   |
| 15. Incind mīl maige arna berbad do cur fo cnocaib na n-uirged 7 na mball arcena 7 térnaid.   | Put the boiled brain of a hare under lumps of the testicles and the limbs as well, and they vanish.  |

<sup>74</sup>MS yg with a suspension mark over the letters.

- | TEXT   | TRANSLATION  |
|--|--|
| <p>16. Ar ĩc lemta .i.<br/> <i>gurbad būadach bādach borrfadach</i><br/> <i>gurbat crāeb caĭn cumachtach</i><br/> <i>gurbad lonn dĭān dĭūmasach</i><br/> <i>gurbad find follān faĭlid</i><br/> <i>gurbad glan garta gāirechtach</i><br/> <i>gurbad trom trēn torrachtach</i><br/> <i>guro genādur do bāig 7 do cobar fri</i><br/> <i>gac mnaĭ bid āil duit. .N. Can fo ix.</i><br/> <i>for abru eolairc 7 cogna daim allaid</i><br/> <i>7 uisce fūtib 7 curtur psalann ar in</i><br/> <i>uisce arna gabāil so ind, 7 ibed [7]<sup>75</sup></i><br/> <i>doberar tairis.</i></p> | <p>For healing impotence, i.e.<br/> May you be victorious, resolute,<br/> swollen<br/> May you be a fair, powerful branch<br/> May you be fierce, swift, proud<br/> May you be bright, robust, joyful<br/> May you be pure, radiant, merry<br/> May you be mighty, strong, perfect<br/> So that they<sup>76</sup> can be conceived out of<br/> affection and desire for every woman<br/> who is pleasing to you. [Name]. Re-<br/> cite [this] nine times on the brow of<br/> an <i>eolarc</i> (?) and [take] the antlers<br/> of a stag and [put] water under them,<br/> and put salt in the water having<br/> chanted this [charm] into it, and let<br/> him drink it, [and] he will recover.</p> |
| <p>17. Ar leme .i. cac<sup>77</sup> gabar 7 descad 7<br/> edursnam cuilinn; donĭter cerĭn dĭb 7<br/> a cur uime ōn trāt go ar aile,<sup>78</sup> 7 ben<br/> de ĩara bārach 7 tēit cum [ff]rtibrat<br/> 7 bĭd inte gu mbĭ lethmarb 7 cuir in<br/> ceirĭn air arĭs 7 bĭd slān.</p>   | <p>For impotence, i.e. dung of a goat and<br/> dregs and the inner bark of a holly<br/> tree; make a poultice from them, and<br/> put it around it until the same time<br/> the next day, and take it off him on<br/> the next day, and he goes to a spring,<br/> and let him be in it until he is ex-<br/> hausted, and put the poultice on him<br/> again, and he will recover.</p>  |
| <p>18. [Ar] lemad .i. cullach bruicc nō<br/> metlec con allaid, crūaidigter co<br/> ndēnann men dĭb 7 doberar ar uisci<br/> fĭrtibrat 7 ibed 7 doberar taris.</p>  | <p>[For] impotence, i.e. badger fat or<br/> wolf dung, they are hardened until<br/> they are turned into a fine powder,<br/> and it is put in water from a spring,<br/> and let him drink it, and he will<br/> recover.</p>  |
| <p>19. [A]r lemad: damān allaid 7 copōg 7<br/> samlemān 7 a tūargain na triūr 7 a cur<br/> ar dā leis in duine 7 bĭd slān.</p>   | <p>For impotence: a spider and a dock-<br/> leaf and a summer elm, and grind<br/> those three things, and put them on<br/> the person's two thighs, and he will<br/> be healthy.</p>   |

<sup>75</sup>The left-hand side of the manuscript page is damaged here, but only one letter (possibly the Tironian note for 'agus') appears to have been obscured.

<sup>76</sup>Presumably the subject of the verb here is 'children, offspring'.

<sup>77</sup>MS *cacac*, with points of deletion under the final two letters.

