

## The Book of Ballycummin: codicology and the significance of filler-texts

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The late sixteenth-century Book of Ballycummin (RIA MS 967/ 23 N 10) is a rare example of a composite vellum and paper Irish manuscript.<sup>2</sup> Yet the original arrangement of the quires and the sequence of the texts within it is unclear since the manuscript was unbound and rebound several times in its later history. Without understanding the original structure of N, it is not possible to read the texts in their proper manuscript context or to situate the codex within the broader context of the Irish manuscript tradition.

Therefore, this chapter has two aims. Firstly, it examines the codicology of the book to establish the original structure and sequence of quires and place the texts in their original order. Secondly, it examines the use of filler-texts, many of which have been overlooked by scholarship, together with their textual history, and assesses their purpose in the codex. It is argued that such filler-texts were not only intentionally selected for their content, but also hold a particular function for the cohesion of the book.

### **A medieval miscellany**

N can be termed a medieval miscellany, given the diverse nature of its contents. It contains copies of tales derived from the now lost *Cín Dromma Snechtai* (henceforth *CDS*) as well as numerous early Irish gnomic tracts, religious poetry, metrical monastic rules, prophecies, some legal texts, and narrative texts.

The concept of a manuscript miscellany does not necessarily need to imply that such a manuscript contains texts randomly organised in a chaotic fashion and with an absence of order. In fact, there is often an underlying internal logic running throughout the manuscript that was apparent to the compiler. But the internal logic imposed by a medieval compiler may not always be immediately discernible to the modern reader, especially when he/she encounters a manuscript in which the original structure has been disturbed and the original manner of textual arrangement is lost, as is the case with N, as will be discussed below.

Even within manuscripts compiled by a guiding intelligence, there are brief miscellaneous texts or sequences of miscellaneous texts which seem unconnected. Such texts, also known as gap-fillers or filler material, occupy left-over space at the end of a column, quire or booklet so as not to leave vellum blank. This filler material by its very nature tends to be short so that it is of suitable length to fill in blank space and can be deliberately chosen from

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<sup>2</sup> Formerly Betham 145. This manuscript is henceforth abbreviated as N.

another source for this specific purpose.<sup>3</sup> The term ‘filler’ does not necessarily imply that such texts are of secondary importance either; although they are used to fill space they are often deliberately selected for their content, as shown by Bahr (2015) through his examinations of other manuscript cultures.

N contains several such shorter texts, often of a difficult nature, that can be deemed filler material. Best (1954, i) believed these to be ‘trifling’, and most of these remain ignored by scholarship.<sup>4</sup> However, it is argued here that such texts are not ‘trifling’ or insignificant. They are of linguistic, metrical and literary value within their own right, with many still in need of reliable editions and translations.<sup>5</sup> They also hold an important function in the manuscript as a whole object, and in the Irish manuscript tradition in general. But to determine what the filler material in N is and what specific purpose it holds within the manuscript as a whole, the original arrangement of N must first be established.

### **Codicological features of N**

The contents and physical features of N are described in detail by Mulchrone (1937, 2769–80, cat. no. 967).<sup>6</sup> Best (1954) published a collotype facsimile, based on the negatives of photographs taken by Osborn Bergin in 1915, accompanied by an introduction and list of contents. These photographs were taken five years prior to the manuscript undergoing conservation in the British Museum (Best 1954, vi). Due to the fragile state of the paper, the leaves were reinforced with gauze during the conservation process, resulting in the loss of some text. The facsimile remains a valuable source for the study of the materiality of N because it retains certain physical features which were lost when it underwent conservation. For instance, the original stitching used to mend a tear in the vellum on p. 9 and 10 is still visible in the facsimile.<sup>7</sup> N was digitised in 2013 and is available to consult on Irish Script on Screen.

N is a small quarto manuscript, measuring at approximately 222 x 154 mm and comprised of 14 leaves of vellum and 61 leaves of paper, with pp. 151 to 160 in a fragmentary state. The manuscript contains 74 texts. The pagination is in a modern hand, with no original foliation evident.<sup>8</sup> According to Best (1954, vi), the pagination is perhaps in the hand of Betham. The vellum is ruled by dry-point. There are no pricking marks on pp. 1–17 (vellum),

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, further study on the circulation and transmission of filler material may even reveal connections between scribal networks and manuscript culture. For a more general observation on the use of filler material in Irish manuscripts, see Ó Macháin (2018, 249) for example.

<sup>4</sup> Incidentally, Best (1954) does not include several filler-texts in his description of N’s contents. For example, he omits the short text beginning *Fechtus ro gap Corcran* on p. 20 and another beginning *Batar triar do Muintir Corcrain* on p. 91. See *RIA Cat.* 2774 and 2778 for a description of both. These two texts are discussed in further detail below.

<sup>5</sup> Apart from the filler material, several texts from this manuscript still require critical editions and translations. For instance, N’s copy of *Tochmarc Emire*, one of three extant complete copies of the longer recension, still awaits to be published. Indeed, this copy often contains superior readings against several mistakes and modernisations in the copy preserved in *Lebor na hUidre* (Toner 1998, 74–76).

<sup>6</sup> For previous catalogue descriptions, see footnote 13.

<sup>7</sup> It is not evident what colour the thread was because the images of the facsimile are in black and white.

<sup>8</sup> I have compared the pagination with arabic numerals written in the hands of Sir William Betham, John Beirne Crowe and Eugene O’Curry. Although there is a strong resemblance between the numbers 3, 5 and 8 with those of Betham, it cannot be said with certainty that the pagination is or is not in fact by him. I am grateful to Dr Bernadette Cunningham for supplying me with photographs of RIA MS 24 O 39/ JG/ 10 (v); RIA MS 24 O 39/ JG/ 10 (vi); RIA MS 67 E 14, as I was unable to get to the RIA Library to access material due to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

which suggests the margins were trimmed. Pricking marks are visible on pp. 18 and 19 as well as puncture-like marks in the gutter, possibly from an earlier binding. Inner and outer bounding lines are visible in some instances. Ruling by dry-point on paper was done leaf by leaf, with lines visible in many instances. The text is generally written in a single column, except for pp. 7, 8, 9 and 10 which are written in double columns. *Litterae notabiliores*, in the style common to Irish manuscripts of the period, are of 2 to 4 lines in size, or 6 lines on occasion. In some instances, guide letters are written in the margins to aid a decorator to fill in the missing *littera notabilior* at a later stage. There is a design trial in the inner margin of p. 1 and a marginal drawing of a bearded man on p. 109. In verse, words and phrases are tucked under the last line of the page rather than placed on the first line of the following page. In narrative texts, words are often divided across page boundaries. There are no catch-words, quire signatures or other marks to indicate the original sequence of leaves or quires. The scribes take care to correct omissions and errors, noting also where they have erred in copying, for example, in copying *Tochmarc Emire* on p. 115, where Aodh draws attention to him having skipped a page in his exemplar and noting the correct sequence in which the text should be read. There is a series of reading marks found throughout the margins, likely added by the manuscript's later owners. There are several watermarks in the paper leaves that mostly consist of a gloved hand with 5-petal flower on stem and one which is a trefoil on the glove over the letters 'V O [?]' (Ó Macháin 2019, 34 and 42).

### **Codicological disturbance in N**

N is not at present bound in its original order, with most of the leaves no longer conjoined, and the original sequence of the gatherings is not immediately apparent. The manuscript has the vellum leaves placed to the front with paper following thereafter.<sup>9</sup> As a result, several texts, written on both vellum and paper, are split and misplaced across the manuscript:<sup>10</sup>

*Trecheng Breth Féne*: pp. 7a–10b (vellum); 98–101 (paper).

(The original order = pp. 98–100, 7–10, 101)

*Senbriathra Fíthail*: p. 6 (vellum); p. 77 (paper).

(The original order = pp. 6, 77)

*Tochmarc Emire*: pp. 11–12 (vellum); 21–6 (vellum); 113–28 (paper).

(The original order = pp. 21–24, 113–124, 11–12, 25–26, 125–128)

*Riaguil in Choimded*: pp. 17 (vellum); 88 (paper).

(The original order = pp. 88, 17)

Previous scholarship asserted that the manuscript was copied from an exemplar in which the leaves were already placed out of order. This stems from an observation made by Strachan (1905, 58), in his edition on *Riaguil in Choimded*:

<sup>9</sup> The fragments at the end of the codex were bound out of order by the later binder in the British Museum and should run pp. 157–8, 155–6, 151–2 (Best 1954, ix).

<sup>10</sup> I follow the modern pagination of the manuscript throughout. There is no original numbering system. The proper sequence is given below each entry.

‘[...] the rest of the poem appears on p. 17 of the MS. Here there are four pages of verse in the midst of prose and obviously out of place. The pages have not been misplaced in the MS itself, for they are vellum, while the rest of the Rule is written on paper. The only explanation that will account for the facts is that the codex was copied page for page from an older manuscript in which two leaves had become displaced’.

Thurneysen (1912, 498, n. 1) observed in a brief footnote on *Tochmarc Emire*, that the leaves on which *Tochmarc Emire* is written are bound incorrectly. However, this astute observation is overlooked by subsequent scholarship. Influenced by Strachan, Mulchrone (1937, 2772) believed the frequent misplacement of leaves in the manuscript suggests that it is ‘a line for line replica of an older vellum’ and that it is also possible that ‘a paper replica was made of the vellum initially written by Aodh, portions only of both now remaining’. Best (1954, vi) noted that the leaves are no longer conjoined and that the gatherings cannot be determined as a result. He wrote that the disorder is ‘not due to a bookbinder in recent times, but seem[s] to be of long standing’ (Best 1954, ix). Best did not elaborate on how ‘long standing’ this may have been. Indeed, he suggested that at first glance it is likely that a former owner placed the vellum leaves at the beginning of the volume and the paper at the end. However, Best (1954, ix) ultimately followed Strachan’s suggestion that N was copied from a manuscript in which the leaves were out of order. These observations were made at a time when perhaps there was little understanding and knowledge of composite manuscripts of mixed material in the Irish manuscript tradition. However, this has changed in recent times as more such material has come to light.<sup>11</sup> More recent scholarship has moved away from the notion that N is a replica. Corthals (1995, 96–7) and Murray (2018, 199) both suggest that N consists of vellum leaves intermingled with the paper leaves with the mis-binding due to a later possessor who desired to place all the vellum together and all the paper together. Still, a thorough codicological examination of N has remained a *desideratum* until now.

