



McQuaid, Andrew (2017) *Advice for kings: an investigation into a subdivision of early Irish wisdom literature*. PhD thesis.

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/8519/>

Copyright and moral rights for this work are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This work cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Enlighten:Theses  
<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/>  
theses@gla.ac.uk

**Advice for Kings:  
An Investigation into a Subdivision of Early  
Irish Wisdom Literature**

**Andrew McQuaid**  
MA, MLitt

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

Celtic and Gaelic  
College of Humanities  
School of Arts  
University of Glasgow

October 2017

## Abstract

This thesis examines a corpus of vernacular wisdom literature from early Ireland that is often referred to as *tecosca rí* 'instructions for kings', or *specula principum* 'mirrors for princes'. It reappraises some of the major theories and perceptions relating to this corpus in an effort to bring scholarly understanding up to date. The thesis begins by examining how and why modern scholars have read this corpus as wisdom literature for kings. It then looks at the development of modern theories of early Irish kingship and kingship ideology in relation to changing perceptions of vernacular literature. Special attention is paid to the concept of sacred kingship, with which this corpus has been associated. Finally, this thesis examines the evidence of the *tecosca* against some of the major themes and debates raised in relation to the perception that these texts constitute advice for kings.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	4
Author's Declaration	6
Abbreviations	7
Introduction	9
Chapter 1: Defining the <i>Tecosca</i>	13
Chapter 2: Introducing the <i>Tecosca</i>	38
Introduction	38
<i>Audacht Morainn</i>	39
<i>Tecosca Cormaic</i>	52
<i>Bríathartheosc Con Culainn</i>	60
<i>Tecosc Cúscaid</i>	66
<i>Cert cech rí g co réil</i>	71
<i>Diambad messe bad rí réil</i>	80
Conclusion	85
Chapter 3: Early Irish Literature and Kingship	87
Chapter 4: Analysing the <i>Tecosca</i>	128
<i>Rí and Flaith</i>	128
<i>Fír Flathemon</i>	143
The Verbal Pronouncement of Truth and Falsehood	159
<i>Geis</i>	167
The Sovereignty Goddess	181
Conclusion	189
Bibliography	194

## Acknowledgements

Finishing this thesis, I found myself wondering why I undertook this task in the first place. At different times during the last few years, I would have given very different answers to this question. In the beginning, filled with optimism, I might have said that knowledge is its own reward. I almost certainly would have mentioned some vague ideal about contributing to something greater than myself, or have said something fairly nationalistic. Sometime in the middle, when the full weight of a self-funded PhD was bearing down on me, I would have repented what I then believed to be a vain and misguided attempt to prove myself. Towards the end, finally, I began to reconcile this project as a continuation of a life-long fascination that began decades ago with a wee boy whose ma used to read him stories of knights and castles and faeries and trolls. Of course, there are elements of truth and self-deception to each of these answers, but I have come to care much less about why and much more about how. Most importantly, it has become clear to me that this work could never have been completed without the friendship, advice, and support of a great many people.

Amongst those who have helped me along the way, two of the most important are my supervisors, Thomas Clancy and Geraldine Parsons. If you are reading this thesis, you are no doubt aware of the extent of their knowledge and the keenness of their insight as scholars. But only those lucky enough to have met either Thomas or Geraldine will know how kind, generous, caring, and patient they are as human beings. Without them this would have been impossible. Even so, wisdom, friendship, and moral support were never lacking during my time at the University of Glasgow. Special thanks must go to Ralph O'Connor, Katherine Forsyth, Sheila Kidd, Dauvit Broun, Bronagh Ní Chonail, and Carol Smith, all of whom have offered their help and advice through the many trials of academic life. Other friends and familiar faces about the department must also be thanked for their warmth and friendliness on a daily basis: Michel Byrne, Sim Innes, Fiona Dunn, Robbie Ó Maolalaigh, Joy Dunlop, Stephen Barrett, Aonghas Maccoinnich, Mark McConville, Gillebride MacMillan, and many others. Every interaction, no matter how casual, has contributed in some way towards the completion of this thesis. Among those deserving thanks, however, my fellow-travellers and PhD-sufferers form a very special group indeed. These are the people with whom I have shared laughs and cries, victory and defeat, and

tea and biscuits over some of the most important years of my life: Martina Maher, Joan Gallagher, Gordon MacKenzie, Anne Paton, Elín Eyjólfsdóttir, Emma Anderson, Max Quaintmere, Myra Booth-Cockcroft, Alasdair Whyte, Cynthia Thickpenny, William Hepburn, Catriona Gray, Guto Rhys, Susan Ross and far too many others to name in full (apologies!). Most especially, I would like to thank Nicola Carty for her enduring friendship, and embiggening love.

I must also thank my parents, Frank and Cheryl, and my grandmother, Molly, who have given me the freedom to choose my own path in life, as well as the emotional and financial support to follow it. Special thanks are also due to my brother Sam and aunt Jackie, whose candour and humour have always helped me keep my head out the clouds (or arse) and my feet on the ground. Similarly, I owe so very much to my many friends outwith academia. Once again, there are far too many to name here, but I would like to single-out Tim, Karen, and Vickie, who have always been on hand for a drink, smoke, or rave, as the circumstances have required.

I would also like to thank two organisations for their financial contributions to my research: the Duncan and Morag MacLean Studentship, for helping to cover my fees for one year, and the British Association for Irish Studies for their bursary, which was put to good use on research materials and costs. Both were very much appreciated, and helped lighten the burden.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my friend Chris Hutchison. Hutchy and I knew each other from we were teens, and we began our research degrees at the same time. We had much the same experience of post-graduate life; struggling to balance our studies with employment, mental health, and lean. We traded a lot of war stories in his wee front-room in the Cregagh estate during my sojourns back to Belfast at Christmas. Unfortunately, Hutchy died before either of us finished our theses, and he is greatly missed by very many people, not least myself.

## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or at any other institution.

## Abbreviations

- AFM Annals of the Four Masters, ed. and trans. John O'Donovan, *Annala Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616. Edited from MSS in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy and of Trinity College Dublin with a translation and copious notes, 7 vols.*, (Dublin, 1848-51; repr. 1856, 1990).
- AM *Audacht Morainn*. No particular edition.
- AM (A) *Audacht Morainn*, Recension A, ed. and trans. Maxim Fomin, in Maxim Fomin, *Instructions for Kings: Secular and Clerical Images of Kingship in Early Ireland and Ancient India* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2013), pp. 367-421.
- AM (B) *Audacht Morainn*, Recension B, ed. and trans. Fergus Kelly, *Audacht Morainn* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976).
- AU Annals of Ulster, eds. Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *The Annals of Ulster (to AD 1131), Part I. Text and Translation* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983).
- BCC *Bríathartheosc Con Culainn*, ed. and trans. Maxim Fomin, 'Bríathartheosc Con Culainn in the Context of Early Irish Wisdom Literature', *Ulidia 2: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales* (Belfast: December Publications, 2009), pp. 92-125.
- CASK D. A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).
- Cert cech rí* *Cert cech rí co réil*, ed. and trans. Tadhg O'Donoghue, 'Cert cech rí co réil', *Miscellany Presented to Kuno Meyer*, eds. Osborn Bergin and Carl Marstrander (Halle A. S.: Max Niemeyer, 1912), pp. 258-77.
- CS *Chronicum Scotorum*, ed. W. Hennessy, *Chronicum Scotorum* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1866).
- Diambad* *Diambad messe bad rí réil*. ed. and trans. Tadhg O'Donoghue, 'Advice to a Prince', *Ériu*, 9 (1921/23), 43-54.
- ECI T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- EIKS Bart Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).
- IKHK Francis J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. ([n.p.]: B. T. Batsford, 1973; repr. 1987; Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001; repr. 2004).

- PPCP Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990).
- SCC *Serglige Con Culainn*, ed. Myles Dillon (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1953).
- SILH James Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955).
- TBDD *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*.
- TC *Tecosca Cormaic*, ed. and trans. Maxim Fomin, *Instructions for Kings: Secular and Clerical Images of Kingship in Early Ireland and Ancient India* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2013), pp. 145-275.
- TCús *Tecosc Cúscraid*, ed. and trans. R. I. Best, 'The Battle of Airtech', *Ériu*, 8 (1916), 170-90.

## Introduction

For over a century now, scholars of early Irish literature have spoken of a distinct category of vernacular wisdom literature, often called *teosc* (pl. *teosca*) ‘instruction’, but also referred to as *speculum principum* (pl. *specula principum*) ‘mirror of princes’. Examples of this literature have been identified in Old and Middle Irish. They have also been closely associated with advice literature in Hiberno-Latin, and even advice literature from Carolingian France (from whence the name *speculum principum* comes). To date, only one attempt at a comprehensive over-view of the vernacular Irish corpus has been made. This was an article published in 1927 by Roland Mitchell Smith.<sup>1</sup> Aside from this, commentary on these texts has mostly been sporadic and fragmentary. Any consideration of the collective identity of the *teosca* has been limited to a few lines in wider discussions, or the notes for *teosc* editions. There has also been a general imbalance in terms of the scholarly attention that each *teosc* has received. The work on certain examples, such as *Audacht Morainn* ‘The Testament of Morann’ and *Tecosca Cormaic* ‘The Instructions of Cormac’, has amassed a respectable word count. Furthermore, the scholarship on these texts has led to some interesting theories and findings, which have had important implications for the wider field of early Irish studies. Other examples, such as *Teosca Cúscraid* ‘The Instruction to Cúscraid’ and *Diambad messe bad rí réil* ‘If I were an illustrious king’, have received considerably less attention, and have yet to make their mark in the study of early Irish literature.

Nevertheless, there has long been a general perception that the *teosca* can be regarded as advice literature for kings. The first chapter of this thesis traces the development of this view. It reveals that scholarly definitions of the *teosc*-corpus have often been expressed only implicitly, and that there has been some disagreement concerning the nature and extent of the corpus. Even so, the association with kings and kingship has been persistent. Two main reasons for this are identified. The first pertains to the use of narrative framing by the *teosca*, and a tendency by scholars to take this framing as indicative of the intended audience of these texts. The most important factor in this has been the use of royal figures

---

<sup>1</sup> Roland Mitchell Smith, ‘*The Speculum Principum in Early Irish Literature*’, *Speculum*, 2 (1927), 411-45.

as advisee characters.<sup>2</sup> Over time, however, this inclination has been reinforced by theories of kingship ideology. Specifically, the *tecosca* have become associated with ideal rulership and the concept of *fír flathemon* ‘ruler’s truth’.

The second chapter of this thesis examines six *tecosca*: *Audacht Morainn*, *Tecosca Cormaic*, *Tecosc Cúscraid*, *Bríathartheosc Con Culainn* ‘The Wisdom Sayings of Cú Chulainn’, *Diambad messe bad rí réil*, and *Cert cech rí g co réil* ‘The tribute of every king is clearly due’. These six are chosen based upon the findings of the first chapter, in which they are revealed to be the vernacular examples most consistently and convincingly regarded as *tecosca*. The second chapter has a dual purpose. Firstly, in order to familiarise the reader with the corpus, it introduces the individual texts and the commentary on them. Secondly, by discussing their form and content, this chapter elucidates some of the major similarities and differences between the *tecosca*. As revealed in the first chapter, the use of narrative framing and advisee characters by these texts has had a strong influence on scholarly perceptions of them. For this reason, particular attention is paid to this aspect of the *tecosca*. Whilst considerable diversity is observed, it is established that each *tecosc* presents itself as being addressed to a royal figure. A working definition for this corpus is then suggested: vernacular Irish wisdom literature that purports to be the advice given to a royal figure (i.e. a king or an aspirant king).

The long-standing association of the *tecosca* with early Irish kingship ideology motivates the third chapter of this thesis. In the first chapter, it is revealed that a number of scholars have detected the theme of *fír flathemon* in several of the *tecosca*. It is also shown that the concept of *fír flathemon* was instrumental for comparing the Irish *tecosc*-corpus and the wider genre of *speculum principum*. In addition to its relationship with the *tecosca*, many scholars have understood this theme to reflect early Irish ideals of kingship. Thus, *fír flathemon* has been important in forming both modern conceptions of early Irish kingship, and the idea that the *tecosca* were advice literature for kings. To gain a deeper insight into *fír flathemon* and the *tecosca* it is necessary, then, to understand early Irish kingship ideology. However, this is no mean feat, for scholarly interpretations of Irish kingship have undergone considerable change during the twentieth century. These changes have been

---

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘royal’ is used here and elsewhere in this thesis to describe a figure who is a king or an aspirant king.

closely linked to changing approaches to the study of early Irish literature, especially vernacular literature, and the *tecosca* themselves have had a part to play in this. For these reasons, the third chapter elucidates these developments, with special attention to how the *tecosca* were used or implicated. It shows how vernacular literature (including *Audacht Morainn*, *Tecosca Cormaic*, and *Diambad messe bad rí réil*) has been used to build a model of sacred kingship. It discusses some of the main conceptual pillars of this model, namely: the sovereignty goddess, *fír flathemon*, and *geis*. It then shows how the interpretation of kingship ideology changed in accordance with new interpretations of early Irish literature. Indeed, some scholars have even given cause to doubt the existence of any kind of sacred kingship in the historical period at all.

The fourth chapter of this thesis examines the evidence of *tecosca* themselves in relation to the key themes and debates raised in the third chapter. It is subdivided into five sections. The first of these concerns the use of the words *rí*, ‘king’, and *flaith*, meaning ‘ruler’, ‘lord’, or ‘prince’.<sup>3</sup> In the third chapter, it is shown how Bart Jaski has used the semantic range of the word *flaith* as part of his case against the existence of a concept of sacred kingship in early medieval Ireland.<sup>4</sup> Jaski’s argument also made use of *Audacht Morainn* and significantly revised the standard interpretation of *fír flathemon*. This section of the thesis suggests a revision of Jaski’s theory, but upholds aspects of it. The investigation finds that the *tecosca* show considerable diversity in their use of the terms *rí* and *flaith*, and attempts to explain these.

The second, third, fourth, and fifth sub-sections of chapter four investigate several of the main themes and concepts associated with sacred kingship. These are: *fír flathemon*, the verbal pronouncement of truth or falsehood, *geis*, and the sovereignty goddess. In chapter three, it is observed that the model of sacred kingship has been constructed out of several themes and concepts, of which these four are some of the most important. Combined, they take the form of a monolithic entity, the shadow of which looms large over the various themes and sources that have been used to construct it. But what do the *tecosca* really have to say about these elements? Do they make use of them? Does their use suggest a conception of sacred kingship? These are some of the questions that this chapter

---

<sup>3</sup> eDIL, s.v. *rí*, s.v. 1 *flaith*.

<sup>4</sup> Bart Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

addresses. The results are a mixed bag. Evidence for *fír flathemon* and the verbal pronouncement of truth or falsehood is strongest, but appear only in some of the *tecosca*. The case for *geis* is most ambiguous, but perhaps this is to be expected for a concept that is revealed to be an elusive one at the best of times. Undoubtedly, however, the sovereignty goddess fares the worst in this analysis. She is nowhere to be found in the *tecosca*. Many conclusions will be drawn from these investigations, but the ultimate message is one of diversity and flexibility. The idea that, within a single and distinct subdivision of literature, key themes and concepts can vary in their meaning, presentation, and frequency. Even within the individual texts themselves, these things can be subtly manipulated for purposes that the modern reader must work hard to discern.

## Defining the *Tecosca*

Despite over a century of modern scholarship on the *tecosca*, the extent and the nature of this corpus remains somewhat ambiguous. Few commentators have taken the time to explain what they believe a *tecosc* to be, or which texts qualify. Most have expressed their understanding of this corpus in an oblique manner. For this reason, an enquiry into how and why scholars have come to regard the *tecosca* as a distinct body of literature is required. This chapter will look at some of the formative considerations of the *tecosca* as a group. It will seek to trace the origins and development of these perceptions, and attempt to establish what scholars mean when they talk about *tecosc*.

In the introduction to his 1909 edition and translation of *Tecosca Cormaic*, Kuno Meyer made some general observations about ‘the gnomic literature of ancient Ireland’.<sup>5</sup> His comments represent the first attempt by a modern scholar to regard the *tecosca* as a distinct literary group. In Meyer’s view, these texts were ‘instructions’ that could be distinguished from a broader corpus of ‘gnomic literature’. He included in this group: *Tecosca Cormaic*, *Audacht Morainn*, *Bríathartheosc Con Culainn*, and *Senbríathra Fíthail* ‘The Old Sayings of Fíthail’. He also provided a collective description:

Among the gnomic literature of ancient Ireland, the instructions given by princes to their heirs, by tutors to their disciples, or by foster-fathers to their sons form a group by themselves.<sup>6</sup>

From this statement, it is clear that Meyer’s conception of this corpus was mainly concerned with two aspects: its didactic nature and the identities of the advisor and the advisee.

R. I. Best was the next to consider one of these texts as part of a distinct literary group, which he did in the introduction to his edition and translation of *Cath Airtig* ‘The Battle of Airtech’ (1916).<sup>7</sup> In this, Best described *Tecosc Cúscraid* (an advice text contained within *Cath Airtig*) as ‘the Instruction or *Teccosc* usually given to the newly elected Prince, which

---

<sup>5</sup> Kuno Meyer, ed. and trans., *The Instructions of King Cormac Mac Airt*, Todd Lecture Series, 15 (1909), p. v.

<sup>6</sup> Meyer, *Instructions*, p. v.

<sup>7</sup> R. I. Best, ‘The Battle of Airtech’, *Ériu*, 8 (1916), 170-90. For *Tecosc Cúscraid*, see § 3 (173).

would seem to have been part of an inauguration ceremony'.<sup>8</sup> Although Best spoke of this text only, the way in which he referred to 'this *Tecosc*', and the suggestion of a repeated context ('usually given'), indicate that he understood there to have been more than one *tecosc*, and therefore intended his definition to apply to more than just *Tecosc Cúscraid*.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Best was surely aware of Meyer's conception of the corpus, having been in contact with him during the preparation of his edition.<sup>10</sup> Despite this, Best's definition had some subtle differences from that of Meyer. On the one hand, Meyer's emphasis upon the didactic nature of this literature is repeated, and this may be related to the continued use of 'instruction' as a label.<sup>11</sup> Best was also concerned with the identity of the advisee, but here the similarities end, for Best reduced Meyer's three possible identities for the advisee to just one: a prince. In addition to this, Best did not stipulate the identity of the advisor at all. Finally, Best expressed the belief that these texts were likely part of a royal inauguration ceremony. This aspect was perhaps hinted at by Meyer with the phrase 'princes to their heirs', but it is undoubtedly a more prominent part of Best's definition. As a result, the royal character of the advisee was surely emphasised.

Roland Mitchell Smith was the next scholar to consider these texts as a distinct literary group. This was in a 1927 article that remains the only attempt at a comprehensive overview of this corpus to date.<sup>12</sup> In this article, Smith put forth two different definitions of *tecosca* as a group. The first of these was a self-contained and considered attempt to define the corpus.

One considerable subdivision of Irish sententious literature is to be found in the instructions to princes given by their tutors or advisers, often their fathers, whom they are about to succeed.<sup>13</sup>

This definition may be said to have combined some of the criteria provided by Meyer and Best. Echoing Meyer, the corpus is viewed as an instructional subcategory of a wider body

---

<sup>8</sup> Best, 'The Battle of Airtech', 170.

<sup>9</sup> Best, 'The Battle of Airtech', 170.

<sup>10</sup> Best, 'The Battle of Airtech', 170. 'In some of the difficult passages of this *Tecosc* I had, when I first took up the text, the benefit of Dr Meyer's advice, and latterly of Dr Bergin's'.

<sup>11</sup> Best's use of the term '*Teccosc*', which he prefers to use in reference to *Tecosc Cúscraid*, seems to be as a synonym for 'instruction', and not a qualification of the term.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, '*Speculum Principum*'.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, '*Speculum Principum*', 411.

of Irish wisdom literature, and a concern with the identity of both the advisor and advisee is also expressed. More like Best, however, was Smith's insistence that the advisee was a prince, as well as the stipulation of a succession context. Smith's second definition, however, deviated from the first. This second definition occurs in quite a different context, and this may partially explain Smith's inconsistency. Smith's aim, in this particular instance, was to assess the character of a particular text, *Aibidil Cuigni maic Emoin* 'The Alphabet of Cuigne mac Emoin':

Strictly speaking, this text does not belong to the *tecosc* group; [...] there is no internal evidence that it was the work of a father or tutor for the instruction of his son or his lord – in fact, we may safely conclude that it performed no such office. Nor does it possess [...] a title which gives a clue to the purpose for which it was written.<sup>14</sup>

Compared to his first definition, then, Smith had broadened the available options for advisor and advisee identity, and his succession context is no longer explicit (although it might be considered implicit in the father/son, tutor/lord character pairs). Given that his first definition was self-contained and introductory, it would seem that it was the first one that Smith preferred. Nevertheless, his inconsistency is an indication of the inherent difficulty of trying to collectively define this group of texts.

Smith considered more texts to be *tecosca* than any commentator before or since, but he struggled to justify some of these examples in much the same way as he did with *Aibidil Cuigni maic Emoin*. His corpus included several texts already implicated by Meyer: *Audacht Morainn*, *Bríathartheosc Con Culainn*, *Tecosc Cúscraid*, *Tecosca Cormaic*, and *Senbríathra Fíthail*. In addition to these, Smith added *Cetheoir Comairli Fíthail* 'The Four Counsels of Fíthal', *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* 'The Sayings of Flann Fína the son of Oswiu', *Diambad messe bad rí réil*, *Cert cech rí co réil*, a poem by St Moling, and the aforementioned *Aibidil Cuigni maic Emoin*. In a number of cases, Smith himself essentially disqualifies these texts from his corpus. His reason for excluding *Aibidil Cuigni maic Emoin* from the corpus is perhaps explained by his treatment of *Senbríathra Fíthail*. By his own admission, *Senbríathra Fíthail* does not have a royal advisee, a criterion stipulated at the beginning of his article.<sup>15</sup> It seems as though Smith had to move his goal-posts, then, to

---

<sup>14</sup> Smith, 'Speculum Principum', 431-32.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, 'Speculum Principum', 429, 430, 430 n. 3.

allow *Senbríathra Fíthail* to be included, and subsequently reformulated his definition during his consideration of *Aibidil Cuigni maic Eoin*, presumably in an attempt to appear consistent. His case for the inclusion of *Cetheoir Comairli Fíthail*, however, is the most dubious of the lot. This text is entirely hypothetical, being abstracted from a narrative episode involving Fíthail and his son in Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirean* 'The Foundation of Knowledge of Ireland': 'it seems reasonable to suppose that Keating in his prose rendering made use of a text, not now in extant, which was perhaps in complete accordance with the old *tecosc* structure'.<sup>16</sup> In reality, even the name of this text is the product of Smith's imagination. To be fair to Smith, the inclusion of this text is at least consistent with his belief that there was a '*tecosc* tradition' of which the extant examples were only the tip-of-the-iceberg, but his article fell quite short of justifying this belief.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Smith's inclusion of the texts *Diambad messe bad rí réil*, *Cert cech rí co réil*, and the poem by St Moling was entirely consistent with his original definition, and the first two, at least, have been considered *tecosc* texts by subsequent commentators.

Smith preferred to use the terms *tecosc* and 'instruction' to refer to these texts, and this was consistent with both Meyer and Best. However, Smith also introduced two further terms.<sup>18</sup> In a footnote, he explained:

*Tecosc*, with its plural *tecosca*, the Old Irish word meaning 'teaching' or 'instruction', is used here and later to refer to the type of text commonly known as *speculum* or 'instruction to princes' (*Fürstenspiegel*).<sup>19</sup>

The term *speculum* 'mirror' (pl. *specula*) also appears, of course, in the title of his article as *speculum principum* 'mirror of princes'. On the one hand, Smith's equation of the *tecosca* with *specula principum* and *Fürstenspiegel* (also 'mirror of princes') would appear to reinforce the importance of the didactic nature of this corpus, and also of the royal advisee, as definitive qualities. On the other hand, these terms might complicate matters, for they refer to a much broader range of wisdom literature, including material from Carolingian Europe. The implication here is that this subdivision of Irish wisdom literature is part of a

---

<sup>16</sup> Smith, '*Speculum Principum*', 431.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, '*Speculum Principum*', 412, 413, 432, 435, 436.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, '*Speculum Principum*', 431 n.3, 426, 435, 429, 441, 435, n.2 [*tecosc*]. 411, 412, 423, 438, 412-413 [instruction].

<sup>19</sup> Smith, '*Speculum Principum*', 412 n. 2.

wider European trend. Smith did not take the time to explain this connection, but he was most likely influenced by Siegmund Hellmann. In 1909, Hellmann argued that the author of the Latin wisdom text, *De duodecim abusivis* 'On the twelve abuses', was in fact an Irish scholar working in the seventh century.<sup>20</sup> This text, particularly its ninth chapter on the *rex iniquus* 'unjust king', was highly influential on examples of *speculum principum* from Carolingian Europe. Hellmann noted stylistic, linguistic, and thematic features in *De duodecim abusivis* that he argued were characteristic of Hiberno-Latin or Irish vernacular writing.<sup>21</sup> The most important of these, for the present enquiry, was his comparison of the *rex iniquus* to the depiction of just and unjust rulers in early Irish vernacular literature.<sup>22</sup> Hellmann's theory has been widely accepted, and a number of scholars have strengthened and developed its case over the years.<sup>23</sup> Hellmann's argument, then, gives reasonable justification for considering the Irish *tecosca* to be part of a wider genre of advice literature for kings.

In their 1932 publication *The Growth of Literature*, Nora and Hector Chadwick considered the *tecosca* in a chapter dedicated to 'gnomic poetry'.<sup>24</sup> Their conception of this corpus was comparable to what had gone before in that they considered these texts to be distinguished from the wider body of Irish vernacular wisdom literature by virtue of their didactic nature, royal advisees, and the suggestion of an inaugural/succession context. This definition was made clear in category (i) of their three-fold division of early Irish gnomic literature:

---

<sup>20</sup> Siegmund Hellmann, *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De xii abusivis saeculi*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, 34 (Leipzig, 1909).

<sup>21</sup> For a summary of Hellmann's argument see Maxim Fomin, *Instructions for Kings: Secular and Clerical Images of Kingship in Early Ireland* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2013), pp. 58-60.

<sup>22</sup> For a comparison of just and unjust rulers in *Audacht Morainn* and *De duodecim abusivis*, with reference to Hellmann's argument, see Fergus Kelly, *Audacht Morainn* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976), pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>23</sup> See James F. Kenney, *The Sources for the History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical* ([n.p.]: Columbia University Press, 1929; repr. New York: Octagon Books, 1979), pp. 281-82. H. H. Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit* (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1968). Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, pp. xv-xvi. H. H. Anton, 'Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim abusivis* und sein Einfluss auf den Kontinent, insbesondere auf die karolingischen Fürstenspiegel', *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter*, ed Heinz Löwe, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982), II, 568-617. Aidan Breen, 'Pseudo-Cyprian *De Duodecim Abusivis Saeculi* and the Bible', *Irlund un de die Christenheit/Ireland and Christendom*, eds. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), 230-45.

<sup>24</sup> H. Munro Chadwick and N. Kershaw Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature, Vol. 1: The Ancient Literatures of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932).

(i) instructions given to a newly appointed king, (ii) instructions given by a father to his son, (iii) anonymous collections of gnomes.<sup>25</sup>

In category (i), the Chadwicks included *Bríathartheosc Con Culainn*, *Tecosc Cúscraid*, *Audacht Morainn*, and *Cert cech ríig co réil*.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, *Tecosca Cormaic*, *Senbríathra Fíthail*, and *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* were segregated from this group and placed in category (ii). This was obviously due to the paternal relationship of their advisors to their advisees, even though *Tecosca Cormaic* would seem to qualify also for category (i), since it purports to be the advice given to a figure who would be, or who had recently become, a king. Indeed, the Chadwicks had to acknowledge that the first part of *Tecosca Cormaic* ‘is of a similar character to the Instructions already noticed, and relates to the aims, duties and conducts of kings and minor rulers’.<sup>27</sup> This problem further illustrates the difficulty of attempting to categorise advice literature, especially concerning the identity of the advisee.

So far, then, there are three main characteristics of the *tecosca* that have been highlighted by scholars in their attempts to collectively define the corpus. These are: a didactic nature, a royal advisee, and a succession context. Beyond these three main characteristics, certain features of style and content have also been identified by Smith and the Chadwicks. An examination of these features, however, shows that they have not been given the same importance as the aforementioned three. For example, Smith made many references to what he referred to as the ‘pagan character’ of the *tecosca*.<sup>28</sup> Smith was never explicit about what this actually entailed, but judging from his references to the pagan ‘spirit and subject matter’, the pagan ‘customs and traditions’, and the ‘pagan sentiments’ of the *tecosca*, it would seem that he had certain aspects of content in mind.<sup>29</sup> Despite this, and having alluded to this pagan character throughout, it was only towards the end of the article in question that Smith analysed the content of the *tecosca* in any depth. Surprisingly, when he did so, only two of the four themes he identified were claimed to be pagan. The

---

<sup>25</sup> Chadwick and Chadwick, *Growth of Literature*, p. 393.

<sup>26</sup> Chadwick and Chadwick, *Growth of Literature*, pp. 393-95.

<sup>27</sup> Chadwick and Chadwick, *Growth of Literature*, p. 395.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, ‘*Speculum Principum*’, 412-14, 432, 435, 443.

<sup>29</sup> Smith talks about the pagan ‘spirit and subject matter’, the pagan ‘customs and traditions’, and the ‘pagan sentiments’ of this literature. These phrases are not exactly conclusive, but further evidence that this refers to content is perhaps provided by the fact he seems to define this aspect in opposition to certain ‘Christian element(s)’, ‘Christian decoration’, ‘Christian touches’ and ‘Christian insertions and additions’ etc. See Smith, *Speculum Principum*, 413, 414, 427, 434, 443, 444 ff.

first and most important of the pagan themes named by Smith was the ‘efficacy of righteousness’, which combined the theme of just rulership with imagery of peace, prosperity and fair weather.<sup>30</sup> According to Smith, this theme was ‘prevalent’ throughout the *tecosca*, and was, therefore, surely a characteristic component.<sup>31</sup> The second was a belief in the power of satire, of which he said: ‘the faith placed by the pagan Irish in the power of satire and the fear in which it was held is reflected in the *tecosca*’.<sup>32</sup> The other two themes which Smith considered important, but did not claim to be pagan, were: ‘the importance of giving heed to advice and instruction’ and ‘the treachery of women’.<sup>33</sup>

Smith’s case for the ‘pagan character’ of the *tecosca* is not very convincing. Not only did he neglect to demonstrate that the ‘efficacy of righteousness’ and a belief in ‘the power of satire’ are indeed pagan, but these examples alone are not enough to convince one of the ‘pagan character’ of the whole corpus. Only two pagan themes, with examples from only four of the eleven texts under his consideration, do not adequately support the implication that such content is characteristic of this literature as a group.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, this deficiency is accentuated by the fact that one of the key themes identified for this literature, but for which no claim of a pagan nature or origin was made, was said to be consistent across all examples: ‘no one of the *tecosca* is without its reference to the treachery of women’.<sup>35</sup>

Smith also identified some stylistic similarities between the *tecosca*. Ultimately, however, he did not establish any conclusive stylistic criteria for the collective identity of this corpus. Instead, Smith identified stylistic features common to the sub-categories he had already identified. These sub-categories were themselves based upon what he called ‘the order of their traditional assignment’, meaning the dates traditionally assigned to their narrative settings.<sup>36</sup> Thus *Audacht Morainn*, *Bríathartheosc Con Culainn*, and *Tecosc Cúscraid* were

---

<sup>30</sup> Smith, ‘*Speculum Principum*’, 439-40.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, ‘*Speculum Principum*’, 440.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, ‘*Speculum Principum*’, 441.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, ‘*Speculum Principum*’, 441-43.

<sup>34</sup> Smith also includes a misleading reference here when he claims that Fred Norris Robinson has ‘pointed out the close relationship of satire to the *tecosca*-literature’. What we actually find in Robinson is the claim that one of these texts, *Tecosca Cormaic*, contains passages of satire. See Fred Norris Robinson, ‘Satirists and Enchanters in Early Irish Literature’, in *Studies in the History of Religions Presented to Crawford Howell Toy*, eds. David Gordon Lyon and George Foot Moore (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1912), pp. 95-130 (p. 129).

