CHAPTER 4

Textual Transfer, Irish Remedy Collections, and the Vernacularisation of Medical Learning in Late Medieval Europe

Deborah Hayden

In his Thomas Davis lecture for Radio Éireann, published in 1961, Fr. Francis Shaw declared that

> [t]he Irish doctor really takes his bow in the fourteenth century, and for the first time holds the stage. Unfortunately the metaphor [...] is too near to reality, for we only see him, dressed in borrowed apparel, and speaking words which are not his own. From now on in a very rich and copious manuscript collection we make the acquaintance of the new doctor, but though he writes in Irish, the learning which he cultivates, the treatment which he suggests, the cures and the diet which he prescribes are all borrowed.[1]

This characterisation of the learning preserved in the extant corpus of Irish-language medical manuscripts—estimated to comprise approximately one-fifth of the total number of surviving manuscripts written in that vernacular from the period *c.*1200–*c.*1650—contains a great deal of truth.[2] Medical teaching in Ireland and Gaelic-speaking Scotland during the later Middle Ages was deeply intertwined with texts and ideas that underpinned the curricula of the emerging continental universities of the period, as is amply evidenced by the publication of numerous vernacular medical texts that are transparent

1 Francis Shaw, "Irish Medical Men and Philosophers," in *Seven Centuries of Irish Learning, 1000–1700*, ed. Brian Ó Cuív (Cork, 1961), 75–86, at 78–79.

2 For this estimation, see Nessa Ní Shéaghdha, "Translations and Adaptations into Irish," *Celtica* 16 (1984), 107–24, at 112. For the sake of convenience and because the focus of this chapter is a text written in Connacht, Ireland during the late Middle Ages, I employ the term "Irish" in reference to the language of the medical texts produced across the medieval Gaelic world; this is in keeping with the usage of the historical dictionary of the Irish language (*eDIL*, www.dil.ie), which covers material of both Irish and Scottish provenance.

translations or adaptations of Latin sources widely used in those centres of learning.[3] Between the mid-fourteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, Irish renderings of academic works on a wide range of medical topics, including treatises on health regimen and pathology,[4] the *Trotula* text on women's medicine,[5] and sections of Guy de Chauliac's surgical treatise, *De Anathomia,*[6] were produced by scribes who, to judge from various colophons in their manuscripts, were typically either medical students or practising physicians.[7] Two of the most popular such texts, Irish versions of which circulated widely across the Gaelic world in the late-medieval period, were the *Rosa Anglica* by the English physician John of Gaddesden (1280–1361) and the *Lilium Medicinae* of the Montpellier physician Bernard of Gordon (fl. 1270–1330).[8]

From the interrelated perspectives of multilingualism, textual transfer, and the historical sociology of knowledge, however, it remains the case that many of the nuances of the relationship between medical writing in the Irish language and the wider scope of European scientific learning in the Middle Ages

3 Digital editions of most of the published Irish-language medical texts are now available in the CELT database (https://celt.ucc.ie/irllist.html#scimed; accessed 21 February 2022). A recent overview of the field is given by Pierce Grace, "Medicine in Gaelic Ireland and Scotland, *c.*1350–*c.*1750," *Irish Historical Studies* 44, no. 166 (2020), 201–23.

4 See, e.g., *Regimen na sláinte: Regimen Sanitatis Magnini Mediolanensis*, ed. Séamus Ó Ceithearnaigh [James P. Carney], 3 vols. (Dublin, 1942–44), and Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha, "Some Words from *Almusór* (1400)," *Ossory, Laois and Leinster* 7 (2019), 14–31 (on an Irish pathological treatise based mainly on the *Practica super nono Almansoris* of Gerardus de Solo).

5 "A Mediaeval Handbook of Gynaecology and Midwifery," ed. Winifred Wulff, in *Irish Texts. Fasciculus V*, eds. John Fraser, Paul Grosjean and J. G. O'Keeffe (London, 1934), 1–99. The Latin text of the *Trotula* has been edited by Monica Green, *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia, 2001); see also her remarks on Wulff's edition in "A Handlist of Latin and Vernacular Manuscripts of the So-called *Trotula* Texts, Part 2: The Vernacular Translations and Latin Re-writings," *Scriptorium* 51 (1997), 80–104, at 99.

6 *Anathomia Gydo*, ed. and trans. Eithne Ní Ghallchobhair, Irish Texts Society 66 (London, 2016).

7 On the marginalia and colophons of Irish medical scribes, see, e.g., Paul Walsh, "'Scraps' from Irish Scribes," in *Gleanings from Irish Manuscripts*, 2nd ed. (Dublin, 1933), 123–81; Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha, "Medical Writing in Irish," *Irish Journal of Medical Science* 169/3 (2000), 217–20; and eadem, "The Medical School of Aghmacart, Queen's County," *Ossory, Laois and Leinster* 2 (2006), 11–43.

8 On the Irish *Rosa Anglica*, see Winifred Wulff, ed. and trans., *Rosa Anglica seu Rosa Medicinae Johannis Anglici: An Early Modern Irish Translation of a Section of the Mediaeval Medical Textbook of John of Gaddesden*, Irish Texts Society 25 (London, 1929) and the essays in Liam P. Ó Murchú, ed., *Rosa Anglica: Reassessments*, Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 28 (London, 2016). On Bernard of Gordon and his works, see Luke Demaitre, *Doctor Bernard de Gordon: Professor and Practitioner* (Toronto, 1980).

have yet to be worked out in any detail. One key issue is that much previous scholarship in this area has focused almost exclusively on the position of Irish vernacular material vis-à-vis Latin sources of a chiefly academic nature, while little attention has been paid to the question of whether medieval Irish-language medical writing may have been influenced by, or have itself influenced, the development of texts in this genre written in other contemporary and geographically proximate vernaculars, such as Anglo-Norman French, Welsh and English.[9] It is the purpose of this contribution to offer, with particular reference to the "sub-genre" of medical remedy books, some preliminary observations regarding the complexities inherent in tracing the transmission of the learning preserved in Irish medical manuscripts across geographical and linguistic borders. The examples considered below give rise to tantalising questions regarding the ways in which the surviving Irish-language medical sources might contribute to broader discussions concerning the interactions of various languages throughout the Insular world, as well as the processes of "vernacularisation" that impacted scientific learning in many regions of Europe during the late Middle Ages.

1 The Languages of Medicine in Medieval Europe

As the institutionalised *lingua franca* of academic discourse, Latin maintained a prestigious position in the early medical faculties of the continental universities, many of which included Irish scholars among their ranks of teachers and students.[10] While the learning cultivated in such institutions provided the basis for medical knowledge and practice in society at large, formal teaching of this kind ultimately only catered to a small medical élite that was not representative of the full range of medical practitioners active during the medieval period.[11] The process of "vernacularisation," defined by William Crossgrove as "the transposition of texts from a high-status language, usually Latin, into a

9 For recent remarks on this subject with regard to the Irish medical lexicon, see Sharon Arbuthnot, "Late Medieval Irish Medicalese and its European Context," in *Medicine in the Medieval North Atlantic World: Vernacular Texts and Traditions*, eds. Deborah Hayden and Sarah Baccianti (Turnhout, 2025), pp. 287–305.