### **When did the disturbance occur?**

N was purchased by the Royal Irish Academy as part of Sir William Betham’s collection in 1851.<sup>12</sup> It was subsequently described as a ‘small quarto volume, partly vellum and partly paper’ in 1871.<sup>13</sup> This description suggests that the mis-binding may have occurred when the codex was rebound and interleaved for the Academy in the 1850’s.<sup>14</sup> However, there are some

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<sup>11</sup> Examples of composite vellum and paper manuscripts are discussed on p. XX.

<sup>12</sup> For the later provenance and previous ownership of the codex, see Richard Sharpe’s chapter and Sharpe (2018, 314–324).

<sup>13</sup> Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts of the Royal Irish Academy by J. O’Beirne Crowe, A. B., Betham Collection vol. v, p. 1242 (RIA MS 67/E/19). O’Beirne Crowe also provides another description of N in RIA MS 67/E/14, pp. 445–464. The manuscript is also described in the series of green cataloguer’s notebooks, namely notebook 70 (RIA MS 67/M/12; cat. nos. 1329–59). For the current binding of these notebooks, see Sharpe (2013, 115, n. 5).

<sup>14</sup> These binder’s blanks are still bound in the manuscript. According to Best (1954, vi), Eugene O’Curry wrote on one of these blank leaves, providing a date of 1851 x 1862. Gilbert noted that a leaf of ‘strong paper’ was placed between p. 28 and 29 which divided the original vellum and paper sections (RIA MS 67/ E/ 19, 1242). In the manuscript as it is presently bound there is also a ‘binder’s blank’ following p. 118, which has notes written in two different modern hands. The first note reads ‘A chasm here, which the Queen’s first historiographer did not notice when describing this piece’, signed ‘J. Clancy’ to which Seosamh Ó Longáin (‘J. Long’) replies ‘This

clues pointing to the manuscript's original arrangement already having been out of order prior to this rebinding. Best (1954, vi), for instance, noted that the modern pagination running through the manuscript is probably by Betham. This might suggest the codex was already out of order when it came into his possession. A further tantalising clue is found in the correspondence between John Windele and Betham. In a letter to Betham, dated 28<sup>th</sup> of December 1840, Windele described the manuscript as 'a half vellum half paper Irish MS' which was lent to him by Mr Denis O'Flynn.<sup>15</sup> It seems therefore that the codicological disturbance occurred when it fell into the hands of an earlier owner. The manuscript was used by Mícheál Ó Longáin, who copied six items into a section of RIA MS 23 E 16 (491), pp. 336–334, dated to c. 1808 on account of a scribal colophon on p. 332 and 343.<sup>16</sup> However, this does not help with the binding history since Ó Longáin selected texts at random for inclusion. For instance, Ó Longáin copied the poems *Día lim fri cach sním* and *Deus meus adiuva me* into E in reverse order to that found in N, for which see further below. Moreover, Ó Longáin copied *Creidim-si Crist israeracht* on p. 94 (N) and *Rob tú mo baile*, p. 95 (N). However, he did not include *Dúthracar, a maic Dé bí* which is found between the two aforementioned texts in N.

### The original collation of N

Best (1954, vi) wrote that 'the leaves are now all detached from their conjugates, so that it is not possible to determine gatherings'. However, there are in fact at least four conjoined vellum bifolia,<sup>17</sup> namely, pp. 1/2 and 3/4, 5/6 and 7/8, 13/14 and 15/16, and 17/18, 19/20. Moreover, a further three bifolia can be reconstructed on account of their shared physical features. A hole is located on pp. 9/10. The hole must be original because Dubhthach accommodates the text around it on p. 9. A tear extends from this hole towards the bottom of the leaf. Dubhthach also accommodates the text around the original thread mending this tear. Another tear extends out of the top of the hole and runs over onto pp. 11/12. This tear could only have spread over onto p. 11 if both leaves belonged to one bifolium. Moreover, the leaves were ruled as a bifolium, i.e. pp. 9 and 12 have 35 lines and 10 and 11 have 36, respectively. Thus, these two leaves were originally one conjugate. Pp. 21/22 and 23/24 are arranged so that the hair side of the leaf (p. 21) matches the hair side of p. 24 and flesh side (p. 22) matches flesh side (p. 23) respectively and importantly the leaves share the same pricking pattern. Therefore, these leaves originally constituted one bifolium. Pp. 25/26 and 27/28, now singletons, are also arranged with the hair and flesh sides facing each other and so were also likely conjugate.

1 <sup>r</sup> /2 <sup>v</sup>	3 <sup>r</sup> /4 <sup>v</sup>	conjoined	1 bifolium
5 <sup>r</sup> /6 <sup>v</sup>	7 <sup>r</sup> /8 <sup>v</sup>	conjoined	1 bifolium
9 <sup>r</sup> /10 <sup>v</sup>	11 <sup>r</sup> /12 <sup>v</sup>	two singletons; tear extends across the inner gutter	[1 bifolium]

can be supplied from leaf [...] Huidhre, and from 5280 [a] ms in the Brit. Museum a copy of which is now in the R.I.A. among J. O' Longáin's mss'. It is unclear to me as to whom the 'Queen's first historiographer' refers to.

<sup>15</sup> RIA MS 12 L 5/20 (Sharpe 2018, 317).

<sup>16</sup> Mulchrone (*RIA Cat.* p. 1393) deduced that a number of these texts 'have apparently been copied' by Mícheál Ó Longáin from N; see also the discussion in Sharpe (2018, 316). In fact, this can be stated with certainty because Ó Longáin directly copies a scribal note which fills the last line of the page in N, p. 18, l. 38 (given in full on p. XX below). In N, this scribal note is written after the second quatrain of the poem *M'óenurán im aireclán*.

<sup>17</sup> That these are conjugates became clear through consulting the manuscript in person.

13 <sup>r</sup> /14 <sup>v</sup>	15 <sup>r</sup> /16 <sup>v</sup>	conjoined	1 bifolium
17 <sup>r</sup> /18 <sup>v</sup>	19 <sup>r</sup> /20 <sup>v</sup>	conjoined	1 bifolium
21 <sup>r</sup> /22 <sup>v</sup>	23 <sup>r</sup> /24 <sup>v</sup>	two singletons; same pricking pattern & hair/flesh sides	[1 bifolium]
25 <sup>r</sup> /26 <sup>v</sup>	27 <sup>r</sup> /28 <sup>v</sup>	two singletons; same hair/flesh sides	[1 bifolium]

Having identified that these bifolia are conjugate, it is now possible to reassemble the quires of the manuscript, of which there are six.<sup>18</sup> In the following analysis, the sequence of texts is determined by the textual continuity across pages.<sup>19</sup> It is also aided by the same textual arrangement of a series of texts found in another manuscript, discussed in more detail below.

### Quire *i*<sup>2</sup> = pp. 1–2 (vellum) [chasm] 3–4 (vellum)

The first quire contains *Tecosca Cormaic*, beginning at the top of p. 1, which Aodh notes that he wrote for himself (*dó udein*). A substantial lacuna occurs in the text between p. 2 and p. 3. We can speculate that four leaves at the least are missing here.<sup>20</sup> The text of *Tecosca Cormaic* continues to the bottom of p. 4 and onto p. 5, the beginning of the next quire. This is an important fact because it shows that the first quire was not added as an after-thought but was part of the original composition of the codex. The loss of leaves in this quire occurred later in the codex's history and may suggest that the quires were kept loosely in a limp cover rather than being bound together.<sup>21</sup>

### Quire *ii*<sup>16</sup> = pp. 5–6 (vellum); 77–88 (paper); 17–20 (vellum); 89–100 (paper); 7–8 (vellum).

*Tecosca Cormaic* continues over from quire *i* as far as p. 5.22. *Briathra Flainn* begins on l. 23 and continues to p. 6, l. 18. *Senbriathra Fithail* follows thereafter on p. 6, l. 19 and is written continuously onto p. 77, a paper leaf which is now of course bound incorrectly. The poem *Laudate Dominum de Celis* begins at the top of p. 78, a verso. This is followed by a group of metrical monastic rules that run consecutively as far as p. 88. *Riaguil in Choimded*, which begins on p. 88, l. 4, is written continuously onto p. 17, the recto of an inner vellum bifolium. This inner bifolium contains a series of religious poems written continuously to the bottom of p. 20, with the final text serving as a filler-text:

p. 18.34–19.19	‘Colum Cille cecinit’, beg. <i>A Muire min maithingen</i> . 16qq.
p. 19.20–20.3	<i>Dia lim fri gach snim</i> . 18qq.
p. 20.4–20.15	<i>Deus meus adiu[v]a me</i> . 7qq.

<sup>18</sup> Visual diagrams of the new collation are provided in Appendix 1.

<sup>19</sup> A detailed list providing the order of all the texts in the reconstructed manuscript is provided in Appendix 2.

<sup>20</sup> An approximation of the loss can be determined based on a calculation of the word count per page. There are 1440 words of the text missing in N, based on the edition by Meyer (1909), and c. 306 words on average per page (written in one text block per page). Therefore, it can be surmised that at least four leaves were required, if not more, for the missing portion of the text of *Tecosca Cormaic* in N. This hypothesis can only be an estimation of course since it does not account for the scribal variation of words, or the idiosyncratic scribal use of abbreviations and contractions.