<sup>35</sup> Smith, ‘*Speculum Principum*’, 443.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, ‘*Speculum Principum*’, 414.

attributed to the 'first century', *Tecosca Cormaic* to the 'third century', and *Cert cech ríg co réil* and *Diambad messe bad rí réil* to the 'seventh and eighth centuries'.<sup>37</sup> For his first-century group, Smith identified common stylistic features such as 'recurrent alliteration, tmesis and parataxis', as well as 'rugged and rhythmical prose without regular formulas'.<sup>38</sup> Smith's description of his third-century group, however, lacks any real stylistic analysis and he merely stated that it follows the style of the first group, but with 'an extreme regularity and terseness of expression'.<sup>39</sup> Finally, his treatment of his 'seventh- and eighth-century' group was not based upon stylistic similarities at all, although he later described it as having a 'regular metrical structure' and called these texts 'poetic *tecosca*'.<sup>40</sup> Clearly then, Smith did not consider any stylistic features as definitive of the corpus as a whole but only partially indicative of sub-categories.

More convincing than these observations made by Smith are those made by the Chadwicks. Even so, the stylistic features identified by the Chadwicks did not eclipse the core criteria of didactic nature and royal advisee. For example, the Chadwicks contrasted the use of precepts by these texts with the more aphoristic, gnomic format employed by other wisdom texts, but ultimately this served only to highlight the importance of the didactic nature of the *tecosca*.<sup>41</sup> The Chadwicks also noted that each of the *tecosca* espoused 'non-heroic' virtues.<sup>42</sup> This was an original observation, but because they associated this feature with the royal character of the advisee, it merely underscored that criterion rather than establishing a new way of looking at these texts. On the other hand, the Chadwicks also highlighted the generally un-metrical structure of the *tecosca* and their tendency to use alliteration, and neither of these can be attributed to their concern for the didactic nature or royal advisee.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the extent to which these aspects could be called definitive is surely undermined by the final example of *Cert cech ríg co réil*, which the Chadwicks described as 'only partly gnomic', 'in rhyming couplets' and 'far more bellicose'

---

<sup>37</sup> Smith, *Speculum Principum*, 414.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, *Speculum Principum*, 414.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Speculum Principum*, 414-15.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Speculum Principum*, 426, 434, 435.

<sup>41</sup> Chadwick and Chadwick, *Growth of Literature*, p. 393.

<sup>42</sup> Chadwick and Chadwick, *Growth of Literature*, pp. 394-95.

<sup>43</sup> Chadwick and Chadwick, *Growth of Literature*, p. 394.

than the other examples of this category.<sup>44</sup> For these reasons, the core characteristics of didactic nature and royal advisee appear to have been paramount for the Chadwicks.

In terms of conceiving of the *tecosca* as a distinct literary group, then, a number of similarities can be observed between Meyer, Best, Smith, and Chadwick and Chadwick. In the first instance, there is a consistent emphasis upon this corpus as a didactic subcategory of a wider body of gnomic literature in the Irish vernacular. A general emphasis upon the royal character of the advisee can also be observed, even if the importance of this feature has been undermined in several instances. Meyer gave three possible options for the identity of the advisee, only one of which was royal. Smith showed some inconsistency on the matter, first suggesting a royal advisee and then a lord. Finally, the Chadwicks defined their category (i) of advice literature by the royal identity of its advisee. Nevertheless, *Tecosca Cormaic* was excluded from this group, despite having a royal advisee. On the other hand, the importance of a royal advisee for the collective identity of this corpus has been reinforced by the suggestion, made by Best and Smith, that royal succession somehow formed part of the context for these texts. In fact, the Chadwicks also made mention of a succession context for each of the texts in their category (i), but this was not stipulated in their neat, three-fold classification.<sup>45</sup> Smith and the Chadwicks shared another similarity in that they each pondered stylistic features in their assessment of the corpus. However, no consensus of opinion on the matter can be observed between them.

At this stage of the discussion it is worth pointing out that none of the scholars examined thus far have made a clear distinction between the narrative and historical contexts of the *tecosca*. Whilst there appears to have been a common perception that the *tecosca* were, to one extent or another, defined by a royal advisee, it is less clear whether or not these scholars were referring only to the characters found in the *tecosca* or to the historical audience of these texts. Did these scholars believe the advisee characters to be representative of the intended audience of the *tecosca*? It seems reasonable to presume so. On the other hand, Smith almost seems to have suggested that the advisee characters may have been the actual audience of the advice contained in these texts – hence why he divided these texts into the ‘first century’, ‘third century’, and ‘seventh and eighth century’

---

<sup>44</sup> Chadwick and Chadwick, *Growth of Literature*, p. 395.

<sup>45</sup> Chadwick and Chadwick, *Growth of Literature*, pp. 393-95.

groups.<sup>46</sup> Of these early commentators, only the Chadwicks stopped to ponder the relationship between narrative and historical contexts in any explicit way. They wrote:

The kings to whom [the *tecosca*] are addressed are mostly persons of the Heroic Age, while the instructors are either famous heroes – friends of the new kings – or sages. The instructions are therefore to be regarded as speeches in character.<sup>47</sup>

Quite what it means to regard a text as a speech in character is not something that the Chadwicks discussed, but this was an important first step towards openly considering the implications of narrative context.

It must also be pointed out here that there seems to have been a reasonable consensus amongst these scholars regarding the collective name for these texts. The most common label is ‘instruction’, with the synonymous Old Irish word ‘*tecosc*’ being a close second. It seems likely that the use of these terms is closely related to the didactic nature of these texts, and also the fact that the Old Irish word is attested in the titles of at least two of the texts in the corpus. Smith’s use of *speculum principum* and *Fürstenspiegel* also acknowledged the didactic purpose and had the additional benefit of stipulating the character of the recipient. On the other hand, these terms have the disadvantage of not being attested in the Irish sources, and the fact that Smith did not explain his use of these terms.

The next significant phase in the *tecosc* scholarship occurred in the 1970s. There were no dedicated studies of the *tecosca* as a group in this period, but some of these texts, particularly *Audacht Morainn*, were used as evidence in wider discussions about early Irish kingship. Despite the fact that these appearances were scattered and the analyses somewhat superficial, it is possible to deduce something of how scholars generally regarded these texts. Essentially, scholars in this period adopted the general interpretation of the *tecosca* laid out before them by Meyer, Best, Smith, and Chadwick and Chadwick, but with one key development. This development can be traced to the work of Myles Dillon

---

<sup>46</sup> Smith, ‘*Speculum Principum*’, 414.

<sup>47</sup> Chadwick and Chadwick, *Growth of Literature*, p. 393.

in the forties, and concerns his interpretation of a literary theme that became known as *fír flathemon*.

In several works published in the 1940s, Dillon built a case for the common Indo-European inheritance of the Celtic and Indian civilisations.<sup>48</sup> One of his most influential theories, and certainly the most relevant one for the study of the *tecosca*, was that which posited the existence of a shared concept of ‘the magic power of Truth’ in both cultures.<sup>49</sup> Arguably, Dillon’s most important witness for the survival of this concept in Ireland was *Audacht Morainn*.<sup>50</sup> Dillon was unconcerned with the collective identity of the *tecosca*, but it is clear that he did perceive there to be a corpus of texts which he labelled ‘Instructions to a Prince’, of which *Audacht Morainn* was a key example.<sup>51</sup> Dillon also used *Diambad messe bad rí réil* in conjunction with *Audacht Morainn* as evidence for what he called *fírinne flatha*, or ‘Princes Truth’.<sup>52</sup> Thus, it appears that Dillon understood these texts to be didactic literature for a royal recipient. Dillon’s conception was undoubtedly influenced by the opinions of Meyer, Best, Smith, Chadwick and Chadwick, but his identification of the theme of *fírinne flatha* in two of the *tecosca* was a new development.

In the 1970s, the subtle but important effect of *fírinne flatha* upon scholarly perceptions of the *tecosca* can be traced. In this period, a number of scholars stressed the importance of *fírinne flatha* as an aspect of early Irish kingship theory, and *Audacht Morainn* was used repeatedly as the primary example. Indeed, the theme *fírinne flatha* was increasingly equated with, and eventually replaced by, the term *fír flathemon*, no doubt due to the extensive use of this phrase in *Audacht Morainn* itself.<sup>53</sup> A discussion of the scholarly perceptions and some of the literary expressions of *fírinne flatha* and *fír flathemon* will be conducted later in this thesis. For now, this discussion will focus upon the increasing association of this theme, kingship ideology, and *Audacht Morainn*. Neither Dillon nor the scholars that followed him claimed that *fír flathemon* was exclusive to the *tecosca*, but it

---

<sup>48</sup> Myles Dillon, ‘The Archaism of Irish Tradition’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 33 (1947), 245-64. Myles Dillon, ‘The Hindu Act of Truth in Celtic Tradition’, *Modern Philology*, 44 (1947), 137-40. Myles Dillon, *Celt and Hindu* (Dublin: University College Dublin, 1973).

<sup>49</sup> Dillon, ‘Archaism’, 250.

<sup>50</sup> Dillon, ‘Act of Truth’, 138. Dillon, ‘Archaism’, 250.

<sup>51</sup> Dillon, ‘Act of Truth’, 138.

<sup>52</sup> Dillon, ‘Archaism’, 250-51.

<sup>53</sup> *AM* (B), §§ 12-22, 24-28. *AM* (A), §§ 10a-26.

will be shown that there was a general perception that the theme was somehow characteristic of the corpus.

In the 1970s, it also became more common for scholars to refer to the *tecosca* as *specula principum* or *Fürstenspiegel* (two terms previously introduced by Smith). This trend seems to have been influenced by the treatment of *De duodecim abusivis* that is found in *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland* by James F. Kenney.<sup>54</sup> This indispensable reference work was first published in 1929, but it was reprinted in 1966 and 1979. In it, Kenney cited Hellmann's ground-breaking work on *De duodecim abusivis*, and declared that 'in both the turn of thought and the form it is characteristically Irish, and would be immediately recognised as such by any person familiar with the secular gnomic literature of the Irish language'.<sup>55</sup> Kenney also highlighted the influence of the ninth chapter, *rex iniquus*, upon ecclesiastic writers on the continent, and he declared that 'the unknown Irish author made a real contribution to the development of European political theory'.<sup>56</sup> Another probable influence on the increased use of the terms *speculum principum* and *Fürstenspiegel* was a 1968 publication by H. H. Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos*, which discussed the phenomenon of mirrors of princes in Carolingian Europe, including *De duodecim abusivis*.<sup>57</sup>

The introduction to Fergus Kelly's 1976 edition and translation of the B-recension of *Audacht Morainn* provides the following statement, which effectively sums up the emerging consensus about *fír flathemon* at the time:

The central theme of *Audacht Morainn* is that the welfare of the king and his tribe depends on his justice or *fír flathemon* (§§ 12-28). This justice protects his tribe from plague, lightning, and enemy attack and ensures abundance of fruit, corn, milk, and fish, fertility of women, and maintenance of peace and prosperity.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Kenney, *Sources for the History of Ireland*.

<sup>55</sup> Kenney, *Sources for the History of Ireland*, pp. 281-82.

<sup>56</sup> Kenney, *Sources for the History of Ireland*, p. 282.

<sup>57</sup> Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos*. In 1982, Anton followed this up with an article on the same subject, which no doubt caught the attention of even more scholars of early Ireland due to its publication in a volume on the subject of *The Irish and Europe in the early Middle Ages*. See Anton, 'Pseudo-Cyprian'.

<sup>58</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xvii.

Kelly called *Audacht Morainn* a *speculum principum* and named *Tecosca Cormaic*, *Briathartheosc Con Culainn*, *Tecosc Cúscraid*, and *Senbriathra Fíthail* as other Irish examples.<sup>59</sup> Inspired by Hellmann, and based upon an inverse comparison between the concept of *rex iniquus* and *fír flaith* or ‘true ruler’, Kelly also made a connection between these vernacular Irish texts and Latin texts popular on the continent, such as *De duodecim abusivis*, *De institutione regia* ‘On the Institution of Kingship’ and *De regis persona et regio ministerio* ‘On the Character of the King and the Office of the King’.<sup>60</sup> Several years prior to Kelly’s edition of *Audacht Morainn*, Francis J. Byrne had expressed a very similar understanding of the *tecosca*. In *Early Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 1973, Byrne referred to *Audacht Morainn* as ‘the earliest example of *Fürstenspiegel* or ‘Mirror for Magistrates’ in medieval literature’.<sup>61</sup> Using *fír flathemon*, Byrne drew comparison between *Audacht Morainn*, *De duodecim abusivis*, Cathwulf’s letter to Charlemagne, and *De rectoribus christianis* ‘On Christian Rulers’ by Sedulius Scottus.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, in an article in 1979, Proinsias Mac Cana made reference to ‘a number of instances from the Old Irish period’ of ‘the *speculum principis* or *Fürstenspiegel*’ (although he names only *Audacht Morainn*), and suggested that ‘the later European fashion for compositions of the *speculum* type is at least partially derived from Irish usage’.<sup>63</sup> Mac Cana’s justification was a perceived correspondence between the concept of *rex iniquus* and *gáu flathemon* (‘the antithesis of *fír flathemon*’).<sup>64</sup> Other important scholars in the seventies and eighties continued to stress *fír flathemon* and refer to *Audacht Morainn* as an example of the *speculum principum* or *Fürstenspiegel*.<sup>65</sup> Overall, a consensus view was becoming clear: *Audacht Morainn* was part

---

<sup>59</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xiii.

<sup>60</sup> Kelly, *AM*, pp. xv-xvi. This idea remains in vogue. Compare the following comment made by Charles Doherty in 2005: ‘The term *rex iniquus* probably reflects the vernacular *anflaith*, who is the opposite of the ideal king *fírfhlaith*’. Charles Doherty, ‘Kingship in Early Ireland’, *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, ed. Edel Bhreathnach (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 3-31 (p. 6 n. 20).

<sup>61</sup> Francis J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 2nd edn. ([n.p.]: B. T. Batsford, 1973; repr. 1987; Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001; repr. 2004), pp. 24-26. Note that Byrne renders *Fürstenspiegel* as ‘Mirror for Magistrates’ here, but as ‘mirror for princes’ later on (p. 175). Why he does this is unclear.

<sup>62</sup> Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>63</sup> Proinsias Mac Cana, ‘*Regnum and Sacerdotium*: Notes on Irish Tradition’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 65 (1979), 443-79 (448).

<sup>64</sup> Mac Cana, ‘*Regnum and Sacerdotium*’, 448.

<sup>65</sup> See D. A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 9-10. Calvert Watkins, ‘*Is Tre Fír Flathemon*: Marginalia to *Audacht Morainn*’, *Ériu*, 30 (1979), 181-98 (181-82). P. L. Henry, Review of *Audacht Morainn* by Fergus Kelly, *Studia Hibernica*, 17/18 (1977/8), 203-10 (203-8). P. L. Henry, ‘The Cruces of *Audacht Morainn*’, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 89 (1982), 33-53 (37, 41-43). Michael J. Enright, *Iona, Tara and Soissons: The*

of a corpus of literature that not only advised kings, but were important repositories of kingship ideology, such as *fír flathemon*.

The next most important contribution to the study of the *tecosca* was made by Colin A. Ireland in his 1999 edition and translation of *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu*.<sup>66</sup> In this work, Ireland did not offer a conception of the *tecosca* that was markedly different from those already established. As the following quotation makes clear, Ireland understood the *tecosca* to be advice literature for kings:

Among the wisdom-texts found in early Irish literature is the type known as *speculum principum* 'a mirror for princes'. As the name implies, such texts are intended to instruct kings on the proper conduct of their affairs, often with emphasis on how their behaviour affects the communities which they govern.<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, Ireland contributed some valuable insights towards this understanding of the corpus. He considered *Audacht Morainn*, *Tecosca Cormaic*, *Bríathartheosc Con Culainn*, *Tecosc Cúscraid*, *Cert cech rí g co réil*, and *Diambad messe bad rí réil* to be examples of the *speculum principum*.<sup>68</sup> Importantly, however, Ireland excluded the text *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* from this corpus. Previously, Smith had included this text in his examples of *tecosc* literature, but, as Ireland pointed out, 'the maxims lack a frame which introduces them or explains their purpose as is often found in other wisdom-texts such as the *specula*'.<sup>69</sup> The implication here, then, is that without the tell-tale use of an advisee character it is difficult to tell if the intended audience of this text was royal. Nevertheless,

---

*Origin of the Royal Anointing Ritual* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1985), pp. 51-55. Although he came a little later, one might also wish to add to this list Kim McCone, who continued to emphasise *Audacht Morainn* and *Tecosca Cormaic* in relation to kingship theory, and particularly in relation to the theme of *fír flathemon*. Although, it must be noted, that McCone refrained from referring to these texts as *specula principum*, and reserved the use of this term for Carolingian texts. Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990), pp. 129, 140-41, 143.

<sup>66</sup> Colin A. Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom Attributed to Aldfrith of Northumbria: An Edition of Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999).

<sup>67</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, pp. 6-7. Ireland preferred to call these texts *specula principum*. His reasons for doing so were not made clear, although it seems likely to have been related to his opinion that 'early Irish vernacular terms for gnomic statements do not constitute a definition and their semantic range may confuse rather than clarify' (p. 4). This is an interesting point to bear in mind since it contrasts with the position of earlier commentators such as Meyer, Best and Smith, who chose to use the attested, Old Irish word *tecosc*.

<sup>68</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 7, 7 n. 29.

<sup>69</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 13.

it might be possible to infer a royal audience from the content of the text itself, but here again Ireland was not convinced: ‘these maxims do not constitute a *speculum* text; they do not tell how one should govern’.<sup>70</sup>

If Ireland explicitly excluded *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* from the *tecosc* corpus, then he also implicitly excluded *Senbríathra Fíthail*. This text had been considered a *tecosc* by Meyer, Smith, and Kelly, whilst the Chadwicks had included it in their category (ii), alongside *Tecosca Cormaic* and *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu*. Despite this, *Senbríathra Fíthail* seems to fall short of the basic *tecosc* criteria in precisely the same ways as *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* does. As Ireland discovered, the narrative framework for *Senbríathra Fíthail* is minimal and confused. Most manuscripts do not mention an advisee character, whereas some associate individual paragraphs to Cormac and Cairbre.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, only one out of the eight manuscript witnesses give this collection the title *Senbríathra Fíthail*.<sup>72</sup> For these and other reasons, Ireland concluded that:

All presently available evidence suggests that *Senbríathra Fíthail* is a selection of Old Irish maxims, elsewhere ascribed to Flann Fína mac Ossu, conflated with sections from the Old Irish *Tecosca Cormaic*. The text we now call *Senbríathra Fíthail* appears to have been redacted by an antiquarian editor working in the Middle Irish period.<sup>73</sup>

The majority of paragraphs in *Senbríathra Fíthail* feature in *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* and thus the content is equally inadequate for establishing a royal audience. Paragraphs 19, 29, 30, and 31 are held in common with *Tecosca Cormaic*, but these paragraphs are of a very general nature and ‘do not tell how one should govern’.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to these important developments, Ireland’s investigation into *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* also brought to the fore some considerations that were hitherto neglected or underdeveloped. It has been seen that Ireland considered the use of narrative framing to be an important factor. Indeed, the very use of narrative framing itself was considered

---

<sup>70</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 13.

<sup>71</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 41.

<sup>72</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 43.

<sup>73</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 45.

<sup>74</sup> Ireland provides a very helpful table noting the use of each paragraph across the manuscript corpus for *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* and *Senbríathra Fíthail*. See Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 21.

by Ireland to be a characteristic feature of the *tecosca*. Thus, the absence of such narrative framing contributed to the exclusion of *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* from the *tecosc* corpus.<sup>75</sup> More than this, narrative framing could obviously be used as an indication of a text's purpose and intended audience. Previously in this chapter, it has been observed that early commentators on the *tecosca* did not openly contemplate the relationship between the use of advisor and advisee characters and the actual authors or intended audience. Ireland, on the other hand, stressed the importance of paying attention to the attribution of texts to a fictional or fictionalised person:

The agreement in character between the contents of the maxims and the purported author or redactor may reveal something of the didactic purpose of the didactic intent of the collection. Even 'false' ascriptions [...] may help in the analysis of the contents of the text. Conversely, the text's contents might help confirm the reputation of, and the cultural role played by, the purported author – even when ascribed to a legendary or mythological figure. Ascriptions, therefore, must be taken seriously.<sup>76</sup>

Nevertheless, narrative framing was not enough, and Ireland also considered the nature and content of the advice contained in the wisdom literature. This was done mainly through some general observations, but it still raised some important considerations. He wrote, for example; 'by their very nature *specula* reflect the hierarchical predisposition of Early Irish society and assume the viewpoint of nobility'.<sup>77</sup> Ireland contrasted this with the perspective of more general gnomic literature, such as the *Triads*, which he considered to range in subject matter 'from secular to religious and from concerns of the nobility to the mundane preoccupations of ordinary persons'.<sup>78</sup>

In *Early Christian Ireland* (2000), Thomas Charles-Edwards wrote a little about advice literature in general, and about *Audacht Morainn* specifically. His conception was quite idiosyncratic, but it is worth elucidating here. He began by identifying a genre that 'contemporaries sometimes called *admonitio*' or 'in Irish *tecosc*', and defined it as 'the explicit recommendation of certain forms of conduct and warnings against others'.<sup>79</sup> This

---

<sup>75</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 13.

<sup>76</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 48.

<sup>77</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 138.

statement establishes that this literature is didactic, which is more or less the same starting-point that all commentators on the *tecosca* have taken. Next Charles-Edwards identified a sub-category of 'generic *admonitio*', for which he took *Audacht Morainn* as his chief example. His analysis of *Audacht Morainn* showed a concern for narrative framing that was very similar to that of Ireland.

[*Audacht Morainn*] purports to be the instructions of a *fili*, Morann, addressed to a king, Feradach Find Fechnach. These named persons were not, however, the actual author and reader. [...] There is a purported situation, within an oral context, and an actual one: an author, text and readership. The ways the text works in its fictional and actual frameworks are, however, related.<sup>80</sup>

Despite this similarity, however, Charles-Edwards arrived at a conclusion that was quite different from Ireland's. Whilst Ireland interpreted the use of royal advisee characters in the *tecosca* as symbolic of an intended royal audience, Charles-Edwards believed the intended audience to be much broader.

*Audacht Morainn* purported to be the words of the head of one order speaking to the head of another, an *ollam* to a king; and Morann and Feradach may then be understood as representing the whole orders of which they were the heads. By implication, therefore, *Audacht Morainn* was a *tecosc* or *admonitio* uttered by the learned orders as a whole to the military nobility.<sup>81</sup>

Something that must be acknowledged, however, is that Charles-Edwards did not seem to equate his *admonitio* genre to the same body of texts that are generally held to be *tecosca*. For one thing, he included in this group two monastic rules, which he considered to be 'attached to the *tecosc* genre by their style'.<sup>82</sup> This opinion can be contrasted with that of Ireland, who acknowledged the stylistic similarities of 'The Rule of Ailbe of Emly' to *Audacht Morainn* but deemed them to be separate genres due to their differing content and intended audiences.<sup>83</sup> The distinction between Charles-Edwards's 'generic *admonitio*' and *admonitio/tecosc* is difficult to tell, but it seems as though the latter entails any didactic element in any literature. Thus, *admonitio* was 'the genre that allowed Columbanus to tell

---

<sup>80</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 138-39.

<sup>81</sup> Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 139.

<sup>82</sup> Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 140.

<sup>83</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 9.

a pope what to do' and 'a favourite vehicle adopted by Alcuin'.<sup>84</sup> It was also, confusingly, 'an element within texts that are not themselves of the genre', such as *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin* 'The Adventure of Cano mac Gartnáin'.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, according to Charles-Edwards, early Irish literature in general 'did not merely entertain or praise kings or nobles, it instructed them'.<sup>86</sup>

A different approach to the *tecosca* was taken by Julianna Grigg, in her article 'The Just King and *De Duodecim Abusiuus Saeculi*' (2010). Grigg argued that the 'genre of *speculum principum*' participated in 'Western Christian political ideas', specifically those concerning kingship.<sup>87</sup> In doing so, Grigg emphasised the importance of content for defining the *tecosca*:

The insular *speculum principum* literature directly engaged with a continuing Western Catholic dialogue on the constitution of Christian kingship. The insular clerics [...] used the genre to create a theoretical, constitutional model of authoritative kingship based on scriptural precedent.<sup>88</sup>

Clearly, Grigg perceived the development and promotion of an ideology of authoritative Christian kingship to be central to this literature. Specifically, it was the concept of the 'just king', which was most notably expressed through the themes of *iustitia regis* and *fír flathemon*, that Grigg deemed to be important.<sup>89</sup> Grigg's position, then, was reminiscent to that of her predecessors. She held the theme of *fír flathemon* to be key to the collective identity of these texts, and considered this theme to connect them to a body of literature from 'a variety of chronologies and countries'.<sup>90</sup> For Grigg, however, the Christian character of this kingship ideology was of paramount importance.<sup>91</sup> This interpretation was informed

---

<sup>84</sup> Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 138.

<sup>85</sup> Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 141.

<sup>86</sup> Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 140.

<sup>87</sup> Julianna Grigg, 'The Just King and *De Duodecim Abusiuus Saeculi*', *Parergon*, 27 (2010), 27-52 (27).

<sup>88</sup> Grigg, 'The Just King', 50.

<sup>89</sup> Grigg, 'The Just King': 'The justice of the king is the dominant theme within the ninth abuse of *De XII*, 35. '*De XII* and *tecosca* texts emphasised the king's 'duty' of rule whereby his 'right' to rule was secured by his preservation of justice', 41. '*De XII* and *Audacht Morainn* link the justice of the ruler with social and agricultural harmony', 35. 'The layered meaning of *De XII*'s '*iustitia regis*' appears to equate to the Old Irish *fír flathemon* (ruler's truth/justice) of *Audacht Morainn*', 37.

<sup>90</sup> Grigg, 'The Just King', 27.

<sup>91</sup> For instance, Grigg expressed her disagreement with Enright on this matter. Grigg, 'The Just King', 30. Enright referred to *fír flathemon* as 'the product of a purely pagan viewpoint'. Enright,

by the work of Kim McCone, particularly his 1990 work, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*.<sup>92</sup> In this, McCone argued that kingship ideology, including *fír flathemon*, had become attuned with the ideals of Christianity, and that texts such as *Audacht Morainn* and *Tecosca Cormaic* testify to this.<sup>93</sup> Grigg was not the first to accept McCone's ideas on this matter, but her article was the most overt use of these ideas in an attempt to characterise the *tecosc* corpus.

Grigg's discussion also drew attention to the significance of the language used by texts in a way that affects how we might perceive the intended audience of the *tecosca*. Initially, there was a tacit consensus amongst commentators that these texts belonged to a body of wisdom literature in the Irish vernacular. During the 1970s, however, scholars increasingly located this corpus within the wider body of European *speculum principum*. The implication was then that there were unspecified examples of this literature in other languages, but that the vernacular Irish *speculum principum* subdivision remained distinct within this broader phenomenon. Grigg continued to make a distinction between Latin and Irish-language *specula*, for example, when she spoke of 'De XII and *tecosca* texts'.<sup>94</sup> Importantly, however, her reason for doing so may have been related to her assertion that different languages might imply a difference in target audience:

The vernacular was [...] used by clerics to achieve a wider public through oral presentation. The ruler's subjects would therefore know how a 'just' ruler should behave [...]. Conversely, the Latin texts were the authoritative clerical voice used for a privileged audience who had an understanding of Latin or access to translators.<sup>95</sup>

This statement makes an important distinction between subject matter and audience. Kings and kingship may be the subject matter of a text, but this does not mean that kings were its exclusive audience: the subject of kingship was relative to the interests of many. This has important implications for how one might interpret the *tecosca*, because it suggests that a distinction can be made between advice *for* kings and advice *about* kings.

---

*Iona, Tara, and Soissons*, pp. 51-55. Cf. Binchy, *CASK*, 9-10. Mac Cana, 'Regnum and Sacerdotium', 447-48.

<sup>92</sup> Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990).

<sup>93</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 139-48.

<sup>94</sup> Grigg, 'The Just King', 31.

<sup>95</sup> Grigg, 'The Just King', 42-43.

This observation may be said to complement, or develop, the assertion made by Charles-Edwards that the target audience of these texts was not exclusively royal.

One of the most recent, and most significant, contributors to the study of the *tecosca* has been Maxim Fomin. In his 2013 monograph, *Instructions for Kings*, Fomin looked at *Audacht Morainn* and *Tecosca Cormaic* in great detail.<sup>96</sup> In this work, he regarded these two texts as examples of a body of literature that he variously refers to as *speculum principis*, *tecosca*, ‘gnomic texts’, ‘instructions to the kings’, ‘vernacular Irish wisdom texts’, and so forth.<sup>97</sup> Fomin made a distinction between vernacular and Hiberno-Latin examples, but this seems to have been a purely linguistic decision: ‘there also exists a corpus of Hiberno-Latin texts that deal with the same subject’.<sup>98</sup> This shared subject matter, which would appear to be the defining characteristic of these texts from Fomin’s perspective, is the ideology of kingship. Thus, Fomin has referred to ‘the ruler’s truth’ or ‘the justice of the king’ as ‘the main concept around which the *speculum principis* genre was centred’.<sup>99</sup> In accordance with this position, Fomin has decided to analyse only the paragraphs of *Tecosca Cormaic* that ‘specifically deal with kingship and related matters’.<sup>100</sup> Based on their subject matter, Fomin selected seven paragraphs from *Tecosca Cormaic* for consideration as evidence for kingship ideology. Regarding these seven, he has suggested that ‘the whole composition can be interpreted as moving progressively downward through the aristocratic hierarchy and deals with subjects pertaining to ideal rulership’.<sup>101</sup> In contrast, Fomin observed that the many other paragraphs of *Tecosca Cormaic* do not pertain to matters of rulership, and he made an example of § 19, the first line of which advises ‘*ní bága fri rí*g’ ‘do not contend with a king’:

This shows that the outlook of the composition has changed at this stage. By representing the king as object, and not the subject, of his exposition in the latter maxim, the author of [*Tecosca Cormaic*] reveals that he does not have

---

<sup>96</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*.

<sup>97</sup> See for example Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 21, 28, 38, 39, 40.

<sup>98</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 29.

<sup>99</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 31.

<sup>100</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 146.

<sup>101</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 179.

the figure of a king in his mind anymore. Rather, at this point he expounds maxims of a general character, appropriate for anyone.<sup>102</sup>

This approach was very possibly influenced by Ireland, who originally suggested that the perspective of a text should be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, Fomin has expressed some dissatisfaction with Ireland's assessment of *Tecosca Cormaic*: 'in spite of the fact that [*Tecosca Cormaic*] consists of heterogeneous matter, much of which has nothing to do with kingship, Ireland has no doubt that [*Tecosca Cormaic*] is a *speculum principis* text'.<sup>103</sup> Fomin, then, appears to have adopted Ireland's method, but has been more rigorous in its implementation. This is due to Fomin's decision to acknowledge the heterogeneous nature of *Tecosca Cormaic*, yet continue to analyse its value as evidence for kingship ideology. This is an approach that has been lacking in the scholarship of the *tecosca*, which has too often been insensitive to the diverse content of the genre, and of the individual texts themselves.

The foregoing discussion has attempted to elucidate some of the more significant breakthroughs, trends, and anomalies in the scholarship on the *tecosca*. Undoubtedly, the most enduring perception about these texts has been that they are advice literature for kings, but the manner in which this consensus has been reached and expressed is not without its problems. Generally speaking, the analysis of the *tecosca* has been piecemeal, and oftentimes superficial. Within the intermittent commentary, there have also been some inconsistencies of opinion that have never been properly addressed. Nevertheless, a workable consensus on the nature and extent of this corpus has prevailed.

The earliest commentators (Meyer, Best, Smith, and the Chadwicks), seem to have defined these texts based on their didactic nature and their intended audience. Whilst it was never made explicit, these scholars appear to have inferred the intended audience of the *tecosca* from their use of advisee characters. However, these advisee characters have also been a source of confusion. The opinions of Meyer, Smith, and the Chadwicks show considerable indecision over how important it was that these advisee characters were royal. This in turn has caused inconsistency over which texts actually belong in this corpus. This can be seen most clearly with Smith and his unstable definition of the *tecosca*, but can also be seen in

---

<sup>102</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 180. See Meyer, '*Tecosca Cormaic*', pp. 20-21, § 19. It is worth noting that § 19 is one of the paragraphs that features also in *Senbríathra Fíthail*.

<sup>103</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 145.

the work of the Chadwicks, who had to acknowledge the considerable overlap between their categories of gnomic literature. In this early period of commentary, there was also the suggestion of an inaugural or succession context for these texts, but this idea was never consistently expressed and always underdeveloped.

