

Colin A. Ireland, Editor and translator. [Old Irish Wisdom Attributed to Aldfrith of Northumbria: An Edition of Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu](#) Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999, xiii, 244 pages (Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies Volume 205). USD 28, UKP 24. ISBN 0-86698-247-7

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Aldfrith son of Oswiu, king of Northumbria from ca. 685-705, is a radiant example of the cultural ties that existed between the Anglo-Saxon world and Ireland in the early middle ages. On his mother's side he descended from the Cenél nÉogain branch of the northern Uí Néill, his father Oswiu and all his uncles had been raised among the Irish. He himself was a pupil of Adomnán at Ioua. His personal links to Ireland and Irish learning were so close that Irish sources preserve an Irish name for him: *Flann Fína mac Ossu*. His reputation as a wise and learned man was so high that he was even attributed with the composition of various literary works in the Old Irish language.

In the present book Dr. Colin Ireland has undertaken the task of editing the most important Old Irish text ascribed to Aldfrith, the *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu*, the 'Sayings of Flann Fína son of Ossu.' These are a collection of gnomic sayings, consisting of three-word maxims (288 in Ireland's edition; actually the numbers vary somewhat from MS to MS). *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* belongs to the genre of Old Irish wisdom texts like the *Triads of Ireland*, *Tecosca Cormaic* ('The Teachings of Cormac') and *Audacht Moraind* ('Morand's Testament'), among which it is usually to be found in the MSS. So far the text has been edited twice, both times without translation, first by Kuno Meyer (*Bríathra Flainn Fína maic Ossu*, in: *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, vol. 3, Halle, Dublin 1910), then by Rudolf Thurneysen under the title *Senbríathra Fíthail* in *Zu irischen Handschriften und Litteraturdenkmälern*, Berlin 1912-13. Selections of the maxims with Modern Irish translations are available online on Dennis King's website *Gaois na Sean-Ghaeilge* (<http://members.home.net/donnchal/index.html>).

The book opens with an introduction (1-59), where the general background of wisdom texts, affinities regarding style, contents and attitude are discussed in great length (1-20). An important section is devoted to the MSS (20-34). For the present edition Ireland has examined thirty-three MSS from the 12th to the 19th centuries which he divides into four groups. His descriptions of the MSS are not only important for the edition at hand, but they are also useful to students of the Old Irish *Triads*. As long as no modern edition of these is available (though it has been promised by Fergus Kelly in his *Guide to Early Irish Law*, Dublin 1988, 284) the description of MSS of *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* is also a helpful supplement to Kuno Meyer's list of *Triads*-MSS (Kuno Meyer, *The Triads of Ireland*, Dublin 1906, v-vii).

Another large section deals with questions of dating, title, ascriptions and the audience of the composition. Because of the lack of historically sound external evidence, arguments for the dating of the text have to be found within its language. The language of the text turns out to agree to the standards of Classical Old Irish, with nothing suggesting a date later than the mid-ninth century, but also no linguistic details which confirm a late seventh-century date.

Such a date, however, would be necessary to ascribe the composition to king Aldfrith personally. Dr. Ireland concludes that 'the ascription of these Old Irish maxims [in two MS families] to Flann Fína mac Ossu is a manifestation of the esteem accorded to this king of Anglo-Saxon Northumbria by subsequent Irish learned circles' (56). In the MS family labelled L our text bears the title *Senbríathra Fíthail* 'Old Sayings of Fíthal', the legendary poet and judge Fíthal being awarded with the merit of its composition.

After a short statement about the method of editing (56-59) the main text of *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* follows. The critical edition of the maxims itself takes up only 33 of the more than 250 pages of the book (61-93), a fact which is evidence of the meticulous work Dr. Ireland has done as a whole. The three-word maxims are organised in seven paragraphs, ordered according to their headword. This structural principle follows the usage in the MSS. For example §1 has all sayings starting with the verb *ad-cota* 'attains, results etc.', §1.3 for instance going *Ad-cota cíall cáinchruth* 'Good sense results in fair form', and §1.48 *Ad-cota léigend libru* 'Learning gives rise to books.' The maxims are not divided equally among the paragraphs: the longest paragraph, §6, consists of 102 sayings, the shortest, §2, of only seven. A detailed apparatus is found at the bottom of each page.