<sup>21</sup> A cover in which the codex was wrapped in was lost when N was rebound. It is not certain if this was an original wrapper. See Sharpe (2018, 322–3) for a discussion of the title on the cover.

p. 20.16–20.34	<i>M'oenaran im aireglan. 14qq.</i>
p. 20.35–20.39	<i>Fechtus ro gap Corcran + 1q.</i>

To establish what follows on from p. 20, a verso, we are aided by the textual arrangement in another manuscript. The placement of pp. 89/90 and 91/92 after p. 20 is supported by the similar textual arrangement of seven independent copies of the same texts in Mícheál Ó Cléirigh's *RIA Stowe MS B iv 2*.<sup>22</sup> Ó Cléirigh notes on pp. 124, 146 and 156 that he copied this segment from a manuscript owned or copied by Maoil Echlainn mac Fíthil, the brother of Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire, archbishop of Tuam.<sup>23</sup> The texts in the Stowe manuscript are as follows:

fol. 137r – 137v7	<i>A Muire mín maithinghean</i>
fol. 137v8 – 138r19	<i>Dia leam fri cech sniomh</i>
fol. 138r20 – 138v8	<i>Deus meus adíua mé</i>
fol. 138v9 – 139r15	<i>M'aonarán imm aireaglán</i>
fol. 139r16 – 140r22	'Anmcairdeas Manchain Leith', beg. <i>Neach at cobrai dul for nem.</i>
fol. 140r23 – 141r20	<i>Iodhal o ro hairccedh-som</i>
fol. 141r21 – 142r6	'Colum Cilli cecinit', beg. <i>Ropadh mellach, a Mic mo De.</i>

There are three texts that follow *M'óenurán im aireclán* in the Stowe manuscript and which correlate with those that are written consecutively on pp. 89 (recto) to 91 (verso), given in the table below.

p. 89.1–90.8	'Anmcairdess Manchai[n L]eith so', beg. <i>Nech atcobra dul ar nemh</i> , 29qq.
p. 90.9–91.13	<i>Idhal o ro hairgid-sum. 24qq.</i>
p. 91.14–91.16	<i>Batar triar do muintir Corcrain + 1q.</i>
p. 91.17–91.29	'Colum Cille cecinit', beg. <i>Robudh meallach, a Meic mo Dé. 10qq.</i>

Thus, it can be safely assumed that *Anmchairdes Mancháin Léith, Ídail ó ro hairgit-sum* and *Robad mellach, a meic mo Dé* follow on from *M'óenurán im aireclán* at the end of p. 20 in N. Following *Robad mellach, a meic mo Dé*, the poem beg. *Cainnech mo chomarci* begins on p. 91, l. 30 and ends on p. 92, l. 7, a verso. The final poem, beg. *Aitteoch friut a ndechmad*, begins on p. 92, l. 8 and ends with a *dúnad* on l. 36.

<sup>22</sup> The poems *A Muire mín, maithingen, Dia lim fri cach sním, Deus meus adiuva me* and *M'óenurán im aireclán* are also found in the same order as B iv 2 in two early eighteenth-century manuscripts, namely *RIA MS 23 I 9* and *BL MS Eg. 197*, both in the hand of Tadhg Ó Neachtain (see descriptions in *RIA Cat.* p. 425; Flower 1926, 43–4). Tadhg Ó Neachtain must have used the same exemplar for both copies. The exemplar follows the same arrangement of texts as in *RIA Stowe MS B iv 2*. It is noteworthy also that the poem *M'óenurán im aireclán* is followed by the text beg. *Báatar triar do muintir Corcráin*, as in *RIA Stowe MS B iv 2* where it is interpolated into the poem by means of a contrived *dúnad*. This text is edited and discussed below.

<sup>23</sup> For example: Ar *sliocht Maoileclainn mac Fíthil do scctriobhus*, *RIA Stowe MS B iv 2*, f. 124. For the identification of Maoil Echlainn as the brother of Flaithrí, see Walsh (1947, 41) and the genealogical tree in Cunningham and Gillespie (2008–2009, 19).

It is possible to ascertain the arrangement of what follows p. 92 by working backwards from the end of the quire, taking into consideration the textual continuity across the pages. Thus, *Trecheng Breth Féne* is written on the final leaf of the quire, namely vellum pp. 7/8, preceded by paper pp. 99/100 and with the beginning found on p. 98. This is the verso of p. 97. Texts, including prophetic narratives and religious poems, run consecutively backwards from p. 97 across the pages to p. 93 (a recto).

Thus, the collation of this quire is comprised of one outer vellum bifolium, namely pp. 5/6 and 7/8, and an inner vellum bifolium, namely pp. 17/18 and 19/20. Between these two bifolia are placed twelve leaves of paper. The same composition is applied in the construction of the following quire.

**Quire *iii*<sup>16</sup> = pp. 9–10 (vellum); 101–112 (paper); 21–24 (vellum); 113–124 (paper); 11–12 (vellum).**

*Trecheng Breth Féne* continues onto the third quire, namely vellum pp. 9/10, and across one further leaf of paper, p. 101, the verso of which is left blank. To make up a paper gathering of 12 leaves of paper, as is found in quire *ii*, there should be another 5 paper leaves placed here. Thus, the five paper leaves spanning from p. 103–112 belong here. These contain *Epistil Ísu*, beginning on p. 103, l. 1 to 108, l. 8, *Cáin Domnaig*, on p. 108, l. 9 to 111, l. 26, and the poem *Nim-geib format fri fer find* occupies the verso of the final paper leaf, namely p. 112. *Tochmarc Emire* begins on the vellum insert (pp. 21 to 24), which then continues across onto 6 leaves of paper (pp. 113 to 124), and again to vellum (pp. 11 and 12), which belongs to the outer bifolium.

Thus, the collation of this quire consists of an outer and inner vellum bifolium, between which twelve paper leaves are inserted. The compiler has the tendency in this quire to begin long texts on the recto, which is why he leaves p. 102 blank.

**Quire *iv*<sup>16</sup> = pp. 25–26 (vellum); 125–128 (paper); 29–52 (paper); 27–28 (vellum).**

*Tochmarc Emire* continues across onto the fourth gathering, beginning on p. 25 (vellum), with the text written across two further paper leaves (pp. 125–128), which are either two singletons or a bifolium inserted to increase the writing space. There is a chasm in the current binding, with p. 28 (vellum) left blank. However, since the two previous gatherings have groups of twelve leaves, it can be safely assumed that pp. 29–52, a gathering of twelve leaves, belong here. There is no break in the textual continuity of *Airec Menman Uraird Meic Coisse* across pp. 40–41, the inner leaves of the gathering, and therefore there was no inner vellum guard in this particular quire.

As in quire *ii* and *iii*., this quire consists of sixteen leaves. However, it has only an outer vellum bifolium with fourteen inserted paper leaves, and no inner vellum bifolium.

**Quire *v*<sup>14</sup> = pp. 13–14 (vellum); 53–76 (paper); 15–16 (vellum).**

This quire consists of an outer vellum bifolium, namely pp. 13/14 and 15/16, into which another 12 leaves of paper are inserted. There is no break in the continuity of the text written across the inner paper leaves, namely pp. 64–65. This establishes that there was no inner vellum guard originally placed in this gathering.

**Quire *vi*<sup>14</sup> = 129–150; 153–154; 159–160; 151–152; 155–156; 157 (paper only).**



The fragmented and deteriorated state of the final section of the codex suggests that this quire did not originally have an outer a vellum bifolium, resulting in this quire suffering more wear and tear as a than the rest of the codex. Given that these paper leaves are no longer conjugate, it is difficult to determine whether any of these leaves were singletons or not.

Having reconstructed these quires, the following observations can be made. N originally consisted of at least six quires. That these were not intended as individual booklets is shown by the continuity of text across several quires. Indeed, in the absence of quire signatures, the sequence of the first four quires is confirmed by the text running from one quire to the next. It seems likely that quire *v* preceded quire *vi*, its final leaves being badly deteriorated. Considerable deliberation was given to the compilation of the codex, with headings used for visual impact and the texts were grouped thematically. For instance, the manuscript begins with gnomic texts, followed by metrical monastic rules, religious poetry, prophecies, contemplative religious poems, a poem on the events at the canonical hours, followed by the triads before moving on to narrative prose or *seanchas* material.

The reconstruction of the quires reveals a clearer picture of the distribution of hands.<sup>24</sup> Aodh begins the manuscript and writes the wisdom material in the first quire as far as the end of *Senbriathra Fíthail* in quire *ii*. Dubhthach then writes most of the rest of the contents in quire *ii*, continuing onto quire *iii*, except for the vellum insert (pp. 18 to 20), which is copied out by Aodh with the assistance of Torna. In quire *iii*, Aodh returns on p. 103 with *Epistil Ísu* and he copies out the material in quire *iv*, with the intermittent assistance of Torna. Quire *v* shows considerable variation between the hands. Dubhthach begins quire *v*, copying the first leaf (pp. 13 and 14) followed by Aodh (pp. 53 to 55), then Dubhthach again (pp. 55 to 56),<sup>25</sup> Aodh then goes on to copy the rest of the contents in this quire, with relief assistance in places by Dubhthach and Torna. The final quire seems to be the work of Aodh alone, according to Best's estimation. However, opinions differ as to the attribution of the hand(s) following p. 125.<sup>26</sup> This distribution underscores the collaborative nature of the work between Aodh and Dubhthach, together with the assistance of Torna.