Despite these problems, it is clear that, by the 1970s, vernacular wisdom literature for kings was regarded by many as a distinct corpus. In the commentary from this period, and into the 1980s, the *tecosca* are frequently associated with kingship ideology. At the same time, these texts were increasingly seen as part of a wider genre of advice literature for kings, often referred to as *speculum principum*. At the centre of these developments lay an inverse comparison between the concepts of *fír flathemon* and *rex iniquus*; two literary manifestations of kingship ideology. This comparison linked vernacular Irish wisdom texts, Hiberno-Latin wisdom texts, and Latin wisdom literature from the Continent.

Following the 1970s, new commentators continued to view the *tecosca* in terms of kingship and kingship ideology, but they were able to contribute some important new insights that offered a more nuanced understanding of this. Most significant were those insights that concerned the intended audience of the *tecosca*. Ireland, for instance, encouraged more careful consideration of the narrative framing and the socio-political perspective of a text in order to determine its audience. In a similar vein, Charles-Edwards suggested that the relationship between the narrative context and the historical context need not be as simple as previously held. Instead, the royal advisee might easily represent a broader audience; one that included the warrior nobility as a whole. Grigg's work had further implications for this, suggesting a distinction between wisdom for kings and wisdom about kings. This perspective actually complements Charles-Edwards's notion of a broader target audience, although Grigg did not acknowledge this. Finally, Fomin's acceptance of the heterogeneous character of *Tecosca Cormaic* is surely an indication that the intended audience for these texts could be more complicated than previously admitted. This would also seem to work well with the opinions of Charles-Edwards and Grigg.

It is worth pointing out that, in this later phase of scholarship, the question of which texts belonged in this corpus still remained an active one. Ireland effectively ruled out two texts that had previously been considered part of the *tecosca* corpus on the basis that they did not relate to theories of kingship or rulership. Fomin went even further down this route,

and chose to focus only on the sections within *Tecosca Cormaic* that dealt with kingship and related matters. In retrospect, this may have been what Charles-Edwards was driving at when he suggested that *admonitio* could be both a genre, and a feature within texts not of that genre. Perhaps the amorphous nature of Charles-Edwards's *admonitio/tecosc* definition was a partial acknowledgement of the inherent difficulty of deciding which texts can be considered part of this corpus.

In the commentary ranging from Meyer to Mac Cana, there was a strong sense that the *tecosc* were part of, or descended from, the pre-Christian and native tradition in Ireland. Indeed, it was even suggested by Mac Cana and Byrne that this heritage reaches back to Indo-European roots.<sup>104</sup> There was little acknowledgement of any Christian influence upon this corpus, and such a possibility was, in some instances, flatly denied.<sup>105</sup> Conversely, the influence was thought to run in the opposite direction by Byrne, Mac Cana and Kelly, each of whom suggested that the *tecosc* tradition influenced ecclesiastic writers in Ireland and on the Continent.<sup>106</sup> This influence explains their association of this literature with the *speculum principum*. Despite this perceived link, it is clear that the *tecosc* were seen in a predominantly native, pre-Christian, secular and vernacular context during this period. This context was perhaps underscored by the association of the *tecosc* with royal inauguration, which Mac Cana, in particular, considered to be of equally archaic heritage.<sup>107</sup>

This contextualisation of the *tecosc* was significantly revised by McCone, who presented a case for the Christian and biblical influence upon these texts:

---

<sup>104</sup> Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 24-25; Mac Cana, 'Regnum and Sacerdotium', 447-50.

<sup>105</sup> Smith, *Speculum Principum*, pp. 12-13; Binchy, 'Bretha Déin Checht', 3-4; Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 24; Mac Cana, 'Regnum and Sacerdotium', 448.

<sup>106</sup> Grigg claims that Kelly 'found nothing to imply that *De XII* influenced, or was influenced by, a postulated *tecosc* tradition'. Whilst this is true, it is not representative of Kelly's view of the origins of the Irish *tecosc*, and the possibility of their influence upon the *specula*, as a whole. Fomin, on the other hand, accuses Kelly of, what he calls, 'an extremely moderate position', but ultimately concludes that Kelly considered the *tecosc* to be of native origin and to have influenced the *specula principum*. Kelly's opinion is quite evasive, for he presents a number of arguments concerning the nature and origins of the *tecosc* without stating his own preference. Nevertheless, I believe that Fomin's statement on this matter is the more accurate of the two. Grigg, 'The Just King', 30. Maxim Fomin, 'Wisdom-texts from Early Christian Ireland: Aspects of Style, Syntax and Semantics', in *Perspectives on Celtic Languages*, ed. Maria Bloch-Trojnar (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, 2009), pp. 161-86.

163. Cf. Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>107</sup> Mac Cana, 'Regnum and Sacerdotium', 448-49.

Instead of asking what is specifically Christian about extant vernacular instructions for princes and the like, one might equally or more appropriately ask what they contain that is specifically pagan or inapplicable to early Christian Irish society. The answer is, little or nothing.<sup>108</sup>

Ireland followed on quite logically from McCone in that he viewed these texts in a context that was Irish and contemporary, but with a Christian influence. Any suggestion of pre-Christian heritage was minimal, as was any connection with later Continental literature. McCone and Ireland held the *tecosca* in an Irish literary focus, but a much broader one than previously allowed due to the new understanding that these texts were influenced by Christian writing and biblical tradition. As a result, these texts were removed from their archaic, pre-Christian context and placed in a thoroughly contemporary Christian one.

At this stage in the historiography, one no-longer finds an inaugural or succession context implied for the *tecosca*, and it is a little ironic that the theory of an inaugural context falls out of favour around about the same time that the commentary more confidently asserted that the audience of these texts was royal. This is especially odd if one considers that there was no significant critique of this inaugural context to be found in the historiography.<sup>109</sup> This strange development might be explained, however, by the change in contextualisation that has just been illustrated. By de-emphasising the pre-Christian heritage of these texts, they were less likely to be seen as part of, what Mac Cana called, 'the pagan liturgy of sovereignty'.<sup>110</sup> At the same time, an emphasis upon their compatibility with Christian thought and writing led to them being viewed as works of contemporary political relevance. In this sense, the real-world context in which they were envisaged became less practical or ritualistic, and more intellectual. This idea makes sense if one considers also that this stage in the historiography witnessed a new emphasis upon content, as illustrated above, and more specifically upon the content that pertains to kingship ideology (i.e. *fir flathemon*).

This sense of a thoroughly contemporary context was consolidated by Charles-Edwards and Grigg through an expansion of the geographical context. Grigg and Charles-Edwards made a number of comparisons between the *tecosca* literature and writings of British and Anglo-

---

<sup>108</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 142.

<sup>109</sup> Kelly at least raised the issue of royal inauguration, but it was a rather brief consideration and takes, to use Fomin's phrase once more, 'an extremely moderate position'. See Kelly, *AM*, p. iv.

<sup>110</sup> Mac Cana, '*Regnum and Sacerdotium*', 448.

Saxon origin, creating, in the process, what might be called an Insular context for this literature. Grigg herself even spoke of an 'insular genre'. At the same time this geographical context expanded even further to become western European in scope. This expansion of the relevance of the *tecosca* outside of Ireland and into Francia, via Britain, in the centuries immediately preceding and following their production, consolidated the sense that these texts were embedded in the contemporary literary and intellectual context, and the notion that they were archaic in nature or origin now seems greatly removed from this conception.

## An Introduction to the Sources

The preceding chapter has traced the scholarly perceptions of the *tecosc*-corpus. It has shown that there have been a number of texts associated with this category over the years, but that a core set of examples can be discerned. These are: *Audacht Morainn*, *Tecosca Cormaic*, *Bríathartheosc Con Culainn*, *Tecosca Cúscraid*, *Diambad messe bad rí réil*, and *Cert cech rí co réil*. These are the texts that have been most frequently considered *tecosc*, and for which significant doubts concerning their suitability for inclusion in this corpus have not been raised. Having established, then, this corpus of six *tecosc*, it is appropriate to introduce and describe these texts with accompanying background information. These introductions will include information about manuscript witnesses, editions, and translations, as well as descriptions of some of the more important aspects of style and form. Since it has been shown that the narrative framing of these texts, in particular their use of royal advisee characters, has been instrumental in the perception that they constitute a distinct category or genre, this aspect will be emphasised here.

## ***Audacht Morainn***

### **Manuscripts<sup>111</sup>**

#### **Recension A**

A<sub>1</sub>, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1298 (H 2 7), pp. 418a-420a; A<sub>2</sub>, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1318 (H 2 16), pp. 413b-414b [Yellow Book of Lecan]; A<sub>3</sub>, London, British Library, MS 33993, ff. 7<sup>v</sup>-8<sup>r</sup> (A<sup>3</sup>).

#### **Recension B**

B<sub>1</sub>, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 967 (23 N 10), pp. 49-52; B<sub>2</sub>, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Adv. MS 72. 1. 42, ff. 13a-14b; B<sub>3</sub>, London, British Library, MS Egerton 88, ff. 13v-14v; B<sub>4</sub>, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 966 (23 N 27), pp. 35-9.

#### **Recension L**

L<sub>1</sub>, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1339 (H 2 18), ff. 293a-294b [Book of Leinster]; L<sub>2</sub>, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1339 (H 2 18), ff. 346a-c [Book of Leinster]; L<sub>3</sub>, Dublin, University College, MS Franciscan A 9, pp. 42a15-43b14.

#### **Recension N**

Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 966 (23 N 27), pp. 40-3; Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1391 (H 5 19), pp. 92-6.

### **Editions and Translations**

Ahlqvist, Anders, ed. and trans., '*Le Testament de Morann*', *Études Celtiques*, 21 (1984), 151-170, [Rec. B].

Fomin, Maxim, ed. and trans., *Instructions for Kings: Secular and Clerical Images of Kingship in Early Ireland and Ancient India* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2013), [Rec. A].

Kelly, Fergus, ed. and trans., *Audacht Morainn* (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976), [Rec. B].

Thurneysen, Rudolf, ed. and trans., '*Morands Fürstenspiegel*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 11 (1917), 56-106, [Rec. A].

---

<sup>111</sup> The manuscripts listed here, and the system of reference used, have been taken from Kelly, *AM*, pp. xx-xxix, and p. 72. Note that Maxim Fomin has used the same manuscripts and reference system in his later edition, translation, and discussion of *Audacht Morainn*. See Fomin, *Instructions*.

## Overview

Four recensions of *Audacht Morainn* ‘The Testament of Morann’ (referred to as *AM* henceforth) have been identified by scholars to date. In 1917, Rudolf Thurneysen named three of these; A, B, and L, and provided an edition and translation of A.<sup>112</sup> Thurneysen originally regarded A as the oldest recension, but he was soon disproven by Julius Pokorny, who established that B was in fact earlier.<sup>113</sup> Thurneysen conceded to Pokorny, and subsequent commentators have followed suit.<sup>114</sup> In 1976, Kelly provided an edition and translation of the B-recension. In this, he considered MS 966 (23 N 27), from the Royal Irish Academy, to represent a separate recension. He named this N. According to Kelly, Recensions L and N were derived from a common source that split from the A-recension.<sup>115</sup> The most recent editor and translator of the A recension, Fomin, has concurred with Kelly’s stemma.<sup>116</sup> Kelly has argued that Recension B was originally compiled c. 700, and that certain segments may have been ‘composed a good deal earlier’.<sup>117</sup> Kelly regarded L and A as ‘later versions’, but did not suggest how late.<sup>118</sup> Fomin similarly regarded Recension A as ‘obviously very late and extremely corrupt’, but also declined to be more specific on this chronology. Nevertheless, Fomin has defended the testimony of Recension A, stating that ‘its significance as an independent version of *AM*, distinguished from B and L versions cannot be disregarded’.<sup>119</sup> Hereinafter, Kelly’s edition and translation of Recension B will be referred to as *AM* (B), and Fomin’s edition and translation of Recension A will be referred to as *AM* (A). *AM* will be used to refer to no recension in particular, but rather the text in general.

The advice in *AM* is not presented as a bare list of maxims but rather as a monologue, addressed from one character to another. Indeed, the text purports to be the advice given

---

<sup>112</sup> Rudolf Thurneysen, ‘*Morands Fürstenspiegel*’, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 11 (1917), 56-106 (73-74).

<sup>113</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xiii.

<sup>114</sup> Rudolf Thurneysen, ‘*Allerlei keltisches*’, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 13 (1921), 297-304 (298-99).

<sup>115</sup> Kelly, *AM*, pp. xiii, xx-xxix.

<sup>116</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 389. Cf. Thurneysen, ‘*Morands Fürstenspiegel*’, Julius Pokorny, ‘*Zu Morands Fürstenspiegel*’, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 13 (1921), 43-46.

<sup>117</sup> Kelly, *AM*, pp. xxix-xlv.

<sup>118</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xiii.

<sup>119</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 369.

by a judge named Morann, via his fosterson Neire, to an ascendant king of Ireland, Feradach Find Fechnach. These are legendary figures, known also from other works of early Irish literature, such as the tales *Bruiden Meic Da Réo* 'Mac Da Réo's Hostel' and *Scélar Chairbre Cinn Cait* 'The Tale of Cairbre Cat-Head': two texts which contribute to the background narrative of *AM*. In short, *AM* is set in Ireland a number of years after a revolt by the *aithechthúatha* 'vassal tribes' against the *tigernae n-Érenn* 'nobles of Ireland'. In this revolt, the ruling class was deposed and slaughtered. Feradach was the son of Craumthainn Niath Náir, the high-king of Ireland who was among those killed in the revolt. Feradach was born in exile in Scotland, whence his pregnant mother had fled. The 'Testament of Morann', then, marks Feradach's return to Ireland with an army in order to claim the kingship of his father. Ralph O'Connor has commented on these legends, and elucidated a number of narrative and ideological similarities and dissimilarities between the texts associated with it.<sup>120</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that an audience familiar with these legendary figures would have understood the implied narrative context of this text.<sup>121</sup>

Given the importance placed on the use of advisee characters by scholars of the *tecosca*, it is worth pointing out that Feradach Find Fechnach is identified as the advisee in all surviving manuscripts. All manuscripts of *AM* (B), and L<sub>1</sub> from Recension L, provide an introductory paragraph (§ 1) that sets out the basic narrative premise, including the roles of Morann and Feradach.<sup>122</sup> In *AM* (A), and the other manuscripts of Recension L, this paragraph is reduced to a single line, but Morann and Feradach are nonetheless established as the advisor and advisee characters.<sup>123</sup> Even in the N-recension, a late and truncated version that is also missing both this title and the narrative introduction, Feradach is clearly addressed within the *tecosc* itself: '*Apair fri Feradach*', 'Tell Feradach'.<sup>124</sup> Hence, the association of this text with the character Feradach Find Fechnach is consistent from the earliest extant copy to the latest. As a result, this association is unlikely to have been an arbitrary one at any stage of its development, and should be seriously considered as an indication of original intent and continued perception of *AM*.

---

<sup>120</sup> Ralph O'Connor, 'Searching for the Moral in *Bruiden Meic Da Réo*', *Ériu*, 56 (2006), 117-43.

<sup>121</sup> Kelly, *AM*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>122</sup> *AM* (B), § 1. Kelly, *AM*, p. 58. Cf. Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 128-29.

<sup>123</sup> *AM* (A), § 1. Kelly, *AM*, p. 58. Cf. Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 128-29.

<sup>124</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. 63.

In his 1966 book on *The Early English and Celtic Lyric*, P. L. Henry provided an early and important analysis of the style and content of early Irish gnomic literature.<sup>125</sup> Of the texts he considered, Henry devoted the most attention to *AM* and he identified four ‘rhetorical devices’ common to both recensions of *AM*.<sup>126</sup> These were: ‘copious alliteration’, ‘parallelism, repetition and variation’, ‘word-order’, and ‘the absence or suppression’ of certain words.<sup>127</sup> ‘Word-order’ was subdivided into ‘cases of nouns in preposition’, ‘case-forms without prepositions’, and the ‘post-position of the verb’, whilst the words omitted or suppressed were the copula, the conjunction ‘and’, and the definite article.<sup>128</sup> Following Henry, Kelly and Fomin have expanded upon his observations.<sup>129</sup> Generally speaking, they have noted that the A-recension makes less use of these rhetorical devices than the B-recension does, and further inconsistencies have been observed within each recension. Kelly has said, for example, that ‘variations in alliterative patterns’ coincide with variations ‘in style, language, and subject matter’, and that this has suggested to him ‘that the text is composed of different strata’.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, Fomin considered it ‘difficult to find a systematic rationale in the structure of *AM*’, declaring that ‘its contents are disparate in character’.<sup>131</sup> Fomin expanded upon Kelly’s ‘different strata’ within *AM* (B), and sub-divided *AM* (A) in the same fashion.<sup>132</sup> Kelly divided *AM* (B) into seven sections, each representing what he perceived to be sub-strata of the composition: §§ 2-5, 6-11, 12-21, 22-31, 32-46, 47-52, 54-63.<sup>133</sup> Kelly did not include § 1 as he believed that this was in fact ‘a later prose account’.<sup>134</sup> Nor did he include § 53, which he suggested was originally ‘the closing paragraph or *dúnad* of an earlier state of the text’.<sup>135</sup> Fomin largely agreed with Kelly’s sub-division of *AM* (B), although he added some detailed observations of his own.<sup>136</sup> The only significant deviation was that Fomin preferred to further sub-divide Kelly’s seventh section (§§ 54-63) into two

---

<sup>125</sup> P. L. Henry, *The Early English and Celtic Lyric* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1966).

<sup>126</sup> Henry refers to *AM* as *Tecosca Moraind*.

<sup>127</sup> Henry, *Celtic Lyric*, pp. 106-10.

<sup>128</sup> Henry, *Celtic Lyric*, p. 109.

<sup>129</sup> Kelly, *AM*, pp. xxxiii-xlv. Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 111-17, 128-43.

<sup>130</sup> Kelly, *AM*, pp. xl-xli.

<sup>131</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 111.

<sup>132</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 111, 116-17.

<sup>133</sup> Kelly, *AM*, pp. xli-xliv.

<sup>134</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xli.

<sup>135</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xliii.

<sup>136</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 111-15.

parts (§§ 54-57 and §§ 58-62).<sup>137</sup> As for *AM (A)*, Fomin sub-divided this text into eight sections: §§ 1, 2, 3-4, 5-9, 10-26, 27-43, 44-49, 50-53.<sup>138</sup>

One of the most important stylistic devices used in *AM* is alliteration, of which two kinds are found. The more prominent type is line-internal, in which two or more stressed words in a single line alliterate. The other is connective or linking alliteration, in which the last word of one line alliterates with the first word of the next.<sup>139</sup> In *AM (B)*, connective alliteration occurs only in §§ 2-5.<sup>140</sup> On the other hand, line-internal alliteration is near-consistent in §§ 12-21 and §§ 33-46, whilst §§ 54-63 and §§ 22-31 make use of what Kelly has called partial, or defective, line-internal alliteration.<sup>141</sup> Only §§ 6-11 of *AM (B)* can be said not to use alliteration at all.<sup>142</sup> Turning to *AM (A)*, alliteration can be found most consistently in § 3 and §§ 10-36. Fomin has commented that § 3 'is very neatly bound together by means of the different patterns of alliteration employed'.<sup>143</sup> In this lengthy paragraph, linking alliteration is primary and line-internal alliteration secondary. The case is quite different for §§ 10-26. In these paragraphs, line-internal alliteration is the 'main principle of organisation', applied rigidly in over half of the lines and partly in the remainder.<sup>144</sup> Besides being consistent, the alliteration here is in several instances quite complex, involving consonant pairs and clusters.<sup>145</sup> Fomin also points out that the same use of alliteration can be found in the parallel section in *AM (B)*; §§ 12-21, and also in the following section of *AM (B)*; §§ 22-31. Elsewhere in *AM (A)*, alliteration is much less consistent. For example, in §§ 30-43, alliteration is only partial and 'less sophisticated'.<sup>146</sup> Finally, there are some scattered and isolated examples of alliteration elsewhere: the first line of § 46, and the final lines of §§ 2, 27, and 48.<sup>147</sup>

---

<sup>137</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 115.

<sup>138</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 128-43.

<sup>139</sup> NB. Kelly has called this feature 'connective alliteration', whilst Fomin has preferred the phrase 'linking alliteration'. Cf. Kelly, *AM*, p. xli. Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 112.

<sup>140</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xli.

<sup>141</sup> Kelly, *AM*, pp. xl, xli, xlii-xliii.

<sup>142</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xli.

<sup>143</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 129.

<sup>144</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 131.

<sup>145</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 132.

<sup>146</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 137.

<sup>147</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 129, 136, 142.

In the introduction to his edition of *AM* (B), Kelly defined parallelism as a literary device in which a ‘sentence is repeated a number of times with one or sometimes two verbal substitutions’.<sup>148</sup> Henry did not provide such a neat definition, but instead selected two examples from *AM* (A) to illustrate this device, both of which are worth reprinting here. The first is *AM* (A) § 4:

*Sluind dó ri cāch brēthir,  
beir dó ri cāch brēthir,  
indid dō ri cāch brēthir  
brig dō ri cāch brēthir.*<sup>149</sup>

The second example is *AM* (A) §§ 5-8:

*Mórad fīrinni, na-mmórfa.  
Nertad fīrinni, na-nertfa.*

*Comad fīrinni, cot·n-ōfadar.  
Tócbad fīrinni, cot·n-uicēba.*<sup>150</sup>

Henry noted that this final example from *AM* (A) is a survival from §§ 6-11 of *AM* (B), and this latter passage is exactly the one that Kelly used to illustrate his definition of parallelism.<sup>151</sup> These examples are the most substantial that can be found in either recension of *AM*. In addition to these, Henry and Fomin identified some other, more minor examples, but it is not necessary to repeat these here.<sup>152</sup>

One of the more obvious rhetorical devices that can be found in both recensions of *AM* is the use of opening formulae in consecutive series of paragraphs. In a number of cases,

---

<sup>148</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xli. Cf. Bowra, *Primitive Song*, pp. 80-82. Henry, *The Early English and Celtic Lyric*, p. 106.

<sup>149</sup> Henry, *Celtic Lyric*, p. 106. The following translation is Henry’s.  
Express to him the word before all,  
bring him the word before all,  
tell him the word before all,  
declare to him the word before all.

<sup>150</sup> Henry, *Celtic Lyric*, p. 107. The following translation is Henry’s.  
Let him exalt justice, it will exalt him.  
Let him strengthen justice, it will strengthen him.

Let him safeguard justice, it will safeguard him.  
Let him elevate justice, it will elevate him.

<sup>151</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xli. Cf. Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 112, 130-31.

<sup>152</sup> Henry, *Celtic Lyric*, pp. 107-8. Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 114, 115, 142.

these series form very striking blocks within the texts. There are three of these opening formulae that can be found in *AM*, originally identified by Kelly and later acknowledged by Fomin. Firstly, to follow the order in which they appear, there is the formula *Is tre fír flathemon* ‘it is through the ruler’s truth’. This formula is used in *AM* (B) §§ 12-21, 24-28, and *AM* (A) §§ 10a-26. Next there is the phrase *Apair fris* ‘tell him’, found in *AM* (B) §§ 12, 22-23, 29-32, and in *AM* (A) §§ 27, 30-34, 36-43, 51. Finally, there are those paragraphs that begin with *Ad-mestar* ‘let him estimate’. These can be found in *AM* (B) §§ 33-52, but do not feature in *AM* (A) at all.

As stated above, these opening formulae occur mostly in series of consecutive paragraphs, and it will be noticed that these series often coincide, roughly, with some of the sub-sections of *AM* identified by Kelly and Fomin. However, it must be pointed out that these formulae were not the main criteria by which these scholars have made these sub-divisions. Instead, alliteration has been the primary criterion for Kelly and Fomin in this respect. Therefore, despite referring to *AM* (B) §§ 12-21 as the ‘*Is tre fír flathemon* series’, Fomin distinguishes this section of the text primarily because of its rigid use of alliteration and tmesis.<sup>153</sup> Similarly, whilst *Ad-mestar* is used throughout *AM* (B) §§ 33-52, both Kelly and Fomin view this as two distinct sub-sections; §§ 33-46 and §§ 47-52. One of their main reasons for doing so was that the former section makes strict use of line-internal alliteration, whilst the latter does not.<sup>154</sup> In addition to these considerations, there are some inconsistencies in the use of these formulae that might preclude their use as the primary criteria for discerning sub-sections. For example, the use of two formulae in a single paragraph (*AM* (B) § 12), and the more fractured deployment of *Apair fris* across paragraphs.

Unlike Kelly and Fomin, Henry did not speak of opening formulae when discussing the devices of *AM*. Instead, Henry spoke of ‘gnomic catchwords in series’. Some of Henry’s catchwords bear a resemblance to the formulae of Kelly and Fomin, in that they appear at the beginning of consecutive paragraphs.<sup>155</sup> Indeed, one of Henry’s examples was the aforementioned *ad-mestar* series. Two further ‘gnomic catchwords’, not included in either

---

<sup>153</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 113. Cf. Kelly, *AM*, pp. xli-xlii.

<sup>154</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xlii. Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 114-15.

<sup>155</sup> Henry, *Celtic Lyric*, pp. 110-11.

Kelly's or Fomin's list of formulae, are quite striking and ought to be illustrated here. One of these is the word *dligid*, which appears a series of paragraphs found only in *AM* (A).

*Ar dligid cach dodcadach dīgdi.*  
*Dligid cach doinech díbdub.*  
*Dligid cach diumsach tairnem.*  
*Dligid cach forránach fuidbech.*  
*Dligid cach forcradach fe[i]scre.<sup>156</sup>*

The other example is the word *to-léci*, which appears a series of paragraphs exclusive to *AM* (B).

*To-léci dorche do sórchi.*  
*To-léci brón do fáilti.*  
*To-léci borb do ecnu.*  
*To-léci báeth do gáeth.<sup>157</sup>*

The position of these catchwords at the head of consecutive paragraphs is clearly very similar to the opening formulae of Fomin and Kelly. Henry's other examples of 'gnomic catchwords' are not like this, however. Some catchwords closely follow one another in a single paragraph, whilst others are spread out across multiple paragraphs. These catchwords include forms of the verb 'to be', used multiple times in *AM* (A) § 52, and the word *cach*, scattered across *AM* (A) §§ 12-15, 17-18, 20, 24-26, 28-29, 35, 37, 39, 42, 48, 52.<sup>158</sup>

Another notable characteristic of *AM* is the appearance of the verb at the end of clauses. This happens by way of two similar literary devices: tmesis and Bergin's Law. In Kelly's words, tmesis is when 'the preverb comes at the beginning of the clause with the rest of

---

<sup>156</sup> *AM* (A) §§ 34a-h. Cf. *eDIL*, s.v. *dligid*.  
 For every man of ill fortune deserves appeasement.  
 Destruction is proper for every tempestuous person.  
 Humiliation is proper for every proud [one].  
 Suppressing is proper for every aggressive [one].  
 Decline is proper for every excessive [one].

<sup>157</sup> *AM* (B) §§ 54a-m. Cf. *eDIL*, s.v. *do-léci*.  
 Darkness yields to light.  
 Sorrow yields to joy.  
 An oaf yields to a sage.  
 A fool yields to a wise man.

<sup>158</sup> Henry, *Celtic Lyric*, pp. 110-11.

the verb at the end'.<sup>159</sup> Bergin's Law, on the other hand, is best defined by Osborn Bergin himself: 'simple and compound verbs may be placed at the end of their clauses; the former then have conjunct flexion, the latter prototonic forms'.<sup>160</sup> These two features were observed in *AM* by Henry, who identified examples of both in *AM* (A) and *AM* (B).<sup>161</sup> Kelly also drew attention to tmesis and Bergin's Law, mainly in the context of *AM* (B), but gave some examples from *AM* (A).<sup>162</sup> The vast majority of the examples given by Henry and Kelly, for both *AM* (A) and (B), are to be found in the *Is tre fír flathemon* series.<sup>163</sup> Strangely, Fomin has said nothing regarding tmesis or Bergin's Law in his extensive analysis of *AM* (A), nor in his brief overview of *AM* (B). For Kelly, these features were significant because he took them to be an indication of the archaic nature of certain segments of *AM*, and also of *AM* (B) relative to *AM* (A).<sup>164</sup> Kelly followed the argument put forth by Calvert Watkins that placing the verb in final position was a characteristic of early Indo-European language, and that tmesis and Bergin's Law were hence 'direct inferences from Indo-European times'.<sup>165</sup>

In §§ 2-5 Morann addresses Neire and charges him with the task of bringing to Feradach 'Mo bríathra rem bás'.<sup>166</sup> As Fomin has observed, this section 'provides the reader with the notional narrative context for the whole text'.<sup>167</sup> It also speaks of some of the characteristics that Feradach's rule will have. §§ 6-11 are 'a repetitive sequence of parallel sentences' that express a reciprocal relationship between the ruler and his *fírinne*

---

<sup>159</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xxxiv

<sup>160</sup> Bergin quoted in Kelly, *AM*, p. xxxvi. Cf. Osborn Bergin, 'On the Syntax of the Verb in Old Irish', *Ériu*, 12 (1938), pp. 197-214.

<sup>161</sup> Henry, *Celtic Lyric*, p. 109.

<sup>162</sup> Kelly, *AM*, pp. xxxiv-xxxviii.

<sup>163</sup> Kelly cites 'eight certain or probable cases of tmesis in Rec. B' (§§ 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 23, 29, 32), and 'seven certain or probable examples' of Bergin's Law (§§ 12, 13, 16, 21, 26, 43, 44). The examples of tmesis in *AM* (A) appear to be derived from *AM* (B), and, whilst Kelly has observed additional examples of Bergin's Law, not taken directly from *AM* (B), he notes that these are in a corrupt form and suggests that they may be examples of pseudo-archaism. Kelly, *AM*, pp. xxxiv-xxxvi. Henry gave only a handful of examples of tmesis and Bergin's Law from *AM* (A) and *AM* (B). He was not attempting to make a comprehensive list. Even so, in a few instances Henry has either identified examples not reiterated by Kelly, or Kelly has silently disagreed over whether they are tmesis or Bergin's Law. Henry, *Celtic Lyric*, p. 109.

<sup>164</sup> Kelly, *AM*, pp. xxxiv, xxxiii.

<sup>165</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xxxiv. Cf. Calvert Watkins, 'Preliminaries to a Historical and Comparative Analysis of the Syntax of the Old Irish Verb', *Celtica*, 6 (1963), 1-49 (36-39). The quotation here is from Watkins.

<sup>166</sup> *AM* (B), § 2: 'My words before my death.'

<sup>167</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 112.

‘righteousness’, his *trócaire* ‘mercy’, and his *túatha* ‘tribes’.<sup>168</sup> Paragraphs 12-21 are a series, each beginning with the famous formula *Is tre fír flathemon* ‘it is through the truth of the ruler’.<sup>169</sup> According to Fomin, this section lists ‘the proper activities of a righteous ruler’.<sup>170</sup> The section spanning §§ 22-31 has been subdivided into three subsections by Fomin. The first (§ 22) uses the analogy of an *arid sencharpait* ‘driver an old chariot’ in order to advise Feradach. The second (§§ 23-28) employs the *Is tre fír flathemon* opening formula and handles ‘the cosmic consequences of righteous rule’.<sup>171</sup> The third subsection (§§ 29-31) opens with the phrase *Apair fris* ‘tell him’. Overall, Fomin and Kelly struggled to find any stylistic or thematic unity in the section spanning §§ 22-32. It seems to have been considered a section by virtue of its exclusion from the surrounding sections, rather than any internal criteria. The next section includes §§ 32-46 and Fomin has referred to it as the *Ad-mestar* series, after the opening formula which characterises it: ‘let him estimate’. Kelly has noticed that § 46 seems to provide a *dúnad* to §32, suggesting that this once formed a unit in itself.<sup>172</sup> Fomin has also presented his own interpretation of an underlying ideology that he believes to unify this section:

The main focus of these sections is on the ‘creations of the creator’ (*dúili Dúilemon*) [...]. These elements are the constituents of the Universe created by the Lord, and the righteous ruler is required to assess them and make them serve or act properly in his domains. Here one can observe a striking example of the Christian view of the omnipotent God to a mortal king.<sup>173</sup>

The following section, §§ 47-52, also uses the *Ad-mestar* formula but has been excluded from the previous section because of the aforementioned *dúnad* which precedes it. In addition to this, Fomin has regarded it as being ‘more miscellaneous in structure and content’ than the preceding section.<sup>174</sup> The final section of *AM* (B), according to Kelly, is §§ 54-63. These paragraphs follow § 53, which repeats the introductory formula found in § 2. Thus Kelly has suggested might have been the *dúnad* closing an earlier version of the text.<sup>175</sup>

---

<sup>168</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 112.

<sup>169</sup> Note that Kelly translated the opening formula as ‘it is through the justice of the ruler’, whilst Fomin preferred ‘it is through the ruler’s truth’. He did not explain why.