<sup>78</sup>MS *ĭi*.

TEXT	TRANSLATION
20. Ar leme: can so ar ind meōir 7 cros dīb tar a dā leis .i.	For impotence: recite this on the tip of the finger, and [make] a cross of them <sup>79</sup> over his loins, i.e.
forraig do lūt	She binds your vigour,
forraig do lāth	She binds your passion,
forraig do nert	She binds your strength,
forraig do trācht	She binds your force,
amal forig ben druagh dam tuile i n-āth 7 cetera.	As a wanton woman overcomes a 'stag of flood' in a ford (etc.).

## TEXTUAL COMMENTARY

§1: *Is iat ... magrall*. The opening two lines of the chapter, found at the bottom of fol. 8v in RIA MS 23 N 29, contain a quatrain of verse that appears to be intended to introduce the ailments for which the following cures are deemed efficacious. While most other examples of metrical material in the *receptarium* are versified remedies, single stanzas of verse are also occasionally used in the text to provide a kind of opening 'summary' of the contents of a given section. For example, the chapters on ailments of the skin, eyes, mouth, teeth, neck and lungs all begin with such passages. These other quatrains are typically written in rhyming couplets (*debhidhe* metre) with seven syllables per line, as in the following example from the chapter on lung ailments:

[D]o gallraib na scamān is laburta sīsanai:

Glasloch brēnloch findloch ān  
is do gallraib na scamān.  
Tirmloch, dergloc, nī saor sin,  
mar aon risin cosachtaig.

'Of afflictions of the lungs, it is discussed here below:

Green *loch*, fetid *loch*, fair clear *loch*  
are among the afflictions of the lungs.  
Dry *loch*, red *loch*, those are not noble,  
along with the cough.'<sup>80</sup>

The reading of the opening stanza in the chapter on ailments of the male reproductive organs is less certain on account of damage to the manuscript page and an ambiguous scribal abbreviation that together render the second line of

<sup>79</sup>i.e. the fingers? See the textual note on this section below, p. 276.

<sup>80</sup>RIA MS 24 B 3, p. 59.34–7; translation cited from Deborah Hayden, 'The lexicon of pulmonary ailment in some medieval Irish medical texts', *ZCP* 66 (2019), 105–29, at 117. For further examples of such stanzas, see RIA MS 24 B 3, pp. 36.13–14 (skin); 48.14–15 (eyes); 55.31–3 (mouth); 56.17–19 (teeth); and 58.24–6 (neck).

the quatrain difficult to interpret. However, it can be established from lines *a*, *c* and *d* that this example similarly consists of heptasyllabic lines in *deibhidhe* metre, where the final words of lines *c* and *d* give *rinn-airdrinn* rhyme (*cland* : *magrall*).

**roc[...]*e lem*.** The second line of the stanza begins with the letters *roce* with a mark of suspension over the *c* and *e*, followed by the letters *lem*, which are written as a separate word. They mark the start of a change in script style, as the preceding words in the chapter (*Is iat gallra in boill ferrda*), which are here taken to constitute the first line of the stanza, are written in larger, rubricated letters. This palaeographic feature, as well as comparison with the contents of similar ‘summarising’ stanzas found at the opening of other chapters in the *receptarium*, point to the possibility that this line contains the beginning of a list of types of ailments pertaining to the male reproductive organs for which the remedies in the chapter are considered to be useful cures. Given that three of the seven syllables in the second line are provided by the partially illegible form [...]*lemd[a]* (on which see the following note), and a fourth syllable is provided by the second word *lem*, the abbreviated form *roc[...]*e** must consist of three syllables in total. If *lem* is the adjective meaning ‘weak, impotent’, then this three-syllable word would presumably be the noun that it modifies, possibly one containing the intensifying prefix *ro-* to denote an ‘excess’ of some condition. I am uncertain, however, as to what the intended expansion is in this case, and have found no comparable examples of this abbreviation elsewhere in the treatise.