10 For examples of some such figures, see Richard Hayes, "Irish Medical Links with the Continent," in *What's Past is Prologue: A Retrospect of Irish Medicine*, ed. William Doolin and Oliver Fitzgerald (Dublin, 1952), 23–28.

11 Päivi Pahta and Irma Taavitsainen, "Vernacularisaton of Scientific and Medical Learning in its Sociohistorical Context," in *Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English*, eds. Irma Taavitsainen and Päivi Pahta (Cambridge, 2004), 1–22, at 9–10.

vernacular language that typically has lower prestige as a written language," served in part to address the needs of this wider audience.[12] The sociolinguistic landscape of medieval Ireland cannot simply be divided into "those who had Latin" and "those who did not," however; proficiency in Latin undoubtedly varied from one practitioner to the next, and there were clearly cases in which individuals who had received some level of university education chose to translate medical texts into their own vernacular for practical purposes.[13] Here one might think of Cormac Mac Duinnshléibhe (fl. *c.*1459), a prolific translator of academic medical texts into Irish whose education at a continental university can be inferred from the fact that he is described in one manuscript as a *basillér a fisígecht* ("bachelor in physic").[14] Indeed, as Crossgrove has observed, "[vernacular medical] texts [in late-medieval Europe] cover the gamut from remedy books, to more general medical advice for lay persons for use in treating themselves or their families, to translations of academic texts for practitioners who may or may not know Latin, but who find vernacular texts useful."[15]

Medical writing in the vernacular is attested from a relatively early stage in the Insular world, where some 300 medical or scientific items in Old English—including astrological and computistical treatises, herbals and remedy books—survive in manuscripts produced between the ninth and twelfth centuries.[16] The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw the appearance

12 William Crossgrove, "The Vernacularization of Science, Medicine, and Technology in Late Medieval Europe: Broadening our Perspectives," *Early Science and Medicine* 5/1 (2000), 47–63, at 47. This article is the concluding essay in a series of papers on the vernacularisation of science, medicine, and technology in the late Middle Ages that appeared in a special issue of *Early Science and Medicine*, vols. 3/2 and 4/2.

13 On Latin proficiency among Irish medical scholars of the late-medieval period, see Jason Harris, "Latin Learning and Irish Physicians, *c.*1350–*c.*1610," in *Rosa Anglica: Reassessments*, ed. Ó Murchú, 1–25.

14 British Library, Arundel MS 333, fol. 113b; see Standish O'Grady, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Library* [*formerly British Museum*], vol. 1 (London, 1926; repr. Dublin, 1992), 257. Nic Dhonnchadha, "Medical Writing in Irish," 218, notes that Cormac is known to have completed the earliest surviving translation of Bernard of Gordon's *Lilium Medicinae* in 1482, as well as Irish renderings the same author's *Liber Pronosticorum* (1295) and *De Decem Ingeniis Curandorum Morborum* (1299). On his extant works, see also Ní Ghallchobhair, *Anathomia Gydo*, 2–4, and Beatrix Faerber, "A Text Preserved at Aghmacart Medical School: Bernard de Gordon's *De Prognosticis*, Book II, 9," *Ossory, Laois and Leinster* 7 (2019), 100–22.

15 Crossgrove, "Vernacularization," 47 and 49.

16 Pahta and Taavitsainen, "Vernacularisation of Scientific and Medical Learning," 9. For a more detailed account of the vernacular sources summarised here, see Deborah Hayden and Sarah Baccianti, "Cultural Crossroads and Medical Learning in the Medieval North

of remedy collections and other medical treatises in Anglo-Norman French,[17] and Welsh-language material is preserved in manuscripts dating to around the end of the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth century.[18] While compilations of herbal remedies and charms predominate in records for the earlier period, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries also witnessed a significant increase in the production of other types of vernacular medical material. Among the *c.*8000 such items in Middle English, for example, are numerous academic and surgical treatises akin to those noted above from Irish tradition.[19] Given the multilingual nature of the environment in which these vernacular medical sources were produced, it is not surprising that many of them have been shown to display extensive language mixing.[20]

Although some Irish medical texts may draw in part on material from earlier, now-lost textual exemplars, the majority of the extant medical manuscripts in this language were written between the mid-fourteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries and their contents point squarely to the participation of Irish and

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Atlantic World," in *Medicine in the Medieval North Atlantic World*, eds. Hayden and Baccianti, pp. 23–52.

17 See especially the editions published in Tony Hunt, *Popular Medicine in Thirteenth-century England: Introduction and Texts* (Cambridge, 1990); idem, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1997); and Tony Hunt and Michael Benskin, eds., *Three Receptaria from Medieval England: The Languages of Medicine in the Fourteenth Century*, Medium Aevum Monographs, New Series 21 (Oxford, 2001).

18 See most recently Diana Luft, *Medieval Welsh Medical Texts, Volume 1: The Recipes* (Cardiff, 2020), and Elena Parina, "Medical Texts in Welsh Translation: *Y Pedwar Gwlybwr* and *Rhinweddau Bwydydd*," in *Crossing Borders in the Insular Middle Ages*, eds. Aisling Byrne and Victoria Flood, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 30 (Turnhout, 2019), 47–63.

19 For this figure, see Pahta and Taavitsainen, 11, whose estimate is based on texts recorded in Linda E. Voigts and Patricia Deery Kurtz, eds., *Scientific and Medical Writings in Old and Middle English: An Electronic Reference* (Ann Arbor, 2000). See also Irma Taavitsainen, Päivi Pahta, and Martti Mäkinen, eds., *An Electronic Corpus of Middle English Medical Texts* (Amsterdam, 2005), which includes 86 texts from three traditions of medical writing (surgical treatises, specialised texts, and remedy books). For edited examples of English medical texts from this later period, see Linda E. Voigts and Michael R. McVaugh, "A Latin Technical Phlebotomy and its Middle English Translation," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 74/2 (1984), 1–69; Faye Marie Getz, *Healing and Society in Medieval England: A Middle English Translation of the Pharmaceutical Writings of Gilbertus Anglicus* (Madison, WI, 1991); and E. Ruth Harvey, M. Teresa Tavormina, and Sarah Star, eds., *Henry Daniel, Liber Uricrisiarum: A Reading Edition* (Toronto, 2020).

20 See, for example, Tony Hunt, "Code-switching in Medical Texts," in *Multilingualism in Later Medieval Britain*, ed. by D. A. Trotter (Cambridge, 2000), 131–47; Hunt and Benskin, *Three Receptaria*; and Päivi Pahta, "Code-switching in Medieval Medical Writing," in *Medical and Scientific Writing*, eds. Taavitsainen and Pahta, 73–99.

Scottish scholars in the broader surge in production of vernacular scientific treatises that characterised this later period.[21] Recently, Jason Harris has observed that "by the end of the fifteenth century, the majority of Irish physicians would appear to have been out of step with the developments in spoken and written Latin that were catching fire elsewhere in Europe. Yet they were not out of step with the European-wide trend towards the cultivation of vernacular medical discourse in communities of practice that fed off but were independent from the world of the universities."[22] Similarly, Sharon Arbuthnot has noted that not only was a core corpus of Latin texts being translated into diverse languages at this period, including Irish, but that "analogous techniques were being employed [across these languages] to deal with specialized medical terminology for which there were no readily available equivalents in English, French, and so on."[23] The following remarks will attempt to build on these studies by looking at some examples from one particular sub-genre of Irish-language medical writing: remedy books.