<sup>170</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 113.

<sup>171</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 113

<sup>172</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xlii-xliii.

<sup>173</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 114.

<sup>174</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 115.

<sup>175</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xliii.

In support of this theory, he has noted the ‘very disparate nature of the material which follows’ in §§ 54-63.<sup>176</sup> Fomin, on the other hand, has seen fit to divide Kelly’s final section in two. The first part, §§ 54-57, he has characterised as giving an account of the ‘moral characteristics of the righteous ruler’. The second part, §§ 58-62, gives a striking, fourfold classification of rulers, replete with the qualities that define them. These rulers are: the *fírflaith* ‘true ruler’, the *cíallflaith* ‘wily ruler’, the *flaith congále co slógaib* ‘ruler of occupation with hosts’, and the *tarbflaith* ‘bull ruler’.<sup>177</sup>

Of the aforementioned sections, Kelly considered the earliest to be the third (‘the first part of the *Is tre fír flathemon* series, i.e. §§ 12-21’) and the fifth (‘the first part of the *Admestar* series, i.e. §§ 32-46’).<sup>178</sup> His reasons for believing so were because of their ‘rigid alliteration’, ‘archaic’ syntax, lack of *ocus* (7), and use of verbs in the final position. Conversely, he believed that the sections that immediately follow these two, i.e. the fourth (§§ 22-31) and the sixth (§§ 47-52), were later additions. In these sections, the initial verb is more common than the final verb, and *ocus* (7) can be found several times (§§ 28, 51, and 52). He also noted that these sections seem to contain legal matter, especially concerning the rights of the men of art, and compared these to the work of a ‘poetico-legal’ school proposed by D. A. Binchy, which included the legal status tracts *Bretha Nemed* and *Uraicecht Becc*.<sup>179</sup>

Turning now to *AM* (A), Fomin has followed Kelly’s approach and subdivided this version according to stylistic and thematic patterns. Fomin’s commentary on these sections is very detailed, and so, for the sake of brevity, only the more noteworthy differences with *AM* (B) will be presented here. The first of these occurs in §§ 5-9, in which the reciprocity between a ruler and his *fírinne* ‘righteousness’ is illustrated.<sup>180</sup> The difference between this sequence in *AM* (A) and *AM* (B) is that the former emphasises the role of *fírinne* by omitting the other

---

<sup>176</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xliii.

<sup>177</sup> Kelly’s translations for the names of these rulers have been followed in this thesis. Fomin translated *cíallflaith* as ‘prudent ruler’ and *flaith congále co slógaib* as ‘the aggressor’. However, the compiler of *AM* obviously did not consider the *cíallflaith* to be an entirely good ruler, and so ‘wily’ would be a better translation than ‘prudent’, which does not have any negative connotations. As for ‘the aggressor’, there is simply not enough in this translation to distinguish his character from that of the bull ruler, who is undoubtedly very aggressive. The compiler of *AM* was obviously being very specific when they referred to the third ruler as *flaith congále co slógaib*. The translation should reflect this.

<sup>178</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xliv.

<sup>179</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xlv-xlv. Cf. D A Binchy, ‘*Bretha Nemed*’, *Ériu*, 17 (1955), 4-6. D. A. Binchy, ‘*Bretha Déin Chécht*’, *Ériu*, 20 (1966), 1-66.

<sup>180</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 131.

two elements found in *AM* (B): *trócaire* ‘mercy’ and *túatha* ‘tribes’. In addition to this, *AM* (A) ends this section with an additional paragraph (§ 9), not found in *AM* (B), which directly associates the ruler’s protection of *fírinne* with a good and long reign. Next are §§ 10-26, which contain the *Is tre fír flathemon* series in *AM* (A). Unlike *AM* (B), the use of this opening formula is not split across two sections of *AM* (A). There are also more paragraphs using this formula in *AM* (A) than in *AM* (B): six paragraphs from *AM* (A) do not feature in *AM* (B).<sup>181</sup> The *Apair fris* series in *AM* (A) runs from §§ 27-43, although the content of this section is quite different from the *Apair fris* section in *AM* (B).<sup>182</sup> The majority of these paragraphs have no parallel in *AM* (B). The only two are *AM* (B) § 22 with *AM* (A) § 27, and *AM* (B) § 29 with *AM* (A) § 35.<sup>183</sup> The former pair contain the ‘old chariot’ analogy, and the latter two proscribe blood-shed by the ruler. Whilst the style and subject matter of the *Apair fris* section in *AM* (B) (§§ 22-31) were deemed somewhat incongruous by both Fomin and Kelly, Fomin was able to characterise the content of the *Apair fris* section in *AM* (A) (§§ 27-43) as ‘warnings against ruining fortunate rule’.<sup>184</sup> The *Apair fris* series in *AM* (B) was followed by the *Ad-mestar* series. This is a reasonably long and consistent section of the text; the first part of which Kelly believed to be one of the oldest parts of *AM* (B) (§§ 32-46). It is striking then that the *Ad-mestar* series does not feature in *AM* (A). *AM* (A) also omits *AM* (B) §§ 54-57, which was also deemed a later addition by Kelly and Fomin. Instead, *AM* (A) proceeds directly to the four types of ruler, §§ 44-49, which is paralleled by §§ 58-62 in *AM* (B). Regarding this, one of Fomin’s most interesting observations is that the evidence of *AM* (A) suggests that the *tarbflaith* was a later addition to the types of ruler.<sup>185</sup> There are several pieces of evidence that suggest this. *AM* (A) § 44 says that there are three types of ruler, but the text goes on to describe four.<sup>186</sup> The first three of the four descriptions seem to be in ascending order of preference, beginning with the *flaith congála co slúagaib díanechtair*, moving onto the *cíallflaith*, and then the *fírflaith*. The placement of the *tarbflaith* in the fourth position seems like a later addition.<sup>187</sup> Fomin also

---

<sup>181</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 131 n. 14. Fomin lists these: §§ 12, 14, 20-22, 25. He also includes §§ 28-29 in his list, but this cannot be correct, since these two are outwith the parameters of his section (§§ 10-26).

<sup>182</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 136-37.

<sup>183</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 136, 139.

<sup>184</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 136.

<sup>185</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 141-43, 419-21.

<sup>186</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 419.

<sup>187</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 419.

noted that the description of the *tarbflaith* features inversions of words and phrases from the descriptions of the former three types of ruler, suggesting that they served as a model for the fourth category.<sup>188</sup> Finally, *AM* (A) ends with a section (§§ 50-53) that Fomin entitles ‘reproof of paganism and idolatry’, although he comments that ‘these paragraphs consist of miscellaneous matter’.<sup>189</sup> By contrast, *AM* (B) concluded immediately after the descriptions of the four types of ruler with a single lengthy paragraph mirroring the opening paragraph (§ 2). Instead, the contents of §§ 50-53 and also § 49, which Fomin has included in his preceding section, are somewhat reminiscent of *AM* (B) §§ 54-57, and both have been considered to be part of a later stratum of *AM*.<sup>190</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 141-42, 419.

<sup>189</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 143.

<sup>190</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 115, 143. Kelly, *AM*, pp. xliii-xliv.

## **Tecosca Cormaic**

### **Manuscripts<sup>191</sup>**

#### **Recension N**

N<sub>0</sub>, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1298 (H 2 7); N<sub>1</sub>, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 967 (23 N 10), pp. 1.1-5.21; N<sub>2</sub>, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 132 (23 D 2), pp. 5.1-25.2; N<sub>3</sub>, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 966 (23 N 27), ff. 7v11-16v z; N<sub>4</sub>, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1391 (H 5 19), pp. 97.1-128.11; N<sub>5</sub>, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Adv. 72. 1. 2; N<sub>6</sub>, Maynooth, MS 49; N<sub>7</sub>, Maynooth, MS 99.

#### **Recension L**

L<sub>1</sub>, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1339 (H 2 18), pp. 343 a 1-345 b 16 [Book of Leinster]; L<sub>2</sub>, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1319 (H 2 17) ff. 145 v a 1-146 v d14 (formerly Royal Irish Academy, MS 535 (23 P 2)) [Book of Lecan]; L<sub>3</sub>, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 1225 (D ii 1), pp. ff. 130 r a 14-133 r b 9 [Book of Uí Mhaine]; L<sub>4</sub>, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 536 (23 P 12), ff. 39 v a 44-40 v b 42; L<sub>5</sub>, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Adv. 72. 1. 1; L<sub>6</sub>, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1349 (H 4 8); L<sub>7</sub>, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1295 (H 2 4), p. 131.1; L<sub>8</sub>, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, G 42.

#### **Recension X**

X<sub>1</sub>, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Adv. 72. 1. 7.

### **Editions and Translations**

Fomin, Maxim, ed. and trans., *Instructions for Kings: Secular and Clerical Images of Kingship in Early Ireland and Ancient India* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2013).

Hardiman, James, ed. and trans., 'Wise Sayings from the Irish', *Irish Minstrelsy; or, Bardic Remains of Ireland*, 2, ed James Hardiman (London: Joseph Robins et al, 1831), 396-7.

Meyer, Kuno, ed. and trans., *The Instructions of King Cormac mac Airt*, Todd Lecture Series, xv (1909).

O'Donovan, John, ed. and trans., 'Cormac's Instructions', *Dublin Penny Journal*, 1, no. 27 (Dec. 29, 1832), 213-5.

O'Donovan, John, ed. and trans., 'Ancient Irish Literature: Cormac's Instructions (Continued)', *Dublin Penny Journal*, 1, no. 29 (Jan. 12, 1833), 231-2.

---

<sup>191</sup> This list of manuscripts and their system of reference has been taken from Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 147. Note that Fomin's list of manuscripts and reference system for *TC* is different from that of Meyer.

Rolleston, T W, trans., 'The Instructions of the King', *The High Deeds of Finn and Other Bardic Romances of Ancient Ireland*, ed T W Rolleston (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, [no date]).

## Overview

Of the editions and translations listed above, only those of Meyer and Fomin are of a suitable academic standard for use in this thesis. The others have been included here for a sense of completion only. Having said this, John O'Donovan's edition is of some interest because his preamble to the text attests to the long life-span of the legend of Cormac mac Airt and how it was perceived in the early nineteenth century:

He was a wise and good man, and although a pagan, is said to have had the sublimest idea of the First Cause. He attempted to reform the religion of the Druids, and to substitute for their polytheism the more rational and sublime belief of one infinite and eternal Being who was the author of the universe. But for this he was violently opposed by that powerful priesthood, who fomented rebellions and generated a spirit of discontent in the minds of the provincial Toparchs against him.<sup>192</sup>

The manuscript tradition for *Tecosca Cormaic* 'The Instructions of Cormaic' (referred to as *TC* henceforth) has been a source of some confusion, but this seems to have been largely resolved by Colin Ireland.<sup>193</sup> Originally, Meyer used ten manuscripts in his edition and noted two others, which he did not use because one was 'incomplete and faulty' and the other was identical to another manuscript he had already used.<sup>194</sup> In his introduction to the text, Meyer suggested that some scribes had confused *TC* and the wisdom text *Senbríathra Fithail* due to their similarity.<sup>195</sup> He observed that two manuscripts in particular, the Book of Leinster and the Book of Ballymote, were guilty of this, sometimes switching from 'Cormac dixit fri Coirpre' to 'ol mac fri Fithul' without explanation.<sup>196</sup> As part of his edition and translation of an early Irish wisdom text named *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu*, Ireland decided to untangle this complicated relationship between that text, *TC*, and a third text called *Senbríathra Fithail*. He identified three main recensions of *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic*

---

<sup>192</sup> John O'Donovan, 'Cormac's Instructions', *Dublin Penny Journal*, 1, no. 27 (Dec. 29, 1832), 213-215 (213).

<sup>193</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*.

<sup>194</sup> Meyer, *Instructions*, pp. viii-x.

<sup>195</sup> Meyer, *Instructions*, p. vi.

<sup>196</sup> Meyer, *Instructions*, p. viii.

*Ossu*: N, Y, and L. He also collected fragmentary versions into group X.<sup>197</sup> Ireland observed that the L-recension has been the main source of confusion between these three wisdom texts, as this recension conflates a series of three word maxims (nearly all of which also appear in Recensions N and Y of *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu*) ‘with sections otherwise associated with *Tecosca Cormaic* and with Cormac’s legendary judge Fíthal’.<sup>198</sup> Indeed, Rudolf Thurneysen had previously used this L-recension as the basis for his edition of *Senbríathra Fíthail*, but Ireland has since demonstrated that ‘a clear consensus was never reached as to whether this text should be ascribed to Fíthal or Cormac’.<sup>199</sup> Ireland concluded that the text that has come to be known as *Senbríathra Fíthail* was a ‘deliberately conflated compilation’ of Old Irish maxims otherwise associated with Flann Fína mac Ossu and sections of *TC* made by a Middle Irish redactor.<sup>200</sup>

Twelve of the manuscripts consulted by Ireland for his edition of *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* also contain versions of *TC*.<sup>201</sup> This made it convenient for Fomin to use Ireland’s referencing system when it came to presenting his edition of *TC*. Fomin’s edition consulted seventeen manuscripts in total, which he divided into three recensions: N, L, and X.<sup>202</sup> According to Fomin, Meyer had identified three recensions; N, L, and H, but Fomin disqualified H by asserting that H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub> did not in fact contain *TC*, and reassigned H<sub>3</sub> to Recension L as L<sub>6</sub>.<sup>203</sup> Regarding Meyer’s editorial practice, Fomin remarked that although his predecessor had questioned the accuracy of the L-recension, Meyer had in fact ‘on

---

<sup>197</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, pp. 21-34.

<sup>198</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 28.

<sup>199</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 43. ‘*Senbríathra Fíthail*’, ed. Rudolf Thurneysen, *Zu irischen Handschriften und Litteraturdenkmälern*, 1, *Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse*, 14, no. 3 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1912-1913), pp. 11-22. Cf. Roland M. Smith, ed. and trans, ‘The *Senbriathra Fithail* and related texts’, *Revue Celtique*, 45 (1928), 1-92.

<sup>200</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 44. The paragraphs of *Tecosca Cormaic* used in *Senbríathra Fíthail* have been identified by Ireland as: *TC* §§ 19, 22, 29, 30, and 31. Cf. Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 21.

<sup>201</sup> N<sub>1-4</sub> and L<sub>1-8</sub>. Cf. Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, pp. 22, 29-31.

<sup>202</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 146-47.

<sup>203</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 426, n. 3. I am unable to find where Meyer explicitly divided the manuscripts into these three recensions, although Rec. H does seem to be implied by his referencing system. I am also unable to find the source of the quote used by Fomin in which Meyer refers to ‘a late and extremely corrupt H-recension’. Although Meyer did indeed refer to H<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>3</sub> as poor and defective, he actually commented that H<sub>1</sub> was ‘a fairly complete and on the whole pretty accurate copy of our text’. Cf. Meyer, *Instructions*, p. ix.

many occasions employed  $L_1$ 's readings throughout his edition in preference to  $N_1$  and  $N_2'$ .<sup>204</sup>

*Tecosca Cormaic* is cast as the advice given from legendary high-king of Ireland, Cormac mac Airt, to his successor, Cairpre Lifechair. This is indicated throughout the text by the opening formula used for the vast majority of the paragraphs, in which Cairpre asks Cormac for advice on a given subject.<sup>205</sup> 'Ní ansae', 'not difficult', is Cormac's inevitable response, followed by his advice, which most often comes in the form of pithy two-, three-, or four-word maxims. The confusion between *TC* and *Senbríathra Fíthail* may cast some doubt over the security of Cairpre's position as the advisee character of this wisdom. However, the paragraphs at the source of this problem contain wisdom of a very general nature. These are *TC* §§ 19, 29, 30, and 31. None of these are explicitly related to kingship or rulership and, in fact, Fomin has even shown how § 19 assumes that the advisee is someone who is beneath the status of king.<sup>206</sup> Indeed, as revealed in the first chapter of this thesis, Fomin has disregarded the testimony of all but seven paragraphs as evidence for kingship theory (more on which below). None of these seven paragraphs are shared with *Senbríathra Fíthail* or *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu*.

Several manuscripts of *TC* ( $N_2$ ,  $L_2$ , and  $L_4$ ) precede the *tecosc* proper with a paragraph establishing the basic narrative scenario and detailing Cormac's talents:

*Ro tothlaig Cairpre Lifechair a mac in tecosc-so, uair ba brithem é ar gaís, ⁊ senchaid ar eolas, ⁊ brugaid ar brugaidecht, ⁊ fili ar filidecht, ⁊ rí ar dligiud ríгда ⁊ uair as lais boí cóir rechta rí do rígaib an domuin uile cenmothá Solam mac Daid.*

Cairpre Lifechair, his son, asked Cormac for his instruction, since he was a judge on account of his wisdom, a historian on account of his knowledge, a hospitaller on account of his hospitality, a poet on account of his [skill in] poetry, a king by royal right, for it is he who had the right way of authority for a king [beyond] the kings of the whole world, apart from Salomon, son of David.<sup>207</sup>

<sup>204</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 425 n. 1. Cf. Meyer, *Instructions*, p. viii.

<sup>205</sup> *TC*, §§ 15, 19, 31 and 34 are the exceptions. They begin either with an address from Cormac to Cairpre or nothing at all.

<sup>206</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 180.

<sup>207</sup> *TC*, § 1. Fomin did not name the manuscript sources for this introductory paragraph, but Meyer did. Cf. Meyer, *Instructions*, p. 2 n. 1.

Cormac's reputation as a wise ruler is attested in a number of early Irish tales in which he is a central character. Using these tales, Tomás Ó Cathasaigh has established the *Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Airt*, which, he has argued, conforms to the international heroic biography with one important modification: 'Cormac is a hero, but he is a hero, not of martial prowess, but of kingship. His heroic biography is adapted to the Irish ideology of kingship'.<sup>208</sup> Cormac and 'the Irish ideology of kingship' shall be discussed later. For now, it is enough to note his legendary character and reputation. Concerning the immediate narrative context of the *TC*, however, there is no hint of this within the *teosc* itself. Nor do the tales that make up Cormac's heroic biography contain an episode in which the *teosc* is delivered. In *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, however, there is an episode which might describe the legendary context in which *TC* was believed to have been composed and delivered:

*Is i d-Teamhraigh do chleachtadh Cormac áitiughadh ar lorg na ríogh roimhe nó gur milleadh a rosc lé h-Aonghus Gaoibuaibtheach, amhail adubhramar thuas; agus ó shin amach i n-Achail i dtigh Cleitigh agus i g-Ceanannus do bhíodh. Óir níor mhaise agus níor shonas lé fearaibh Éireann rí go n-ainimh d'áitiughadh i d-Teamhair; agus uime sin do rad Cormac an ríge da mhac .i. Cairbre Litfeachair, agus do léig Teamhair dó, agus do chuaidh féin i dtigh Cleitigh agus i n-Achail i bhfochair Theamhrach.*

*Gonadh ionnta soin do rinne na Teagaisc Ríogh ag múnadh mar budh dual do rígh bheith, mar adubhramar thuas, agus cionnus do smachtfadh na tuatha 'n-a ndligheadhaibh. Agus ón tráth fár thréig Cormac an ríge níor chreid acht don aoin-Dia neamhdha.*

It was at Tara that Cormac usually resided, according to the practice of his predecessors, until his eye was destroyed by Aonghus Gaoibuaibtheach, as we have said above; and thenceforward he abode in Achail, in the house of Cleiteach, and in Ceanannus. For the men of Ireland considered it neither becoming nor auspicious that a king with a blemish should abide in Tara; and for this reason Cormac gave over the sovereignty to his son Cairbre Lithfeachair; and he gave up Tara to him, retiring himself to the house of Cleiteach and to Achail not far from Tara.

And it was there he composed the Teagaisc Ríogh, setting forth what a king should be, as we have said above, and how he should rule the people through

---

<sup>208</sup> Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Airt* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1977), p. 104.

their laws. And from the time that Cormac gave over the sovereignty, he believed only in the one God of heaven.<sup>209</sup>

Of course, since Keating was writing in the late sixteenth-/early seventeenth-century one can only speculate as to whether the early Irish creators of *TC* had the same legendary context in mind.<sup>210</sup> Nor is it certain that the *Teagasc Ríogh* of which Keating spoke was the same text as *TC*. In any case, Keating's entry at least illustrates that the legend of Cormac advising Cairpre on matters of kingship was well known in Keating's day.

Meyer's edition of *TC* is the longest text to be considered in this thesis. It spans 37 paragraphs and 747 lines. Fomin's edition, however, features only seven of the paragraphs included by Meyer. The reason for this is that Fomin has been deliberately selective, and has chosen to present only those paragraphs which he believes to 'specifically deal with kingship and related matters'.<sup>211</sup> These paragraphs are §§ 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 17, in Meyer's numeration, but Fomin has renumbered § 17 as § 3a in his edition. The subject matter covered by Meyer's edition is considerably varied, but the introductory questions may serve as a rough guide to the intentions of each paragraph. For example, §§ 1-6 appear to take questions about rulership as their starting point, which would seem to justify Fomin's selection: *Cid as dech do rí? Cate cóir rechta rí? Cia dech do les túaithe? Cateat ada flatha 7 chuirmthige? Cate téchta flatha?*<sup>212</sup> The opening question for § 3a in Fomin's edition, however, does not seem to fit this criteria: *Cia etergén sína?*<sup>213</sup> In justification of its inclusion, Fomin has explained that he chose to follow the position of this paragraph as found in Recension N, whilst Meyer had followed the position given by Recension L.<sup>214</sup> Furthermore, Fomin believes that the subject matter is relevant:

Recensions of *TC* do not agree between themselves as to the place of the section on weathers in the body of the wisdom-text. The topic of the proper

<sup>209</sup> *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn le Seathrún Céitinn, D.D./The History of Ireland by Geoffrey Keating, D.D.*, ed. and trans. Patrick S. Dinneen, 4 vols, Irish Texts Society (1902-14), II, pp. 344-47.

<sup>210</sup> Bernadette Cunningham, 'Keating, Geoffrey [Seathrún Céitinn] (b. c.1580, d. in or before 1644)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15224>> [accessed 18 Feb 2016].

<sup>211</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 146.

<sup>212</sup> *TC*, §§ 1.2, 2.2, 6.2. 'What is best for a king?' 'What [constitutes] the right way of authority for a king?' 'What is the entitlement of a lord?'

<sup>213</sup> *TC*, § 3a.2. 'How do you discern weathers?'

<sup>214</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 169 n. 15.

weather and of weather conditions appropriate for each season was however central to the cosmology of the early Irish righteous kingship.<sup>215</sup>

By contrast, the majority of paragraphs in *TC* are much more universal in character, and bear no clear relevance to rulership. Several introductory questions plucked from these paragraphs should serve to illustrate this: ‘*Cid as dech dam?*’, ‘*Cia etargén síl nÁdaim?*’, and ‘*Cia messam tacra 7fuigell?*’<sup>216</sup> In fact, the longest paragraph in *TC* is a sustained invective against women, which contains over twice as many lines as the second longest paragraph.<sup>217</sup>

Fomin has also acknowledged some doubt as to the subject matter of § 3, which opens with the question: ‘*Cia dech do les túathe?*’<sup>218</sup> Fomin admitted that this section was ‘not directly concerned with kingship’, but suggested that ‘indirectly it does point to a king, who is (as in the previous two paragraphs) held to be totally responsible for anything happening in his domains’.<sup>219</sup> Furthermore, he has suggested the following rationale for the association of his seven chosen paragraphs:

A preliminary analysis of the first part *TC* suggests that the whole composition can be interpreted as moving progressively downward through the aristocratic hierarchy and deals with subjects pertaining to ideal rulership: § 1 is devoted to the good king, §§ 2-3 to the reciprocal duties of the king and his subjects, § 3a deals with the subject of weather upon which depended the welfare of the whole kingdom, § 4 deals with the entertainment of the king and his subjects, § 5 introduces the subject of lordship, which is further expanded in § 6.<sup>220</sup>

Fomin’s decision to focus solely on the material in *TC* that pertains to kingship is not unusual. In fact, every scholar who has spoken of this text has done so in these terms. In the next chapter, the frequent use of *TC* in discussions about early Irish kingship will be traced. Indeed, as will be shown, *TC* has consistently been considered to be one of the key texts in the corpus of advice literature for kings ‘in spite of the fact’, as Fomin has said, ‘that

---

<sup>215</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 169-70.

<sup>216</sup> *TC*, §§ 11.1, 13.1, 22.1. ‘What is best for me?’ ‘How do you distinguish the race of Adam?’ ‘What is the worst pleading and arguing?’.

<sup>217</sup> *TC*, § 16 is 123 lines long, whereas § 3 is 54.

<sup>218</sup> *TC*, § 3.2: ‘What is best for the benefit of a kingdom?’.

<sup>219</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 166-67.

<sup>220</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 179-80.

*TC* consists of heterogeneous matter, much of which has nothing to do with kingship'.<sup>221</sup> Nevertheless, the position taken in this thesis will be similar to that of Fomin: whilst it is acknowledged that the extended text of *TC* contains a great deal of wisdom that is universal in character, there is a core of paragraphs that are explicitly concerned with rulership. For this reason, Fomin's edition of *TC* will be used in this thesis, with the many other paragraphs of Meyer's edition largely being passed over in silence. All references to *TC* will be from Fomin's edition and translation unless specified otherwise. No attempt to modify Fomin's translation or edition will be made except for when doing so facilitates the main argument of this thesis.

---

<sup>221</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 145.

## ***Bríathartheosc Con Culainn***

### **Manuscripts**

U, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 1229 (23 E 25), ff. 43a–50b [*Lebor na hUidre*]; H, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1363 (H 4 22), pp. 89–104.

### **Editions and Translations**

Fomin, Maxim, ed. and trans., '*Bríathartheosc Con Culainn* in the Context of Early Irish Wisdom Literature', *Ulidia: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, 2 (2009), pp. 92-125 [based upon H].

Curry, Eugene, ed. and trans., 'The Sick-bed of Cuchulainn, and the only Jealousy of Eimer', *The Atlantis: Register of Literature and Science*, 1 (Dublin: John F. Fowler, 1858), pp. 362-392 [based upon U].

Curry, Eugene, ed. and trans., 'The Sick-bed of Cuchulainn, and the only Jealousy of Eimer', *The Atlantis: Register of Literature and Science*, 2 (Dublin: John F. Fowler, 1859), pp. 98-124 [continuation, based upon U].

D'Arbois de Jubainville, Henri, '*Cuchulainn Malade et Ailté; Grande Jalousie d'Émer*', *Cours de Littérature Celtique, tome 5; L'Épopée celtique en Irlande, tome 1* (Paris: Ernest Thorin, 1892), 170-216 [based upon U].

Dillon, Myles, ed., *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1953) [based upon U].

Dillon, Myles, ed., 'The Trinity College Text of *Serglige Con Culainn*', *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 6 (1949), 139-175 [based upon H].

Dillon, Myles, trans., 'The Wasting sickness of Cú Chulainn', *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 7, (1951), 47-88 [based upon H].

Hull, Eleanor, trans., 'The Instruction of Cuchullin to a Prince', *The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature*, ed Eleanor Hull (London: David Nutt in the Strand, 1898), pp. 229-234, [translation based upon editions by O'Curry and D'Arbois de Jubainville].

Smith, Roland Mitchell, ed. and trans., '*Bríathartheosc Conculainn*', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 15 (1925), 187–192, [based upon H?].<sup>222</sup>

Windisch, Ernst, ed., '*Serglige Conculaind*', *Irische Texte mit Wörterbuch*, 1 (Leipzig: Verlag Von S. Hirzel, 1880), pp. 197-234 [based upon H?].<sup>223</sup>

<sup>222</sup> Smith does not state which manuscript he has used, but his variant readings are from U, ergo he must have used H.

<sup>223</sup> Windisch gave variant readings from U for some words, but seems to have silently changed others in the main text to the readings from U.

## Overview

*Bríathartheosc Con Culainn* ‘The Wisdom Sayings of Cú Chulainn’ (henceforth referred to as *BCC*) is an advice text that can be found embedded within the tale *Serglige Con Culainn*, ‘The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn’.<sup>224</sup> *Serglige Con Culainn* survives in two manuscripts only: *Lebor na hUidre*, folio 46<sup>b</sup> 1-30 (referred to as U) and TCD H. 4. 22 (referred to as H). This tale has attracted considerable attention from modern scholars. According to Dillon, it ‘has a special claim to our attention, because of its long descriptions of the Irish Elysium, here called Mag Mell ‘the Plain of Delights’, and also for the quality of the poetry which makes up almost half of the text’.<sup>225</sup> The popularity of *Serglige Con Culainn* (*SCC*) has meant that majority of the modern editions of *BCC* exist by virtue of this fact, and that much of the commentary on *BCC* has focussed on its relationship with *SCC*. Despite this, there are ample reasons for considering the *BCC* in its own right. Indeed, two scholars, Smith and Fomin, have seen fit to produce editions of *BCC* in isolation of *SCC*. In this thesis, Fomin’s edition and translation will be used when reference is made to *BCC*. When referring to all other parts of *SCC*, Dillon’s edition of the U version will be used.

Despite appearing in only two manuscripts, there has been a relatively large amount of discussion on the relationship between the two versions of *SCC*, and on the textual history of the tale itself. Heinrich Zimmer was the first to consider the manuscripts. According to Dillon, Zimmer concluded that ‘the two MSS were derived from a common earlier source’.<sup>226</sup> Thurneysen disagreed with Zimmer, however, by suggesting that H was actually derived from U.<sup>227</sup> Dillon himself noted a number of examples that would seem to support Zimmer’s argument, but ultimately decided that ‘the exemplar of H was U itself’.<sup>228</sup> Dillon’s

---

<sup>224</sup> ‘The Wisdom Sayings of Cú Chulainn’ is the translation of the title provided by Fomin in his edition and translation of the text. See Maxim Fomin, ‘*Bríathartheosc Con Culainn* in the Context of Early Irish Wisdom Literature’, *Ulidia: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, 2 (2009), pp. 92-125. Roland Smith preferred to translate the title as ‘The Instruction of Cú Chulainn’ in his edition and translation, but Fomin’s rendering is preferred here because it acknowledges the distinction between the use of *Bríathartheosc* by the compiler of *BCC* and the use of *teosc* by the compilers of other wisdom texts. Cf. Roland Mitchell Smith, ‘*Bríathartheosc Con Culainn*’, *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 15 (1925), 187–192.

<sup>225</sup> Myles Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1953). p. ix.

<sup>226</sup> Myles Dillon, ‘The Trinity College Text of *Serglige Con Culainn*’, *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 6 (1949), 139-175 (141).

<sup>227</sup> Dillon, ‘The Trinity College Text of *Serglige Con Culainn*’, 142.

<sup>228</sup> Dillon, ‘The Trinity College Text of *Serglige Con Culainn*’, 142-46.

conclusion has subsequently been upheld, most recently by Fomin who has declared that 'the testimony of H can safely be disregarded'.<sup>229</sup>

There is, then, only one extant version of *SCC*, but it has been argued that this is itself a combination of two versions. The earlier of the two has been dubbed Version B, and the later Version A. Thurneysen dated the language of B to no later than the ninth century, and the language of A to the eleventh century. Dillon agreed that B was indeed earlier than A, but expressed some doubt as to whether it could be dated quite as early as the ninth century.<sup>230</sup> As part of this discussion, there has also been some disagreement as to which of these two versions *BCC* originally belonged, if indeed it belonged to either of them. According to John Carey, there have been three possibilities, suggested by the three main scholars of *SCC*.<sup>231</sup> Firstly, Zimmer attributed *BCC* to Version A. Then Thurneysen suggested that *BCC* belonged either to Version B or was the work of the compiler, who brought versions A and B together. Finally, Dillon rejected the possibility that the *tecosc* belonged to B, and argued that *BCC* can only have been inserted by the compiler of *SCC*.<sup>232</sup> To these, Carey has added his own view. Since the language of *BCC* is Middle Irish, Carey ruled out an attribution of the text to the author of Version B. On the other hand, Version A shares none of its distinguishing, Middle Irish features with *BCC*. Instead, Carey's solution rests on the use of a single late form found both in Version B and in *BCC*, separated by only 25 lines. Based upon this, he concluded that the *BCC* was 'written by the Middle Irish redactor of Version B'.<sup>233</sup> Carey's solution has remained unchallenged.

Since *BCC* survives only within *SCC*, the main narrative of *SCC* can be said to form part of the narrative context in which one must understand *BCC*. However, the relationship between *BCC* and the main narrative of *SCC* is not as straightforward as one might first expect. The composite character of *SCC* appears to have created a number of narrative inconsistencies or continuity errors, and the episode in which *BCC* occurs can itself be

---

<sup>229</sup> Fomin, 'Bríathartheosc Con Culainn', 95.