[...]***lemd[a]***. Both the beginning and the end of this word are illegible, the former due to an apparent erasure in the manuscript, and the latter on account of damage to the edge of the manuscript page. The letters *lemd* are clearly visible, and appear to have been preceded by two or three further letters, while one more letter, possibly an *a*, is partially visible following the *d* in *lemd-*. The word is taken here to conclude the second line of a stanza of verse. Reading the ending as *-da* would provide perfect rhyme with *ferrda* in the preceding line, and the illegible letters at the beginning of the word would provide the third syllable necessary for *rinn-airdrinn* rhyme between lines *a* and *b* of the stanza. If [...]*lemd[a]* is the correct reading, it could be interpreted as a further adjectival formation based on *lem* ‘weak, impotent’.

***gilla cailte*.** The second word here is probably the genitive singular of the form given in *eDIL* s.v. *collud* (dil.ie/10521), a verbal noun of *coillid* ‘damages, violates, destroys’, later ‘loses’ (see *eDIL*, s.v. 1 *coillid*, dil.ie/10126).<sup>81</sup> Under the participial form *coillte* the dictionary gives the example *daoine coillte* meaning ‘eunuchs’ from the New Testament translation of 1602. Given the wider contents of our text, it is probable that a reference to ‘castration’ is likewise intended here, but I have tentatively taken *gilla cailti* to refer to the person who performs the operation rather than the person who has been subjected to it

<sup>81</sup>On the semantics of this term, see David Greene, ‘Modern Irish *cailleann* and *coilleann*’, *ZCP* 37 (2009), 5–9.

on the basis of other examples where the noun *gilla* is followed by ‘a defining gen[itive] of the work allotted or the service performed’, e.g. *gilla con* ‘a kennel attendant’ or *gilla cupáin* ‘cup-bearers’ (see *eDIL* s.v. *gilla*, dil.ie/25843).

**tumaighe.** On this noun, see *eDIL* s.v. *tumtuide* ‘hernia, rupture’ (dil.ie/42469), which tentatively connects the latter form with the verb given in *eDIL* s.v. *tummaid*, tu(i)mmaid ‘dips, plunges, immerses’ (dil.ie/42467). Presumably the word reflects the nature of a hernia as a condition characterised by the abnormal protrusion of a part of an organ through an aperture, natural or accidental, in the walls of its containing cavity. The trisyllabic form is required here for the metre; however see also the note on §13 below.

**§2: ar leme.** In the majority of the 20 remedies in our text, the heading consists of the preposition *ar* followed by a noun denoting the ailment to be cured. I have translated this preposition as ‘for’ throughout, in an effort to maintain the succinct style of the original text; however in most cases the intended sense was clearly that of ‘for guarding against’ or ‘for protecting against’ (see *eDIL*, s.v. 1 *ar*, dil.ie/3902).

**§3: eólus.** I have translated this term as ‘prescription’, a meaning which is given in the *eDIL* entry for the word (dil.ie/20161) under section (g) ‘secret knowledge, a prescription, spell, charm’ based on scholarly commentary concerning early translations of the Old Irish law-texts.<sup>82</sup> The two remedies in which the word is used in our text (here and in §10) do not involve incantations or ritual actions of any kind, however, and consequently the meanings ‘secret knowledge, spell, charm’ seem less applicable in this context.

**naomaide.** Contrary to the definition given in *eDIL* s.v. 2 *nómad* (dil.ie/33296), Liam Breatnach has demonstrated that this word can only refer to a period of nine days.<sup>83</sup> This particular length of time is a common feature of the ritualistic instructions for the administration of medical remedies found in other vernacular traditions, such as Welsh and Old English.