2 Irish-Language Remedy Collections

Although considerable emphasis has been placed in previous studies of Irish-language medical writing on the relationship between medicine, scholasticism, and philosophical speculation in late-medieval texts translated from Latin, the extant medical manuscripts from this vernacular tradition also contain a very substantial number of remedy collections that may offer more direct insight into the practical use of those manuscripts as reference manuals for working physicians.[24] This is one respect in which the focus of modern

21 For a discussion of the historical circumstances surrounding the loss of many early medieval Irish manuscripts and the survival of most Old Irish texts in much later codices, see Richard Sharpe, "Books from Ireland, Fifth to Ninth Centuries," *Peritia* 21 (2010), 1–55, and Donnchadh Ó Corráin, "What Happened [to] Ireland's Medieval Manuscripts?" *Peritia* 22–23 (2011), 191–223. For observations on the possible preservation of earlier Irish medical material in late-medieval manuscripts, see Deborah Hayden, "A Sixteenth-century Irish Collection of Remedies for Ailments of the Male Reproductive Organs," *Celtica* 33 (2021), 248–76, and eadem, "Old English in the Irish Charms," *Speculum* 97.2 (2022), 349–76.

22 Harris, "Latin Learning and Irish Physicians," 25.

23 Arbuthnot, "Late Medieval Irish Medicalese," 289–90.

24 On Irish medicine and philosophy, see especially Francis Shaw, "Medieval Medico-philosophical Treatises in the Irish Language," in *Féil-sgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill: Essays and Studies Presented to Professor Eoin MacNeill*, ed. J. Ryan (Dublin, 1940), 144–57, and idem, "Irish Medical Men and Philosophers." On approaches to adapting and translating this

scholarship on medical writing in the Irish language has differed somewhat from that devoted to Anglo-Norman French, Welsh and English material, where remedy books have drawn the attention of numerous editors from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.[25] The characterisation of English remedy collections offered by Linda Voigts and Michael McVaugh is, however, equally applicable to the Irish evidence:

> These compendia sometimes contain elements of zodiacal computation of prognosis; they often contain uroscopy texts for diagnosis, but they are made up mostly of treatments for ailments—or, more accurately, for symptoms—by minor surgical procedures, non-theoretical phlebotomy, cupping, dietary, prayers, charms, ritual action, and, of course, "prescriptions." These recipes may be simples or compounded from a variety of ingredients—animal, lapidary, or, most often, vegetable. The remedies are frequently organized from head to foot, or, in the case of herbal simples, by the plant. A large group derives from Macer's *De virtutibus herbarum;* others may derive from such works as the Salernitan *Antidotarium Nicolai*. The variable nature of this sort of text cannot be too strongly emphasized.[26]

In keeping with this last observation, Faith Wallis subsequently noted that medical compilations concerned with pharmacology, *materia medica*, and recipe literature tend to present the "most disturbed textual traditions" among

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material (including some criticism of Shaw's views), see Nessa Ní Shéaghdha, "Translations and Adaptations," 111–17, and Michael Cronin, *Translating Ireland*: *Translation, Languages, Cultures* (Cork, 1996), 25–28.

25 Voigts and McVaugh, "A Latin Technical Phlebotomy," 22–23, cite six separate editions of Middle English remedy books published between 1844 and 1938. The surviving Old English material likewise consists primarily of remedy collections, and these have received considerable editorial attention and discussion; see, e.g., Oswald Cockayne, ed. and trans., *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England: Being a Collection of Documents, for the Most Part Never Before Printed, Illustrating the History of Science in this Country Before the Norman Conquest*, 3 vols., Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores 35 (London, 1864–66); Edward Pettit, ed. and trans., *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: The Lacnunga*, Mellen Critical Editions and Translations 6A–6B, 2 vols. (Lewiston, 2001); and John D. Niles and Maria A. D'Aronco, eds., *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England, Volume I: The Old English Herbal, Lacnunga, and Other Texts*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 81 (Cambridge, MA, 2023). For a recent analysis of these texts and references to secondary scholarship, see Emily Kesling, *Medical Texts in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 38 (Oxford, 2020).

26 Voigts and McVaugh, "A Latin Technical Phlebotomy," 21–22.

works belonging to the broad genre of medical writing; such sources often exhibit a particularly high degree of reworking and adaptation, with individual remedies being excerpted and rearranged by compilers to suit their own needs and preferences. Individual remedies might be deliberately stripped of their author's name or, conversely, ascribed to a spurious authority in an effort to establish the effectiveness of a given remedy in the eyes of a target audience; in addition, prose recipes could be recast into verse form for didactic purposes.[27] Modern editions of individual remedy books can, therefore, yield the misleading impression that the medical knowledge contained in these collections was more stable across different manuscript witnesses than it actually was. When anonymised remedies from a single linguistic tradition are studied in isolation, moreover, they might appear to represent learning that is distinctive to that tradition and disconnected from its wider European context.

The complexities of textual transfer that obtained both within the Irish medical manuscript corpus and across different linguistic traditions will be illustrated here by way of three examples drawn from an early-sixteenth-century prosimetrical remedy book compiled and written mainly by the North Connacht physician Conla Mac an Leagha, a member of a hereditary medical family active in that region during the late-medieval period.[28] Although all

27 Faith Wallis, "The Experience of the Book: Manuscripts, Texts, and the Role of Epistemology in Early Medieval Medicine," in *Knowledge and the Scholarly Medical Traditions*, ed. Don Bates (Cambridge, 1995), 101–26, at 107–11. For remarks on the use of authoritative attributions in the Irish remedy collection discussed further below, see Deborah Hayden, "Attribution and Authority in a Medieval Irish Medical Compendium," *Studia Hibernica* 45 (2019), 19–51; on the versification of Irish herbal remedies in its wider European context, see eadem, "Three Versified Medical Recipes Invoking Dían Cécht," in *Fír Fesso: A Festschrift for Neil McLeod*, eds. Anders Ahlqvist and Pamela O'Neill, Sydney Series in Celtic Studies 17 (Sydney, 2018), 107–123.

28 The contents and background of this text, parts of which are preserved in two separate Royal Irish Academy manuscripts (RIA MSS 24 B 3 and 23 N 29), have been discussed in a number of recent publications. For editions and analysis of one chapter and several individual remedies, see Siobhán Barrett, "Varia I: The King of Dál nAraide's Salve," *Ériu* 69 (2019), 171–78; Hayden, "A Sixteenth-century Irish Collection;" eadem, "Attribution and Authority;" eadem, "Three Versified Medical Recipes;" 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), 159–77. The codicology of the text has been treated by Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha, "An Irish Medical Treatise on Vellum and Paper from the 16th Century," in *Paper and the Paper Manuscript: A Context for the Transmission of Gaelic Literature*, ed. Pádraig Ó Macháin (Cork, 2019), 111–25, and further remarks on its contents are found in eadem, "Michael Casey's Medical Transcripts in Gilbert MS 147," *Éigse* 60 (2019), 75–85.

three cures are transmitted either anonymously or with spurious attributions, each can nonetheless be traced to the wider context of Latin medical learning that circulated widely in western Europe throughout the medieval period. The second and third examples can, moreover, be situated within the context of the vernacularisation of medical learning that was cultivated across the Insular world in the late Middle Ages.