The very detailed notes to the individual maxims take up pages 95-161. Dr. Ireland discusses questions of the text constitution and grammatical problems in due depth. As regards the contents, he frequently points out parallels within the text itself and in other wisdom texts, but he limits himself to the Irish tradition. It would have been interesting if Ireland had sometimes also drawn the reader's attention to the wider European tradition. For example §1.3 mentioned above (*Ad-cota cíall cáinchruth* 'Good sense results in fair form') echoes the sentiment of Latin *mens sana in corpore sano* 'A sound mind in a sound body' very closely.

Five appendices are added to the main text. Appendix 1 ('§8 *Cía fégam ránac*') and 2 ('§9 *Secht co-m-ar-thai déc*') are editions of two short gnomic texts, appendices 3-5 are dedicated to diplomatic editions and collations of the most important MSS of *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu*.

A long bibliography and a glossarial index conclude the book. Some words, so far not taken into account by the *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (DIL), have been added to the Old Irish lexicon by Ireland's edition. It might have been useful to the reader if these words had been specifically noted. A few examples from the letters G, I and L shall suffice. The following words from Ireland's glossarial index are not found in DIL:

*gnáthgair* f. 'lingering about, hanging around' §4.10 (a variant reading for the slightly better attested *gnáthaige* 'frequency, wont'; however given the weak attestation in only one MS, the question should be asked if *gnáthgair* is but a misspelling for *gnáthaige*).

*immattrab* n.? 'living hemmed in; being surrounded' §6.34 (a non-trivial compound of *imm-* and *attrab* 'act of taking possession; dwelling').

*lánetch* n. 'a complete refusal, a full rejection' §6.83 (though a trivial compound of *lán* 'full' and *etch* 'refusal', it could well have been included in DIL's long list of

*lán*-compounds).

In some cases entries to existing words in DIL can be modified, provided Ireland's suggestions are correct:

*greifel* 'staggers (a horse ailment)' in DIL, but more general 'disorder, confusion, chaos' according to Ireland and other authorities he cites in the note to §6.79.

For the very weakly attested *irach* 'bountiful' §2.6 might (!) provide another instance.

*ledb* 'strip of skin or leather; weal' in DIL; Ireland proposes the meaning 'remnant' for §6.2.

*líamain*: Ireland treats *líamna* in §1.8, found in a single MS, as the i-stem acc. (sg. or pl.?) of *líamain* 'reproach, slander'. DIL only quotes forms which point to a a-stem inflection of the verbal noun of *liid* 'to charge, to accuse'. Again the meagre attestation makes one hesitant about accepting the proposal.

*lugae*: DIL only quotes examples of the phrase *lugae dige* 'lack of drink, thirst'. Ireland proposes for §6.2 an instance of *lugae* without a qualifying genitive in a more general meaning 'yearning; want, deficiency'.

In conclusion it can be said that this book, the result of many years of work by Colin Ireland, proves to be a very felicitous and highly recommendable edition of a text belonging to a hitherto somewhat neglected corner of the Old Irish literary tradition.

**Collins, Roger. *Early medieval Europe: 300-1000*. 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999). Pp. xxv, 533. 0-312-21885-0 clothbound, 0-312-21886-9 paperback.**

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This second edition of Collins' book has an entirely new chapter on Spain after the Arab conquest, as well as a significantly expanded section on the Ottonian Empire. First edition mistakes, such as the deletion of references to the entirely spurious *Life of Rimbart* by Anskar, have been corrected. Recent scholarship in all of the chapters has been included, where appropriate.

Collins does a wonderful job of providing comments on the primary research sources for each of the areas that he discusses, while still supplying expert opinion and comment on scholarship in areas that are deficit in primary sources yet rich in theory and discussion. A very nice chart of the chronology of main events from 238 A.D. 1000 A.D. prefaces the introduction, while extensive notes and a bibliography of primary and secondary sources, as well as each chapter, can be found at the end. Collins takes the reader through the end stages of the Roman empire and emperors, through the division of the Roman empire into Eastern