**§5: uirge coilig.** I have taken *coilig* to be the genitive singular form of the word given in *eDIL*, s.v. 2 *cailech* ‘cock, the male of various birds’ (dil.ie/7723), and thus distinct from the word in the preceding remedy, which is abbreviated as *cull-*, and therefore possibly intended to be the genitive singular of *cullach* ‘boar’. There is clearly some ambiguity here, however: compare, for example, the statement in the Irish version of the *Trotula*-text on women’s ailments that *doni slat ferda tairb 7 uirgi coilig in genemain*, where only the word *cullach* ‘a boar’ is listed in the glossary.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup>See Charles Plummer, ‘Notes on some passages in the Brehon laws’, *Ériu* 8 (1916), 127–32, at 130.

<sup>83</sup>Liam Breatnach, ‘Varia III. The meaning of *nómad*’, *Ériu* 62 (2012), 197–205.

<sup>84</sup>Winifred Wulff (ed.), ‘A mediaeval handbook of gynaecology and midwifery: preceded by a section on the grades and on the treatment of wounds and some good counsel to the physician himself finishing with a discussion on the treatment of scabies’, in J. Fraser, P. Grosjean and J. G. O’Keefe (eds), *Irish Texts* 5 (London, 1934), i–xxvii, 1–99, at 58.28–9. No translation of the text is given by the editor, but the phrase in question might be rendered as ‘the male member of a bull and the testicle of a cock bring about conception’.



§6: This remedy is nearly identical to that given in §17.

**descad.** Precisely what kind of ‘dregs’ or ‘sediment’ are in question is not made explicit here, but a separate recipe for dying the hair red found elsewhere in the *receptarium* calls for *descad fina* (‘sediment’ or ‘dregs’ of wine).<sup>85</sup> Similarly, the Welsh medical recipe collections include instructions for treating imposthumes or abscesses by making plasters involving the ‘sediment of old ale’ (*gwaddod hen ddiod*) or the ‘sediment of verjuice’ (*gwaddod aesel*).<sup>86</sup>

**etursnam.** This term refers to the scraped-off, green inner bark of a tree, and is noted as an ingredient in several other remedies from Conla Mac an Leagha’s collection; see *eDIL*, s.vv. *etarsnam* ([dil.ie/20744](http://dil.ie/20744)) and *snob* ([dil.ie/38176](http://dil.ie/38176)).<sup>87</sup>

§7: **doim allaid.** For the use of the phrase *dam allaid* (lit. ‘wild ox’) to mean ‘stag’, see the examples cited in *eDIL*, s.v. 1 *dam* (II) ([dil.ie/14462](http://dil.ie/14462)), where in two cases it translates Latin *cervus*; see also the example cited from Sextus Placitus’s *Liber medicinae ex animalibus* above, p. 256.

§11: **būalad.** On this usage of the verb *búailid*, which more usually means ‘striking, beating, attacking’, see the entries in *eDIL* svv. 2 *būalad* (‘bathing, healing, curing’, [dil.ie/7258](http://dil.ie/7258)) and 2 *būal* (‘expld. as cure, curing’, [dil.ie/7256](http://dil.ie/7256)). The sense intended in this case may have been that of ‘shaking [one’s feet] around’ in the water.

**brechtān.** *eDIL*, s.v. *brechtán* ([dil.ie/6643](http://dil.ie/6643)), gives the definitions ‘butter, fat, relish spread on bread’ for this word, whereas Dinneen defines it as ‘mixed food as bread and butter, a roll of bread and butter’.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, *Am Faclair Beag* defines *breachdan* as ‘wheat, custard, fresh butter, fresh meat’, and cross-references the word *breacan*, defined as ‘topping (trad. fat, meat, butter or curds on bread)’.<sup>89</sup> See also *eDIL*, s.v. 1 *bracht*, ‘expld. as juice, grease, fat; pith, substance’ ([dil.ie/6462](http://dil.ie/6462)). The word is used on at least one other occasion in a separate remedy from Conla Mac an Leagha’s collection, namely *Ar cnam craide .i. brechtán 7 saill do tumad a mil 7 a catimh* (‘for wasting of the heart i.e. dip *brechtán* and bacon in honey and consume it’).<sup>90</sup>

**ceram.** I am uncertain of the meaning of this term. If it is the feminine noun *céir* ‘wax’ (a common ingredient cited in medieval medicinal recipes for making poultices or plasters for wounds) modified by the adjective *am* (a variant

<sup>85</sup>RIA MS 24 B 3 (445), p. 35.20.