<sup>230</sup> Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, pp. xii-xvi. Cf. Carey, 'The Uses of Tradition in *Serglige Con Culainn*', *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, eds. J. P. Mallory and G. Stockman (Belfast: [n.pub.], 1994), 77-84 (82).

<sup>231</sup> Carey, 'Uses of Tradition', 84.

<sup>232</sup> Carey, 'Uses of Tradition', 82. Cf. Myles Dillon, 'On the Text of *Serglige Con Culainn*', *Éigse*, 3 (1941) 120-29.

<sup>233</sup> Carey, 'Uses of Tradition', 82.

considered an example of such an inconsistency. Indeed, the episode in which the *tecosc* is found is extraneous to the main narrative of *SCC* and seems to have no direct bearing upon it.<sup>234</sup> Although the *tecosc* proper runs from lines 262 to 302 in *U*, what has been called the ‘*tecosc* episode’, or ‘*Briathartheosc* episode’, actually begins and ends on lines 233 and 310. Therefore lines 233-61 and 303-10 frame the *tecosc* within *SCC*. This framing forms the immediate narrative context of *BCC* and has no direct bearing on the main narrative of *SCC*.

As Carey has stated, ‘the episode’s discrete character is obvious, and in this sense perhaps it can be called a separate tale’.<sup>235</sup> Immediately before the beginning of the *tecosc* episode, Cú Chulainn’s charioteer Lóg has returned from the Otherworld to Cú Chulainn in his sick-bed at Emain Macha. Lóg recounts his adventure to Cú Chulainn and Cú Chulainn makes an immediate recovery.<sup>236</sup> The *tecosc* episode then begins with a complete change of cast and scene. Here, the leaders of four provinces (excluding Ulster) are gathered at Tara in order to decide on whom they should confer the sovereignty of Ireland (*dia tibertas rígi nÉrend*).<sup>237</sup> There has been a seven-year interregnum at Tara following the tragic death of Conaire Mór at Da Derga’s hostel.<sup>238</sup> To resolve the issue, a *tarbfeis* ‘bull-feast’ is held. The *tarbfeis* is described in *SCC* as a ritual in which a white bull is killed for the consumption of one who then sleeps to dream a prophetic vision of the next king. There is only one other known account of a *tarbfeis*. This occurs in the tale *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, which recounts the tragic fate of Conaire Mór. In Carey’s opinion, ‘there can be no doubt that the *Serglige*’s description derives directly from the *Togail*’s’.<sup>239</sup> This was previously suggested by Dillon, and was later reiterated by Ralph O’Connor.<sup>240</sup> In any case, a man fitting Lugaid Réoderg’s description and location is revealed in the vision of the *tarbfeis*. When the news reaches Lugaid, he is at Cú Chulainn’s bedside, and the latter rises to deliver *BCC*. The *tecosc* is then

---

<sup>234</sup> Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, p. ix.

<sup>235</sup> Carey, ‘Uses of Tradition’, 82.

<sup>236</sup> *SCC*, § 20.229-32.

<sup>237</sup> *SCC*, § 21.234-35.

<sup>238</sup> *SCC*, § 21.237.

<sup>239</sup> Carey, ‘Uses of Tradition’, 79.

<sup>240</sup> Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, p. x. Ralph O’Connor, *The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel: Kingship and Narrative Artistry in a Medieval Irish Saga* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 315.

introduced with the line '*Bríathartheosc Con Culaind inso*.'<sup>241</sup> Following *BCC*, lines 303-10 conclude the episode with a stanza from Lugaid confirming that he will follow Cú Chulainn's advice and several lines of prose stating that Lugaid thence departed for Tara where he was proclaimed king ('*gongarar garm rígi dó*').<sup>242</sup> The main narrative of *SCC* then resumes, quite self-consciously, with the line '*Imthúsa immurgu Con Culaind iss ed adfiastar sund coléic*', 'Of Cú Chulainn, however, it will now be told here'.<sup>243</sup>

The *teosc* itself is much shorter than either *AM* or *TC*, spanning just forty lines, yet fewer scholars have commented upon its content and character. In the preface to his edition and translation, Smith wished to highlight 'the writer's familiarity with ancient Irish law, and his familiarity with earlier compositions of the 'instruction' type, notably the *Tecosca Cormaic*'.<sup>244</sup> In particular, Smith was able to identify three lines that have near identical parallels in *TC*.<sup>245</sup> Dillon noted the same parallels and both he and Smith also highlighted the use of some legal vocabulary in the notes to their editions.<sup>246</sup> It was not until Fomin presented his edition and translation, however, that the contents of this *teosc* were discussed in any detail. Fomin divided the forty lines of *BCC* into eight sections, which he labelled a-h, apparently according to their content. Fomin characterized the content of these sections like so: (a) warnings against extremes of behaviour, (b) advice on different legal functions the king was expected to fulfill, (c) advice on 'manners of communication', (d) condemnation of maltreatment of others, (e) encouraging generosity, (f) miscellany, and (g) various types of bad behaviour and their results.<sup>247</sup> The final section (h) is a closing statement by Cú Chulainn's that exhorts Lugaid to follow the foregoing advice. Fomin has highlighted how self-conscious this closing statement is. He has suggested that perhaps it was intended as an *íarcomarc* 'closing word', and maybe even originally formed a *dúnad*.<sup>248</sup>

---

<sup>241</sup> *SCC*, I. 262.

<sup>242</sup> *SCC*, § 27 I. 308.

<sup>243</sup> *SCC*, § 28.311-12. Translation taken from Myles Dillon, 'The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn', *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 7 (1951), 47-88 (58).

<sup>244</sup> Roland Mitchell Smith, 'On the *Bríathartheosc Conculaind*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 15 (1925), 187-192 (187).

<sup>245</sup> *BCC*, II. 3503-5, *TC* § 19.25, 19.32, 19.33. Cf. II. 37-39 in Smith's edition of *BCC*.

<sup>246</sup> Smith, *Serglige Con Culainn*, pp. 34-36.

<sup>247</sup> Fomin, '*BCC*', p. 100.

<sup>248</sup> Fomin, '*BCC*', p. 101.

Fomin has also subjected the syntax of this *teosc* to his minute scrutiny, but the precise details are not immediately relevant to this study. That said, his investigation has suggested that the sources for the composition of *BCC* included *AM*, *TC*, and the ecclesiastic wisdom text, *Aipgitir Chrábaid*.<sup>249</sup> In particular, Fomin has proposed that the author of *BCC* borrowed from the sections of *TC* ‘not traditionally devoted to kingship’, but only ‘if they contained advice to young persons’.<sup>250</sup> Concerning the influence of *AM*, Fomin has stated that ‘only syntactic and alliterative patterns’ from *AM* (A) have been used.<sup>251</sup> On the other hand, Fomin has admitted that certain similarities may be due to ‘the existence of a pool of common gnomic sayings in early Irish literary tradition’.<sup>252</sup>

---

<sup>249</sup> Fomin, ‘*BCC*’, pp. 103 ff.

<sup>250</sup> Fomin, ‘*BCC*’, p. 114.

<sup>251</sup> Fomin, ‘*BCC*’, p. 115.

<sup>252</sup> Fomin, ‘*BCC*’, p. 114-15.

## ***Tecosc Cúscraid***

### **Manuscripts**

Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1337 (H 3 18), pp. 724-728.

### **Editions and Translations**

Best, R I, ed. and trans., 'The Battle of Airtech', *Ériu*, 8 (1916), 170-90.

### **Overview**

Much like *BCC*, *Tecosc Cúscraid* 'The Instruction to Cúscraid' (*TCús*) has survived embedded within a narrative tale, *Cath Airtig*, the 'Battle of Airtech'. *Cath Airtig* is extant in two manuscripts, but only one of these contains *TCús*. The Book of Lecan version of *Cath Airtig* does not include the first three paragraphs, which contain *TCús*.<sup>253</sup> To date, both *Cath Airtig* and *TCús* have received very little scholarly attention, and Best's 1916 translation and edition of *Cath Airtig* remains the only edition or translation of either text.<sup>254</sup> Although Best provided a translation for the text, he admitted that some of this was 'only tentative' due to 'a few cryptic passages' and the inherent insecurity of translating from a single copy.<sup>255</sup> His translation will be used in this thesis as far as it goes, although some alternatives will be suggested in due course. The lines of this *tecosc* are longer and much less pithy than most of those found in *AM*, *TC*, and *BCC*. They also lack any repetitive opening formula, such as found in *AM*. Best did not suggest a date for the composition of either *Cath Airtig* or *TCús*, but he did note a number of Middle Irish forms in the *tecosc* specifically.<sup>256</sup> Since Best has not numbered the lines of his edition, all references to *TCús* will be cited according to the paragraph of *Cath Airtig* it occupies, i.e. '*Cath Airtig* § 3'. Given the brevity of *TCús*, this is unlikely to cause any difficulty for the reader. References to other parts of the tale *Cath Airtig* will similarly be cited according to paragraph number only. Obviously, a new edition of *Cath Airtig* would be most welcome, but this is beyond the scope of the current investigation.

---

<sup>253</sup> Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 P 2.

<sup>254</sup> For some commentary on the tale see Edel Bhreathnach, 'Tales of Connacht: *Cath Airtig*, *Táin bó Flidhais*, *Cath Leitreach Ruibhe*, and *Cath Cumair*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 45 (2003), 21-42.

<sup>255</sup> Best, 'Battle of Airtech', 170.

<sup>256</sup> Best, 'Battle of Airtech', 185-86. These were *artotroi*, *degdaoine*, *fri n-othib*, and *atomrua*.

The aforementioned brevity of *TCús* is another thing that this *tecosc* has in common with *BCC*. In fact, *TCús* is easily the shortest of the texts considered in this thesis. Similar to *BCC*, also, is the fact that *TCús* is in some ways quite a self-contained text, despite being embedded within a narrative tale. The *tecosc* is confined to a single paragraph, which opens with a clear exhortation to Cúscraid: ‘*Artotroi (.i. eirig) a Chuscraid coemainigh*’, ‘Rise up, O fair Cúscraid’. This paragraph concludes by repeating the word ‘*artotroi*’, making a *dúnad* that clearly demarcates the *tecosc* from the rest of *Cath Airtig*. On the other hand, it may be argued that the content of *TCús* is much better integrated with the surrounding narrative than *BCC* is with *SCC*. The first paragraph of *Cath Airtig* sets the scene: there is an assembly amongst the Ulaid in the aftermath of the events of *Bruiden Da Choca* ‘Dá Choca’s Hostel’.<sup>257</sup> The purpose of this meeting is to determine who shall be king, now that the heir-apparent, Cormac Cond Longas, has met a tragic end. The Ulaid choose Conall Cernach, but he is unwilling. Instead, Conall nominates his fosterson, Cúscraid Mend Macha (who also happens to be the son of the preceding king, Conchobar mac Nessa). The final lines of § 1 make it clear what is to follow: ‘*as ann isbert Conall na briathrasa oc egaine Concobair 7 immorro Teguscc Cumsraidh*’, ‘then it was that Conall spake these words lamenting Conchobar and moreover the Instruction of Cúscraid’. The second paragraph provides the lamentation for Conchobar in verse, whilst § 3 contains the *tecosc* itself. It is perhaps telling that the Book of Lecan version omits not only the *tecosc*, but also the two preceding paragraphs. It seems clear that the *tecosc* was an intentional aspect of this opening narrative. Unlike the events of the *tecosc* episode in *SCC*, the events described in § 1 of *Cath Airtig* are important for the main narrative of the tale.

Cúscraid’s position as the advisee character of this *tecosc* seems fairly secure. For one thing, it is worth noting also that the title *TCús* is unique among the *tecosca* in that it is derived from the name of the advisee character, Cúscraid Mend Macha, rather than that of the advisor, Conall Cernach. From the title alone, then, the position of Cúscraid as advisee would seem to be intentional and significant. More importantly, Cúscraid’s instruction and inauguration are pivotal for the development of the surrounding narrative. As Best noted, the first three sections of *Cath Airtig* are ‘necessary to explain an otherwise unusually

---

<sup>257</sup> Cf. Gregory Toner, *Bruiden Da Choca*, Irish Texts Society, 61 (London: Irish Texts Society, 2007). Whitley Stokes, ‘Da Choca’s Hostel’, *Revue Celtique*, 21 (1900), 149–65, 312–27, 388–402. A version of *Bruiden Da Choca* actually precedes *Cath Airtig* in the TCD manuscript.

abrupt opening'.<sup>258</sup> Although he does not feature prominently in the events that unfold, direct correspondences can be observed between the advice of *TCús* and the events of the tale that follow. Early in the *teosc*, for example, Cúscraid is entreated thus:

*Bat menci do dalai im cert coicrichais  
fri turcomracc ndegdaoine.*

Let thy assemblies be frequent concerning the right of borders,  
for meeting of nobles.<sup>259</sup>

It seems unlikely to be a coincidence, then, that Cúscraid's very first actions as king are to divide the lands of Ulster amongst his people.<sup>260</sup> In the following section, the theme of borders and the division of land is reiterated:

*Ro fodail coiced nUlad di maicni Concobair & do cloinn Ruraige amhail ba  
techtæ fon samla sin.*

Now in that wise, after a space, he distributed the Fifth of the Ulid among the  
clann of Conchobar, as was fitting.<sup>261</sup>

A similar comparison can be made between the following advice from *TCús* and the cause of the Battle of Airtech itself:

*Bat err tnuthach tairptech [...] cosnamach fri hailecricha fri ditin do marcrich.*

Be a zealous and mighty champion [...] contending against foreign lands for  
the protection of thy great territories.<sup>262</sup>

As § 9 reveals, the Battle of Airtech was due to a territorial dispute between Ulster and Connacht.<sup>263</sup> Thus, the decision to go to war rings true with the advice given by Conall. This territorialism is further emphasised by the response of the Ulstermen: '*Isbertator Ulaid na*

---

<sup>258</sup> Best, 'Airtech', p. 170.

<sup>259</sup> *Cath Airtig*, § 3.

<sup>260</sup> *Cath Airtig*, § 4.

<sup>261</sup> *Cath Airtig*, § 5.

<sup>262</sup> *Cath Airtig*, § 3

<sup>263</sup> *Cath Airtig*, § 9 '*Ro fas morcoccad mor andaide iter Oilill & Meidb 7 Ultu im crich Malond ar doradad di Concobair í hi cinaidh indeich ro milled uime di sluaighed Thanu*', 'A great contention thereupon arose between Ailill and Medb and Conchobar's fifth concerning Crich Maland. For to Conchobar it had been given on account of those that were slain around him in the hosting of Táin Bó Cúailnge.'

*leicfidis uathadh é acht muna cosantai i rrói Catha friu é*, ‘The Ulid replied that they would not yield up the land unless it were won from them on the field of battle’.<sup>264</sup> Of course, one might object that Cúscraid himself is not named as the speaker here, but his participation and prowess in the ensuing battle is specified, suggesting that he has become a ‘zealous and mighty champion’, just as Conall advised.<sup>265</sup> These observations imply an intentional correspondence between the tale *Cath Airtig*, the character of Cúscraid, and the advice of *TCús*.

The *tecosc* itself contains some of the themes identified in the other *tecosca* so far. Given the brevity of the text, it is not really necessary to attempt to subdivide it according to its contents. Instead a summary of the themes covered should suffice here. Firstly, a concern for the fulfillment of law and justice is prominent:

*Pat seirtid rechtgæ flaithemhain*  
*Bat comaltach ferbbai fri n-oithib (.i. be mait[h] do briat[h]ar ic comlaige fri*  
*cech oen fristibre).*  
*Bid dluithi rechtge do dligeð naro ercoillet do mifoltæ (.i. do mignim)*  
*tromtortha na tuath forollat (.i. atat)for do greiss.*  
 [...]  
*Bat firen firbrethach cen forbrisiu n-indsciu etir tethrai tren 7 trug.*

Be a follower of sovrán law.  
 Fulfill the word given on oath.  
 Let the law of thy rule be consolidated, lest thy misdeeds ruin the heavy fruits  
 of the people that increase under thy protection.  
 [...]  
 Be just and righteous in judgement, not suppressing speech between the  
 tethra of the strong and the weak.

Then there is a clear advocacy for the use of royal force, either to order society from within,  
 or to use martial strength to protect it from outside forces:

*Morad maithe is toirr (.i. is dir) duit. Doerad anflathi. Dith bithbinech.*  
*Bat err tnuthach tairptech dalach diubartach coc[th]ach, cosnamach fri*  
*hailecricha fri ditin do marcrich.*

To exalt the good is encumbant on thee, to enslave the oppressor, to destroy  
 criminals.

---

<sup>264</sup> *Cath Airtig*, § 9.

<sup>265</sup> *Cath Airtig*, § 10. ‘*Is don cocad sin aroet maithe Ulad di tuitim im Chuscraid*’, ‘Because of that war it was the lot of (?) the Ulid to fall around Cúscraid’.

Be a zealous and mighty champion, holding assemblies, ardent, warlike,  
contending against foreign lands, for the protection of thy great territories.

There are also encouragements to be generous, recommending '*gnim gart* (.i. *einig*)  
*digruaide*', 'an act of hospitality and generosity (?)', and the giving of '*ferbbai*' 'kine', and  
'*setaibh*' 'jewels (?)', although the language of the relevant section is quite obscure.

## ***Cert cech rí g co réil***

### **Manuscripts<sup>266</sup>**

LL, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1339 (H 2 18), p. 148a; H, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1315 (H 2 13), pp. 12-13; T, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1291 (H 1 17), fol. 96b; L, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 1007 (23 L 34), p. 167; N, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 487 (23 N 11), p. 77; D, Castlerea, Clonalis House, The Book of O’Conor Don, f. 146r18; C, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 625 (3 C 12), vol. 1, p. 113 [The Book of O’Conor Don (transcript)].

### **Editions and Translations**

O’Donoghue, Tadhg, ed. and trans., ‘*Cert cech rí g co réil*’, *Miscellany Presented to Kuno Meyer*, eds Osborn Bergin and Carl Marstrander (Halle A S: Max Niemeyer, 1912), pp. 258-77.

### **Overview**

*Cert cech rí g co réil*, ‘The tribute of every king is clearly due’, (*Cert cech rí g* from here on) is another *teosc* that has received relatively little scholarly attention. To date, Tadhg O’Donoghue has been the only scholar to produce an edition or translation of this text. This was published over a century ago, in 1912. O’Donoghue consulted seven manuscripts in the preparation of his edition. He did not attempt to elucidate the relationship between these manuscripts in great detail, but he did make some basic observations. According to O’Donoghue, manuscripts L, D, and C are ‘practically identical’.<sup>267</sup> He believed that C is a transcript of D, made by Eugene O’Curry, and suspected that L was either copied from D or they had both been made from a common original.<sup>268</sup> He also observed that N and H correspond closely. Of all the manuscripts, L, D, and C contain the largest number of stanzas (77), and for this reason O’Donoghue followed their order.<sup>269</sup> Even so, he preferred the readings of LL and H, despite them being shorter than LDC by 15 and 12 stanzas respectively. It seems likely that O’Donoghue chose to follow LL because he deemed it the oldest version, although it is unclear why he also preferred H. Manuscript T is the shortest

---

<sup>266</sup> This list of manuscripts has been taken from Tadhg O’Donoghue, ‘*Cert cech rí g co réil*’, *Miscellany Presented to Kuno Meyer*, eds. Osborn Bergin and Carl Marstrander (Halle A S: Max Niemeyer, 1912), pp. 258-77 (p. 259).

<sup>267</sup> O’Donoghue, ‘*Cert cech rí g*’, p.258.

<sup>268</sup> O’Donoghue, ‘*Cert cech rí g*’, p.258.

<sup>269</sup> O’Donoghue, ‘*Cert cech rí g*’, p.258.

version. It is comprised of only 12 stanzas, all of which are taken from the second half of the text, as they appear in LDC.<sup>270</sup> The language of this *teosc* is Middle Irish.<sup>271</sup>

Stylistically speaking, *Cert cech rí* stands apart from the other *teosca* considered thus far, in that it is an example of syllabic poetry.<sup>272</sup> More specifically, and as O'Donoghue has observed, 'the metre of the poem is *dechnad mbe*'.<sup>273</sup> Each stanza is made up of four lines, presented as two couplets. Each line has five syllables, the last word of each being monosyllabic. The *teosc* follows this format throughout, and cannot be subdivided into separate stylistic units like *AM* and *TC* can. For illustrative purposes, it is worth reproducing the first stanza here.

*Cert cech rí co réil · do chlannaib Néill náir  
acht triar ni dlig cert · dia raib nert na lāim.*

The tribute of every king is clearly due to the descendants of noble Niall  
except three who owe it not, if their hands be strong.

In this first stanza, several stylistic features can be witnessed that recur with reasonable consistency throughout the *teosc*. The first couplet, for example, gives internal rhyme, or *aicill*, with *réil* and *Néil*. Consonance is a key feature too, with 'the last word of the first line nearly always consonates with the last words of lines 2 and 4'.<sup>274</sup> It is not uncommon to find consonance between the last words of the first and third, and second and fourth lines also. Alliteration is frequent.

On first appearance, *Cert cech rí* would seem to be furnished with much less of a narrative framework than the other *teosca*. This text is not embedded within a narrative tale, in the way that *BCC* and *TCús* are. Nor do any of its versions provide an introductory paragraph, as with *AM* and *TC*. Unlike these *teosca*, there is no regular title to attribute the advice to someone. One manuscript, however, heads the text with the phrase '*Fothad na Canone cc*'. This is the LL manuscript, which O'Donoghue considered to be the oldest. In contrast to the

---

<sup>270</sup> O'Donoghue, '*Cert cech rí*', p. 258.

<sup>271</sup> O'Donoghue, '*Cert cech rí*', p. 259.

<sup>272</sup> Cf. Kuno Meyer, *A Primer of Irish Metrics: with a Glossary and an Appendix Containing an Alphabetical List of the Poets of Ireland* (Dublin: School of Irish Learning, 1909), pp. 5 ff.

<sup>273</sup> O'Donoghue, '*Cert cech rí*', p. 259.

<sup>274</sup> O'Donoghue, '*Cert cech rí*', p. 259.

legendary figures to whom *AM*, *TC*, *TCús*, and *BCC* are attributed, this Fothad na Canoine was in fact a historical figure who lived c. 804.<sup>275</sup> Fothad was an ecclesiast who, according to the Annals of Ulster, convinced Áed Oirdnide mac Néill (king of Tara, 788-819) to exempt clergy from attendance at military hostings.<sup>276</sup> These figures are too early to have been the actual author or recipient of this Middle Irish text, but since *Cert cech rí* addresses someone named Áed a number of times it is tempting to infer an intended narrative context. To this end, Byrne has been able to build a fairly convincing case for the historical recipient of this text. As a mere aside to a much larger discussion on the history of Ireland in the eleventh century, Byrne has argued that this *teosc* purports to be addressed to Áed Oirdnide mac Néill (d. 819), but was actually composed for Áed mac Néill meic Máel Shechlainn (d. 1083).<sup>277</sup> Byrne likened this literary conceit to ‘the apologue normal in later bardic poetry’, in several examples of which ‘the person addressed has the same name as his supposed ancestor’.<sup>278</sup> Byrne’s theory has much to commend it, and more can be said in support of his theory.

Both Áed Oirdnide and Áed mac Néill meic Máel Shechlainn were kings of Cenél nEógain, a major branch of the Uí Néill dynasty. That *Cert cech rí* was directed towards an Uí Néill audience seems obvious. The opening line asserts: ‘*Cert cech rí co réil do chlannaib Néill náir*’, ‘The tribute of every king is clearly due to the descendants of noble Niall’. This is likely to be, in part, a reference to Niall Noígiallach, the most famous Niall of early Irish history, and the progenitor of the Uí Néill. Further concern for the pre-eminence of men named Niall and their descendants can be found in §§ 4, 21, 54, and 56. A specifically Northern Uí Néill persuasion can be inferred from favourable references to the two main branches of that dynasty (Cenél nEógain and Cenél Conaill) in §§ 31 and 33. By contrast, the branches of the Southern Uí Néill are notable for their absence. The identity of the audience can be refined even further to determine that this *teosc* is more likely to be addressing a ruler of Cenél nEógain than one of Cenél Conaill. Stanzas 34 and 36, for instance, advise comradeship with the clans of Colla Uais and Colla fo Chrích. These are two branches of the

---

<sup>275</sup> Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *The Annals of Ulster (to AD 1131), Part I. Text and Translation* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), 804.8.

<sup>276</sup> AU, 804.8.

<sup>277</sup> F. J. Byrne, ‘Ireland and Her Neighbours c.1014 – c.1072’, *A New History of Ireland, 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, eds. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, T. W. Moody, and F. X. Martin, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 862-98.

<sup>278</sup> Byrne, ‘Ireland and Her Neighbours’, pp. 895-96.

Airgíalla, a population group that was traditionally subject to the Uí Néill in general. These two examples, however, may refer to groups under the influence of the Cenél nEógain. Byrne has suggested that Colla Uais may refer to Uí Macc Uais and Uí Thuirtre, who were the most northerly of the Airgíalla and were dominated by the Cenél nEógain from the ninth century.<sup>279</sup> The descendants of Colla fo Chrích, on the other hand, populated the more central groups of the Airgíalla territory, such as the Airthir and the Uí Chrimthainn, and they too were under Cenél nEógain influence in the Middle Irish period.<sup>280</sup> As Byrne notes, it is surely significant that that only two of the three legendary Collas are mentioned; omitting Colla Mend, whose descendants were traditionally loyal to the Southern Uí Néill.<sup>281</sup> Stanza 34 also advises that the advisee ally himself with the clans of Cían. This is likely a reference to the Cíannachta, another vassal people with branches found in both Brega (Cíannachta Breg) and in modern County Derry (Cíannachta Glinne Geimin). Although there is no direct indication which of these two is being referred to here, it is worth noting that the northern branch was within the Cenél nEógain's orbit of power from the eighth century.<sup>282</sup>

Stanza 4 of the text addresses an Áed son of Niall, whilst §§ 27, 52, 58, and 67 also address someone called Áed. According to Byrne's regnal list for the Cenél nEógain kings of Ailech, there were eight named Áed in the period 700-1185.<sup>283</sup> Three of these eight were sons of a Niall. These were: Áed Oirdnide mac Néill (ruled 788-819), Áed Findliath mac Néill (ruled 855-879), and Áed mac Néill meic Máel Shechnaill (ruled 1068-83).<sup>284</sup> Both Áed Oirdnide and Áed Findliath had long and distinguished careers, as kings of Ailech and Temair. Both were surely worthy of poetic invocation centuries later. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the content of *Cert cech rí* is more relevant to the life of Áed Oirdnide than that of Áed Findliath. The most convincing reasons for associating this text with Áed Oirdnide are closely related to the attribution of authorship to Fothad na Canoine in the Book of Leinster.<sup>285</sup> Both the Annals of Ulster (AU 804.8) and the Annals of the Four Masters (AFM

---

<sup>279</sup> Byrne, 'Ireland and Her Neighbours', p. 896; Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 114-15, 125, 220.

<sup>280</sup> Byrne, 'Ireland and Her Neighbours', p. 896.

<sup>281</sup> Byrne, 'Ireland and Her Neighbours', p. 896.

<sup>282</sup> Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 114.

<sup>283</sup> F. J. Byrne, 'High Kings and Provincial Kings', *A New History of Ireland, IX: Maps, Genealogies, Lists*, eds. T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin, F. J. Byrne (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1984), pp. 189-210 (pp. 194-95).

<sup>284</sup> Byrne, 'High Kings and Provincial Kings', pp. 194-95.

<sup>285</sup> O'Donoghue, '*Cert cech rí*', pp. 258-59.

799.10) tell of an important interaction between Fothad and Áed at Dun Cuair. In the Annals of Ulster, the story goes that, whilst preparing for a hosting against the Laigin, Áed freed the clergy from their obligation to attend at the behest of Fothad na Canoine. The Annals of the Four Masters embellish this account with some further details and a poem, beginning *Ecclais Dé bhi* ‘The church of the living God’, which commemorates the event and is attributed to Fothad na Canoine. Tellingly, *Cert cech rí* appears to acknowledge this historic decision in § 21: ‘*na clerig do rēir · nā hēlig andāil*’, ‘for the submission of the clergy, do not require their attendance’. Furthermore, in the Book of Leinster, *Cert cech rí* is immediately followed by the poem *Ecclais Dé bhi*, here introduced with ‘*Fothad na Canone cecinit cu Aed Ordni*the’.<sup>286</sup> One could also draw a thematic comparison between the occupational conservatism expressed in the final two lines of that poem, and § 18 of *Cert cech rí*.<sup>287</sup>

As previously stated, Byrne has suggested that the intended audience of *Cert cech rí* was one Áed mac Néill meic Máel Shechlainn, who was king of Ailech from 1068 until his death in 1083.<sup>288</sup> The foremost reason for suspecting that this Áed was the actual recipient of the text is that he is the only high-king of the Northern Uí Néill named Áed mac Néill within the chronological parameters set by the Middle Irish language of the *teosc*. There are also a number of correspondences that can be drawn between the life and times of this Áed and the content of *Cert cech rí*. To begin with a broader perspective, Byrne has suggested that the tone and tenor of *Cert cech rí* suits the historical context of a Cenél nEógain king in the high Middle Ages. The period from the fifth to eighth centuries witnessed the astronomical rise of the Uí Néill to suzerainty over the northern ‘half’ of Ireland, Leth Cuinn.<sup>289</sup> From the early eighth to eleventh centuries, the Cenél nEógain dominated the Northern Uí Néill sphere of influence, whilst their Clann Cholmáin cousins achieved a parallel position over

---

<sup>286</sup> Book of Leinster, folio 149a, p. 621.

<sup>287</sup> Compare ‘*timmairg cāch ria mod – narop om do mír*’ (*Cert cech rí co réil*) with ‘*Foghnadh cach a modh, gan on gan ecc*’ (AFM 799.10). John O’Donovan, ed. and trans., *Annala Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616. Edited from MSS in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy and of Trinity College Dublin with a translation and copious notes*, 7 vols., (Dublin, 1848-51; repr. 1856, 1990).

<sup>288</sup> Byrne, ‘Ireland and Her Neighbours’, p. 895.

<sup>289</sup> Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ‘Ireland, 400-800’, *A New History of Ireland, 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, eds. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, T. W. Moody, and F. X. Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 182-234, pp. 201 ff. Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, pp. 441 ff. Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 70 ff.

the Southern Uí Néill.<sup>290</sup> Their hegemony was reflected in the alternation of the high-kingship at Tara between these two branches, almost to the complete exclusion of all other *cenéla*.<sup>291</sup> In 1002, however, Brian Bóruma, a Munster king, was powerful enough to interrupt this arrangement and take the kingship of Tara for himself. Brian's success was not due to his strength alone. Byrne has also identified the weakness of the Uí Néill as a contributing factor. In particular, he deemed the refusal of Cenél nEógain to assist the Clann Cholmáin king of Tara, Máel Shechnaill mac Domnaill, against the ambitions of Brian Bóruma, to be significant.<sup>292</sup> He has also suggested that the Cenél nEógain inactivity on this front reflected both a break-down of wider Uí Néill relations, and also an increase in factionalism within Cenél nEógain itself, which hindered action outwith its traditional Northern Uí Néill sphere of influence.<sup>293</sup>

The advice of *Cert cech rí* suits the more restricted Cenél nEógain power of this latter period. It is clear from §§ 1 and 2, for example, that the advisee is not a king of Tara, since the king of Tara is said to be exempt from tribute to him. The exemption of the king of Cashel is also likely in recognition of the ascendant power of Munster in this period. Instead, the advice of *Cert cech rí* concerns itself much more with the consolidation of power within the kingdom. Stanza 4 advises '*do thúatha fadéin, tuc dot réir ar tús*', 'bring your own people in the first instance under your power', and this sets the tone for much of the *teosc*. As many as eight stanzas advise the collection of tribute, and a further eight advise the taking of hostages.<sup>294</sup> A clear majority of these (eleven out of the sixteen stanzas) refer to the king's own peoples and territories.<sup>295</sup> At times the advised level of control seems harsh, as in § 7:

*Cid inmain in túath · bíd imguin ri scáth  
corrabat a ngéill · it láim féin sech cách.*

<sup>290</sup> Ó Cróinín, 'Ireland, 400-800', pp. 210 ff. Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, pp. 571 ff. Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 87 ff.

<sup>291</sup> That is, from Áed Allán mac Fergaile (high-king, 734-28) to Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (980-1002), with the one exception being Congalach Cnogba mac Máel Mithig of Síol nÁedo Sláine (944-56).

<sup>292</sup> Byrne, 'Ireland and Her Neighbours', pp. 857, 864.