2.1. *A Cure for Epilepsy*

The first of the three remedies in question is stated to be for the ailment *cuthach*, a word that is typically translated in lexicographical sources as "rage," "fury," or "madness":[29]

> [Ar cut[h]ac*h*]: inci*n*d gabai*r* boi*nin*d do cur trē f*h*āinde óir ⁊ a tab*air*t do naīdi*n* īa*r*na breit*h* sul blaises biad ⁊ ni gēba cut*h*ac*h* ē.
>
> [For *cuthach*]: put the brain of a female goat through a gold ring and give it to an infant after it has been born before it tastes food, and *cuthach* will not seize it.[30]

That epilepsy was probably the affliction for which this remedy was deemed efficacious can be inferred from its context in the remedy book, where it is found at the end of a chapter that otherwise primarily consists of remedies for *galar toitmech* ("falling sickness").[31] The latter phrase is a literal translation of Latin *morbus caducus*, a term which was itself a close translation from Greek and is well attested as a reference to epilepsy in numerous therapeutic manuals of the late-medieval period. In such sources, epileptic seizures were typically perceived as periodic occurrences associated with lunar phases and

29 See e.g. eDIL, s.v. *cuthach* or dil.ie/14046 ("rage, fury, madness"); http://www.teanglann.ie, s.v. *cuthach* ("rage, fury"), and Patrick S. Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla. An Irish-English Dictionary* (Dublin, 1927), s.v. *cuthach* ("madness, rage").

30 RIA MS 24 B 3, 90.13–15 (my translation). In this and the following passages cited from unpublished texts, 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. Note that this recipe in fact begins in the manuscript witness with the word *aliut* ("another"), indicating that it is intended to treat the same ailment as the preceding remedy, which is headed *Ar cut*[*h*]*ach*. This example is also noted in Deborah Hayden, "Téacs leighis ó thuaisceart Chonnacht: comhthéacs, foinsí agus struchtúr," in *Téamaí agus Tionscadal Taighde*, ed. Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh, Léachtaí Cholm Cille 50 (Maynooth, 2020), 60–84, at 79.

31 The chapter as a whole is found in RIA MS 24 B 3, 89–90.

hence with lunacy.[32] It is not difficult to see how a native term meaning "rage," "fury," or "madness" might have come to be associated with the visible symptoms typical of an epileptic seizure; indeed, the juxtaposition of the terms *cuthach* and *galar toitmech* in this chapter of Conla Mac an Leagha's remedy book reflects a practice widely evidenced in other contemporary linguistic traditions, whereby translators sought to reconcile the language of classical, learned medicine with vernacular usage. Epilepsy posed a particular problem in this regard due to the difficulty of establishing its etiology and therapeutics; Luke Demaitre has noted that the condition "was one of the most baffling diseases since antiquity, and the subject occupied disproportionately long chapters in [late-medieval medical] compendia. On the other hand, these chapters contain the greatest amount and range of magical remedies, as well as of anecdotes from practice, which was probably not sheer coincidence."[33]

No authoritative attribution is given in the above cure for *cuthach* in our Irish remedy collection, but a close parallel for it can be identified in a passage on curing infantile diseases from the *Naturalis Historia* of the first-century A.D. Roman Pliny the Elder:

> Cerebrum caprae Magi per anulum aureum traiectum prius quam lac detur infantibus instillant contra comitiales ceterosque infantium morbos.
>
> The brain of a she-goat, passed through a golden ring, is given drop by drop by the Magi to babies, before they are fed with milk, to guard them from epilepsy and other diseases of babies.[34]

Medical learning derived from Pliny's *Natural History* made its way into medieval sources via a number of different routes, such as the fourth-century compilation of medical remedies known as the *Medicina Plinii* and the fifth- or sixth-century compilation known as the *Physica Plinii*, the latter of which has been shown to have influenced the compilers of the Old English leechbooks. The medical contents of the encyclopedia were also excerpted and circulated widely among scholars working in continental centres of learning during

32 Luke Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine: the Art of Healing, from Head to Toe* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2013), 147; on the history of the disease, see also Oswei Temkin, *The Falling Sickness. A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology* (Baltimore, MD, 1945).

33 Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine,* 141.

34 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 28.78, ed. and trans. W.H.S. Jones, *Pliny, Natural History: Books 28–32* (Cambridge, MA, 1963), 174–75.

the late-medieval and early-modern periods.[35] It is possible, however, that the Irish vernacular version of Pliny's remedy for infantile epilepsy might be traced to an intermediary source: the work of the eleventh-century translator Constantinus Africanus, a physician of North African origin who rendered a large number of Arabic medical texts into Latin while he was based at Monte Cassino in Italy. That Constantine's writings were well known to Irish physicians is indicated by the fact that at least two Irish medical manuscripts contain an incomplete Irish version of a tract on diseases compiled mainly from his *Viaticum*, a Latin medical *summa* adapted from an Arabic treatise entitled *Kitab Zad al-musafir wa-qut al hadir* ("The Book of Provision for the Traveller and Nourishment for the Settled") by the tenth-century Tunisian physician Khalid al-Jazzar.[36] The *Viaticum* was probably originally aimed at the medical community in Salerno, but was also taught and commented on as one of the basic texts in Parisian medical education from the late twelfth century down to the early fourteenth century.[37] Conla Mac an Leagha's cure for epilepsy may have ultimately derived not from this source, however, but rather from the fifth practical book of Constantine's *Pantegni* ("The Complete Art"), a comprehensive encyclopedia of medical knowledge that was translated and adapted from the *Complete Book of the Medical Art* by the Persian physician 'Ali ibn al-'Abbās al-Maǧūsī (d. 982). The Latin *Pantegni* includes the following, very similar passage concerning the use of the brains of a she-goat and a gold ring:

> Quidam autem dicunt ut si capre cerebrum per anulum aureum tractum et infanti datum antequam lac sugat tranglutiri datum nec caducus fieri nec phantasticus potest.

35 The *Medicina Plinii* has most recently been edited by Yvette Hunt, *The Medicina Plinii*: *Latin Text, Translation and Commentary* (London and New York, 2020). On knowledge of the *Natural History* in early medieval England, 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, and J. N. Adams and M. Deegan, "Bald's *Leechbook* and the *Physica Plinii*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 21 (1992), 87–114. On the later reception of Pliny's work, see Aude Doody, *Pliny's Encyclopedia: The Reception of the Natural History* (Cambridge, 2010).

36 A copy of this text is found in Dublin, King's Inns Library MS 17, fol. 13r–31v (s. XV), and a second, abridged version of it occurs in NLI MS 512, fol. 5–8 (dated to 1462). A digital facsimile of the former manuscript can be viewed on *ISOS* (www.dias.isos.ie; accessed 21 February 2022). Translated excerpts from Constantine's *Viaticum* are also found elsewhere in Conla Mac an Leagha's remedy book; on some of these, see Hayden, "Authority and Attribution," 31–32 and 41–42.