<sup>86</sup>Williams (ab Ithel) and Pughe, *Physicians of Myddfai*, 90 and 232 (text) and 302 and 415 (trans.) (§§6 and 674).

<sup>87</sup>For discussion of the term, see David Stifter, ‘Zur Bedeutung und Etymologie von altirisch *sirem*,’ *Die Sprache* 45 (2005), 160–89, at 168, and Hayden, ‘Three versified medical recipes’, 112.

<sup>88</sup>Patrick S. Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla. An Irish-English Dictionary* (Dublin, 1927), s.v. *breachtán*.

<sup>89</sup>*Am Faclair Beag. Faclair Gàidhlig is Beurla le Dwelly ’na bhroinn/An English – Scottish Gaelic dictionary incorporating Dwelly*, online at <https://www.faclair.com> (accessed 30 June 2021).

<sup>90</sup>RIA MS 24 B 3 (445), p. 68.5. On the etymology of *breachtán*, see also John Cameron, *Gaelic Names of Plants (Scottish and Irish)* (Edinburgh, 1883), 90–1.

spelling of *om* ‘crude, unrefined’, on which see [dil.ie/33824](http://dil.ie/33824) and [dil.ie/3046](http://dil.ie/3046)), one would expect the inflected form *aimh* for the latter on account of the preceding preposition *do*. Moreover, the five letters appear to have been written as one word here. I have identified only two other examples of the form *ceram* in the *receptarium*, one of which is a versified cure for *gallra in cléib* (‘ailments of the chest’) that calls for *ní do ceram, bun copōc* (‘some *ceram* [and] the root of a dock-leaf’) to be added to a drink,<sup>91</sup> and a remedy for cough (*Ar cossachtaig*) that advises one to *melle 7 simsān 7 ceram do bruith ar medg 7 a ōl*, ‘boil onion (?) and wood-sorrel and *ceram* in whey and drink it’.<sup>92</sup> It seems unlikely that wax would be included as an ingredient in a potion to be ingested by the patient.

**§13: *tumaig*.** The manuscript reading gives this word as a disyllable, but cf. *tumaighe* in §1 (where the trisyllabic form is required for the metre) and *tumaig* elsewhere in this section. Either the form *tumaig* indicates that final *-idh/idhe, -igh/-ighe* had already fallen together as /i:/, or the scribe has simply omitted the final vowel in the word here.

***scrait*.** This word is not recorded in *eDIL*, but Dinneen’s dictionary includes the term s.v. *scrait* ‘a rag’, and it is also found in the dictionary of Scottish Gaelic with the meaning ‘shred, rag’.<sup>93</sup> I have not yet identified any other examples of it in our text; the more usual term employed in the *receptarium* to refer to a piece of linen cloth used for the administration of a medicinal remedy is that found in *eDIL*, s.v. *bréit* ([dil.ie/6695](http://dil.ie/6695); see e.g. RIA MS 24 B 3 (445), pp. 44.5, 53.6, 55.8 and 68.15).

***losa guir*.** Although my translation is tentative here, I take *guir* to be the genitive singular form of the o-stem noun given in *eDIL* s.v. *1 gor* ([dil.ie/26395](http://dil.ie/26395)) attested in various sources with the medical meaning of ‘inflammation, pus, matter (gore?)’, and thus possibly a reference to herbs that are used specifically for treating inflammation.