<sup>293</sup> Byrne, 'Ireland and Her Neighbours', pp. 857-59.

<sup>294</sup> *Cert cech rí*, §§ 1, 10, 12, 13, 54, 56-58, and §§ 5-8, 10, 21, 53, 55.

<sup>295</sup> There is a bloc of four stanzas, §§ 53-56, which concerns tribute from the other provinces. There is also § 8 which talks of 'a prisoner from afar'.

Though the people be leal, let there be strife against even a shadow  
until their hostages be in your own hands.

This attitude is accompanied by an almost paranoid fear of betrayal, which can be seen in §§ 26, 27, and 41.<sup>296</sup> In particular there is a concern for the king's safety from his own household, with § 10 advising that hostages be taken from the king's brother, § 32 encouraging the king to subdue his brothers and sons, and § 29 citing the example of a previous Cenél nEógain king who was assassinated by one of his own warriors:

*Colmán Rímid riam · ort a mílid féin  
tabair sin dot óid · ocus óid a chéill.*

Colmán Rimid, heretofore, whom his own warrior slew  
take cognizance of that, and mark its meaning.

Byrne linked this concern to the high frequency of regicide recorded in the annals for the early Middle Irish period: 'many high-kings had been killed by their own followers; the Cenél nEógain in particular regard it as a glory to kill their kings and princes'.<sup>297</sup> In addition, this concern for betrayal or assassination rings with special significance for Áed mac Néill meic Máel Shechlainn. Áed himself had in fact killed his own brother, Domnall mac Néill, so that he could attain the kingship for himself.<sup>298</sup> Curiously, stanza ten of *Cert cech rí* advises treating one's brother with the same strict authority used for everyone else:

*Cid bráthair do rí · ó gebthar a giall  
acht rothechta thech · ná sóer nech ar biad.*

Even the brother of a king, whose hostage has been accepted,  
provided he possess a dwelling, exempt no man from giving provisions.

Was this *tecosc* attempting to justify Áed's actions against Domnall by recognising not only the risk of betrayal but also by warning against favouritism and leniency, even between

---

<sup>296</sup> *Cert cech rí*, § 26, '*nár étar do brath*', 'may no man betray you'. § 27, '*Ná bí imbóegul braith, it óenur imboith*', 'Run no risk of betrayal, while alone in your chamber'. § 41, '*Na tóisig fot smacht, cidat nóisig neirt, cia beith olc na crí, connách tí for beirt*', 'Keep the chiefs under your authority, though they be strong nobles, so that though they meditate evil, it may not come to pass'.

<sup>297</sup> Byrne, 'Ireland and Her Neighbours', p. 895.

<sup>298</sup> Interestingly, this is the event in Áed's life which garners the most coverage in the annals. See AU, 1068.5. Dennis Murphy, ed., *The Annals of Clonmacnoise* (Dublin: Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, 1896), 1067. William M. Hennessy, *Chronicum Scotorum* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1866), 1065. AFM, 1068. Whitley Stokes, *The Annals of Tigernach* (*Revue Celtique*, 16, 1895-96; repr. Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 1993), p. 408.

brothers? Equally, it could be warning Áed against his other brother, Donnchad, who was waiting in line for the kingship and would eventually succeed him.<sup>299</sup> This is certainly a possibility, but it must also be acknowledged that this example is something of a double-edged sword, for it is well known that kin-slaying, or *fingal*, was amongst the most heinous of crimes in medieval Ireland.<sup>300</sup> Thus, it may have been inadvisable to raise the issue of Áed's fratricide in poem written for him.

Another feature of *Cert cech rí*g, which might be suited to the career of Áed mac Néill meic Máel Shechnaill, is the favour it shows for Armagh. This can be seen in the following stanzas: §§ 1-2, which name the '*Abb Aird macha móir*', 'the Patriarch of great Ard Macha', as one of only three people who do not owe tribute to the Uí Néill; § 23, which asks the king to protect Armagh from criminals; and § 22, in which it is implied, by reference to St. Patrick, that the king's own church, in which he will be buried, is Armagh:

*Almsa menic maith · don relic diantóich  
do Pátric do Dia · bail imbia fo chloich.*

Give frequent and generous alms to the church, for which it is right  
for (the sake of) Patrick and God, where you will be buried.

This association with Armagh was not unusual for a Cenél nEógain king and, in fact, the Cenél nEógain had been sponsors of the foundation since the mid-eighth century.<sup>301</sup> However, there is one tantalising connection between Áed and *Cert cech rí*g on this matter. In 1043, Áed's father, Niall, raided the Uí Méith and Cúailnge in revenge for the profanation of the Bell of Testament, that is St. Patrick's bell.<sup>302</sup> Is it a coincidence that § 23 gives the following advice?

*Sin Macha nalleic · cell cech ratha ruit  
ret remes co bráth · éigem na gad cluic.*

In Armagh, the church of every swift (?) grace, do not allow at any time during  
your reign, crying nor stealing (?) a bell.

---

<sup>299</sup> AU, 1083.2.

<sup>300</sup> Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, Early Irish Law Series, 3 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988; repr. 2009), p. 127.

<sup>301</sup> Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 51.

<sup>302</sup> AU, 1068.5.

Similarly, there are reports of a raid by one Domnall ua Lochlainn on the Fir Manach, in retaliation of the persecution of Armagh in 1079.<sup>303</sup> Now, Domnall was not only Áed's cousin, but also one of his subordinate kings, and so it might be surmised that Áed himself was behind this manoeuvre. One reason to suspect this is that the raid was assisted by the men of Mag nítha; a territory that was under the control of the Cenél nEógain at this time.<sup>304</sup> Another reason would be that Domnall's father, Ardgar, seems to have had a close political relationship with Áed's father, Niall. Indeed, Niall seems to have imposed Ardgar upon the rival kingship of Tulach Óc, in order to control it.<sup>305</sup> It is not unreasonable to suppose that this political alliance spanned two generations. One could also draw a comparison to Áed Oirdnide, who reportedly attacked the Ulaid in revenge for the violation of the shrine of St. Patrick.<sup>306</sup> If the author of *Cert cech ríge* was deliberately encouraging Áed mac Néill meic Máel Shechlainn to emulate Áed Oirdnide, then perhaps this contributed to the military action of 1079.

---

<sup>303</sup> AU, 1076.5.

<sup>304</sup> Byrne, 'Ireland and Her Neighbours', p. 880-882.

<sup>305</sup> Byrne, 'Ireland and Her Neighbours', p. 894.

<sup>306</sup> F. J. Byrne, 'Church and Politics, c.750-c.1100', *A New History of Ireland: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, eds. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, T. W. Moody, and F. X. Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 656-679, (pp. 657 and 659). Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 161.

## *Diambad messe bad rí réil*

### Manuscripts<sup>307</sup>

LL, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1339 (H 2 18), p. 147b 1 [Book of Leinster]; Ld, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud. Misc. 610, fol. 72b 1 [Book of the White Earl]; L, Chatsworth, Book of Lismore, fol. 95a 2; Eg, London, British Library, MS Egerton 92, fol. 9a 1; H, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1337 (H 3 18), p. 41; M, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 1225 (D ii 1), fol. 29a 1 [Book of Uí Maine]; L 34, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 1007 (23 L 34), p. 220; O’C, Castlerea, Clonalis House, Book of O’Conor Don, fol. 382a; N, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 487 (23 N 11), p. 76. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, MS 5057-5059, fol. 42.

### Editions and Translations

O’Donoghue, Tadhg, ed. and trans., ‘Advice to a Prince’, *Ériu*, 9 (1921-23), pp. 43-54.

### Overview

*Diambad messe bad rí réil*, or ‘If I were an illustrious king’ (abbreviated to *Diambad* from here on), is another *tecosc* that has been edited and translated only once. In O’Donoghue’s edition, he used nine out of ten manuscript copies known to him. The tenth (Brussels MS 5057-59) was unavailable to him. As with *Cert cech ríog*, O’Donoghue did not present a strict schema of recensions, but did make observations towards that end. He regarded LL and Ld as one version, and L, Eg, and N as another. He considered manuscripts L<sub>34</sub> and O’C to be ‘practically identical’ and to be related to the LL-Ld version. Finally, O’Donoghue considered H and M to be independent. Of all versions, O’Donoghue considered LL-Ld to be the ‘best and probably the oldest’, and he used LL as the basis for his edition. Having said this, LL and Ld do not include § 35 of his edition. Only L<sub>34</sub> and O’C have all 37 stanzas that O’Donoghue presented. Manuscript M is much shorter by comparison, having only 24.<sup>308</sup> The L, Eg, and N manuscripts are each missing the same nine stanzas.<sup>309</sup> Manuscript H is also missing nine, but they are not always the same ones as the L, Eg, and N manuscripts.<sup>310</sup>

<sup>307</sup> This list of manuscripts was taken from Tadhg O’Donoghue, ‘Advice to a Prince’, *Ériu*, 9 (1921-23), pp. 43-54 (p. 43).

<sup>308</sup> M lacks §§ 9, 10, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 35.

<sup>309</sup> L, Eg, and N lack §§ 9, 10, 19, 22, 23, 25, 26, 30, 32.

<sup>310</sup> H lacks §§ 24, 25, 29, 30, 21, 32, 33, 34, 37.

Stylistically speaking, *Diambad* is another example of syllabic verse. This time the metre is *Rannaigecht mór*, i.e. stanzas are made up of two pairs of heptasyllabic lines in which the final word of each line is monosyllabic.<sup>311</sup> Alliteration, consonance, and internal rhyme are all important throughout.<sup>312</sup> All of this is quite similar to *Cert cech rí*g, of course, but these two *tecosca* do seem to have one significant stylistic contrast. Whilst a large number of the wisdom contained in *Cert cech rí*g is prescriptive (or proscriptive), a great deal more of the wisdom in *Diambad* is descriptive or observational.

Only one manuscript out of the ten names an advisee for *Diambad*. This is the Laud manuscript, in which the text is introduced with ‘*Fingin cecinit do Chormac mac Cuilennain*’.<sup>313</sup> O’Donoghue speculated that the intended Fingen may have been ‘Fingin mac Flainn, fl. 850’, whom he found in the list of Irish poets appended to Meyer’s *Primer of Irish Metrics*.<sup>314</sup> Meyer had previously made a case for the Munster provenance of this figure, and O’Donoghue matched this with the apparent Cashel bias implied by §§ 6 and 7 of *Diambad*.<sup>315</sup> As Meyer observed, there is no annalistic record of a Fingen mac Flainn, but this association with Cashel, and his suggested *floruit*, means that the attributed advisee may have been Cormac mac Cuilennáin, the bishop-king of Cashel who attained the kingship in 901.<sup>316</sup> This Cormac had a short but accomplished tenure, leading Munster on a successful campaign against the Uí Néill and Connachta in 907.<sup>317</sup> His death in the battle of Belach Mugna (908), against the Laigin and Uí Néill, is regarded as a great loss by the Annals of the Four Masters, the *Chronicum Scotorum*, and the Fragmentary Annals, which depict

---

<sup>311</sup> O’Donoghue, ‘Advice’, 44. Cf. Meyer, *Irish Metrics*, p. 13.

<sup>312</sup> O’Donoghue, ‘Advice’, 44.

<sup>313</sup> O’Donoghue, ‘Advice’, p. 44.

<sup>314</sup> O’Donoghue, ‘Advice’, pp. 43-44. Cf. Meyer, *Irish Metrics*, p. 41.

<sup>315</sup> Kuno Meyer, ed., ‘*Fingen Mac Flainn’s Gedicht auf die Fir Arddae*’, *Archive für Celtische Lexikographie*, 3 (1907), 291-98 (291-92). O’Donoghue, ‘Advice’, p. 44.

<sup>316</sup> Fingen Mac Flainn’s *floruit* was originally proposed by O’Reilly, and subsequently accepted by Meyer and O’Donoghue. See Edward O’Reilly, ‘A Chronological Account of Nearly Four Hundred Irish Writers, Commencing with the Earliest Account of Irish History, and Carried Down to the Year of Our Lord 1750; with a Descriptive Catalogue of Such of Their Works as are Still Extant in Verse or Prose, Consisting of Upwards of One Thousand Separate Tracts’, *Transactions of the Ibero-Celtic Society*, 1.1 (1820), lv.

<sup>317</sup> Seán Mac Airt, ed. and trans., *The Annals of Inisfallen (MS. Rawlinson B. 503)* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1944; repr. 1968, 1975, 1988), 907.1-3. AFM 902.6-7. W. Hennessy, ed., *Chronicum Scotorum* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1866), 907.

him as a man of great piety and learning.<sup>318</sup> Indeed, a variety of literary accomplishments are attributed to him, albeit with widely varying degrees of plausibility.<sup>319</sup>

Obviously, both Fingen and Cormac are too early to be the actual author and recipient of this Middle Irish text, but their attribution might still carry significance. Cormac's reputation, for instance, could help explain why he was cast as the advisee. It is tempting to consider a comparison to his namesake, Cormac mac Airt, who was similarly renowned for his learning and piety (despite living and dying before the coming of Patrick), and to whom *TC* was addressed. Whoever wrote the Laud version of *Diambad* may well have wished to draw a favourable comparison between these two kings, but also between the two wisdom texts, *TC* and *Diambad*. This is suggested by the direct reference to *TC* in § 4 of *Diambad* itself: '*Tecosca Cormaic ba cor gāeth: ar Coirpri Lifechair luath*', 'A wise contract was Cormac's Instructions to hasty Coirpre Lifechair'.<sup>320</sup> Evidently, the compiler of *Diambad* was aware of *TC* and held it in high regard.

On the other hand, it is difficult to find any significant correlation between what is known of Cormac mac Cuilennáin and the content of *Diambad*. Stanza 3 advises the taking of hostages from '*Fir Lugach*', whom O'Donoghue speculated may be the Luigni of Meath, but there seems to be no reason to believe that this group was of any concern to Cormac mac Cuilennáin, not even in his northern campaign of 907.<sup>321</sup> There is also, perhaps, a conflict of interest between Cormac's multifaceted career as '*ri Caisil scriba optimus atque episcopus & ancorita & sapientissimus Gaoidiol*', 'king of Caisel, an excellent scribe and bishop and anchorite and the most learned of the Irish', and the position taken by §§ 26-33, which seem to advocate a rather rigid division of labour and occupational conservatism.<sup>322</sup> On the whole, however, the attribution of Cormac mac Cuilennáin as the advisee character does make some sense.

---

<sup>318</sup> AFM 903.7. CS 908. Joan Newlon Radner, ed. and trans., *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978), 908.

<sup>319</sup> For an overview of the scholarship on this subject, see Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Cormac mac Cuilennáin: King, Bishop and "Wonderous Sage"', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 58 (2011), 109-28.

<sup>320</sup> O'Donoghue, 'Advice', 45.

<sup>321</sup> O'Donoghue, 'Advice', 51 n.1.

<sup>322</sup> CS 908. See, for example, *Diambad* § 26: '*Roscáiled do chāch a hord*', 'For each his task has been appointed'. § 27: '*Mac ind abbad isin chill [...] mac in rí do naidm na ngailf*', 'Let the abbot's son enter the church [...] the king's son to bind hostages'. § 29: '*Mac in chléirig ar in*

Alternatively, three manuscripts attribute authorship of *Diambad* to someone named Dubh dá Thuath.<sup>323</sup> None of these manuscripts name an advisee, but it must be considered here whether it is possible to infer one from this attribution of authorship. Unfortunately, this is very difficult, and not least because the identity of this Dubh dá Thuath is rather insecure. Originally, Meyer understood this Dubh dá Thuath to be a historical person, who is also attested in two other texts.<sup>324</sup> One of these attestations is that of Dubhdathuath, bishop and abbot of Ráith Áeda, whose obit is recorded as 783 in the Annals of the Four Masters (788 in the Annals of Ulster). The other is Dubh dá Thuath mac Steléne, who is named in a verse in the tale *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* as one of ‘*ochtar i n-Ard Macha*’, ‘eight in Armagh’.<sup>325</sup> O’Donoghue accepted Meyer’s identification in his edition of *Diambad*. Thomas Clancy, however, has subsequently shown that ‘it is hard [...] to argue any necessity of identity between the bishop and the *Aislinge* character’.<sup>326</sup> Instead, Clancy has persuasively argued that the Dubh dá Thuath mac Steléne named in the *Aislinge* is to be identified with a seventh-century figure attested in the genealogies of the Múscraige Tíre (as Mac Stelín, Mac Stealáin, and Mac Scelín), who is also to be equated with the eponymous protagonist of the tale ‘The Trial of Mac Teléne’.<sup>327</sup>

Clancy was less convincing, however, in his consideration of the relationship between this Mac Steléne and the Dubh dá Thuath named in *Diambad*. For the most part, he seems to have been reasonably happy to accept that they were the same person. This is, of course, a distinct possibility. As Clancy notes, both Mac Steléne and *Diambad* seem to have Munster origins.<sup>328</sup> Further to this, Mac Steléne was associated with poetic figures in the *Aislinge*, so it might make sense that he too dabbled in verse.<sup>329</sup> On the other hand, there is no direct evidence that Clancy’s Mac Steléne was a poet. Furthermore, and as Clancy himself says, the evidence of the *Aislinge* ‘would lead us to suspect that ‘Mac Steléne’ [...]

---

*cuairt : do gabáil co suairc na salm*, ‘Let the cleric’s son go on the circuit, joyfully to sing psalms’. § 32: ‘*Mac ind filed cosin dam*’, ‘Let the poet’s son take to poesy’.

<sup>323</sup> Book of Lismore, fol. 95<sup>a</sup> 2, Egerton 92, fol. 9<sup>a</sup> 1, H. 3. 18, part 1, p. 41.

<sup>324</sup> O’Donoghue, ‘Advice’, 43-44.

<sup>325</sup> O’Donoghue, ‘Advice’, 44. Cf. Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, ed and trans, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1990), p. 3.

<sup>326</sup> Thomas Owen Clancy, ‘Mac Steléne and the Eight in Armagh: Identity and Context’, *Éigse*, 26 (1992), 80-91.

<sup>327</sup> Clancy, ‘Mac Steléne’, 85-87.

<sup>328</sup> Clancy, ‘Mac Steléne’, 85.

<sup>329</sup> Clancy, ‘Mac Steléne’, 89.

is the name by which this character was chiefly known to Irish tradition'.<sup>330</sup> If this was indeed the case, then one must wonder why none of the three manuscripts that attribute *Diambad* to Dubh dá Thuath use this patronymic. This is particularly problematic, since the name Dubh dá Thuath was not a particularly uncommon one.<sup>331</sup> Given these doubts, the identification of this Dubh dá Thuath with Mac Steléne ought to be supported with evidence from *Diambad* itself. Unfortunately, information about Mac Steléne is scarce, and *Diambad* itself is equally lacking the kind of information that is easily cross-referenced (i.e. personal names, population names, events etc.). This scarcity of information leads this investigation to a dead-end. Even if all doubts were cast aside, and the identification of Dubh dá Thuath as Mac Steléne was accepted, one would still be at a loss to identify who he would be likely to address this wisdom text to.<sup>332</sup>

---

<sup>330</sup> Clancy, 'Mac Steléne', 82.

<sup>331</sup> Clancy, 'Mac Steléne', 82. Cf. Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, p. 48.

<sup>332</sup> The same problem presents itself for all attempts to identify this Dubh Dá Thuath. For example, the case of Dubh Dathuath, chief of the Three Tribes of the Luigni, presents one tantalising coincidence, since Fir Lugach is the only population name mentioned in this *teosc* (§ 3). It is very difficult to determine, however, why a chief of the Luigni would advise that hostages be taken from his own population, as § 3 recommends. See AFM 785.8 and AU 790 for this Dubh Dathuath's obit.

This chapter has given an overview of the style, form, and content of the six texts most commonly and convincingly regarded as *tecosca*. In doing so, it has revealed this corpus to be quite diverse. Besides the obvious differences in length and chronology, there are also more complicated differences in style. These include syntactic formulae, poetic devices, and the use of legal language. Interestingly, such stylistic differences are present not just between the texts, but within them as well, particularly in the longer and earlier examples: *AM* and *TC*. Without a doubt, these two texts have been subject to the most stylistic analysis by modern scholars, a great deal of which can be credited to the recent work of Fomin. For the other *tecosca* (with the exception of *BCC*), scholarly understanding of their style has hardly progressed beyond what had been established by the middle of the last century. As witnessed in the first chapter of this thesis, early commentators on the *tecosca* either struggled to find any consistent stylistic criteria for characterising this corpus, or glossed over this aspect in their synopses. Undoubtedly, there is a great deal of scope for more research in this particular aspect of the *tecosca*, with much to be gained.

It has also been established in the first chapter of this thesis, that the majority of commentators on the *tecosca* have considered them to be a distinct group based on the perception that they are, in some way, wisdom literature for kings. One of the reasons for this belief is the use of narrative framing and royal advisee characters. The present chapter can be said to partially justify this. In the preceding overview, a basic narrative-premise, common to each *tecosc*, has been identified. At its simplest, this involves the bestowal of advice from one figure to another. It can also be argued that, in each case, the advisee figure was intended to be a royal one. Having said this, there is considerable variation in the strength of this argument for each *tecosc*. The attribution of the advisee characters Feradach, Cairbre, Cúscraid, and Lugaid all seem reasonably secure (although, the attribution of certain paragraphs of *TC* to Fíthal and Flann Fína, as discussed in the previous chapter, should be borne in mind). More open to debate are the advisee characters of *Diambad* and *Cert cech rí*g. The main reason for this is that neither of these texts employ a narrative framework to the same extent that the other four *tecosca* do. Some versions of *AM* and *TC* are preceded with an introductory paragraph, whilst *TCús* and *BCC* survive embedded within larger narratives. Both of these factors help to establish the narrative context of these *tecosca*. In addition to this, each of these four examples have survived with titles that are fairly consistent. Although only one of these titles (*TCús*) stipulates the name of the advisee character, by naming their advisor characters the other three titles

help the reader place these texts in the context of early Irish literature and legend. The advisor and advisee characters of *AM*, *TC*, *TCús*, and *BCC* can be identified by anyone with a knowledge of early Irish literature, and thus a basic narrative premise can be inferred. For *Cert cech rí* and *Diambad* clues such as these are not as forthcoming. Only one manuscript of *Diambad*, for example, provides a heading that names an advisee, and *Cert cech rí* is the only text not to explicitly name an advisee in at least one manuscript. Ironically, however, *Cert cech rí* provides enough internal evidence to indicate not only a royal advisee character, but also to build a reasonably strong case for the identity of a historical recipient. That this historical figure was a high-king of the Northern Uí Néill, adds weight to the popular assumption that the use of royal advisee characters is indicative of a royal audience. However, it would be unwise to speculate that this was the case for each *teosc*. Based on the evidence here it is impossible to say whether or not the intended audience of any *teosc* other than *Cert cech rí* was royal. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence across the corpus to suggest that all six of the *teosca* examined here may be collectively defined as wisdom literature that purports to be the advice given to a royal figure.

## Early Irish Literature and Kingship

It has been established that the *tecosca* have long been defined by the perception that they constitute advice literature for kings. Two main reasons for this widely-held belief have been identified. The first and most basic of these is the use of royal figures as advisee characters. In much of the scholarship on the *tecosca*, the importance placed upon advisee characters has been largely implicit. The second chapter of this thesis has revealed, however, that each of the *tecosca* either name, or strongly imply, a royal advisee in at least one manuscript. This indicates that, whether or not the target audience for these texts was exclusively royal, the *tecosca* were at least presented as advice given to a royal figure.

The second reason for believing that these texts constitute advice for kings relates to scholarly theories about early Irish kingship ideology. The most important of these is the concept of *fír flathemon*, or 'ruler's truth'. Scholars have detected this concept in several *tecosc*, and *AM*, in particular, has been very closely associated with it. *Fír flathemon* has also been pivotal for the comparison of the Irish *tecosca* to the wider genre of *speculum principum*. As early as 1929, Kenney remarked that the *tecosca* contributed to 'European political theory'.<sup>333</sup> Seventy years later, in 2010, Grigg similarly asserted that the 'Insular *speculum principum*' participated in 'Western Christian political ideas'.<sup>334</sup> Clearly, then, the association of the *tecosca* with kingship ideology is an important one, and ought to be investigated.

To do this, it will first be necessary to understand kingship ideology in early Ireland. Unfortunately, this is not at all a straight forward matter. The concept of kingship in early Ireland has been the subject of considerable discussion during the last century. In this time, there have been some discernible trends in interpretation. On a practical level, some scholars have argued that early Irish kingship was inherently limited in its fiscal and executive power, whilst others have instead argued for the aggressive development of precisely those things. On an ideological level, some have emphasised the pre-Christian and Indo-European inheritance of early Irish kingship, whereas others have identified Classical and biblical influences. These various interpretations are very closely related to scholarly

---

<sup>333</sup> Kenney, *Sources for the History of Ireland*, p. 282.

<sup>334</sup> Grigg, 'The Just King', 27.

discourse about the nature of early Irish vernacular literature. How one chooses to approach the evidence can greatly affect the image of kingship that is presented. To complicate matters further, the *tecosca* themselves have been embroiled in this discourse. This chapter will trace the evolution of scholarly perceptions of early Irish kingship ideology, and acknowledge the simultaneous development of approaches to early Irish literature, including the *tecosca*.

Dillon was an early proponent of the view that vernacular narrative in early Ireland was the end-product of 'a long oral tradition' which preceded it.<sup>335</sup> He suggested that the origins of the 'Irish tradition' lay in the remote past, and by comparing Indian and Irish literature, he proposed a common Indo-European inheritance.<sup>336</sup> These ideas about oral transmission and Indo-European inheritance were influential amongst scholars of early Irish literature. Kenneth Jackson, for instance, would later present the case for the continued existence of an oral story-telling tradition that preserved the early Irish saga material from the Iron Age until it was written down, largely unaltered, in the seventh century.<sup>337</sup> Calvert Watkins, on the other hand, argued for the Indo-European character of the gnomic-epic verse structure in early Irish literature, and wished to emphasise this native component over any Latin influence.<sup>338</sup>

The idea that early Irish vernacular literature was itself a direct survival of ancient tradition is related to the theory that this literature preserved information about pre-historic society. Dillon was of the opinion that the heroic sagas give a picture of the social and political conditions of pre-Christian Ireland that 'seems genuine'.<sup>339</sup> Jackson argued much the same, saying that Irish saga literature offered a 'window to the Iron Age', and that the 'political construction, material civilisation, and way of life' described in this material was an accurate reflection of society in pre-historic Ireland.<sup>340</sup> There was also a certain amount of agreement between these scholars that these literary survivals reflected real social and

---

<sup>335</sup> Myles Dillon, *Early Irish Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948; repr. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994), p. xii.

<sup>336</sup> Dillon, *Early Irish Literature*, p. 188.

<sup>337</sup> Kenneth Jackson, *The Oldest Irish Tradition: A Window on the Iron Age* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1964), pp. 52-54.

<sup>338</sup> Calvert Watkins, 'Indo-European Metrics and Archaic Irish Verse', *Celtica*, 6 (1963), 194-249.

<sup>339</sup> Dillon, *Early Irish Literature*, p. xii.

<sup>340</sup> Jackson, *Oldest Irish Tradition*, p. 4.

political continuity from pre-historic Ireland into the medieval period. According to Dillon 'the Heroic Age lasted in literature and in society, side by side with Christianity, down to the sixteenth century'.<sup>341</sup> On the other hand, Jackson's dating was much more conservative, but he still accounted for the transmission of pre-historic narrative tradition by explaining that La Tène civilisation must have survived in Ireland, 'without any cultural break', until the fifth century.<sup>342</sup> Watkins employed Indo-European linguistic theory to propose that 'not only the vocabulary, but the institutions themselves, the whole structure of early Ireland, represent a remarkably faithful reflex of what we know of "Indo-European" tribal society'.<sup>343</sup> Watkins did not specify his chronology, but since he was speaking about Old Irish literature, it may be surmised that he considered these survivals to have lasted into the early medieval period at least.

Dillon made similar assertions about the nature of early Irish legal literature, and these too were influential on other scholars. Once again, he proposed an 'ancient oral tradition' that preserved the legal material until it was written down in the sixth or seventh century.<sup>344</sup> Dillon also believed the material to 'reflect, in some respects, a pre-Christian society', and to have its roots 'not in Roman Law, but in ancient Indo-European custom'.<sup>345</sup> D. A. Binchy was an important commentator on the vernacular laws and he agreed with Dillon's theory of an oral transmission from pre-history.<sup>346</sup> Binchy went further, in fact, and accentuated the conservative nature of the vernacular law and its practitioners by asserting that by the eighth century the written corpus was 'canonical' and 'regarded as sacrosanct and immutable'.<sup>347</sup> In his opinion, these laws reflected something of the reality of early medieval Ireland. The basic structure of Irish society, both in the law and in practice,

---

<sup>341</sup> Dillon, *Early Irish Literature*, p. 189.

<sup>342</sup> Jackson, *Oldest Irish Tradition*, p. 54.

<sup>343</sup> Watkins, 'Indo-European Metrics', 213.

<sup>344</sup> Dillon, *Early Irish Literature*, p. xii

<sup>345</sup> Dillon, *Early Irish Literature*, p. xii; Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick, *The Celtic Realms* (London: Phoenix Press, 1967), p. 92.

<sup>346</sup> D. A. Binchy, 'Secular Institutions', in *Early Irish Society*, ed. Myles Dillon (Dublin: Published for the Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland by Colm O Lochlainn, 1954), pp. 52-65 (p. 53).

<sup>347</sup> Binchy, 'Secular Institutions', p. 53.

remained essentially the same ‘from the coming of the Goidels down to the Norse invasions’.<sup>348</sup> Binchy dubbed this socio-political structure the ‘old order’.<sup>349</sup>

As examples of wisdom literature, of course, the *tecosca* do not strictly belong to either the legal or narrative corpora. Nonetheless, it has been indicated already in this thesis that each of the *tecosca* employ narrative elements. All of the *tecosca* are presented as the advice from one figure given to another. In the case of *AM*, *TC*, *TCús*, and *BCC* this involves the use of characters from vernacular saga literature, and for these texts the immediate narrative context, in which the advice is bestowed, is readily apparent. In addition to this, some commentators have noted the use legalistic language by several of the *tecosca*. Binchy, for example, believed *AM* to have originated from the same ‘poetico-legal’ school as the legal tracts on status: *Bretha Nemed* and *Uraicecht Becc*.<sup>350</sup> Kelly agreed that this must have been the case for *AM* (B) §§ 22-32 and 47-2, due to the ‘legal or semi-legal’ language that he detected there.<sup>351</sup> Even so, Henry felt that Kelly did not go far enough in representing the legal aspect of *AM* in his translation, and suggested some amendments in line with his view.<sup>352</sup> Concerning *BCC*, Smith noted ‘the writer’s familiarity with ancient Irish law’, which he believed to be ‘more prominent and more minute’ than that of the other *tecosca*.<sup>353</sup> With this in mind, it would be unwise not to consider the likelihood that the interpretive models for the vernacular legal and narrative literature could also apply to the *tecosca*. Certainly, some scholars have done this. In his article on ‘The Archaism of Irish Tradition’ (1948), for example, Dillon directly compared the thematic content and tone of *AM* with the Indian Upanishads.<sup>354</sup> The implication being that both texts had preserved Indo-European concepts. In *IKHK*, Byrne followed Dillon’s lead and reasserted the Indo-European inheritance of *AM* and ‘gnomic ‘Instructions’ of this sort (*tecosca*) in the native tradition’, and he included *TC* as a further example.<sup>355</sup> In his edition of *AM*, Kelly did not go

---

<sup>348</sup> Binchy, ‘Secular Institutions’, p. 53; D. A. Binchy, ‘The Passing of the Old Order’, *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Celtic Studies, Dublin 1959* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1962), pp.119-132.

<sup>349</sup> Binchy, ‘Old Order’, p. 119.

<sup>350</sup> D. A. Binchy, ‘*Bretha Nemed*’, *Ériu*, 17 (1955), 4-6.

<sup>351</sup> Kelly, *AM*, pp. xlv-xlv.

<sup>352</sup> Henry, ‘Cruces’, 34, 39.

<sup>353</sup> Smith, ‘*Bríathartheosc Conculaind*’, 187.

<sup>354</sup> Dillon, ‘Archaism’, 250-51.