The reconstruction demonstrates that the compiler(s) gave due consideration to the layout of text across the quires, writing seamlessly across vellum to paper. Lengthy texts usually begin on a recto, as was common practice in the Irish manuscript tradition. With the thematically arranged poetry, however, a poem can begin at the bottom of a verso. The compiler(s) does not always display a concern for filling the text frame *per se*, with blank spaces left on occasion, or even the odd entire page left empty, which usually marks the end of a gathering or the end of a group of texts. Nevertheless, empty spaces are occasionally filled with a variety of texts that can be classified as follows:

- (i) Scribal notes that fill out the last line of a page.
- (ii) Filler-texts that occupy unused space at the end of a page.

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<sup>24</sup> The following assessment is based on Best's (1954, vi-vii) analysis of the hands in N. However, a palaeographical re-examination of the hands is merited, but this remains outside the scope of the present paper. The hand from p. 135 does not appear to be that of any of the named scribes. For some preliminary discussion on the style of script in N, see P. Breatnach (2015, 142).

<sup>25</sup> See below for a discussion of this hand, which differs to that of Best (1954, vi).

<sup>26</sup> For instance, according to Mulchrone (1937, 2779) the handwriting on p. 129 onwards 'appears to be later than the rest of the MS'.

(iii) Anthologised filler-material that occupy the blank space of a page.

In what follows, the manuscript context of a selection of these texts is assessed. This examination shows that they were chosen for their intrinsic value, while at the same time serving the purpose of filling gaps at the end of the page, and that some filler material was anthologised during transmission.

### Scribal notes

An example of a scribal note to fill out the last line of the page is found on p. 48: *Finit amen o Aodh forsan aipgitir sin. Baile in Chuimine m'airm a n-ailt tSeain hi Maoil Conaire*, p. 48 i, 'Finit. Amen, by Aodh of the above *Aipgiter*. Ballycumin my stead, in the house of John O'Mulconry' (trans. Best 1954, vii). Another scribal note on the bottom of p. 18 is written after the third quatrain of *A Muire mín, maithingen: Spreaigh a sgol no co tige Luan Aoine do tsunnradh* which I translate as 'Disperse, oh school, until Monday comes, Friday to be precise'.<sup>27</sup> This note fills out the final line of the page and the scribe begins the fourth quatrain at the top of p. 19.

Such scribal practice was used to ensure that lines were entirely occupied with text, leaving no blank space, and had the visual effect of filling out the entire text-frame. This practice is seen in other medieval Irish manuscripts, for instance, in UCD OFM MS A 20, fol. 90r where Aodh Ó Dochartaigh writes at the end of the poem a note to fill the last line of the page: *Iomlánachadh in line do leisce a bheith folamh Misi Áodh do sgriobh*, 'A filling out of the line for I am loath that it should be empty. It is I, Aodh, who have written this' (ed. and trans. Murphy 1933, 368–9).<sup>28</sup>

### Filler-texts

(i) *Fechtus ro gap Corcrān*.

Following *M'óenurán im aireclán*, the final four lines of p. 20 are occupied by a short text concerning Corcrán and Máel Suthain.<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that no other copy of *M'óenurán im aireclán* is followed by this text.<sup>30</sup> Unlike *Deus Meus adiuva me* or *M'óenurán im aireclán*, both of which begin with *litterae notabiliores*, serving as visual aids for the reader, this filler-text in N is not afforded an enlarged initial. Thus, the compiler does not afford the text any authority on the page, and it serves merely to fill the empty space at the end of the page. Mulchrone (1937, 2774) describes this text as a note followed by a 'rhetoric'. But as can be seen below it clearly consists of a prose introductory sentence and a single quatrain. Since the

<sup>27</sup> This scribal note is overlooked by Mulchrone (1937); Best (1954) and Murphy (1956, 192). However, Strachan (1904a, 122) noted it, but read *spaigh* and *tigi* for *spreaigh* and *tige*. Plummer (1925, 96) subsequently based his reading on Strachan's: *spaigh asgol no tigi luan aoine do tsunnradh*, translating '... until Monday of the fast precisely'. I take *spreaigh* as the imperative of *spréidid*, *spréigid* 'disperses, scatters' (see *DIL* s.v.), followed by *nó co tige*, a modern verbal form used in Connacht dialect (< OIr. *co tí*, with the 3sg. pres. subj. of *do-icc*).

<sup>28</sup> Another example is found in King's Inns Library MS 15, fol. 72r, noted by Walsh (1947, 211).

<sup>29</sup> It is difficult to establish with any certainty who the characters in the text are. Perhaps Máel Suthain refers to Máel Suthain Ua Cerbaill, the ecclesiastic who died in Aghadoe in 1010 (see Charles-Edwards, 2004). He is described as a 'venerable senior of Ireland' in the Annals of Inisfallen (AI 1010). The annals record two other men of this name (AFM 1031.2, 1125.3). Corcrán may refer to Corcrán Cléirech, who died in Lismore in 1040. There is every likelihood that there may have been others bearing these names, but which are not recorded. The reference to 'the middle of Ireland' may suggest a person from Clonmacnoise.

<sup>30</sup> *M'óenurán im aireclán* has been published and translated widely in anthologies of Irish poetry. For instance, the copy in this MS was ed. by Strachan (1904b). Meyer (1905) edited and translated the copy in UCD MS A 9. Murphy (1956, 18–22) edited and translated the copies in N, NLI MS G 7, RIA MS B iv 2 and UCD MS A 9.

text has not been published, I provide a semi-diplomatic edition with an accompanying translation.<sup>31</sup>

*Fechtus ro gap Corcrán bŭachaill Māel Sut[h]ain int sen[f]forcha ina lāim co tuc in teistemin-si fair.*

*INmain lām̃h nodis-lŭaidend  
nar timgair tar sāl snēds[h]eng.  
Senōir fīal fer[r]<sup>32</sup> don-fōirend,  
grīan mōirseang medhōin Ēirend*

Once Corcrán, Máel Suthain's herdsman, took the old mallet in his hand and gave this testimony to him:

Dear is the hand, which plies it,  
that calls us across a swift and narrow sea.  
The noble elder who is best to assist us,  
the great and slender sun<sup>33</sup> of the middle of Ireland.

The quatrain is written in *rannaigeacht bec*. There are two internal rhymes in the first couplet. Each internal stressed word in *c*, apart from *ferr*, in *c* has a rhyming counterpart in *d* and *aicill* occurs between *c* and *d*. There is alliteration in each line. Note, however, that the penult alliterates with the preceding word rather than the final in the last line, as one would expect in the strict metre. The 3sg. pres. ind. ending in *-lŭaidend* in *a* and the 1pl. inf. pron. *-r* in *b*, for instance, suggests a date of composition in the late Middle Irish period.

Another perhaps closely related text in N is that which concerns *muintir Corcráin*. This occurs on p. 91 where it is preceded by *Ídail ó ro hairgit-sum* and is followed by *Robad mellach, a meic mo Dé* on the same page. It begins with a *littera notabilior*. The text is concerned with three members of Corcrán's community who are so thirsty that they require the milk of a herd of cows to quench their thirst. The text has a similar structure to *Fechtus ro gap Corcrán* and consists of an introductory sentence, followed by a quatrain, written in *dechnad cummaisc*.<sup>34</sup> A marginal *.r.* (*rann*) visually marks the presence of the quatrain.<sup>35</sup>

It is interesting to note that this text is interpolated into the copy of *M'óenurán im aireclán* in RIA MS Stowe B iv 2, fol. 139r, with a contrived *dúnad*, i.e. the repetition of *m'aonuran* at the end of the text. Given the text's brevity of the text, it is not surprising that it has been overlooked by scholarship. Murphy (1956), for example, does not mention this interpolation, nor does he print the text in his notes. The N copy has not been published either.

<sup>31</sup> I supply macrons over long vowels and letters in square brackets.

<sup>32</sup> An alternative is to take *fer* 'man' as an antecedent to the relative clause and *senóir fīal* as a *nominativus pendens*, 'A noble elder, one who assists us'.

<sup>33</sup> For the figurative use of *grīan* applied to persons, see *DIL* s.v. *grīan*.

<sup>34</sup> See Murphy (1961, 50–1 §12) for this metre and for further examples, see L. Breatnach (2015, 59 and 82).

<sup>35</sup> For other examples of *.r.* marking syllabic rather than non-syllabic verse, see Cleary (2020, 107–8); Kobel (2020, 190, 196–7).

I therefore provide a semi-diplomatic edition with translation (with significant readings from B supplied where necessary):

*Bātar trīar do muintir Corcrāin forarb follus mian lomma sech cach.*

.r.     *Na ibdais loimm cethri<sup>36</sup> lulgach*  
          *Conn Donn Dealbnach.*  
          *nocharb<sup>37</sup> furāil āirghi gamnach*  
          *d'[Fh]āilbe Mumnech.*

There were three of Corcrán's community on whom desire for drinking milk was more manifest than anyone else.

Conn and Donn Delbnach<sup>38</sup>  
used to drink milk of seven milch cows.  
A herd of strippers<sup>39</sup> was required  
for Fáilbe Muimnech.

(ii) *Simōn, Madian is Matha*, 2 qq.

A brief Middle Irish poem, written in *deibide*, listing the twelve apostles of Christ and bishops of Ireland, occupies the final five lines of p. 56. The text in N was edited without translation by Meyer (1912, 299). I supply a revised edition, followed by my translation:

.xii. *apstali*

1.     *Simōn, Madian is Matha,*  
          *Partalōn, Tomās togda,*  
          *Petur, Andrias, Pilip, Pōl,*  
          *Eōin ocus dā Iacōb.*
2.     *Dā Findīan, dā Colum cāid,*  
          *Cīarān, Caindech, Comgall caīn.*  
          *Dā Brēnainn, Rūadān co lí,*  
          *Ninne, Mo Bī mac Nat Fraīch.* (ed. Meyer 1910, 299)  
*Comāirem epscop na hĒrenn<sup>40</sup>*

## The twelve Apostles

<sup>36</sup> I supply here B's reading since N's .uii. leaves the line one syllable short. This appears to be a miscopying of the exemplar's .iiii.