**§14: *cnū*.** So far as I have been able to establish, the meaning of ‘a (small) lump’ or similar is not given in any published dictionaries for the Gaelic languages as a possible transferred sense of the word listed s.vv. *cnú* and *cnó*, the primary meaning of which is usually given as ‘nut’. However, *Am Faclair Beag* does give the meaning of ‘vesicle, gas bladder (on seaweed)’ for Scottish Gaelic *cnò*.<sup>94</sup> As noted above, moreover, a corresponding remedy found in Sextus Placitus’s *Liber medicinae ex animalibus* states specifically that it is intended *ad carbunculos in ueretro* (‘for carbuncles in the private parts’). A carbuncle is a red, swollen and painful cluster of boils that are connected to each other under the skin, and this may be what is intended by the word *cnú* here. Note also that the following remedy in the text is for *cnuicc* ‘lumps’; the term *cnocc* is well attested in *eDIL* with the medical meaning of ‘swelling, lump’

<sup>91</sup>RIA MS 24 B 3 (445), p. 60.38.

<sup>92</sup>RIA MS 24 B 3 (445), p. 62.13–14.

<sup>93</sup><https://www.faclair.com/>, s.v. *sgrait* (accessed 21 July 2021).

<sup>94</sup><https://www.faclair.com/>, s.v. (accessed 21 July 2021).

or ‘ulcer’ (dil.ie/9767). Presumably a *cnocc* was considered to be larger than a carbuncle or *cnú*.

**§16:** The addressee of this prayer is not made explicit, and could be either the afflicted individual or the male member itself.

**for *abru eolairc*.** My translation of the final lines of this incantation is very uncertain. The first seven letters might be taken as the preposition *for* ‘on, upon’ followed by the noun given in Dinneen, s.vv. *abhra* and *fabhra* with meanings including ‘eyelash’, ‘eyelid’ and ‘the brow (*esp.* of a hill)’. The sense of the first two words might therefore be ‘on the brow/brink of’, while the following word *eolairc* (with a smudge under the ‘o’ in the manuscript that might be a point of deletion) could be identical with the genitive form spelled *eolairg* or *eolaircc* that occurs in several place-names mainly in the north of Ireland.<sup>95</sup> The phrase as a whole may therefore refer to the type of location in which the incantation is to be sung, i.e. on top of a hill of some kind.

***cogna daim allaid 7 uisce fūtib*:** The use of the plural form of the conjugated preposition here suggests that the scribe understood the singular *cogna* to refer to the stag’s ‘horns’ or ‘antlers’ in a collective sense. *eDIL* only gives the form *congna*, defined as ‘horn(s), antler(s)’ (dil.ie/12168), but cf. Dinneen, s.v. *congna*, which gives the alternate form *cóghna*.

**§17:** As noted above, this remedy is nearly identical to that in §6.

**§18: *cullach bruicc*.** If the first of these two words is *cullach*, recorded in *eDIL*, s.v., as a noun meaning either ‘boar’ or ‘stallion’ (dil.ie/13770), it could be used adjectivally here to denote a ‘male’ badger (cf. *collach portáin*, ‘a male crab’).<sup>96</sup> It would be unusual for a remedy to call for an entire animal as an ingredient, however, and one would rather expect the term to denote a part thereof. I have therefore instead taken it to be a substantival usage of the adjective given in *eDIL*, s.v. *collach* ‘corpulent’ (dil.ie/10504) and to refer to some kind of fatty matter derived from the badger (*brocc*). The substance known as *taxea* or *adeps taxonina*, a greasy secretion of the badger’s subcaudal glands that was equated with Latin *lardum* ‘bacon, lard’ by Isidore in his *Etymologiae* (20.2.24), is noted as a pharmacological ingredient in a cure for gout from the *De medicamentis* of the fifth-century Gaulish writer Marcellus of Bordeaux.<sup>97</sup> An association between *taxea* and the testicles of the badger, as well as a belief that the substance had aphrodisiac qualities, may ultimately derive from confusion between the area in which musk was secreted by the badger and the

<sup>95</sup>Edmund Hogan, *Onomasticon goedelicum locorum et tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae: an index, with identifications, to the Gaelic names of places and tribes* (Dublin 1910), revised and corrected by Donnchadh Ó Corráin, online at <https://www.dias.ie/celt/celt-publications-2/onomasticon-goedelicum/> (accessed 3 September 2021), s.nn. *ard eolorg*, *carn eolairg*, *carrac eolaircc*, *carrac holairc*, *mag n-eolairg* and *túath eolairg*.