<sup>355</sup> Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 24-26.

as far as to suggest that this text preserved Indo-European concepts, but he did remark that 'AM provides much information about the place of the Irish king in pre-Christian society, and no doubt most of it also holds good for the early Christian period'.<sup>356</sup>

Scholarly perceptions about the nature of early Irish vernacular literature have often been supported by complementary understandings of the people believed to have produced it. Modern scholars commonly refer to those responsible for literature, law, and learning, as the learned orders. Among these orders, a category known as *filid* have been of utmost importance for the modern understanding of early Irish vernacular literature and society. Indeed, their societal role has been closely associated with kings and kingship, as will be seen. The common English language translation for *fili* (pl. *filid*) is 'poet', but this translation is too simplistic for the range of learned and social activity covered by these professionals in the early medieval period. According to Dillon, Watkins, Jackson, and Binchy, the *filid* were schooled in lore, genealogy, and law, whilst their social activities involved the deployment of this knowledge as praise poetry, history, saga, and legal judgement.<sup>357</sup> As such, they could be described as being poets, historians, and lawyers.<sup>358</sup> This diverse range of learning was thought to be unified, however, by its traditional nature, its pre-Christian origins, and its oral transmission. First Dillon, and then Binchy, asserted that *filidecht* (meaning here the traditional learning of the *fili*) originated in druidic schools and was orally transmitted into the early Middle Ages, whence it began to be written down.<sup>359</sup> Jackson and Watkins later went on to acknowledge general support for this view.<sup>360</sup>

In this scheme of things, the learning of the *fili* was understood to be very closely associated to his status in society. Binchy suggested, for example, that there was a popular 'veneration of ancestral tradition' in early medieval Ireland, which was naturally related to the prestige of those 'who were the custodians and practical interpreters of that tradition'.<sup>361</sup> A more

---

<sup>356</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xvi.

<sup>357</sup> Myles Dillon, *The Cycles of the Kings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946; repr. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994), pp. 2-3. Dillon, 'Irish Tradition', 261-63. Watkins, 'Indo-European Metrics', 214. Jackson, 'Oldest Irish Tradition', 52-54. D. A. Binchy, 'The Background of Early Irish Literature', *Studia Hibernica*, 1 (1961), 7-18 (11-2).

<sup>358</sup> Dillon, *Celt and Hindu*, p. 12.

<sup>359</sup> Dillon, *Early Irish Literature*, p. xvi. Binchy, 'Early Irish Literature', 11-12. Binchy, 'Secular Institutions', 53, 63.

<sup>360</sup> Watkins, 'Indo-European Metrics', 213-14. Jackson, *Oldest Irish Tradition*, pp. 54, 64.

<sup>361</sup> Binchy, 'Secular Institutions', 63.

concrete example of the relationship between the status and learning was the power of *áer* 'satire'. Dillon believed *áer* to have instilled great fear of the *filid* amongst the early Irish, since it was believed that its words had the power to physically disfigure their subject.<sup>362</sup> Byrne explained this as being due to a common belief in the 'power of the word', a concept introduced by Dillon and related to *fír flathemon* by a number of scholars, as will be discussed below.<sup>363</sup> That the *filid* retained some sort of magical aura or ability into the early medieval period was suggested by many scholars (Dillon, Binchy, Watkins, Jackson, Dillon and Chadwick, and Byrne).<sup>364</sup> According to this interpretation, there was a very close association between these 'quasi-magical powers', the social status, learning and origins of the *fili*.<sup>365</sup> Dillon, for example, summarised the situation thus:

[The *fili*] seems to have inherited much of the prestige of the druid of pagan times. [...] The *fili* was honoured and feared, like the Brahmin in India. He was no longer a priest in this Christian society, but he had means of divination akin to magic. Or at any rate, he had had them in the pagan past, and the tradition of his magical power survived.<sup>366</sup>

The power and prestige of the *filid* was integral to the special relationship that some scholars believed them to have had with kings. This relationship was first posited by Georges Dumézil, who examined 'the function of the professional encomiast in connexion with the kingship in India, in Rome, and in Ireland'.<sup>367</sup> Dumézil's main thesis was upheld by Dillon, who summarised it as the 'common survival in these three places of a primitive Indo-European custom, according to which the new king was proclaimed, instructed, and in a sense bound by the solemn praise of the professional poet'.<sup>368</sup> This line of argument was later picked up by Byrne, who claimed that 'the *fili* played an important part in the

---

<sup>362</sup> Dillon, 'Irish Tradition', 261. Dillon and Chadwick, *Celtic Realms*, p. 97. Myles Dillon, *Celts and Aryans: Survivals of Indo-European Speech and Society*, (Rashtrapati Nivas, Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1975), p. 126.

<sup>363</sup> Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 15, 24. Cf. Myles Dillon, 'The Hindu Act of Truth in Celtic Tradition', *Modern Philology*, 44 (1947), 137-40. Dillon, 'Archaism'.

<sup>364</sup> Binchy, 'Secular Institutions', 63. D. A. Binchy, 'The Background of Early Irish Literature', *Studia Hibernica*, 1 (1961), 7-18 (11). Watkins, 'Indo-European Metrics', 214. Jackson, *Oldest Irish Tradition*, p. 25. Dillon and Chadwick, *Celtic Realms*, p. 97. Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 14-5. Mac Cana, 'Regnum and Sacerdotium'.

<sup>365</sup> Binchy, 'Background', 11.

<sup>366</sup> Dillon and Chadwick, *Celtic Realms*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>367</sup> Dillon, 'Irish Tradition', 263-64.

<sup>368</sup> Dillon, 'Irish Tradition', 264.

inauguration of a king'.<sup>369</sup> Byrne reasoned that the phrase most often used in connection with inauguration was *do gairm rí* 'the "proclaiming" of the king' and that 'thus the poet, as master of the power of the Word, was the true king-maker'.<sup>370</sup> This vision of the *fili* as king-maker reached its zenith in the work of Mac Cana. Much like Dillon and Binchy, but with more confidence, Mac Cana asserted that 'it is clear beyond question that the primary officiating role [in royal inauguration] belongs to the *ollam filed* or chief-poet, and no doubt it is one he has inherited from his druidic predecessors'.<sup>371</sup> Mac Cana suggested that:

[The *ollam filed*] seems normally to have composed an inaugural ode for (or after) the occasion, and [that] there is some evidence to suggest that at least in earlier times he also read out a *teagasc ríogh* or *speculum principum* for the guidance of the royal ordinand.<sup>372</sup>

Whilst Mac Cana did not specifically mention the 'power of the Word' or any magic aura surrounding the role of the *fili* in the royal inauguration, he did consider the rite of inauguration to be the most marked manifestation of the sacred kingship, which, in turn, may suggest something supernatural about the role of the *fili* here.<sup>373</sup> Either way, Mac Cana's contribution made a case for the existence of a special relationship between *fili* and king; one that was of a traditional nature and reliant upon the learning of the *fili*. Furthermore, Mac Cana's reference to the recitation of a '*teagasc ríogh*' makes clear the relevance of his perspective to the present enquiry.

Given the emphasis placed upon the pre-Christian inheritance of the *fili*, his magic aura, and his formidable status in society, it is not surprising to find the suggestion of opposition between *filid* and clergy in Mac Cana's commentary. According to Mac Cana, 'the clergy were the Christian pendant to the (culturally) pagan *filid*'.<sup>374</sup> The druidic functions that the *fili* inherited apparently gave him the position of a 'residual priesthood', meaning that in Ireland *sacerdotium* was shared between the *filid* and clergy.<sup>375</sup> Mac Cana's opinion was not without precedent, for some scholars have tended to treat secular and ecclesiastic

---

<sup>369</sup> Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 15.

<sup>370</sup> Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 21.

<sup>371</sup> Mac Cana, '*Regnum and Sacerdotium*', 453.

<sup>372</sup> Mac Cana, '*Regnum and Sacerdotium*', 452.

<sup>373</sup> Mac Cana, '*Regnum and Sacerdotium*', 448.

<sup>374</sup> Mac Cana, '*Regnum and Sacerdotium*', 479.

<sup>375</sup> Mac Cana, '*Regnum and Sacerdotium*', 455, 479.

learning separately. Dillon, for instance divided responsibility for vernacular narratives and the annals between *filid* and monks respectively.<sup>376</sup> In Mac Cana's work, however, what was previously regarded as a social and pedagogical independence, developed overtones of political and philosophical opposition. The focal point for this development was the rite of royal inauguration. As we have seen, inauguration was thought to have been a critical event for the special relationship between *fili* and king. According to Mac Cana, however, there was an attempt by the clergy to gain control of this rite: 'their aim, like that of their brethren on the Continent, was not merely to cleanse the inauguration rite of the worst of its pagan excesses but to Christianise it in its content and structure'.<sup>377</sup> Mac Cana believed this attempt to have been more than an administrative power struggle, and to have had a distinctly ideological motivation. Ultimately, Mac Cana reckoned the clerical attempt to control royal inauguration in Ireland to have failed, although it did, apparently gain some ground: the rite of royal inauguration, at which the clergy took particular offence, 'was suitably modified to observe the proprieties of the new religion'.<sup>378</sup> In the end, the failure of the clergy was due to the entrenched position and conservative nature of the *filid*, as well as the traditional nature of Irish kingship. As such, it brings this line of enquiry to a logical high-water mark.

The vernacular laws, sagas, and wisdom texts have all been used extensively by modern scholars in their efforts to understand early Irish kingship. In much the same way as some scholars have done for the vernacular literature, many have argued that the institution of kingship was conservative and traditional. This model of kingship can be roughly subdivided according to evidence category. On the one hand, the vernacular legal literature has been used to argue that kingship was limited in its executive and fiscal power. On the other hand, vernacular narratives, and also the *tecosca*, have been used to present the kingship as archaic and traditional in its ideology. Together, these theories have helped create a vision of the early Irish *rí* 'king' as sacred.<sup>379</sup>

Binchy and Byrne were two influential scholars who examined the vernacular legal material for evidence of early Irish kingship. According to Binchy, 'nowhere is the absence of

---

<sup>376</sup> Dillon, *Cycles of the Kings*, p. 2.

<sup>377</sup> Mac Cana, 'Regnum and Sacerdotium', 451.

<sup>378</sup> Mac Cana, 'Regnum and Sacerdotium', 449-50.

<sup>379</sup> eDIL, s.v. *rí*.

executive government more conspicuous than in the domain of law'.<sup>380</sup> Binchy found very little evidence for tribute taken from subjects, for the formation of law by the king, or for fees levied for the arbitration of legal matters.<sup>381</sup> In a similar vein, Byrne stressed that 'the king was never to become the fountain of justice'.<sup>382</sup> Echoing Dillon several decades earlier, Byrne stated that 'customary law was adopted by the people and merely confirmed by the king' (at a royal assembly or *óenach*), and that there was 'very little room for the king to become involved in the enforcement of the law'.<sup>383</sup> Despite this vision of the Irish king as one with limited fiscal and administrative powers, Binchy and Byrne had to account for the fact that the legal literature attests to a hierarchy of kingship in early medieval Ireland. Indeed, the laws make provision for three grades of king, two of which were over-kings. The *rí túaithe* was the king of a single *túath*, whilst the *ruiri*, and the *rí ruirech* were the two grades of over-kingship.<sup>384</sup> Binchy translated the former as 'superior king', and explained that he had to be 'recognised as overlord by the kings of at least two other tribes'.<sup>385</sup> In the same fashion, the second type of over-king, a 'king of superior kings', held the fealty of a number of *ruirig*.<sup>386</sup> Nevertheless, Binchy and Byrne did not see these factors as problematic for their vision of limited royal power. For one thing, Binchy doubted that these over-kings had much power in practice.<sup>387</sup> Thus, he argued that this hierarchy had no federalist or constitutional significance, and that it was instead based upon a personal relationship between over-king and sub-king.<sup>388</sup> Because of this, no over-king could annex land or interfere with the succession of another *túath*.<sup>389</sup> Byrne concurred with Binchy, and explained the arrangement between like so:

Relations between kings were conducted along personal lines very much according to the pattern of society within the *túath*. The kings were in effect

---

<sup>380</sup> Binchy, *CASK*, p.18.

<sup>381</sup> Binchy, *CASK*, pp.18 & 20.

<sup>382</sup> Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 30.

<sup>383</sup> Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 31. Cf. Dillon, *Early Irish Literature*, p. xii. *eDIL*, s.v. 1 *oenach*.

<sup>384</sup> Binchy, *CASK*, p. 31.

<sup>385</sup> Binchy, *CASK*, p. 31.

<sup>386</sup> Binchy, *CASK*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>387</sup> D. A. Binchy, 'The Passing of the Old Order', *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Celtic Studies, Dublin 1959* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1962), pp. 119-32 (p. 123). Binchy, *CASK*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>388</sup> Binchy, 'Old Order', p. 123. Binchy, *CASK*, pp. 31-32. Cf. Dillon & Chadwick, *Celtic Realms*, p. 95.

<sup>389</sup> Binchy, 'Old Order', p.124. Binchy, *CASK*, pp. 31-32.

in the position of *céili* or clients to their overlord [...] The king entered into a contract with other kings and this was formally ratified by his *túath*, on whose behalf he acted.<sup>390</sup>

According to Byrne, there was a personal contract between an over-king and sub-king, and also between any king and his *túath*. This contractual understanding of royal relations appears to further diminish the possibility of authoritarian rule.

From this perspective, then, the early Irish hierarchy of kingship was, in a sense, superficial. The difference between the grades of kingship was not qualitative but one of scale, and the *rí túaithe* was the basic model for kingship of any size:

In the Old Irish period [...] the *rí túaithe*, however insignificant on the national scale, was the true king. Even the most powerful of high-kings was basically ruler of a single *túath*, and exercised no direct authority outside of it.<sup>391</sup>

This model of kingship was viewed as traditional, and its persistence conservative. Binchy considered, for example, that the 'status and functions' of the *rí* had 'remained strikingly similar to those which modern anthropologists attribute to the old Indo-European tribal king'.<sup>392</sup> Irish kingship followed 'substantially the same line of development as the rest of North and Western Europe', he said, but with an 'inevitable time-lag'.<sup>393</sup> Only when the new dynasties of the Uí Néill and Eóganacht ascended to great power was there some change. According to Binchy, these 'mesne kingdoms' claimed a more direct and invasive type of over-kingship.<sup>394</sup> Nevertheless, their rule was merely 'super-imposed upon the old tribal structure' and beneath them business continued as usual, until the Norse invasions finally began to alter the traditional pattern of kingship.<sup>395</sup>

Using the vernacular legal material, then, these scholars have portrayed early Irish kingship as traditionally limited in administrative and fiscal power, suggesting that innovation and development was slow and reluctant. Using non-legal, vernacular sources, however, others have sought to demonstrate that the importance of the *rí* to early Irish society is better

---

<sup>390</sup> Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 43.

<sup>391</sup> Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 41; Cf. Mac Cana, 'Regnum and Sacerdotium', 447.

<sup>392</sup> Binchy, 'Old Order', p. 122.

<sup>393</sup> Binchy, *CASK*, p. 46.

<sup>394</sup> Binchy, *CASK*, pp. 36-43

<sup>395</sup> Binchy, *CASK*, pp. 36-37.

understood from an ideological perspective. This stance was best summarised by Proinsias Mac Cana, who said that ‘at the beginning of the Christian period, and probably for a long time after, the king's social importance stemmed much less from his legal and political functions than from the sacral character of his office’.<sup>396</sup> This idea of a sacred kingship has been considered by some to have been part of a traditional and pre-Christian ideology of kingship, aspects of which survived into the early medieval period and beyond, and several of the *tecosca* have often been used as evidence in support of this.

In her contribution to the multi-authored volume on the international phenomenon of *The Sacral Kingship*, Maartje Draak asked herself: ‘what is the criterion which makes it justifiable to say that the pagan Irish had sacral kings?’<sup>397</sup> Her own answer to this question largely epitomises the scholarly consensus for much of the twentieth century: ‘the criterion is the fact numerous texts insist on the king bringing about or being responsible for the fertility of the soil, the fairness of weather, the absence of disaster’.<sup>398</sup> Draak’s answer highlights the cosmological aspect of sacred kingship, particularly the supernatural benefits thought to accrue from the king. Her answer also indicates how literature has been of central importance for this understanding of sacred kingship. Draak herself derived four motif categories from the vernacular literature to illustrate her claim. In retrospect, however, Draak’s categories were too reductive and idiosyncratic to be useful here.<sup>399</sup> Instead, it is better simply to speak of the most popular motifs associated with sacred kingship. The most popular motifs, both in the medieval literature and the modern scholarship, are the sovereignty goddess, *fír flathemon*, and *geis*. As will be shown, the

---

<sup>396</sup> Mac Cana, ‘*Regnum and Sacerdotium*’, 447. The phrase ‘sacral kingship’ has been the preferred term for many years now. In this thesis, however, the phrase ‘sacred kingship’ will be used. There is no discernible difference in meaning between the use of ‘sacral’ by scholars of medieval kingship and the standard definition of ‘sacred’. The only difference is that ‘sacral’ is less familiar in everyday speech. It is for this reason that ‘sacred’ is preferred here.

<sup>397</sup> Maartje Draak, ‘Some Aspects of Kingship in Pagan Ireland’, *La Regalità Sacra/The Sacral Kingship: Contributions to the Central Theme of the VIII<sup>th</sup> International Congress for the History of Religions (Rome, April 1955)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), pp. 651-63 (p. 653).

<sup>398</sup> Draak, ‘Kingship in Pagan Ireland’, p. 653. The idea that a king’s sacrality was responsible for fecundity and well-being in the realm has been found all over the world and there is a wealth of literature on the subject. A good starting place would certainly be the large volume in which Draak’s article appears: *La Regalità Sacra/The Sacral Kingship*.

<sup>399</sup> Those were: ‘I. ‘Birth’-rites’, ‘II. ‘Marriage’-rites’, ‘III. The Observances of the King’, and ‘IV. What happens when the equilibrium is disturbed’. Draak, ‘Kingship in Pagan Ireland’, pp. 654, 656, 660, 663.

literary manifestations of these three are quite diverse and deceptively complex. Even so, their appeal to scholars as evidence for kingship ideology has remained strong.

Over the years, multiple female characters in early Irish narrative have been identified as reflexes of a sovereignty goddess. This began with Tomás Ó Máille, who was the first modern scholar to suggest that the early Irish personified sovereignty as the bride of kings.<sup>400</sup> Ó Máille was seeking to explain why it was that two recurrent characters, Medb Chrúachna and Medb Lethderg, were each espoused to a series of kings. As Ó Máille has shown, these women were frequently portrayed as choosing their own royal spouses, and he reasoned that this was because the two Medbs symbolised sovereignty over their respective population groups; the Connachta and the Laigin.<sup>401</sup> As such, marriage to either Medb symbolised a legitimate transfer of sovereignty from one king to the next. Importantly, Ó Máille also suggested that Medb Chrúachna and Medb Lethderg were localised manifestations of a pan-Irish belief:

The metaphor of the “marriage” of Ireland to a particular king is common from the time of our sagas to the days of the Jacobite poems in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. [...] Right through Irish literature *Ériu* = *Éire* is personified as a woman.<sup>402</sup>

T. F. O’Rahilly was an early advocate of Ó Máille’s theory, stating that ‘in early Irish belief each king of Tara (or Ireland) on attaining the kingship was espoused to the goddess *Ériu*, and lesser kings were similarly espoused each to a local goddess’.<sup>403</sup> One of O’Rahilly’s most significant contributions was his association of the symbolic marriage between king and goddess with the rite of royal inauguration. O’Rahilly drew inspiration from the term *banais rígi*, which he found in the vernacular tale *Tochmarc Emire*, ‘The Wooing of Emer’, and which he translated as the ‘wedding feast of kingship’.<sup>404</sup> O’Rahilly claimed that this feast

---

<sup>400</sup> Tomás Ó Máille, ‘Medb Chruachna’, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 17 (1928), 129-46.

<sup>401</sup> Ó Máille, ‘Medb Chruachna’, 130-39 ff.

<sup>402</sup> Ó Máille, ‘Medb Chruachna’, 140.

<sup>403</sup> T. F. O’Rahilly, ‘On the Origin of the Names *Érainn* and *Ériu*’, *Ériu*, 14 (1946), 7-28 (14). O’Rahilly also identified *Ériu* as a ‘solar goddess’. However, this idea did not find favour with anyone except for Mac Cana. See Proinsias Mac Cana, ‘Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature’, *Études Celtiques*, 7 (1955), 76-114 & 356-413. For a brief criticism of O’Rahilly’s approach in general, and in this article specifically, see Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, ‘Pagan Survivals: The Evidence of Early Irish Narrative (1984)’, *Coire Sois: The Cauldron of Knowledge*, ed. by Matthieu Boyd (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2014), pp. 35-50 (p. 41).

<sup>404</sup> O’Rahilly, ‘*Érainn* and *Ériu*’, 14, 14 n. 3. Cf. *eDIL*, s.v. *banais*.

was an integral part of the inauguration of Irish kings from 'hoary antiquity' until the late medieval and even early modern periods.<sup>405</sup> O'Rahilly also offered an explanation of the ideology behind this marriage between king and goddess. His explanation was brief and speculative but it would prove hugely influential on subsequent scholars.

It has its roots in the time when men regarded the material Earth as Mother, and when the ruler of the land was inaugurated with a ceremony which professed to espouse him to this divine mother, with the intent that his reign might be prosperous and that the earth might produce her fruits in abundance.<sup>406</sup>

Following O'Rahilly's lead, Carney developed the idea of the *banais rígi* by associating it with an event known as the *feis Temro*, the 'Feast of Tara', which is recorded in the Annals of Ulster and the Annals of Inisfallen as having been held by several kings in the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>407</sup> Thus, for Carney, the sovereignty goddess appeared to be a living part of early Irish kingship ideology. Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick, on the other hand, took a comparative mythological approach, and sought to establish the Indo-European character of this marriage between king and sovereignty goddess by comparing it with evidence from Hindu culture.<sup>408</sup> A similar comparison was made around the same time by Binchy, when he remarked that:

The myth of the sacred or quasi-divine king is as firmly embedded in old Celtic tradition as in the Eastern world. It is this myth that underlies the Feast of Tara, a kind of *ἱερός γάμος* of the Midland Goidels with the Earth-goddess of the kingdom.<sup>409</sup>

In this passage, Binchy established a comparison between the Feast of Tara and the Greek term *ἱερός γάμος*, *hieros gamos*, or 'sacred marriage'. It is not clear who or what influenced Binchy's use this term, but he went on to use it again, a decade later, in his highly influential

---

<sup>405</sup> O'Rahilly, 'Érainn and Ériu', 20-21.

<sup>406</sup> O'Rahilly, 'Érainn and Ériu', 21.

<sup>407</sup> James Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955), pp. 334-38. Cf. D. A. Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara', *Ériu*, 18 (1958), 113-38.

<sup>408</sup> Dillon and Chadwick, *Celtic Realms*, p. 93.

<sup>409</sup> Binchy, 'Tailtiu and Tara', 135.

O'Donnell lectures.<sup>410</sup> It is likely due to Binchy that the term *hieros gamos* has found its way into common usage amongst scholars of Irish kingship.<sup>411</sup>

The work of Sir James George Frazer is one probable influence on the theory of a sacred marriage in early Ireland. In his book *The Golden Bough*, Frazer discussed the phenomenon of the sacred marriage, which he called a 'theogamy' or 'divine marriage'.<sup>412</sup> Beginning with the example of the Greek goddess Diana and her royal consort, the king of Nemi, Frazer assembled comparanda from a wide variety of cultures. His examples took many different forms, but in Frazer's opinion they were all fertility rites.

According to a widespread belief, which is not without a foundation in fact, plants reproduce their kinds through the sexual union of male and female elements, and that on the principle of homeopathic or imitative magic this reproduction can be stimulated by the real or mock marriage of men and women, who masquerade for the time being as spirits of vegetation. Such magical dramas have played a great part in the popular festivals of Europe, and based as they are on a very crude conception of natural law, it is clear that they must have been handed down from a remote antiquity. [...] is it not likely that in certain festivals of the ancients we may be able to detect the equivalents of our May Day, Whitsuntide, and Midsummer celebrations, with this difference, that in those days the ceremonies had not yet dwindled into mere shows and pageants, but were still religious or magical rites, in which the actors consciously supported the high parts of gods and goddesses?<sup>413</sup>

---

<sup>410</sup> Binchy, *CASK*, p. 11. See H. Wagner, 'Studies in the Origin of Early Celtic Civilisation', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 31 (1970), 42. Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 16. Mac Cana, 'Regnum and Sacerdotium', 449-50. Note one scholar has argued, in the context of ancient Greek religion, that the use of *hieros gamos* to refer to a symbolic marriage between man and goddess is misuse of the term. See Aphrodite Avangianou, *Sacred Marriage in the Rituals of Greek Religion* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991).

<sup>411</sup> Wagner, 'Origin of Early Celtic Civilisation', 42. Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 17. Máire Herbert, 'Goddess and King: The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland', *Women and Sovereignty*, ed. Olga Fradenburg, *Cosmos*, 7 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pp. 264-75. Morten Warmind, 'Sacred Kingship Among the Celts', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 12 (1992), 196-206. Mac Cana, 'Regnum and Sacerdotium', 449 ff. McCone, *PPCP*, p. 110. Edel Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World, AD400-1000: Landscape, Kingship and Religion* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), p. 53 ff.

<sup>412</sup> J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion. Part I: The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 2 vols (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1911; repr. 1913). Of particular relevance are chapters 11, 12, and 13. NB. Binchy cited Frazer in connection with *fírfíathemon*, but did not make any connection with the *banais rígi* or *hieros gamos* etc. See Binchy, *CASK*, p. 9.

<sup>413</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, pp. 120-21.

Frazer's interpretation of the sacred marriage as a fertility rite likely explains why O'Rahilly associated the *banais rígi* with the fertility of the kingdom. Certainly, O'Rahilly did not provide any direct Irish evidence for this connection.

Another literary motif that is often associated with the sovereignty goddess is the bestowal of a drink by a female figure to her favoured spouse, hero, and/or king. O'Rahilly was the first to collate the narrative evidence for this.<sup>414</sup> Two of the most important examples are those found in *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin*, 'The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedóin', and in *Baile in Scáil*, 'The Phantom's Frenzy'. In the former tale, Niall Noígiallach, royal progenitor of the Uí Néill dynasty, is offered a drink by a woman who identifies herself as *in Flaithius*, 'the Sovereignty'.<sup>415</sup> In the second tale, a woman identified as *Flaith Érenn*, the 'Sovereignty of Ireland', bestows red liquor to a succession of kings.<sup>416</sup> O'Rahilly also connected this libation motif to the etymology of the name Medb. Previously, Ó Máille had suggested that the name Medb meant 'the intoxicating one', explaining 'that ambitious men were intoxicated by the wine of sovereignty'.<sup>417</sup> O'Rahilly, on the other hand, associated Medb's name with the theme of libation, and argued that the bestowal of a drink was an integral part of both normal wedding ceremonies and the sacred marriage.<sup>418</sup> Following O'Rahilly's paper, the theme of libation was accepted as an integral part of the motif of the sovereignty goddess by many scholars.<sup>419</sup>

The theme of *fír flathemon* has been associated with early Irish kingship ideology almost as long as the sovereignty goddess has. During this time, *fír flathemon* has rivalled the sovereignty goddess in terms of its importance as evidence for the sacred kingship. The phrase *fír flathemon* can be translated as the 'justice/truth of the prince/ruler', and it has come to refer to the idea that the moral and ethical character of a king is supernaturally connected to the well-being of his kingdom.<sup>420</sup> The first scholar to articulate this idea was

---

<sup>414</sup> O'Rahilly, 'Érainn and Ériu', 15-17.

<sup>415</sup> O'Rahilly, 'Érainn and Ériu', 17. Cf. Whitley Stokes, 'The Adventure of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedóin', *Revue Celtique*, 26 (1903), 191-203.

<sup>416</sup> O'Rahilly, 'Érainn and Ériu', 14. Cf. *Baile in Scáil: The Phantom's Frenzy*, ed. and trans. Kevin Murray, Irish Texts Society, 58 (London: Irish Texts Society, 2004).

<sup>417</sup> Ó Máille, 'Medb Chruachna', 144.

<sup>418</sup> O'Rahilly, 'Érainn and Ériu', 14-15, 15 n. 1.

<sup>419</sup> See Mac Cana, 'King and Goddess', 77. Wagner, 'Early Celtic Civilisation', 42. Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 51. McCone, *PPCP*, p. 109.

<sup>420</sup> Cf. *eDIL*, s.v. 1 *fír*, s.v. *flathem*.

Smith, who was attempting to describe a common theme between *AM*, *TC*, *TCúsc*, and *Diambad*. Smith did not call this theme *fír flathemon*. Instead, he called it the ‘efficacy of righteousness’, and he described it as ‘the belief found no less commonly in among the Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans, that a just ruler brings his people prosperity and fair weather’.<sup>421</sup> For Smith, however, the efficacy of the ruler depended upon general merit, and he made no specific association with truth or justice. It was, in fact, Dillon who first made the connection between truth and *fír flathemon*. In two early papers, Dillon compared the Hindu concept of Truth (*ṛta*) and the Hindu ‘Act of Truth’ to the evidence of Irish vernacular literature.<sup>422</sup> According to Dillon:

The Act of Truth [was] based upon a belief in the magic power of the truth. In both Indian and Irish stories, there are episodes in which a person by formal recitation of the truth is able to work miracles.<sup>423</sup>

For Dillon, two early Irish cognates of the Hindu concept of Truth were ‘the Prince’s Truth (*fírinne flatha*)’ and ‘Men’s Truth (*fír fer*)’.<sup>424</sup> It is clear, then, that for Dillon this concept of Truth was not exclusive to kings. Nevertheless, his examples from Irish literature placed the king at the centre of the Act of Truth. Indeed, Dillon used quotations from *AM* and *Diambad* to show that *fírinne flatha* was thought to have supernatural benefits for a kingdom.<sup>425</sup>

The earliest explicit association of *fírinne flatha* with the concept of sacred kingship can be found in the works of Binchy and Wagner, c. 1970.<sup>426</sup> Wagner spoke of *fír flatha*, whilst Binchy spoke of *fír flathemon*, but it is clear that they had the same concept in mind. Wagner wrote: ‘the archaic text *Teccosca* or *Audacht Moraind* [...] is chiefly concerned with the *fír flatha*, the proper behaviour of a lord in relation to the proper functioning of the

---

<sup>421</sup> Smith, ‘*Speculum Principum*’, 440, 439.

<sup>422</sup> Dillon, ‘Act of Truth’. Dillon, ‘Archaism’. Dillon was inspired by the definitions of Hindu Truth by Burlingame and Lüders. Burlingame defined the Act of Truth as ‘a formal declaration of fact accompanied by a command or resolution or prayer that the purpose of the agent shall be accomplished’ (quoted in Dillon, ‘Act of Truth’, 138). Lüders defined the Hindu concept of Truth thus: ‘Truth was the highest power, the ultimate cause of all being’ (quoted in Dillon, ‘Act of Truth’, 138, and Dillon, ‘Irish Tradition’, 248).

<sup>423</sup> Dillon, ‘Archaism’, 247.

<sup>424</sup> Dillon, ‘Archaism’, 251. Even in later work, it is clear that Dillon was interested in *fírinne flatha* (by then referred to as ‘*fír flathemon*’) as only one aspect of the wider Irish conception of Truth. See Dillon, *Celts and Aryans*, p. 130.

<sup>425</sup> Dillon, ‘Irish Tradition’, 250-51. Dillon, ‘Act of Truth’, 138-40.

<sup>426</sup> Binchy, *CASK*, pp. 9-10. Wagner, ‘Celtic Civilisation’, 8-9. Both texts were published in 1970, but Binchy’s paper was read in 1968.

earth and the cosmos'.<sup>427</sup> He continued: 'the general welfare of the people is dependent upon the king's justice as a ruler and a legislator. The *fír*, his responsibility, reflects clearly the sacral nature of Irish kingship'.<sup>428</sup> Binchy also took *AM* as his primary source for *fír flathemon*. His summary of the theme is a good representation of the effects that scholars have commonly associated with *fír* and its opposite, *gáu flathemon*:

Through *fír flathemon* come prosperity and fertility for man, beast, and crops; the seasons are temperate, the corn grows strong and heavy, mast and fruit are abundant on the trees, cattle give milk in plenty, rivers and estuaries teem with fish; plagues, famines, and natural calamities are warded off; internal peace and victory over external enemies are guaranteed.