<sup>37</sup> B reads *nocar*.

<sup>38</sup> This Conn Delbnach may be same as the father of Giolla an Coimdeadh, the vice-abbott of Clúain moccu Nóis, who died in 1128 (*Giolla an Coimdeadh mac Cuinn Dealbhnaigh tanaisi Abbadh Cluana M Nois quieit*, 'Gilla an Coimdedh son of Conn Delbnach, viceabbot of Clúain moccu Nóis, rested', CS 1128; ed. and trans. Mac Niocaill and Hennessy 2003, 279 and 280).

<sup>39</sup> A *gammach* 'stripper' is a cow that has not come into calf in a particular year and is still accompanied by the calf of the previous year (Kelly 1997, 40, fn. 99).

<sup>40</sup> Meyer (1910, 299) omitted this sentence in his edition.

1. Simon, Mathias and Matthew,  
Bartholomew, excellent Thomas,  
Peter, Andrew, Philip, Paul,  
John and the two James.
2. Two Finniains, two holy Colums,  
Ciarán, Cainnech, fair Comgall,  
Two Brénainn, brilliant Rúadán,  
Ninne, Mo Bí, son of Nat Fráech.

The same number of Ireland's bishops.

There are two other extant copies, namely the eleventh-century *Liber Hymnorum* (TCD MS 1441; E 4.2; hereafter T), fol. 31vb (ed. Bernard and Atkinson 1898, 159);<sup>41</sup> and another copy which is preserved in the commentary to *Féilire Óengusso* in UCD OFM MS A 7 (hereafter A), fol. 26r (ed. and trans. Stokes 1905, 168), a manuscript compiled by Ruaidhrí Ó Luinín for Cathal Mac Maghnusa Mhéig Uidhir who died in 1498. Although all three copies have been published, no critical discussion of their transmission has been undertaken.

All three copies are likely descended from a common source. However, N and T are perhaps more closely related as indicated by the following shared reading: *Eoin ocus da Iacob*,<sup>42</sup> p. 56, l. 29 (N); *Eoain is da Iacob*, fol. 31vb23 (T) versus *in da Iacob ocus Eoin*, fol. 26ra9 (A). The order in A results in the loss of the required end-rhyme. A also has an additional dual article to accommodate the syllable count. T's *eoain* is an intermediary spelling between OIr *Ioäin* and MÍr *Eóin*.<sup>43</sup>

T has the first quatrain only and omits the heading that is found in A and N, both of which have two quatrains. In A, the heading *IN da apstal .x. dano* 'The twelve apostles then' precedes the first quatrain and *.xii. apostoli Hibernie* 'Ireland's twelve apostles' precedes the second. N also begins with the heading *.xii. apstali* 'The twelve apostles' and the phrase *Comäirem epscop na hĒrend* 'The same number of Ireland's bishops' follows the second quatrain, which may have been added by N. Interestingly, the copies in T and N are used in a similar manuscript context, namely as filler-texts. This suggests that this poem perhaps circulated in manuscript traditions with the specific purpose of filling in blank spaces.

According to O'Leary (2013, 43), the replacement of Judas Iscariot with Matthias suggests this verse is based on an apocryphal rather than a canonical list. It is also interesting to note that the names in T and A amount to thirteen, including Paul.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, in 1b, T and

<sup>41</sup> According to Bieler (1948, 177), this part of the manuscript forms a supplement, 'apparently by a different hand and of somewhat later date'.

<sup>42</sup> For examples of trisyllabic forms of *lācób* in *Saltair na Rann*, see Knott (1952, 113; cf. Greene 1984, 193–4).

<sup>43</sup> On the development of Old Irish *Iohain* (Lat. *Iohannes*) to Middle Irish *Eóin* or the later hiatus form *Ióin*, see Greene (1984). Cf. *Iohain* in *Saltair na Rann*, e.g. SR 7500 (for an analysis of this spelling influenced by the Latin form, see Greene 1984, 193–4).

<sup>44</sup> Paul is traditionally referred to as an 'apostle'. Indeed, he refers to himself as an 'apostolus' in Galatians 1.1. However, he is not included in the number of the 'twelve apostles', but usually used in addition to them. His inclusion as an 'extra' apostle is because he was understood to have been an eye-witness of Christ in the vision he had on the road to Damascus which marked his conversion (Acts 9). I am grateful to Dr Daniel Watson for discussing this point with me.

A read *Tatha* ‘Thaddeus’, an alternative name for Jude,<sup>45</sup> which rhymes with *Matha* (cf. *Tatha: Matha*, SR 7592). However, it is striking that N substitutes *Tatha* with *togda* which breaks the rhyme between *ab*. The omission of *Tatha*, rather than Paul, who was not considered one of the twelve apostles, is difficult to account for. One reason may be that the scribe of N wanted to conform with the number of the apostles stated in the heading, and emended *Tatha* out, since this is a less well-known apostle.

According to Mulchrone (1937) and Best (1954), the poem on p. 56 was copied by Aodh. Yet the use of the distinctive single headed and vertical *cenn fo eite* is indicative of Dubhthach’s hand, not Aodh who mostly employs a three headed *cenn fo eite* (e.g., p. 2, l. 11, p. 3, l. 26). At first glance, the poem appears unanchored in its immediate manuscript context. It is preceded by an anecdote concerning the king Áed Oirdnide, beginning and ending on the same page as the poem, and it is followed by a group of closely related narrative texts. Indeed, the texts of pp. 55 and 56 represent an assortment of unrelated texts, discussed in further detail below, that fill the space, before the next thematic group of CDS group of texts were copied out. However, upon closer reading of the contents of the manuscript, we find that the first verse concerning the apostles is interrelated with the Middle Irish poem *Ídail ó ro hairgit-sum* on the spread of idol-worship found on p. 90–1 in quire *ii*, and in which twelve stanzas enumerate the twelve apostles.<sup>46</sup> It could be argued, therefore, that Dubhthach, aware of Aodh’s inclusion of the poem on idolatry in quire *ii*, deliberately selected this short poem on account of its similar content.

(iii) *Tomhus tighe mec inn Ōicc*, 3qq.

Another filler poem, perhaps chosen deliberately for its subject matter, is written on p. 67 and occupies the final four lines of the page. This Middle Irish poem, written in *rannaigeacht mór*, extols the measurements and contents of Mac ind Óc’s house.<sup>47</sup> Two other copies survive. Meyer (1912, 108) printed the copy from the early sixteenth-century British Library MS Harleian 5280, fol. 74a, and provided variants from RIA Stowe MS B iv 2 (hereafter B), fol. 136r, without translation. The copy in N has not appeared in print and, like most filler-texts, the poem has not received any critical attention. The semi-diplomatic text from N is printed here followed by my own tentative translation,<sup>48</sup> and is accompanied by a discussion of its textual transmission:

1. *Tomhus tighe mec inn Ōicc,*  
*fōt cen bine, buidnib sēt:*  
*eitir dā fraighid ro sīacht*

<sup>45</sup> Medieval Irish scribes understood Thaddeus (Ir. *Tatha*) and Jude as the same name, as evidenced by commentary to the *Félire Óengusso* in the *Leabhar Breac* (see Boyle 2021, 173; O’Leary 2013, 43).

<sup>46</sup> This poem is discussed in greater detail in [Elizabeth Boyle’s chapter](#). For a detailed discussion of this poem, including an edition and translation, see Boyle (2021, 162–176).

<sup>47</sup> *Tech Maic ind Ó(i)c* also refers to *Brú na Bóinne* rather than the character Óengus himself. For instance, *Tech mic ind Óc ós do dind* ‘The house of Mac ind Óc above thy stead’ (*Brug na Boinde* I, MD ii 10); *Tech Meic ind Óc ós do dind*, *Senchas na Relec* (LU 4125). On the spelling and variations of the name *Mac ind Ó(i)c*, see Cleary (2019, 251–2); (2018, 309–13).

<sup>48</sup> Word separation, macrons and punctuation are editorial. The ligature *æ* is expanded as *æe* where it represents a diphthong.

*mō secht troighid mō secht cēt.*<sup>49</sup>

2. *Cethri doruis ind cen brōn,  
bith oc ol tria bithu sir.  
turib, ciprib ūar is cāem.  
cāel fo thuighid d'eittib ēun.*
3. *Dabach d'argut*<sup>50</sup> *mōr a llucht,  
slōgh ōs a ucht cen nach socht,  
suidhe fichet co ba secht,  
core cert secht*<sup>51</sup> *fichit torc.*<sup>52</sup>
1. The dimension of Mac ind Óc's house,  
a place without fault — with large amounts of wealth.<sup>53</sup>  
Between two walls, it reached  
greater than seven feet [high], more than seven hundred [wide].
2. Four entrances into it, without sorrow,<sup>54</sup>  
perpetually drinking,  
with pillars, with *ciprib*,<sup>55</sup> when it is fitting,

<sup>49</sup> The scribe mixes arabic and roman numerals in this sentence, namely, *mo .7. troighid mo secht .c.* This interchanging of numeral types is a common occurrence in N and is found also, for instance, in the copy of *Tucait Baile Mongáin*: .uii. mbladhna, p. 67, l. 15–16; .7. tulcabai, p. 67, l. 26. Arabic numerals are generally set between points as is the practice with roman numerals for them to stand apart from other letters (Bischoff 1990, 176); but cf. da *Iacob*, p. 56, l. 29. This mixing practice is found in other contemporary Irish manuscripts, e.g. *as i aois an tiagarna* 15.ui.u., Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, MS NKS 261B, 4vb. I am grateful to Liam Breatnach for providing me with this example. It is interesting to note that Harl. and B use only roman numerals in their respective copies, which suggests the interchanging of numeral types is a particular feature of Aodh's scribal practice.