37 Cornelius O'Boyle, *The Art of Medicine. Medical Teaching at the University of Paris, 1250–1400*, Education and Society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance 9 (Leiden, 1998), 123–24.

> Some say that, if a goat's brain be drawn through a gold ring and given to swallow by an infant before it sucks milk, the infant cannot become epileptic (*caducus*) or deluded (*phantasticus*).[38]

It may be significant that, in contrast to Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* where this advice occurs within a discussion of various types of ailments affecting infants (including teething, sore gums, ulcerated mouth, and diarrhea), Constantine includes the remedy in a location that is contextually comparable to that of Conla Mac an Leagha's remedy book, namely, at the end of a chapter entitled *De epilepsia et eius cura* ("Concerning epilepsy and its cure"). One might wonder whether Constantine's modification of the original remedy in the *Naturalis Historia* to specify that the cure was efficacious for babies affected by "delusions" of some kind—as suggested by the term *phantasticus*, which replaces Pliny's *ceterosque infantium morbos* ("and other diseases of babies")—might underlie the use of the word *cuthach* ("madness, frenzy") in the heading of the vernacular version.

When considered in isolation from its wider European context, therefore, the anonymous Irish remedy for *cuthach* identified here from a sixteenth-century North Connacht remedy book might be thought to belong to a kind of strange, folkloric medicine peculiar to the vernacular medical tradition of medieval Ireland. Upon closer inspection, however, it can be firmly identified as a product of a culture steeped in Latin learning from an early period and well-versed in wider currents of continental medical pedagogy.

2.2 *A Cure for an Ulcer or Fistula*

Words drawn from other vernaculars can in some cases provide valuable clues regarding the immediate sources and broader cross-linguistic transmission of passages in Irish remedy collections. Medical texts contain a relatively high proportion of specialist, technical terminology, such as names of ingredients or tools, that could naturally present difficulties for translators. Various approaches might be adopted in dealing with such terms, such as replacing a word in the source-text with a more colloquial native term, coining an entirely

38 Constantinus Africanus, *Pantegni Practica*, 5.17, in *Opera omnia Ysaac* (Lyons, 1515), fol. xcix, d; my translation is a slight modification of that given in Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine,* 145 (who suggests that this advice from Constantine might have originated in "vernacular lore"). On the evolution and transmission of the *Pantegni*, see Danielle Jacquart and Charles Burnett, eds., *Constantine the African and ʿAlī Ibn al-ʿAbbās al-Maǧūsī: The Pantegni and Related Texts*, Studies in Ancient Medicine 10 (Leiden, 1994) and Erik Kwakkel and Francis Newton, eds., *Medicine at Monte Cassino: Constantine the African and the Oldest Manuscript of the Pantegni*, Speculum Sanitatis 1 (Turnhout, 2019).

new equivalent from native elements, or adapting a foreign word to suit the phonological and morphological structure of the target language.[39] As Päivi Pahta has observed with regard to vernacular English medical texts, however, "[t]he term formation strategy that relied on the source language resulted in a continuum of lexical elements where the borderline between code-switching and borrowing is fuzzy."[40] Tony Hunt has similarly noted, this time in relation to Anglo-Norman medical sources, that "in the context of multilingual societies it can be unrealistic to attempt to distinguish code-switching from borrowing."[41]

An example from Conla Mac an Leagha's remedy book that illustrates the difficulty of using isolated lexical borrowings to trace lines of textual transmission is use of the term *róitse* ("roach [fish]") in the following cure for *linnida* ("dry fistula, ulcer"):[42]

> Leigis a n-ag*haidh* dā cinēl na lindidan .i. īasc re n-abu*rtur* rōitsi, loisc*ter* ē a crocān nua crīad ⁊ in lūaith do cur a cn*eid* na lindigan re 7 lā ⁊ īc*caid*.
>
> A cure for two types of *linnida* ("dry fistula, ulcer"), i.e. a fish that is called a *róitse* is burnt in a new earthen pot, and put the ashes in the wound of the ulcer for 7 days, and it heals.[43]

Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha identified the term *róitse* in this example as one of a handful of "neologisms" that are found in the remedy collection a whole, stating that the term in question was "evidently from Anglo-Norman."[44] The form *róitse* does indeed appear to derive from the Anglo-Norman word *roche*, which is attested with various meanings including "rock, stone, boulder" and "a roach (fish from the carp family)," although only the former meaning has been noted in lexicographical sources for the Irish language.[45] The earliest

39 For a more detailed analysis of these techniques in relation to Irish medical texts, see Arbuthnot, "Late Medieval Irish Medicalese."

40 Pahta, "Code-switching," 81–82.

41 Hunt, "Code-switching," 131.

42 See *eDIL*, s.v. *linnida* (dil.ie/30283).

43 RIA MS 24 B 3, 88.12–14 (my translation).

44 Nic Dhonnchadha, 'Michael Casey's Medical Transcripts," 82–83 and n. 82; the author also notes the existence of a second copy of the remedy in a slightly earlier (fifteenth-century) Irish medical manuscript (Dublin, National Library of Ireland G11, 285.39–42).

45 See www.anglo-norman.net, s.vv *roche*[1] and *roche*[2] respectively. For attestations of the borrowing in Irish, see Henry Risk, "French Loan-words in Irish, Part II," *Études Celtiques* 14/1 (1974), 67–98, at 87 (citing *róitse, róiste* < AN *roche* 'rock') and *eDIL*, s.v. *róiste* "rock"

attestation of Anglo-Norman *roche* meaning "fish" is found in a twelfth-century glossary among mainly English glosses, a point which led the compilers of the Anglo-Norman dictionary to suggest that it "could also be considered to be English," although they acknowledge that the existence of the secondary gloss *scygla* in the glossary in question "already provides a Middle English name for the fish [...], making this instance of *roche* more likely to be the Anglo-Norman equivalent."[46]

The fundamental idea underlying our Irish cure for *linnida* appears ultimately to be rooted in classical medical tradition, since the first-century Greek physician Dioscorides stated in his *De Materia Medica* that "[t]he head of salted smaris [a small sea-fish, when] baked and <ground up> checks sores that grow a fungous flesh, stays the growth of spreading ulcers, and wipes out warts and warty excrescences."[47] Exactly when the reference to a "salted smaris" was turned into one for a "roach" is unclear, and it may simply be an example of ingredient substitution for practical purposes.[48] It is evident from a number of remedy collections in other vernaculars, however, that a cure prescribing the ashes of a "roach" for fistulas or ulcers was well established in the Insular world by the late-medieval period. This is indicated, for example, by the occurrence of at least three remedies in Anglo-Norman sources of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that bear comparison with the Irish cure for *linnida* cited above:

> **London, British Library MS Harley 978, fol. 34ra (*c.*1240–50):**
> *A la gute festre, esprové mecine:* Pernez uns peissuns que sunt apelez roches, si ardez en un noef pot, si en fetes poudre. E pernez le jus de avence, si versez al pertus e emplez del pudre e fetes ço desque les pertuz

(dil.ie/35494); these citations are also noted by Nic Dhonnchadha, "Michael Casey's Medical Transcripts," 83 n. 82.