<sup>96</sup>Niall Ó Dónaill, *Irish-English dictionary* (Dublin, 1977), s.v. *collach*.

<sup>97</sup>Joshua T. Katz, ‘Hittite -tašku and the Indo-European word for “Badger”’, *Historische Sprachforschung/Historical Linguistics* 111/1 (1998), 61–82, at 70; see Maximilian Niedermann (ed.), *Marcelli de medicamentis liber*, *Corpus Medicorum Latinorum* 5 (Leipzig, 1916), Ch. 36.5.

animal's anus or testicles.<sup>98</sup> This semantic connection appears to be reflected in the text known as *De taxone*, an anonymous treatise on the medical uses of the badger that is found copied alongside Sextus Placitus' *Liber medicinae ex animalibus* by the seventh century and was subsequently translated into Old English. One remedy in that work suggests that impotence caused by *maleficium* (bewitchment) might be cured by cooking a badger's testicles in honey and drinking it with water from a spring.<sup>99</sup>

**metlec con allaid.** According to *eDIL* s.v. cú (b) (dil.ie/13291), the term *cú allaid* can refer to either a wolf (lit. 'wild dog') or some kind of plant, possibly orache; the latter definition is drawn from a medical glossary containing the entry *atriplex .i. cu allaid*.<sup>100</sup> In our text, it would appear that some alternative is being suggested to the first ingredient listed in the recipe (which, as noted above, probably refers to the 'fat' of a badger), indicating that *con allaid* is more likely to mean 'a wolf' here. The immediately preceding word is written as *metlec* with a very small dot over the *c* that may have been intended to indicate lenition. I take this to be a substantival usage of the adjective *máethlach* (dil.ie/31268), a formation based on *máethal* 'beestings, clotted milk or curds, cheese' and by extension any soft substance resembling curds' (dil.ie/31264). Dinneen's dictionary, s.v. *maothlach*, includes 'dung' among the extended meanings of the term, and this may have been what the scribe had in mind here, although the translation 'fat' is also a possibility.

**§19: samlemān.** The translation of this word as 'summer elm' is tentative. See *eDIL*, s.v. lemán (dil.ie/29876), which equates that term with *lem* meaning 'elm-tree', and cites its use in medical remedies. The prefix *sam-* could have several different meanings, but I have opted for that given in *eDIL* s.v. 1 sam 'summer' (dil.ie/36114), on the basis that the remedy may reflect ritual practices concerning propitious times for gathering medicinal herbs that are widely attested in medieval medical sources from various linguistic traditions.<sup>101</sup>

**§20: forraig.** The manuscript here gives the form *forraig*, which is a late 3 sg. present form of the verb listed in *eDIL* s.v. fo-rig (dil.ie/23698); this reading is supported by the fact that the final repetition of the word in our text is rendered with the latter spelling (*amal forig ben drúagh*). Compare the line *fo-rig fo-regar* 'it preserves, it is preserved' in the edited version of the Old Irish text known as 'The Caldron of Poesy', where Liam Breatnach has noted that the manuscript witness in fact contains the 'late form' *forraig*, and argues that this is 'comparable to *ad-ruig* for earlier *ad-rig*', the latter of which similarly means

<sup>98</sup>Katz, 'Hittite -tašku', 74–5.

<sup>99</sup>Rider, *Magic and Impotence*, 26. For the text of the remedy, see Howald and Sigerist (eds), *Sexti Placiti Liber medicinae ex animalibus*, 231: *Si cui malefactum fuerit et non poterit rebus ueneris uti, testiculos eius cum melle decoque et ex aqua fontanali, quae est perennis, si ieiunus per triduum bibat, remediatur, sic ut deficere non possit*. For the Old English version, see de Vriend, *Old English Herbarium*, 238–9.