<sup>50</sup> *dabuch d[e]argiubair mor lucht*, Harl.; *dabach d'arccat mór a lucht*, B

<sup>51</sup> .7.xx.it, N; .uii.xx.it, B; .uiii.xx., Harl.

<sup>52</sup> The Harl. copy ends with the repetition of the first word at the end, i.e. *tomus*.

<sup>53</sup> The dative plural form of *buiden*, understood here as a dative of accompaniment, is used in a cheville and refers to an inanimate object, namely *sét*, 'treasures, possessions, wealth (*DIL* s.v. 2 *sét*, II)). It therefore means 'quantity, number', as defined by Meyer (1906, 287–8), a meaning which is not noted in *DIL* s.v. *buiden*.

<sup>54</sup> The sense here may be that no one is refused hospitality at these four entrances. According to *DIL* s.v. *brón*, this word can be used in the extended sense, having the opposite meaning of *fáilte*, citing the example in Heptad 13, where hospitality is provided to a freeman but not to his retinue (*7 ni tabuir fuba fair ce dobera bron doib treimit*, *CIH* v, 1889. 32–3). For the refusal of hospitality, see the discussion in Kelly (1988, 139–140).

<sup>55</sup> *Ciprib* is the only example cited in *DIL* s.v. ? *ciprib*. Perhaps we should read *c[u]iprib*, the dative plural of the rare word *cuifre* or *cuipe* (see *DIL* s.vv.) which is explained as *condircle* with the later sense of 'kindness, gentleness, compassion' in the glossaries (*DIL* s.v. *condircle*), e.g. *Cuifre .i. conircli nó comsuilge ut dicitur muna som dóa conaircli*, '*Cuifre* "kindness (?)", i.e. indulgence or gentleness, as is said: "unless through indulgence"', OM 264. The citation in OM is taken from *Bretha Crólige* §24 (ed. Binchy 1938, 20), where it is similarly glossed as *áilgine* 'gentleness'. It is also cited in a similar gloss in O'Dav. 427. In the latter instance, *cuipe* is explained by way of an etymological derivation of *cuipe* 'froth' which is glossed *in lind* 'the ale'. On the other hand, Dr Christina Cleary points out to me that we might expect a decorative element here, since the first verse gives the dimensions and the third gives the food. Cf. *DIL* s.v. *cibir*, described as a cover (of a vessel), with only one late example cited from *Beatha Colaim Chille*.

and wattling<sup>56</sup> under a thatch of birds' feathers.

3. A silver vat, great its contents,  
A host [standing] over its interior, without any gloom.  
Seating for seven times twenty people,  
a fitting cauldron which fits a hundred and forty boars.

All three copies descend from a common source, with Harl. possibly having innovated, as perhaps indicated by in 3a: Harl. *dabuch d[e]argiubair mor lucht* against N *dabach d'argut mor a lucht*; B *dabach d'arccat mór a lucht*. Harl.'s *dabuch d[e]argiubair* 'vessel of red-yew' is followed by the substantivised adjective *mór* (*DIL* s.v. *mór*, II 'a great amount, a great deal (many)') and the MIr. partitive genitive plural of *lucht* (OIr. *lucht(a)e*, see *GOI* §309; *SNG* III, §5.8), translated as 'a vat of red-yew with a great amount of contents'.<sup>57</sup> In contrast, B and N have 'a silver vat' with a following predicative construction and possessive pronoun. In 3d, the use of roman numerals has led to confusion: Harl. *.iiii.xx.* against *.7.xx.it*, N; *.uii.xx.it*, B. In this instance, B and N have misread the number of minims, with the scribe in N substituting roman numeral *.uii.* with arabic *.7.*

The poem occupies the bottom of the text-frame on the page in all three manuscript witnesses. This suggests the text was copied from an exemplar where it was probably also used to fill out the end of the text frame. In N, the poem is situated in between the sequence of *CDS* tales. Óengus and the Brug can be considered to be part of the narrative universe of the *CDS* texts, as he features in *Tochmarc Étaíne* (ed. Bergin and Best 1938). But this text is not in N. Therefore, the poem seems to disrupt the sequence of *CDS* texts since it does not appear to be thematically connected with its immediate textual surrounding. It is interesting to note, however, that the poem is preceded by the *CDS* text *Scél asa mberar combad hé Find mac Cumail Mongán oculus aní dia fil aidid Fothaid Airtig a scél só síis* (ed. White 2006, 74, §15) which concludes by stating that Mongán mac Fíachnai is Finn mac Cumail. This may have influenced the inclusion of this poem in this position to connect the *CDS* text with the small number of other Fenian tales in the manuscript, for instance, *Úath Beinne Étaíre*, placed earlier in the same quire, where Óengus of the Brug comes to save Díarmait, his foster-son, and Gráinne from Finn mac Cumail (ed. and trans. Ní Shéaghda 1967, 136 and 137). It might be argued therefore that this small poem represents a filler-text used as a reading aid to recall a text or theme that is found in a text earlier in the manuscript.

#### (iv) *Coig Mumain a Mumhain móir*

Following *Trecheng Breth Féne*, which concludes at the top of page 101, Dubhthach pens a colophon seeking a blessing upon Aodh, noting that he is writing in 1575 at *Baile Thibaird ar Blá Maige*, in the company of Seán Ó Maoil Chonaire. Dubhthach states that he chose to copy the Triads on account of its reliable knowledge (*derpiris*). Following this colophon, Aodh takes up the pen, using a lighter, brown ink, and he thanks Dubhthach (*gu roiuh maith agat*). Leaving

<sup>56</sup> *Cáel* is a substantivised adjective here meaning 'wattling' (see *DIL* s.v. *cáel* II (a)); on the use of hazel-rods (*cáel*) in the construction of walls, see Kelly (1997, 382).

<sup>57</sup> For examples of vats made of yew or silver, see *eDIL* s.vv. *dabach*; *ibar*.



the space of one line, Aodh copies the topographical Middle Irish poem on the five divisions of Munster on the lower half of page 101.<sup>58</sup> This poem has seven verses, written in *rannaigeacht mór* (also known as *rannaigeacht díaltach*). It is perhaps noteworthy that two of the seven verses concern Thomond:

2. *Tūadmuma nach cumang cath*  
*Ó Lēim C[h]onculainn na cloch*  
*Co Sligid Dāla [recte Dala]<sup>59</sup> na n-ech –*  
*Do-rāla [recte -rala] for a leth loch.*
3. *Lethat Tūadmuman a tūaid*  
*Sloinnfet trē dūan-molad dōib:*  
*Ó hAichtgi co hĒblinn āin*  
*Is ē a dāil fri hĒrinn hōig.* (ed. Lloyd 1905, 50)

‘Thomond [a territory] not scanty in battalions [extends] from Cuchulinn’s stony Leap to Slighe Dāla of the steeds – there chances to be at its side a lake.

The breadth of Thomond from the north I shall relate to them in a laudatory poem: from Sliabh Aichtghi to noble Sliabh Eibhlinne, such is the distribution of it as compared with the whole of Ireland’ (trans. Lloyd 1905, 51).

Aodh possibly chose this poem for its intrinsic interest, and indeed he gives a nod to Munster elsewhere in the manuscript. In a colophon on p. 77, Aodh laments the departure of James Fitzmaurice and his family to Rome in 1575, who were members of the sixteenth-century ruling Geraldine dynasty in Munster. The placement of the poem here might have been influenced by Dubhthach’s mention of *Baile Thibaird ar Blá Maige*, although there is disagreement amongst scholars where this is located.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, it is more likely that Aodh included this poem as an acknowledgement of the branch of the learned Uí Mhaoil Chonaire based in the Thomond area in Munster in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>61</sup>

### **Anthologised and miscellaneous filler-texts**

As mentioned previously, there is an assortment of three brief poems and two prose texts on p. 55; the poems are (1) *At-berim frib lith saine* (4 qq.), p. 55.5–10, which enumerates the proper food to be eaten on Beltaine, Lughnasad, Samain and Imbolc; (2) *Frítha cach da comámus* (2 qq.), p. 55.11–13, which draws parallels between the people of the provinces of Ireland and different nationalities; (3) *Atd-ius dúib a n-aicned fír* (2 qq.), p. 55.14–18, which concerns tears of repentance. Copies of these poems are found in the following manuscripts:

<sup>58</sup> Ed. and trans. Lloyd (1905), 49–54.

<sup>59</sup> The short vowel in *Dala* is confirmed by the rhyme with *do-rala* (3sg. perf. of *do-cuirethar*), which historically has a short *a*.

<sup>60</sup> On the location of *Baile Thibaird ar Blá Maige*, see Murray’s chapter.

<sup>61</sup> For further discussion of the Uí Mhaoil Chonaire in the Thomond area of Munster, see Ó Dálaigh (2008–9).

1) *At-berim frib lith saine*: British Library, Harleian 5280, early sixteenth century, fol. 35b24–35; Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 512, fifteenth/ sixteenth century, fol. 98vb24. The Harl. copy is edited, with variants from Rawl. B 512, and translated in Meyer (1894, 48–9). N remains unpublished.

2) *Frítha cach da comámus*: Book of Uí Mhaine (RIA MS D ii 1), late fourteenth century, fol. 83vb54; Oxford, Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 610, fifteenth century, fol. 10rb; NLI MS G 1, late sixteenth century, fol. 47r; British Library, Harleian, early sixteenth century, fol. 35b36–39. British Library MS Egerton 1782, early sixteenth century, fol. 56b. Edited without translation in Meyer (1896, 112) from Egerton only.

3) *At-d-íus dúib a n-aicned fír*: British Library Harleian 5280, fol. 35b40–44. Edited without translation in Meyer (1910, 299) from N only.