46 www.anglo-norman.net, s.v. *roche*[2]. For the glossary in question, see Tony Hunt, *Teaching and Learning Latin in Thirteenth-century England*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1991), 1.23.

47 Dioscorides, *De materia medica,* 2.28; trans. Lily Y. Beck, *Pedanius Dioscorides of Anazarbus: De Materia Medica*, 3rd rev. ed., Altertumswissenschaftliche Texte und Studien 38 (Hildesheim, 2017), 100.

48 According to Max Höffler, *Die volksmedizinische Organotherapie und ihr Verhältnis zum Kultopfer* (Stuttgart, 1908), 149, the freshwater carp fish is not noted in written sources prior to the sixth century, but appears to have been well known in Europe during the early Christian period, when it was frequently found in monastery ponds and consumed at Lent by monks and clergy; Höffler further notes that the fish is frequently used in medicinal preparations as a substitution for other animal ingredients.

> seient ensechiz e les plaies sanez. E endementers que vus frez cest, fetes lui beivre le jus de avence.[49]
>
> **Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 388 (*c.*1320–30):**
> Item a gutefestre bone medicine e prové: Pernez pessounus que sunt appelez roches, si lez ardés en un nuvele pot de tere dekez a puder e pernez le jous de avense, si versés eins a la pertuse de pot e mellez ov le puder e quissez dekez il seit secche e dumenteres donez loy a beyre le jous de avense. Gara.[50]
>
> Item ad guttam festinandam: Pernez pessoun que est appellé roche, si ardez ben tut vives en une nuvele pot tut a puder. E pernez le jous de avence, si versés eins le pertuse de[ke] il seyt ben moyste. E puz met[e]z se enplaystre a le gute e festez ly beyre jus de avence.[51]

Although the Irish version of the remedy is more concise than any of these three examples, several similarities of phrasing—such as the instruction to take a fish "that is called" a *roche* and to use a "new (earthen) pot" to produce ashes from it that can be applied to the wound—indicate that the word *róitse* is not itself an isolated lexical borrowing, but may rather have made its way into Irish vernacular medical writing as part of a longer passage, possibly one taken directly from another vernacular source. It need not necessarily be the case, however, that the source in question was a medical remedy written in Anglo-Norman French, since the term *roche* is also used in a very similar cure from at least two contemporary English-language sources. One of these is the remedy collection known as the *Liber De Diversis Medicinis*, found in Lincoln Cathedral MS A 5. 2 and written *c.*1422–1454 in the North Riding of Yorkshire:

> Tak a fysche þ*a*t men calles a roche & bryn it in a newe pott & make dely powdir þ*er*-of. ÞAn tak þe jus of auaunce & helle it in þe thirlles & fill þe thirlles with þe poudir & do so ilk day to þe thirlles be dryed & þe wonde hale. & gare þe seke ilk a daye drynk þe jews of auaunce.[52]

49 Hunt, *Popular Medicine*, 121 (no. 132).

50 Hunt and Benskin, *Three Receptaria*, 139 (no. 571, fol. 28ra).

51 Hunt and Benskin, *Three Receptaria*, 149 (no. 666, fol. 33va).

52 M.S. Ogden, ed., *The "Liber de Diversis Medicinis" in the Thornton Manuscript* (*MS. Lincoln Cathedral A. 5. 2*), Early English Text Society 207 (Oxford, 1938), 80.23–27. Ogden notes (117) a parallel for this remedy in the work of the late antique medical writer Oribasius; see Johann Raeder, ed., *Oribasii Collectionum Medicarum Reliquiae*, 4 vols., Corpus Medicorum Graecorum 6 (Leipzig, 1928–31), 2.49.

The second occurs in the Middle English translation of the *Practica Phisicalia*, the recipe book of John of Burgundy (*c.*1338–1390):

> For þe gowte-festre. Take a fiche þ*a*t is callyd a roche, and branne hym to poudyr in a scherde, and take aua*u*nce and sawge, *and* iuce hem, *and* do þe juce in-to þe hol*is* of þe festre, and aftyr fyl þe holys w*ith* þe poudyr, and vs þis medcyn, tyl þe holys be drye, and tyl þe sore hele, and all þ*a*t tyme let hym drynke ana*u*nce, tyl he be hole.[53]

While it is impossible to determine the immediate source of the Irish remedy for *linnida* on the basis of the above evidence alone, the juxtaposition of these examples demonstrates that loanwords cited in isolation do not always provide unambiguous grounds for attributing material to one particular linguistic tradition.[54] On a broader level, these comparanda from Anglo-Norman and English sources also point to the participation of Irish medical scribes in the processes of vernacularisation of scientific learning that impacted other linguistic traditions across the Insular world. The possibility that the remedy as a whole—and not only the loanword contained in it—may have made its way into the Irish source directly via the medium of one of these vernaculars should be left open to consideration.

2.3 *A Cure for Skin Disease*

Much like the preceding example, the final Irish remedy to be considered in this discussion illustrates the way in which medical cures that can ultimately be traced to Latin texts might be abbreviated, adapted, or repurposed in the process of being rendered into a vernacular language. It also demonstrates how, even within a single linguistic tradition, varying approaches might be taken to identifying the sources of medical learning with a view to suiting the tastes of a given translator and their perceived target audience. One copy of the cure in question occurs within the section of Conla Mac an Leagha's remedy book that is concerned with ailments of the head, and includes several recipes that appear to be intended to purge malignant humours in order to relieve dermatological complaints in this part of the body:[55]

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53 Herbert Schöffler, ed., *Beiträge zur mittelenglischen Medizinliteratur. Sächssische Forschungsinstitute in Leipzig, anglistische Abteilung, Heft I* (Halle, 1919), 235.

54 Here one might note Carol Eastman's observation (in her *Codeswitching* (Clevendon, 1992), 1) that "the study of loanwords *per se* out of context is a relic of the past" (cited in Hunt, "Code-switching," 132).

55 Although I have not yet managed to fully elucidate the contents of this section of the remedy book, the passage cited here is preceded by several remedies stated to be for *carriage*, defined in *eDIL* (s.v., dil.ie/8262) as "scabies, mange, skin disease."

> [...] sūg p*r*aisci bāne ⁊ escob b*án* do cur a toll a s*r*ōna gu sreōda. *Dá* rab tesbac*h* [i]na s*r*ōin [i]na diaig, c*urtur* b*ainne* cīc*h*i inte arambi m*a*c [...] Et derb*aid* Dyan Cec*h*t g*ur*ob tarb*ach* don incin*n* sin.
>
> [...] put the juice of white cabbage and daisy[56] in his nostril until he sneezes, and if there should be heat in the nose afterwards, the breast-milk of one who has nursed a son is put in it [...] And Dían Cécht confirms that that is beneficial for the brain.[57]

The association of this teaching with Dían Cécht, the healer-figure of the supernatural Irish race of settlers known as the Túatha Dé, was clearly intended to lend an air of local or native authority to the passage and is one of several examples of such attributions to Irish legendary or mythological figures in Conla Mac an Leagha's remedy book as a whole.[58] From this particular perspective, however, it is interesting to compare Conla's version of the remedy with a second copy of the passage found in London, British Library MS Harley 546, written some forty years earlier in 1459. The corresponding passage in that manuscript is very similar to the version in Conla Mac an Leagha's remedy book, with a key exception being that the authority for the recipe is instead given as an abbreviated letter "g":

> It*erum* sūg p*r*aisci bāi*n*e ⁊ esb*o*c beaa*n* do cu*r* a poll*aib* na s*r*ōna co s*r*eōga ⁊ dá roib tesbac*h* sa s*r*ōin na diaig*h* c*urtar* bai*n*di cí*ch* m*a*ic in*n*ti ⁊ d*erbaid* .g. g*ur*ab ta*r*b*ach* do*n* cin*n* sin.