<sup>100</sup>Whitley Stokes, 'Three Irish medical glossaries', *ACL* I, 325–47, at 335 (§86).

<sup>101</sup>For the general background, see Delatte, *Herbarius*, 39–72 and Hunt, *Popular Medicine*, 55–9; for an example of such teaching in an Irish context, see Robin Flower, 'Popular science in mediaeval Ireland', *Eriu* 9 (1921/23), 61–7, at 65–7.

'binds' (in both a physical and legal sense).<sup>102</sup> While Best rendered the verb *fo-rig* into English with the meaning 'hinder, delay', both Carey and Borsje translated it as 'binds', a sense that is common in impotence spells.<sup>103</sup>

There is an important distinction between the TCD MS H 3. 17 (1336) version of this charm and the text transmitted in Conla Mac an Leagha's *receptarium*, however: namely, the fact that the manuscript form in the latter, *forraig*, is in the 3 sg. present, whereas in the former it takes the 1 sg. In the H 3. 17 witness, the verb is only written out in full once, appearing as *foriug* with a suspension mark over the *o*.<sup>104</sup> Best expanded this as *fonriug*, and suggested that it may be for OIr. *fa-riug*, 'I hinder, delay him, etc.', with the Middle Irish use of *-n-* for the 3 sg. masculine infixed pronoun.<sup>105</sup> Carey, by contrast, took *fonriug* to be an error for *fo-rriug*, and thus possible 'evidence for copying from a majuscule exemplar — an indication of a relatively early date.'<sup>106</sup> Whether or not there was an infixed pronoun included in the original form of the verb, however, the u-quality of the conjunct ending indicates a 1 sg. in the H 3. 17 witness. In Conla Mac an Leagha's text, the verb is written *plene* on two occasions: first as *forraig*, and then as *forig* in its final repetition. It may be that, in our copy of the charm, an unnamed woman responsible for causing the man's impotence was understood to be the subject of the verb in each case. The two versions are not mutually exclusive, however, as the use of the 1 sg. in the context of charm-incantations, as evidenced by the H 3. 17 copy, is a common feature of binding spells in particular.<sup>107</sup>

***cros dīb***: I have taken the second word to be a conjugated preposition referring to the fingers of the individual reciting the incantation. Compare, however, the version of this charm in TCD MS H 3. 17, which reads *focertar cros de dar da les in fir*; R. I. Best interpreted this as 'Let the cross of God be put over the loins of the man'.<sup>108</sup>

***ben druagh***. This is probably a corruption of the original form *ben drúth* 'wanton woman' attested in the H 3. 17 version of the charm.

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<sup>102</sup>Liam Breatnach, 'The Caldron of Poesy', *Ériu* 32, 45–93, at 72–3. On the form *atomriug* 'I bind/gird myself', see D. A. Binchy, 'Varia III. 3. *Atomriug*', *Ériu* 20 (1966), 232–4.

<sup>103</sup>Best, 'Some Irish charms', 32; Carey, 'Encounter at the ford', 19; Borsje, 'Celtic spells and counterspells', 48 n. 145 (citing the discussion by Rider, *Magic and Impotence*, 76–89).

<sup>104</sup>In all subsequent occurrences in the H 3. 17 text, the verb is abbreviated to the letter *f* between points, with a suspension mark over the top; this is also the case in Conla Mac an Leagha's text, with the exception that the last occurrence of the word in that witness is written as *forig*, as noted above.

<sup>105</sup>In support of this, Best refers to the discussion by John Strachan, 'The infixed pronoun in Middle Irish', *Ériu* 1 (1904), 153–79, at 165–9.

<sup>106</sup>Carey, 'Encounter at the ford', 19 n. 29.

<sup>107</sup>Borsje, 'Celtic spells and counterspells', 32.

<sup>108</sup>Best, 'Some Irish charms', 32.