Several of the copies of these poems occupy the otherwise empty space of a column or page in the respective manuscripts. Thus, Rawlinson B 512's copy of *At-berim frib lith saine* occupies the final nine lines on fol. 98vb. The end of the tale concerning Tuán mac Cairill is found in column a of the folio. This is followed by a poem on Tuán mac Cairill (7 qq.), which is followed by an independent quatrain beginning *Dia ro rannta cóicid Éreenn*, and finally, the poem beginning *At-berim frib lith ngaili*. A new text concerning the correspondence between Alexander and Dindimus begins at the top of fol. 99r and continues to fol. 100vb22. In the Book of Uí Mhaine, *Frítha cach da comámus* occupies the final four lines of the column, written in darker ink but added by the same hand as that of the rest of the folio (Mulchrone 1943, 3342). Rather than beginning the metrical *dindsenchas* at the bottom of the folio, the scribe begins it over at the top of the next folio and uses a filler-text to fill in the empty space at the end of the column. The copy in Laud Miscellany 610 also serves as a filler-text. It is preceded by another short filler note about Fiacc of Sléibte and the story of the Exaltation of the Cross begins over on fol. 10va1. NLI MS G 1, on the other hand, is so small, measuring but 6 by 5 centimetres, that the poem is the *only* text on the page.

It is notable also that copies of these three poems are found in the same textual arrangement in both Harl. 5280 and in N. In Harl., they occupy the remaining blank space in the column and are written in ink of deteriorating quality. The copies in N and Harl. derive from a shared exemplar in which its compiler likely brought together or anthologised these filler poems.<sup>62</sup>

Following these poems, and filling out the rest of p. 55, we find two brief prose texts *Tochmarc Baise* and *Táin Bó Rúanaid*. A copy of each is found in TCD MS H 3.18 (1337), vol. 4, p. 60, where they are separated by *Bruiden Senbicc Ébric*. Copies of *Tochmarc Baise* and *Táin Bó Rúanaid* are also found in Harl. 5280, fol. 48b, in the same textual arrangement as N. Meyer (1912, 104) published the TCD copy of *Tochmarc Baise*, with variants from the Harleian copy, without translation. N remains unedited and the text has remained overlooked by scholarship.<sup>63</sup> Meyer printed the TCD copy of *Táin Bó Rúanaid*, with variants from the

<sup>62</sup> A critical examination of these three poems, and their textual transmission, remains a *desideratum*. That N did not copy the poems directly from Harl. is evident from several readings. For instance, in the poem *At-berim frib lith saine*, N reads *bith* (p. 55, l. 9) in q. 4a whereas Harl. omits this due to haplography which leaves the line one syllable short (see Meyer 1894, 49).

<sup>63</sup> I am currently preparing a critical edition and translation of this text.

Harleian copy, without translation. The N copy has not appeared in print. More recently, Hyland (1999, 119) published a translation based on Meyer's edition.

Consisting of brief prose introductions followed by *rosc* passages, these texts are not without their difficulties, containing obscure vocabulary and pseudo-archaic spellings.<sup>64</sup> In *Tochmarc Baise*, the introduction lays out the circumstance of the courting of Baís, the female wizard, by Fachtnae Fáthach, followed by a dialogue which is in the form of a self-contained non-rhyming alliterative *rosc*. *Táin Bó Rúanaid* concerns the plundering expedition of Rúanaid on a cattle-raid in which he utters a non-rhyming alliterative *rosc*.

It is possible that Dubhthach included both texts here because they fit into the larger construct of narratives in the codex as a whole. For instance, in *Tochmarc Emire*, Emer's response is in the form of *rosc* as is the case in *Tochmarc Baise*. Apart from the reference to the *Táin Bó Cúailgne* in *Verba Scáthaige* (ed. Henry 1990, 200), *Táin Bó Rúanaid* is the only other text in the manuscript that has a *táin* in its title. The inclusion of *Tochmarc Baise* and *Táin Bó Rúanaid* is not so unusual either when we consider the significant number of texts in this quire that contains poetry of a non-rhyming variety such as *Aigidecht Aithirni* and *Aided Chonchobuir*.

## Conclusion

To conclude, in this paper I examined the physical features, order and textual arrangement of N. Thus, I established the original structure and running order of the manuscript's quires and leaves. A digital reconstruction of N, based on my findings, is now available to view on [www.isos.dias.ie](http://www.isos.dias.ie), allowing the modern reader to study the manuscript in its intended original order. Furthermore, the reconstruction demonstrates that N is not a 'replica', as was previously assumed.<sup>65</sup> N is in fact an independently produced manuscript. There is a discernible structure in the layout and arrangement of its texts, with Aodh and Dubhthach, together with Torna, working collaboratively in choosing and laying out the manuscript's contents in a systematic and careful way. Due consideration was also given to the construction of the physical book, with its combined strata of vellum and paper.

The reconstruction of N shows that it is a rare surviving example of a pre-1600 Irish composite vellum and paper manuscript, where the outer and inner vellum bifolia serve distinct purposes; the outer protects the paper leaves, the inner provides a better base for holding the stitching. Another Irish example that I am aware of is a sixteenth-century legal manuscript bound into the composite volume TCD MS H 3. 18 (1337), vol. 12, pp. 329–352. This is a single quire comprised of one original outer vellum bifolium (pp. 329/330 and pp. 351/3) within which there are eight leaves of paper whip-stitched together.<sup>66</sup> Such practice may reflect a transitional period when people were still unaccustomed to paper. It might also suggest that such methods of manuscript production reflect the economy of the paper market and the rising scarcity of vellum.<sup>67</sup> Of course such a method of manuscript production was already in practice

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<sup>64</sup> On the 'eccentric spellings' used in this manuscript, see Micheál Hoyne's chapter in this volume.

<sup>65</sup> See Mulchrone (1937, 2772).

<sup>66</sup> See also Nic Dhonnchadha's (2019) reconstruction of a sixteenth-century composite vellum and paper medical manuscript.

<sup>67</sup> For the cost of paper in Ireland, see Karen Ralph's chapter in this volume.

in England, albeit a hundred or more years earlier. An example of this is found in British Library, MS Lansdowne 406, dated to the early fifteenth century.<sup>68</sup>

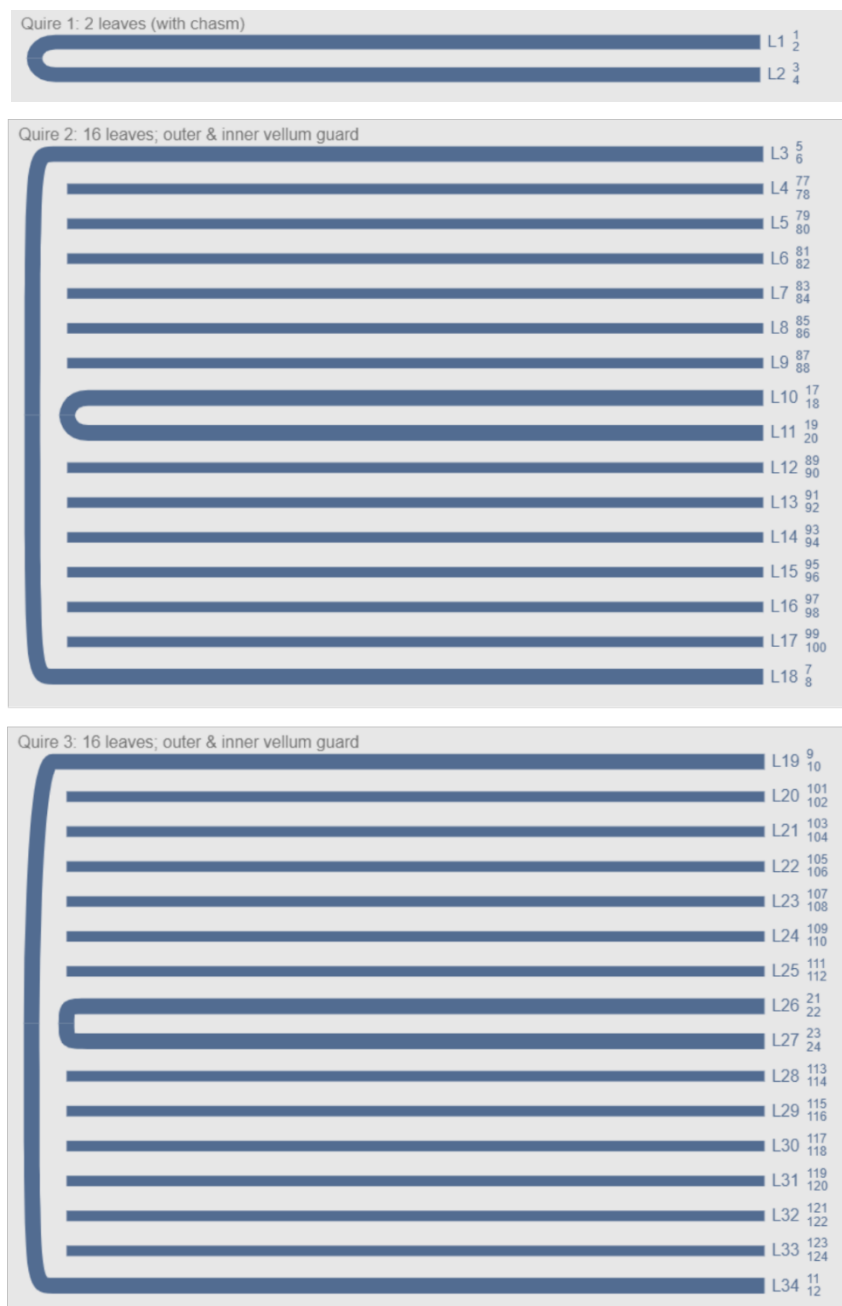
Lastly, an examination of the otherwise seemingly miscellaneous and insignificant filler-texts in N reveals, apart from their linguistic and literary merits, not only an aesthetic concern with filling blank spaces but that such texts were selected for their thematic relevance, and may have possibly functioned as reading aids to interlink separate texts across the book. Moreover, such material also reveals that there was a process by which filler-texts were anthologised in the manuscript tradition, with scribes drawing on the vibrant heritage of learning preserved in manuscripts of the fifteenth and sixteenth century.