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56 The plant referred to here as *escob bán* (spelled *esboc beaan* in the second version of the text cited below) is not recorded in *eDIL* (accessed 8 June 2024), but Niall Mac Coitir, *Ireland's Wild Plants: Myths, Legends and Folklore* (Cork, 2015), 255, gives *Espibawn*, *Espieban, Easpagán, Easpag Bán, Easpag Baoch* and *Easpag Speáin* as alternative names for the ox-eye daisy (*leucanthemum vulgare*). Mac Coitir further notes (257) that the word "has nothing to do with bishops (*easpag* in Irish), but derives from the word *easpa* meaning an abcess. Ox-eye daisy was used in traditional medicine to cure abcesses, boils and other skin complaints."

57 RIA MS 445 (24 B 3), 41.21–24. While the beginnings of individual remedies in the collection are consistently marked using rubricated initials, the passage cited here starts mid-sentence in the manuscript, following a line and a half of text beginning with the words *Dentur scetrac*. In another earlier copy of the passage (considered below), however, it is clear that two distinct remedies for the same ailment are in question, with the excerpt cited above being the second of the these.

58 For more such examples, see Hayden, "Attribution and Authority," and Barrett, "The King of Dál nAraidi's Salve."

> Another: put the juice of white cabbage and daisy in the nostrils until he sneezes, and if there is heat in the nose afterwards the breastmilk of [a woman who has nursed] a son is put in it, and "g" confirms that that is beneficial for the head.[59]

In noting this and other textual parallels between Conla Mac an Leagha's remedy book and the Harley 546 compilation, Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha expanded the abbreviated "g" in the above passage as "G*ailen*," presumably on analogy with numerous other examples from Irish medical texts in which the name of the famous Greek medical authority is reduced to its first letter.[60] Closer inspection of the contents of the passage may, however, point to a different source, namely, the Latin *Compendium Medicinae* of the medieval English physician Gilbertus Anglicus (*c.*1180–*c.*1250), which was translated into Middle English in the early fifteenth century. In a discussion of how to cure red or infected eyes in that vernacular version of Gilbertus's text (based on a section headed *De prurigine oculorum* ("On itching of the eyes") in the original Latin), we find the following advice for purging harmful humours from the head:

> And 3yue him sumwhat in his nose to make him snesse, as sauge or plemeros y-brusid and y-holde longe in þe nose. And 3eue him þe poudir of piretre, of staphie, and syneuey y-sowid / in a lynen cloþ. And let him holde þis in his mooþ and chewe it ofte. And when þe humour falleþ dovn from his brayn into his mooþ, þen alwei let him spet it oute. And aftir þat he is y-purged, take a woman-is mylke þat fedeþ a knave childe and anoynt his y3en þerwiþ.[61]

Once again, the Irish version of this remedy is considerably abbreviated by comparison with both its Latin and English parallels, omitting details such as the instruction to have the patient chew a cloth containing certain herbs and

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59 London, British Library MS Harley 546, fol. 14v10–12. A digital facsimile of this manuscript can be viewed online at http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_546 (accessed 22 February 2022).

60 Nic Dhonnchadha, "Michael Casey's Medical Transcripts," 85 n. 90.

61 Getz, *Healing and Society in Medieval England,* 56. Cf. Gilbertus Anglicus, *Compendium Medicinae*, Bk. III (Lyons, 1510), fol. 138va: *Et ex eadem decoctione fomentetur caput optime tunc apponatur puluis condisi aut sileris in naribus. et prouocetur sternutatio vt dissoluatur humiditas. Post fiat masticatio ex puluere stapbidis piretri sinapis in panno ligatis per longum tempus. Et si fluens humor permittatur decurrens a cerebro exire primo in lecto recte recipiatur: et irrorentur oculi et frons cum lacte mulieris masculum nutrientis et hoc modo curatur lippitudo et lacrime et dolor oculorum.*

suggesting different ingredients to induce sternutation. However, the fundamental idea underlying Gilbertus's original remedy—that malignant humours might be purged from the head by making the patient sneeze—is preserved in both the English and Irish vernacular versions. These also cite the advice that the breastmilk of a woman who has nursed a male child might be used to soothe the patient after the purging process, although both the Latin and English versions of the text indicate that the eyes should be anointed with such milk, whereas in the Irish text this procedure is apparently intended to relieve discomfort in the nose. Women's milk is prescribed in medieval medical recipes from early English tradition, and Gilbertus' specification here to use the milk of a woman who has nursed a male child may again ultimately stem from the *Naturalis Historia* of Pliny, who notes that "for all purposes [...] a woman's milk is more efficacious if she has given birth to a boy, and much the most efficacious is hers, who has borne twin boys" (*in omni usu efficacius eius quae marem enixa sit multoque efficacissimum eius quae geminos pepererit mares*). Indeed, Pliny also notes in this section of his encyclopedia that the milk of a woman who has nursed a baby can be usefully employed to anoint eyes that are "bloodshot from a blow, in pain, or suffering from a flux" (*oculo ab ictu cruore suffuse et in dolore aut epiphora, si inmulgeatur, plurimum prodest*).[62] Curing such conditions is, of course, precisely the stated purpose of the remedies in the relevant chapter of Gilbertus' text, which is concerned with relieving itchy or red eyes.

3 Translation Across Vernaculars in Irish Textual Tradition

The foregoing discussion has sought to highlight, in a very preliminary way, some parallels between the learning preserved in one sixteenth-century Irish remedy collection and material transmitted in both Latin and other contemporary vernacular traditions of medical writing. The question of whether any of the cures included in Conla Mac an Leagha's collection might have entered the Irish canon directly via the medium of languages such as French or English is a thorny one that requires considerable further research. Although many years ago Robin Flower suggested that the cultivation of medical learning in Ireland from the twelfth century onwards might be connected to the rise of the Anglo-Norman nobility, who provided patronage to Irish physicians for

62 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 8.21 (ed. and trans. W.H.S. Jones, 52–53). On this theme in medieval English tradition, see R.A. Buck, "Woman's Milk in Anglo-Saxon and Later Medieval Medical Texts," *Neophilologus* 96 (2012), 467–85, where this example from Pliny is noted at 473–74.

practical purposes, the exact mechanisms of cross-linguistic transfer in this genre have yet to be established with any real clarity.[63]