Therefore, rather than deeming filler-texts as insignificant or ‘trifling’, as Best did, a better approach going forward is to examine the compiler’s motivation for their inclusion as influenced by the larger codicological structures in which they appear. Moreover, by investigating such ‘trifling’ texts, such as those in N, scholars can productively restore to critical view texts that might otherwise be ignored, and ultimately end up lost.

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<sup>68</sup> This manuscript contains sermons attributed to Philip Repyngdon, an Austin canon, and is discussed by Sharpe (2014, 256—7).

## Appendix I: Collation diagrams<sup>69</sup>



<sup>69</sup> The following collation diagrams were created using <https://www.viscodex.library.utoronto.ca> (last accessed on 11 of June 2021). The thick lines represent vellum leaves and the thinner paper. The paper leaves are left unconjugated as it is difficult to establish which were originally conjoined or singletons. However, see Ó Macháin's (2019) examination of N's water marks and his reconstruction on that basis.

Quire 4: 16 leaves; outer vellum guard

L35	25 26
L36	125 126
L37	127 128
L38	29 30
L39	31 32
L40	33 34
L41	35 36
L42	37 38
L43	39 40
L44	41 42
L45	43 44
L46	45 46
L47	47 48
L48	49 50
L49	51 52
L50	27 28

Quire 5: 14 leaves; outer vellum guard

L51	13 14
L52	53 54
L53	55 56
L54	57 58
L55	59 60
L56	61 62
L57	63 64
L58	65 66
L59	67 68
L60	69 70
L61	71 72
L62	73 74
L63	75 76
L64	15 16

Quire 6: 15 paper leaves (final leaves mere fragments); no outer vellum guard

L65	129 130
L66	131 132
L67	133 134
L68	135 136
L69	137 138
L70	139 140
L71	141 142
L72	143 144
L73	145 146
L74	147 148
L75	149 150
L76	153 154
L77	157 158
L78	155 156
L79	151 152

## Appendix 2: Running order of texts in the original order

### *i*<sup>2</sup> Outer vellum bifolium, chasm

1.1–4.34	[TECOSCA CORMAIC]
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### *ii*<sup>16</sup> Outer and inner vellum bifolium, conjoined, with twelve paper leaves.

5.1–5.22	[TECOSCA CORMAIC cont.]
5.23–6.18	[BRIATHRA FLAINN FHÍNA MAIC OSSU]
6.19–6.37; 77.1–77.19	[SENBRÍATHRA FÍTHAIL]
78.1–78.17	<i>Laudate Dominum de celis.</i> 5qq.
78.18–79.3	<i>Riagail Corbmaic Maic Cuilendain.</i> 14 qq.
79.4–82.8	<i>Riaguil Ailbe.</i> 70qq.
82.9–88.3	‘Fothaid na Canoine cecinit hanc regulam’, beg. <i>Ess he as cnam na flatha.</i> 109qq.
88.4–34; 17.1–17.16	<i>Riaguil in Choimded.</i> 32qq.
17.17–18.26	‘Uga Corbmaic meic Cuilendain’, beg. <i>In roghso, a Rig na run.</i> 29qq.
18.27–18.33	<i>Feidlimidh espoc ocus ri Muman</i> + 4qq.
18.34–19.19	‘Colum Cille cecinit’, beg. <i>A Muire min maithingen.</i> 16qq.
19.20–20.3	<i>Dia lim fí gach snim.</i> 18qq.
20.4–20.15	<i>Deus meus adiu[u]a me.</i> 7qq.
20.16–20.34	<i>M’oenaran im aireglan.</i> 14qq.
20.35–20.39	<i>Fechtus ro gap Corcran</i> + 1q.
89.1–90.8	‘Anmcairdess Manchai[n L]eith so’, beg. <i>Nech atcobra dul ar nemh,</i> 29qq.
90.9–91.13	<i>Idhal o ro hairgid-sum.</i> 24qq.
91.14–91.16	<i>Batar triar do muintir Corcrain</i> + 1q.
91.17–91.29	‘Colum Cille cecinit’, beg. <i>Robudh meallach, a Meic mo Dé.</i> 10qq.
91.29–92.7	‘Colum Cille cecinit’, beg. <i>Cainnech mo comarci.</i> 7qq.
92.8–92.36	<i>Aittech fíut a ndechmad.</i> 11qq.
93.1–93.4	‘Cománus cecinit’, beg. <i>Clanda aille Indreachtaigh.</i> 3qq.
93.5–93.12	‘Tarbach interrogauit do Comanus’, beg. <i>Cia airt in fassaig-si.</i> 6qq.
93.13–93.19	<i>Ticcfaid aimser aimser cen firinne.</i>
93.20–94.10	‘Beg Mac Dé ro chan so sis’, beg. <i>Is mairc tairceba aireus sni a lluc tíre na nGoidel.</i>
94.11–94.31	‘Fursa craibdech praefetauit’, beg. <i>Maircc tairgeba aires sni a mbiat saerbath gan caingnima.</i>
94.32–95.8	‘Comad croiche Crist ann so sis’, beg. <i>Creidmi Crist is raeracht.</i> 7qq.
95.9–95.24	‘Comad Manchín Leith ann so’, beg. <i>Duthracar, a Maic De Bí.</i> 11qq.
95.25–96.8	<i>Rob tu mo boile.</i> 16qq.
96.9–97.31	<i>Tainic teirt denam tarba.</i> 35qq.
98.1–100.36; 7a1–8b41	[TRECHENG BRETH FÉNE]

### *iii*<sup>16</sup> Outer and inner vellum bifolium, conjoined, with twelve paper leaves.

9a1–10b36; 101.1–12	[TRECHENG BRETH FÉNE cont.]
101.17–101.33	<i>Coig Mumain a Mumhain móir.</i> 7qq.
102	Blank
103.1–108.8	[EPISTIL ÍSU].
108.9–111.26	[CÁIN DOMNAIG].
112.1–112.28	<i>Nim geiph format fí fer fíom.</i> 14qq.
21.1–24.34; 113.1–124.34; 11.1–12.35	[TOCHMARC EMIRE]

iv<sup>16</sup> Outer vellum bifolium, conjoined, with fourteen paper leaves.

25.1–26.35; 125.1–128.27	[TOCHMARC EMIRE cont.]
29.1–43.33	[AIREC MENMAN URAIRD MEIC COISSE]
44.1–48.31	[APGITIR CHRÁBAID]
49.1–52.19	AUDAGHT MORINN
27	Rule of the Golden Number and Diagram
28	Blank

v<sup>14</sup> Outer vellum bifolium, conjoined, with twelve paper leaves.

13.1–14.5	[ÚATH BEINNE ÉTAIR]
14.6–14.[20]	[IMMATHCHOR NAILELTA 7 AIRT]
53.1–54.6	[The quarrel between Finn and Oisín]
54.7–55.4	[A judgement concerning stolen and injured horses]
55.5–55.10	<i>Atberim rib lith saine</i> . 4qq.
55.11–55.13	<i>Frithae cec da comamus</i> . 2qq.
55.14–55.18	'Fothaid dixit hoc', beg. <i>Atdius daib a n-aicned fir</i> . 2qq.
55.18–55.23	TOCHMARC BAISE
55.23–55.30	[TÁIN BÓ RÚANAID]
56.1–56.26	[Anecdote concerning Áed Ordnide]
56.27–56.31	'xii. apstali', beg. <i>Simon Madian is Matha</i> . 2qq.
57.1–61.31	[IMMRAM BRAIN]
62.1–63.23	[COMPERT CON CULAINN]
63.24–64.23	COIMPERT MOGGAIN
64.24–66.17	SCEL ASA MBERAR CUMAD HE MOGGAN FINN MAC CUMAILD
66.18–67.12	[SCÉL MONGÁIN]
67.13–67.31	TUCAIT BAILE MONGAIN
67.32–67.35	<i>Tomhus tighe Mec inn Óicc</i> . 3qq.
68.1–68.19	UERBA SCÁTHAIGE
68.20–70.5	[Dindsenchas Emain Macha]
70.6–70.26	FORFESS uhFER uhFaLGAE
70.27–72.18	ECHTRA ConLE
72.19–72.31	TOGAIL BRUIDNE DA DERG
73.1–74.6	BAILI CHUIND CETCATAIGH
74.7–76.29	PRULL
15.1–16.3	[AÍGIDECHT AITHIRNI]
16.4–16.28	[AIDED CHONCHOBUIR]

vi<sup>14</sup> Paper leaves only; with final leaves severely damaged.

129.1–130.22	BAILE BINNBERLACH MAC BUAIN
131.1–134.22	DERGRUATHAR RIGH NA RANN OCUS NA RELTHANN
135.1–141.26	TUICC AR TUS OCUS LAPAIR IAR SIN
142.1–142.27	<i>A mic Luigdec, tolaibh snas</i> . 14 qq.
143–50; 153–54; 159–60	Calendar of Irish Saints
151–52, 155–156	Rule of the Golden number
157, 158	Fragments of an index



## Abbreviations

<i>CIH</i>	D.A. Binchy (ed.), <i>Corpus iuris Hibernici</i> (6 vols, Dublin, 1978).
<i>CS</i>	W.M. Hennessy, (ed. and trans.), <i>Chronicum Scotorum</i> , RS 46 (London, 1866; repr. Wiesbaden, 1964).
<i>MD</i>	Edward Gwynn, <i>The Metrical Dindshenchas</i> . Todd Lecture Series 8–12 (Dublin, 1903–35).
<i>OM</i>	Pádraic Moran, ed. <i>De Origine Scoticae Linguae (O'Mulconry's Glossary): An Early Irish Linguistic Tract, with a Related Glossary</i> , Irsan (Brepols, 2019).

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