Here it may of course prove useful to look to the wider context of translation practices in late-medieval Ireland, where many literary works are known to have been rendered into Irish directly from other vernaculars around the time that Conla Mac an Leagha's medical remedy collection was compiled, i.e. the second half of the fifteenth century and the start of the sixteenth century.[64] Of possible significance in this regard is the fact that one of the most prolific scribes and literary translators of the period in question was one Uilliam Mac an Leagha, whose precise relationship to the North Connacht medical scribe Conla Mac an Leagha is uncertain, but who was clearly a contemporary working in similar learned circles.[65] This Uilliam was wholly or partially responsible for copying seven extant manuscripts, several of which contain hagiographical and narrative material that he translated directly from Middle English into Irish.[66] One of the manuscripts in question, London, British Library, Additional 30512, was in the possession of the Cahir Butlers in 1561, and Erich Poppe has observed that "it is very likely that [Uilliam] Mac an Legha worked within a mixed Irish and Old English cultural and social milieu. The dominant medium of cultural and literary influence to which he was exposed,

63 Robin Flower, "Ireland and Medieval Europe [Sir John Rhŷs Memorial Lecture]," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 13 (1927), 271–303.

64 A valuable recent account of the state of the art in this field is given by Aisling Byrne, *Translating Europe: Imported Narratives and Irish Readers at the End of the Middle Ages*, Paul Walsh Memorial Lecture 4 (Maynooth, 2019).

65 On Uilliam's possible relationship to Conla and other members of his family who worked as medical scribes, see Paul Walsh, "An Irish Medical Family: Mac an Leagha," in *Irish Men of Learning: Studies by Father Paul Walsh*, ed. Colm Ó Lochlainn (Dublin, 1947), 206–18, and also Aisling Byrne, "Cultural Intersections in Trinity College Dublin MS 1298," in *Adapting Texts and Styles in a Celtic Context*: *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Processes of Literary Transfer in the Middle Ages. Studies in Honour of Erich Poppe*, eds. Axel Harlos and Neele Harlos, Studien und Texte zur Keltologie 13 (Munster, 2016), 291–304, at 292. Aidan Breen, "Uilliam (Iollann) Mac an Lega," in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, eds. Eoin Kinsella et al., 2009, https://www.dib.ie/biography/mac-lega-uilliam-iollann-a4990 (accessed 8 June 2024), argues that Uilliam was the father of Conla. My thanks to Nicholas Thyr for drawing my attention to this reference.

66 Erich Poppe, "Latin and Latin Learning in Fifteenth-century Ireland," in *Researching the Languages of Ireland*, ed. Raymond Hickey (Uppsala, 2011), 97–117, at 99–100; on the manuscripts and translation style of Uilliam Mac an Leagha, see, e.g., Byrne, "Cultural Intersections," 292–93; Erich Poppe, "*Stair Ercuil ocus a Bás*: Rewriting Hercules in Ireland," in *Translations from Classical Literature:* Imtheachta Aeniasa *and* Stair Hercuil ocus a Bás, ed. Kevin Murray, Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 17 (London, 2006), 37–68, at 37–38; and Bianca Ross, *Bildungsidol, Ritter, Held: Herkules bei William Caxton und Uilliam Mac an Lega* (Heidelberg, 1989).

was probably English."[67] It is worth noting that the 30512 manuscript contains a short mnemonic poem on when to gather medicinal herbs that, while it finds close parallels in Latin and English medical sources, also bears certain stylistic similarities to the didactic versified remedies in Conla Mac an Leagha's prosimetrical collection, not least of which is its invocation of the native Irish healer-figure, Dían Cécht, as an authority for medical teaching that is evidently drawn from foreign source-materials.[68] This poem was not the work of Uilliam Mac an Leagha himself, but was rather copied into the 30512 manuscript in the sixteenth century by Torna mac Torna Ó Máel Chonaire, a member of the Connacht learned family of poets.[69] Torna's brother, Conaire, is in turn credited as the source of an exemplar for a surgical text in Dublin, King's Inns Library MS 15 that was written in 1512 by Conla Mac an Leagha's brother, Máel Eachlainn, whom was *ollam* in medicine to the Mac Donnchaidh lords in Sligo.[70] Clues of this kind not only point to the close relationships that obtained between members of learned families who specialised in different scholarly disciplines, but also support Robin Flower's argument that there was a considerable interchange of literature between manuscripts produced in the regions of Munster and Connacht respectively during the later Middle Ages.[71] On this basis, one might wonder to what extent the pedagogical background, vernacular source-materials and translation practices of Uilliam Mac an Leagha might likewise be evidenced among the medical scribes of that learned family who were active in North Connacht around the turn of the sixteenth century.

4 Conclusion

In his aforementioned discussion of the Latinity of Irish doctors during the late-medieval period, Jason Harris observed that

> [i]t is perhaps not helpful at this stage to characterize Irish physicians as either "outward looking" or "conservative"; they may have been as various as they were numerous. What would indubitably be helpful would be the

67 Poppe, "Latin and Latin Learning," 100.

68 Robin Flower, "Popular Science in Mediaeval Ireland," *Ériu* 9 (1921–23), 61–67, at 65–67; Hayden, "Three Versified Medical Recipes."

69 On this family, see Paul Walsh, "The Learned Family of O Maelconaire," in *Irish Men of Learning: Studies* (Dublin, 1947), 34–48, and Nollaig Ó Muraíle, "The Learned Family of Ó Maol Chonaire: The Connacht Branch," in *The Book of Ballycummin*, eds. Elizabeth Boyle and Ruairí Ó hUiginn, Codices Hibernensis Eximii 4 (Dublin, forthcoming).

70 Walsh, "An Irish Medical Family," 206–7.

71 Flower, "Ireland and Mediaeval Europe," 283.

> further exploration of their manuscripts in relation to the textual traditions of the Latin works on which they drew, or the pursuit in much greater detail of a comparison between the processes, contexts and significance of vernacularization in Ireland and in other regions of northern Europe.[72]

The three examples discussed here, drawn from a single medical remedy book compiled in North Connacht around the turn of the sixteenth century, represent only a small drop in a much larger ocean of Irish-language scientific material that remains largely unstudied, but has much to contribute to wider discussions concerning the multilingual, multicultural milieu of the medieval Insular world. Recent advances in digital technologies may provide a practical means for facilitating such research; although it has been over twenty years since William Crossgrave observed that it would "be enormously helpful to have a 'Repertorium' for, e.g. medieval Irish or Danish manuscripts dealing with science, medicine and technology" comparable to that pioneered for Middle English medical texts by Linda Voigts and Patricia Deery Kurtz, no such database yet exists for the Irish-language material.[73] This is, surely, the next logical step for achieving a more in-depth understanding of the place of Ireland within the wider currents of medical and scientific learning that impacted Europe as a whole throughout the Middle Ages.

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72 Harris, "Latin Learning," 25; see also above, p. 87.

73 Crossgrove, "Vernacularization," 59–60; on the database compiled by Voigts and Kurtz, see above, n. 19. The LEIGHEAS project, based at Maynooth University, is in the process of developing such a digital resource for the Irish corpus: see https://leigheas.maynoothuniversity.ie (accessed 8 June 2024).

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