The opposite of *fír flathemon* is *gáu flathemon* 'the injustice (lit. 'falsehood') of the prince', and this provokes all the corresponding disadvantages for his *túath*.<sup>429</sup>

As observed in the first chapter of this thesis, it was around this time, in the 1970s, that the concept of *fír flathemon* came to be regarded as a major aspect of Irish kingship ideology and the *tecosca*.<sup>430</sup> Several scholars in this period presented *fír flathemon* as an important and widespread theme, with *AM* frequently used as evidence. Byrne, for example, called *fír flathemon* 'a constantly recurring theme' in Irish literature, and illustrated this with a lengthy quote from *AM* (A).<sup>431</sup> Byrne also compared the evidence of *fír flathemon* from *AM* (A) to the ninth *abusio* (on the '*rex iniquus*') from *De duodecim abusivis*, but that was the extent of his evidence basis.<sup>432</sup> In Kelly's edition of *AM* (B), he gave a brief description of *fír flathemon*, 'the central theme of *AM*'.<sup>433</sup> He stated that the 'theme is familiar in native and foreign tradition', and cited both *De duodecim abusivis* and the *Odyssey* in defence of this point.<sup>434</sup> Mac Cana also linked *fír flathemon* to the prosperity and fertility of the land. He

---

<sup>427</sup> Wagner, 'Celtic Civilisation', 8.

<sup>428</sup> Wagner, 'Celtic Civilisation', 8.

<sup>429</sup> Binchy, *CASK*, p. 10.

<sup>430</sup> See Chapter One of this thesis.

<sup>431</sup> Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>432</sup> Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>433</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xvii.

<sup>434</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. xvii.

did not illustrate this point directly, but he did note that *AM* 'lists the many benefits that flow from the king's justice'.<sup>435</sup>

Another important contributor around this time was Ó Cathasaigh. In his *Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Airt* (1977), Ó Cathasaigh argued for both the centrality of *fír flathemon* to kingship ideology, and the centrality of the king to Irish cosmology. In this work he stated that *fír flathemon* 'testifies to the anthropocentric world-view which pervades the Irish literature of kingship: the king is the centre of the cosmos'.<sup>436</sup> Ó Cathasaigh believed Cormac mac Airt to have been the 'exemplary model of *fír flath* [true ruler]', who was defined by his ability to make true judgements, which were themselves examples of the Act of Truth as identified by Dillon.<sup>437</sup> Unlike Dillon, however, Ó Cathasaigh was unconcerned with non-royal expressions of this Truth, and focused exclusively upon *fír flathemon*. Indeed, Ó Cathasaigh considered Cormac's expression of true judgements to make the latter a specifically royal hero, or 'king-hero'.<sup>438</sup> He contrasted this with the concept of the martial, or warrior-hero, as embodied by Cú Chulainn.<sup>439</sup> Finally, Ó Cathasaigh suggested the Indo-European inheritance of both *fír flathemon* and the distinction between royal and martial heroism: 'in this way it points to the integrity of Irish tradition'.<sup>440</sup>

Ó Cathasaigh would later develop his interpretation of *fír flathemon* in connection with the Otherworld of Irish vernacular saga. This was first done in his article 'The Semantics of *Síd*' (1977-79). In a nutshell, Ó Cathasaigh's thesis was that the concept of *fír flathemon* bridged the semantic gap between the etymologically related words 1 *síd*, 'Otherworld hill or mound', and 2 *síd*, 'peace': 'that is as much to say that 1 *síd* denotes the source of *fír flathemon*, and 2 *síd* its symptom'.<sup>441</sup> According to Ó Cathasaigh, a ruler could transgress *fír*

---

<sup>435</sup> Mac Cana, 'Regnum and Sacerdotium', 447-48.

<sup>436</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, *Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 64-65. Cf. Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Semantics of *Síd* (1977-79)', *Coire Sois*, ed. by Matthieu Boyd (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2014), pp. 19-34 (p. 22). Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Concept of the Hero in Irish Mythology (1985)', *Coire Sois*, ed. by Matthieu Boyd (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2014), pp. 51-64 (p. 56).

<sup>437</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, *Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 63-66, 106.

<sup>438</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, *Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>439</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, *Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>440</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, *Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 64-66.

<sup>441</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, 'Semantics of *Síd*', pp. 19-22.

*flathemon* through false judgement, and in doing so would destroy his special relationship with the Otherworld, resulting in a breakdown of peace and order.<sup>442</sup> Ó Cathasaigh's theory emphasised the importance of *fír flathemon* to Irish kingship ideology, placing it front and centre, and the sovereignty goddess was notable for her absence in this scheme. Ó Cathasaigh even went as far as to describe 'the doctrine of *fír flathemon*' as 'the providential design that underlies' Irish literature.<sup>443</sup>

Perhaps more so than any other scholar, Kim McCone attempted to draw together the evidence for sacred kingship into a single model. In the fifth chapter of his much-discussed monograph, *Pagan past and Christian Present* (1990), he remarked that 'there is no shortage of comparative evidence indicative of an appreciable pagan Celtic and Indo-European input into the early Irish concept of kingship'.<sup>444</sup> Indeed, McCone cited a large amount of evidence from early Irish narrative, and made numerous comparisons with material from Wales, India, and Greece.<sup>445</sup> In making this point, McCone was essentially continuing the work of scholars such as Dillon, Watkins, Ó Máille, O'Rahilly, and Binchy. As shown above, these earlier scholars argued that literary themes associated with kingship ideology, such as the sovereignty goddess and *fír flathemon*, had Indo-European precedents. McCone differed from his predecessors, however, by asserting that all such manifestations of sacred kingship were rooted in a single cosmological scheme. This scheme was based upon a tripartite division of society, represented and unified by the king, and a tripartite division of the cosmos, represented and unified by the sovereignty goddess.<sup>446</sup> The sacred marriage between them, then, was a union of unions:

It thus emerges that the king (*flaith[em]*) and the woman of sovereignty (*flaith[ius]*) mate and interact as respective representatives of human society and the divine powers manifested in nature or the cosmos as a whole. As individuals, each is endowed with a similar threefold set of personal qualities that essentially replicates the basic arrangement of the constituencies they represent.<sup>447</sup>

---

<sup>442</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, 'Semantics of *Síd*', p. 26.

<sup>443</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, 'Semantics of *Síd*', p. 28.

<sup>444</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 108.

<sup>445</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 108 ff.

<sup>446</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 117, 122, 124-27, 129.

<sup>447</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 130. The diagram on this page is particularly helpful for understanding McCone's conception of things.

The three components in McCone's tripartite division of the cosmos were the material, the social, and the moral.<sup>448</sup> In society, this was reflected in the division of the free-grades into *briugu* 'hospitallers', *láech* 'warriors', and *áes dano* 'men of art'.<sup>449</sup> In the kingship literature, McCone argued that this tripartite system was expressed through the characteristics attributed to, or prescribed for, ideal rulers. To this end, he provided examples from kingship tales such as *Scél na Fír Flatha* 'The Irish Ordeals', *Aided Chonchobair* 'The Death of Conchobar', and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga (TBDD)*, as well as examples from *AM* and *TC*, and reduced them to three basic categories: physical/martial, social, and intellectual/moral.<sup>450</sup> According to McCone, this 'nexus of physical, martial, social and moral or intellectual attributes' was 'enhanced in the king's case to *fír flathemon* or 'ruler's truth', which is distinguished by cosmic resonances reaching beyond the individual into the depths of nature, society and morality as a whole'.<sup>451</sup>

Finally, McCone completed his theory by comparing his three-fold scheme to an observation made by Mac Cana about the sovereignty goddess.<sup>452</sup> In several articles published in *Études Celtiques* between 1955-59, Mac Cana had examined a number of narrative tales as evidence for the myth of the sovereignty goddess.<sup>453</sup> Mac Cana's work was a direct continuation of that begun by O'Rahilly, in the sense that it sought to find examples and manifestations of the theme of the sovereignty goddess in the narrative literature.<sup>454</sup> One of Mac Cana's conclusions was that there are 'three distinct categories' for the depiction of the goddess. These were: 'an ugly hag transformed into a beautiful lady by the embraces of the hero', 'a wild wondering woman who is restored to sanity and beauty through union with the rightful king', and 'a girl of royal birth brought up among cowherds and elevated again to her due dignity through marriage to the king'.<sup>455</sup> McCone associated these three manifestations of the sovereignty goddess with his division of the

---

<sup>448</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 128-31.

<sup>449</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 127-28, 130-31.

<sup>450</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 121-22.

<sup>451</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 124.

<sup>452</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 128.

<sup>453</sup> Proinsias Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', *Études Celtiques*, 7 (1955-56), 76-114, 356-413. Proinsias Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature (*Suite et fin*)', *Études Celtiques*, 8 (1958-59), 59-65.

<sup>454</sup> Mac Cana, 'Theme of King and Goddess', 78.

<sup>455</sup> Mac Cana, 'Theme of King and Goddess (*Suite et fin*)', 63-64.

early Irish cosmos into physical, mental, and social categories, respectively. Thus, he considered the sovereignty goddess and *fír flathemon* to be different manifestations of the same underlying ideology. This is underscored by their co-dependence for a successful sacred kingship:

The points raised above constitute a substantial dossier of varied evidence [...] for an Indo-European institution, ideology and mythology of sacred kingship. This was based on the widely attested notion that the well-being of society and nature flowed from a ritual marriage between a goddess and the new ruler [...] The success of such unions was held to be dependent upon maintenance of the king's 'truth' as manifested by his physical perfection, social standing, justice and so on, any serious infringement of which constituted a 'lie' liable to rupture this happy state of affairs.<sup>456</sup>

Another literary theme that has often been used as evidence for sacred kingship is *geis* (pl. *gessi*), which is normally translated as 'taboo' or 'prohibition'.<sup>457</sup> *Geis* is a concept that appears frequently in early Irish narrative. These taboos are usually placed upon heroes, often royal figures, and regularly play pivotal roles in the narrative development of the tales in which they appear. Eleanor Hull was the first to consider the relationship between *geis* and kingship ideology. In her 1901 article, 'Old Irish Tabus, or *Geasa*', she highlighted the widespread depiction of 'tribal, ancestral, or personal tabus' that 'hem in the actions of all the chief personages of Irish romance'.<sup>458</sup> Importantly, Hull also suggested that taboos had special significance when applied to rulers:

In general terms, many of the tabus of savage races are founded upon the idea that certain men, usually kings, have a special spiritual influence upon their fellow-men, and that the well-being of these persons is essential to the well-being of the entire tribe.<sup>459</sup>

Using the text *Geasa agus Buadha Riogh Éireann*, also known as 'The Taboos of the Kings of Ireland', Hull argued that these prohibitions were representative of long-standing beliefs and practices associated with rulership in Ireland:<sup>460</sup>

---

<sup>456</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 120.

<sup>457</sup> *eDIL* s.v. *geis*.

<sup>458</sup> Eleanor Hull, 'Old Irish Tabus, or *Geasa*', *Folklore*, 12 (1901), 41-66 (41).

<sup>459</sup> Hull, 'Tabus', 53.

<sup>460</sup> Note that the various manuscripts for this text do not agree on a title, and a critical edition is yet to be produced. Instead, the text is usually referred to using one of two titles. The English title, 'The Taboos of the Kings of Ireland', was provided by Dillon in his edition and translation. This

*Geasa* seem to have controlled the lives, not of imaginary personages only, but of actual chiefs and rulers of Ireland and this for a long period of time, stretching from the unchronicled years of barbarism into a late historical period.<sup>461</sup>

In his 1951 edition and translation of the same text, Dillon followed Hull in asserting that royal *gessi* reflect a 'primitive notion of kingship' in which the observance of such prohibitions was associated with the prosperity of the king and his people.<sup>462</sup> Indeed, the final paragraph of *Geasa agus Buadha Riogh Éireann* informs the reader that:

*Is demin tra do ríghuib Hérinn dia sechmalltais a ngeasa ocus dia foghbatis a mbúadho ní bíath tuissil ná turbrodh foruib, ocus ní thiccfoth teidhm nó taimlechta ina fláith, ocus ní fúighbitis aurchra aimsire ria nóchuit blíadan.*

It is certain of the kings of Ireland, if they avoided their *geasa* and obtained their prescriptions, that they would suffer neither misfortune nor disturbance, and neither plague nor pestilence would come in their reign, and they would not fail with age before ninety years.<sup>463</sup>

The supernatural element is obvious here, as is the fact that these *gessi* are not solely for the benefit of the king, but also for his entire kingdom. In this sense, the benefits of observing ones *gessi* are very reminiscent of those associated with *fír flathemon*. This comparison was not drawn directly by Dillon, although in an earlier article he did consider both *fír flatha* and *geis* to be two manifestations of 'the magic power of truth'.<sup>464</sup>

---

edition was based primarily on one manuscript (the Egerton manuscript) with variant readings. Dillon did not discuss his choice of title. The Irish title, *Geasa agus Buadha Riogh Éireann*, is taken from the versions found in the Book of Lecan and the Book of Ballymote. In both of these manuscripts, the text is found prefixed to *Lebor na Cert* 'The Book of Rights'. In his edition and translation of *Lebor na Cert*, John O'Donovan included an edition and translation of *Geasa agus Buadha Riogh Éireann* as found in the books of Lecan and Ballymote. See Myles Dillon, 'The Taboos of the Kings of Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 54 (1951/52), 1-6, 8-25, 27-36. See also John O'Donovan, *Leabhar na g-Ceart, or The Book of Rights* (Dublin: The Celtic Society, 1847).

<sup>461</sup> Hull, 'Tabus', 45.

<sup>462</sup> Dillon, 'Taboos', 1-2. *The Survival of Geis in Medieval Romance*, by John Revell Reinhard, was published in 1933, between the publications of Hull and Dillon considered here. Reinhard's book remains the most comprehensive survey of taboo in Irish literature yet written, but much of the theory that underpins it is out-of-date. One section makes a survey of *geis* in Irish literature that are applied to 'Kings, Chiefs, and Warriors'. In this, Reinhard seems to adhere to a concept of sacred kingship, informed by the work of Frazer, but does not name it as such. He remarks, for example, that 'the object of royal tabus was to isolate the king from sources of danger, for upon him depended the welfare of his tribe'. John Revell Reinhard, *The Survival of Geis in Medieval Romance* (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1933), see pp. 103-25.

<sup>463</sup> Dillon, 'Taboos', 24-25.

<sup>464</sup> Dillon, 'Archaism', 250-52.

An important hypothesis put forth by Dillon concerning *geis* was that ‘royal taboos seem to belong to an earlier stratum of tradition’ and that ‘the wider application of *geiss* in the literature derives from them’.<sup>465</sup> This theory was later taken up by David Greene, in 1979, who argued that *gessi* were originally ritual prohibitions placed on sacred kings.<sup>466</sup> According to Greene, other types of *geis*, such as those that were applied to heroes like Cú Chulainn, were in fact the result of a broadening of the original, exclusively royal, definition.<sup>467</sup> A similar theory was later espoused by Charles-Edwards in an article on the subject of *geis* (1999).<sup>468</sup> Charles-Edwards suggested that the taboos of Conaire Mór in *TBDD* could be separated into two categories: those that pertained to his royal office, and those that pertained to him personally.<sup>469</sup> He surmised:

Both contents and sanctions suggest that we should distinguish two categories among the prohibitions. If we borrow terms used, one in the *Lebor na hUidre* summary and the other in *Togail Bruidne Da Choca*, the two categories are, first, *erchuillti a fhilatha*, ‘the prohibitions attached to his reign’, and, secondly, *erchuillti a sháegail*, ‘the prohibitions attached to his life-span’. The first [...] were not binding, and probably not imposed, until his inauguration as king of Tara. They are prohibitions comparable to those in *The Taboos of the Kings of Ireland*. They pertain to any king, not to a particular individual. Quite distinct are the prohibitions attached to his life-span. These were binding from the start for they were, it seems, imposed upon Conaire at his conception and at his name-giving.<sup>470</sup>

Indeed, in *Geasa agus Buadha Ríogh Éireann*, prohibitions are not attributed to a particular king, but rather to particular kingships, i.e. those of Tara, Leinster, Munster, Connacht, and Ulster.<sup>471</sup> In this way, Charles-Edwards’s position developed that thread of thought begun by Hull and continued by Dillon and Greene. These scholars all agree that there are essentially two types of *gessi*: one royal, and one not. Royal *gessi* are considered to have

---

<sup>465</sup> Dillon, ‘Taboos’, 2.

<sup>466</sup> David Greene, ‘Tabu in Early Irish Narrative’, *Medieval Narrative: A Symposium*, eds. Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Peter Foote, Andreas Haarder, and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (Odense: Odense University Press, 1979), pp. 9-19 (12-14).

<sup>467</sup> Greene, ‘Tabu’, p. 12.

<sup>468</sup> Thomas Charles-Edwards, ‘Geis, Prophecy, Omen, and Death’, *Celtica*, 23 (1999), 38-59.

<sup>469</sup> Charles-Edwards, ‘Geis’, 51.

<sup>470</sup> Charles-Edwards, ‘Geis’, 51.

<sup>471</sup> See Dillon, ‘Taboos’.

been older in origin, and part of the ideology of sacred kingship. Charles-Edwards built upon Greene's assertion that non-royal, heroic *gessi*, were a broadening of the original concept.

Perhaps his most important contribution to this subject, however, is the way in which Charles-Edwards connected royal *gessi* to other phenomena associated with kingship ideology, namely inaugurations and the *tecosca* themselves. According to Charles-Edwards, Conaire's personal *gessi* were derived from a tradition of 'paternal injunctions placed upon a child at his birth', and he used Conaire's prohibition against hunting birds as an example of this.<sup>472</sup> In *TBDD*, Conaire learns of this prohibition from Nemglan, king of the bird-people. Since Nemglan is the head of Conaire's agnatic kin-group, Charles-Edwards has argued that the birdman represents the paternal authority behind this injunction.<sup>473</sup> Conaire's royal *gessi*, on the other hand, are said to be derived from 'the acts of ill-omen which the druid, at the king's inauguration, had warned him to avoid'.<sup>474</sup> In defence of this theory, Charles-Edwards has argued that, in *TBDD*, the bulk of Conaire's *gessi* are first revealed to the reader on the occasion of his inauguration. Even though these *gessi* are not proclaimed by a druid, Charles-Edwards chose to defer to the testimony of a different version of the tale, in which they are.<sup>475</sup> This led Charles-Edwards to conclude that 'here, as, we may presume, in the normal royal inauguration, it was a sacred figure who publicly recited the injunctions'.<sup>476</sup> This formed the basis of a direct comparison between the function of *gessi* and the *tecosca*:

It is worth noting at this point, the interesting suggestion, stemming originally from a remark by Geoffrey Keating, that a *tecosc rí*g was recited at the inauguration of a king. Here too, the prohibitions on Conaire are a parallel, for they are proclaimed at the inauguration of Conaire's reign.<sup>477</sup>

---

<sup>472</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Geis', 58-59.

<sup>473</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Geis', 45-46.

<sup>474</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Geis', 58.

<sup>475</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Geis', 45-46. This version is a summary of the tale found in *Lebor na hUidre*. The relevant passage reads: 'Ar gabaissom flaith i ndíad a athar ⁊ asbert Ninión druí bátar n-é airchoilte a flatha...' 'For he took the kingship in succession to his father and Ninión the druid said that the following were the prohibitions of his reign...'. This translation is by Charles-Edwards.

<sup>476</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Geis', 47.

<sup>477</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Geis', 46.

Charles-Edwards supported this circumstantial similarity with some comparisons of form and content:

When it is a question of an action which must not be performed, by Conaire the 2 sg. jussive subjunctive is used; if it is an action which should not be performed by others, the 3 sg. or pl. is employed. The only peculiarity of form which marks it off from the generality of similar injunctions in the laws or in the *speculum principis* literature is that all the injunctions are negative.<sup>478</sup>

Ó Cathasaigh was another scholar who considered *geis* to be an important component of kingship ideology. As previously discussed, Ó Cathasaigh has extrapolated a theory of kingship ideology from *TBDD* in which the Otherworld is the source of *fír flathemon* and ideal rule. More specifically, Ó Cathasaigh argued that peace (2 *síd*) was bestowed upon Conaire Mór and his reign by the Otherworld (1 *síd*) as a sign of their sponsorship.<sup>479</sup> As Ó Cathasaigh has shown, *TBDD* attributes Conaire's accession to the intervention of Nemglan, a representative of the Otherworld, who reveals to Conaire the actions he must take in order to acquire the kingship of Tara. However, according to Ó Cathasaigh, Nemglan's assistance was not unconditional, and Conaire's *gessi* 'constitute in effect a contract with the Otherworld'.<sup>480</sup> In support of this, Ó Cathasaigh would later observe that the audience of *TBDD* is only informed of Conaire's full list of *gessi* once he has been proclaimed king, thereby implying a connection between these two things.<sup>481</sup> Furthermore, the circumstances of Conaire's downfall appear to indicate that his good relations with the Otherworld were contingent upon the his observation of these *gessi*. In particular, Conaire's failure to prevent *díberg* in his reign is the first in chain of events that leads to his downfall and death. Ó Cathasaigh has also shown how, during this spiral of unfortunate events, the Otherworld beings take on a malign role, hastening Conaire's demise.<sup>482</sup> Therefore, Ó Cathasaigh concluded that 'the transgression of the taboo destroys the respect of the Otherworld beings who have delegated sovereignty to him'.<sup>483</sup>

---

<sup>478</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Geis', 46.

<sup>479</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, 'Síd', p. 22.

<sup>480</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, 'Síd', p. 24.

<sup>481</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, 'Concept of the Hero', pp. 57-58.

<sup>482</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, 'Síd', pp. 25-26.

<sup>483</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, 'Síd', pp. 25-27. Cf. Ó Cathasaigh, 'Concept of the Hero', p. 59. Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'Gat and Díberg in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', *Coire Sois*, ed. Matthieu Boyd (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), pp. 412-21 (pp. 414-15).

The preceding discussion has traced the development of a model of sacred kingship in early Irish kingship ideology. Three major concepts associated with this model have been elucidated here. These are: the sovereignty goddess, *fír flathemon*, and *geis*. Although appearing as distinct motifs in the literature, these concepts have often been quite closely related. Some scholars have explained the rationale behind these concepts in terms of Truth, as a cosmic force and ethical principle. Similarly, fertility and peace have been associated with each as products that may be gained or lost. In this way, the three themes of sovereignty goddess, *fír flathemon*, and *geis* together make something of a composite model. Admittedly, not all scholars have agreed on how these various themes were connected. Ó Cathasaigh, for example, has argued that the Otherworld formed critical role in linking *fír flathemon*, *geis*, and also peace, but he was silent on the subject of the sovereignty goddess. McCone, on the other hand, has presented a unique theory regarding a tripartite division of society and the cosmos that underpins the concepts of sovereignty goddess and *fír flathemon*. Finally, Charles-Edwards has attached *geis* to *fír* and the *tecosc*-genre with his own theory about the public recitation of injunctions. Nevertheless, they have been consistently associated with one another as manifestations of sacred kingship.

The model of sacred kingship and its composite themes are also united by their evidence base. It has been shown that scholars built this model using the evidence of vernacular literature, and particularly that of narrative literature, although other types of literature such as the *tecosca* and legal literature have also been instrumental. These ideas have their origins in the tendency amongst early scholars to emphasise the pre-Christian and Indo-European inheritance of vernacular literature, and were further propped up by a complementary understanding of the learned orders.

In the second half of the twentieth century, and especially from the 1970s onwards, early Irish studies underwent something of a paradigm shift.<sup>484</sup> At the root of this development was a new way of approaching early Irish literature. Instead of looking for evidence of pre-Christian and Indo-European survivals, scholars began to look for evidence of post-conversion, biblical and Latin influences, as well as messages of contemporary political relevance. Unsurprisingly, this new approach yielded new interpretations of early Irish

---

<sup>484</sup> Cf. Jonathan M Wooding, 'Reapproaching the Pagan Celtic Past – Anti-Nativism, Asterisk Reality and the Late-Antiquity Paradigm', *Studia Celtica Fennica*, 6 (2009), 51-74.

society, not least the institution of kingship. Nevertheless, the new scholarly interpretations of kingship were not monochrome. Initially, scholars were largely unconcerned with the concept of sacred kingship, preferring instead to focus upon new sources and evidence for the practical side of kingship. However, it was not long before others began to reinterpret the concept of sacred kingship in line with the new approaches available to them.

The work of James Carney has been credited by McCone as initiating a change in approach towards early Irish literature.<sup>485</sup> In his 1955 work, *Studies in Irish Literature and History*, Carney expressed scepticism about the extent to which pre-literate narrative traditions had influenced early Irish literature. He did not believe, for example, that ‘the form of any of the fictions or entertainments preserved in our medieval manuscripts [are] in any way close to the form in which they would be told when they existed (in so far as they actually did) on a purely oral level’.<sup>486</sup> Carney took this stance because he had detected numerous examples of non-native influence upon early Irish literature that could only have come from written sources introduced in the post-conversion period.<sup>487</sup> These findings lead Carney to propose that the composition of early Irish saga literature had to be either a significant revision of existing native material or new fictional creation.<sup>488</sup> Carney concluded, in the end, that the traditional elements of the literature must be ‘a mere nucleus’ around which the rest was composed.<sup>489</sup> From the late 1970s onwards, scholars began to amass evidence that would support Carney’s view that early Irish vernacular literature was largely a new creation, and not simply the product of an ancient oral tradition. The most compelling evidence for this was undoubtedly the identification of biblical influences. In a number of

---

<sup>485</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. ix. Cf. McCone, ‘A Tale of Two Ditties’, p. 122. Cf. Carney, *SILH*, p. 276. Cf. Ó Corráin, ‘Historical Need’, 142 n. 5. It must be noted, however, that McCone’s *PPCP* has come under considerable criticism for its take on the historiography of early Irish literature and society. See John Carey, ‘Review of *Pagan Past and Christian Present*’, *Speculum*, 67 (1992), 450-52. Patrick Sims-Williams, ‘Review of *Pagan Past and Christian Present*’, *Éigse*, 29 (1996), 179-96. David Dumville, ‘Review of *Pagan Past and Christian Present*’, *Peritia*, 10 (1996), 389-98. Wooding, ‘Reapproaching the Pagan Celtic Past’.

<sup>486</sup> Carney, *SILH*, p. 277.

<sup>487</sup> James Carney, ‘The Impact of Christianity’, *Early Irish Society*, ed. Myles Dillon (Dublin: Colm O Lochlainn, 1954; repr. 1963), pp. 66-78. ‘Particular sagas show every sign of being composed fictions which can have had no existence in Irish oral tradition prior to their presentation as written texts’ (p. 72). Carney, *SILH*, pp. 277, 321.

<sup>488</sup> Carney, ‘Early Irish Literature: The State of Research’, *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Celtic Studies, Galway 1979*, eds. Gearóid Mac Eoin with Anders Ahlqvist and Donncha Ó hAodha (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), pp. 113-30, p. 127.

<sup>489</sup> Carney, *SILH*, p. 321.

works from the 1980s and 1990s, Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, Aidan Breen, and Kim McCone were able to demonstrate the considerable ecclesiastical element in Irish legal and narrative literature in the vernacular.<sup>490</sup>

This revision of the literature led to a complementary reconsideration of the learned orders in early Ireland. Carney had in fact held a dualistic conception of the learned orders, maintaining a fairly sharp distinction between secular and ecclesiastic men of learning that was not dissimilar to Mac Cana's position. Nevertheless, his conception of early Irish literature required there to have been an early integration of native and non-native learning.<sup>491</sup> The idea that the two learned traditions had amalgamated from an early stage became one of the main conceptual pillars upholding a new understanding of the learned orders, one in which the divisions between secular and ecclesiastic spheres of learning were diminished. Donnchadh Ó Corráin was the first to posit the development of a single learned class in early medieval Ireland, and later attributed it to precisely this cause:

The hereditary native learned castes were Christianised at an early date: by the sixth century, certainly, it is evident that Christian Latin learning and native learning had coalesced. As a result of this process there came into being a Mandarin class of *literati* who ranged over the whole of learning from scriptural exegesis, canon law and computistics to inherited native law, legend and genealogy.<sup>492</sup>

McCone was a significant proponent of Ó Corráin's concept of a single Mandarin class that was 'monastically orientated', with a 'monastic core curriculum'.<sup>493</sup> He noted that many

---

<sup>490</sup> Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, and Aidan Breen, 'The Laws of the Irish', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 382-438. Liam Breatnach, 'Canon Law and Secular Law in Early Ireland: The Significance of *Bretha Nemed*', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 439-59. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Irish Origin Legends and Genealogy: Recurrent Aetiologies', *History and Heroic Tale: A Symposium*, ed. Tore Nyberg et al (Odense: Odense University Press, 1985), pp. 51-96. Kim McCone, 'Dubthach Maccu Lugair and a Matter of Life and Death in the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már*', *Peritia*, 5 (1986), 1-35. Liam Breatnach, 'The Ecclesiastical Element in the Old Irish Legal Tract *Cáin Fhuithirbe*', *Peritia*, 5 (1986), 36-54. Liam Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar: The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law*, Early Irish Law Series, 2 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1987). Kim McCone, 'A Tale of Two Ditties: The Poet and Satirist in *Cath Maige Tuired*', *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney*, eds. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, and Kim McCone (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989), pp. 122-43. McCone, *PPCP*.

<sup>491</sup> Carney, 'Impact of Christianity', pp. 69, 71, 72, 74, 76. Carney, *SILH*, pp. 277, 321.

<sup>492</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Origin Legends', pp. 51-52.

<sup>493</sup> McCone, 'Tale of Two Ditties', p. 134. McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 1, 26.

schools of native learning appear to have been based at monasteries, and that the existence of secular counterparts, in the pre-Norman period, remained unproven.<sup>494</sup>

Around the same time, a new conception of kingship began to develop that complemented this understanding of literature and the learned in early Ireland. Instead of viewing the early Irish king as one who was traditionally restricted in the exercise of royal power, the case was made that kings could wield considerable fiscal and administrative powers.<sup>495</sup> Ó Corráin, for instance, argued that the archaic model of the tribal-king was being superseded from at least the seventh century onwards by that of more powerful, dynastic over-kings.<sup>496</sup> The powers employed by these kings included the ability to promulgate laws over large areas in the form of *cána* and *rechtgae*, the ability to grant lands and lordships, the imposition of candidates to both clerical and royal office, the levying of tribute, and the use of officers of royal authority.<sup>497</sup> Following Ó Corráin, Patrick Wormald also questioned the continued existence of the pre-Christian tribal-king model in the early medieval period.<sup>498</sup> Wormald agreed that medieval Ireland 'saw the rise of new and aggressive dynasties' who were 'wiping out a series of minor tribal kingships, [and] placing the lands in question under lords of their own choosing'.<sup>499</sup> Importantly, Wormald added that this behaviour was 'exactly as Clovis had done, as Offa of Mercia was doing at that very same time, and as Harald Finehair was to do'.<sup>500</sup> Early medieval kingship in Ireland thus appeared to be, in McCone's words, 'a good deal more normal and up to date by contemporary European standards than nativists like to admit'.<sup>501</sup>

---

<sup>494</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 26.

<sup>495</sup> Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship in pre-Norman Ireland', *Historical Studies XI: Nationality and the Pursuit of National Independence, Papers Read before the Conference held at Trinity College, Dublin, 26–31 May 1975*, ed. T.W. Moody (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1978), pp. 1–35.

<sup>496</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', pp. 4, 35.

<sup>497</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', pp. 21–27. McCone has supported Ó Corráin's findings. See McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 9, 122, 126.

<sup>498</sup> Patrick Wormald, 'Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship: Some Further Thoughts', *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach, with Virginia Darrow Oggins (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1986), pp. 150–184.

<sup>499</sup> Wormald, 'Further Thoughts', p. 165.

<sup>500</sup> Wormald, 'Further Thoughts', p. 165.

<sup>501</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 9.

Beyond these functional developments of kingship, Ó Corráin also began to discern an alternative model of kingship ideology; one that was aggressively dynastic and distinctly Christian. This ideology was very closely linked to the new understanding of literature and the learned. If early Irish vernacular literature could no longer be considered the product of an antiquarian interest in native tradition, there had to be an alternative reason for its production. According to Carney, the production of literature in early Ireland was a 'consistent policy' that was motivated by 'religious or political reasons'.<sup>502</sup> Ó Corráin followed this interpretation very closely. In particular, he has argued that there was a political motivation for the adaptation of traditional native genealogy to the biblical and Patristic model of world history. According to Ó Corráin, 'the Irish spliced their local genealogical superstructure to the scriptural one and attempted to fit it into the Judeo-Christian time-scale'.<sup>503</sup> This process began in the seventh century, with the production of genealogical poetry for the dominant Leinster dynasties, and led to the elaboration of an Irish national origin legend that was ultimately realised, by the eleventh to twelfth centuries, in the form of the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*.<sup>504</sup> Importantly, however, the genealogical material that made up this national origin legend was also intended to consolidate the political authority of the more successful dynasties by elaborating for them formidable aristocratic pedigrees whilst relegating lesser groups to more poorly realised branches of less notable ancestry.<sup>505</sup> As Ó Corráin has said, 'the genealogists, like similar castes everywhere, constantly reinterpreted political reality, justifying the contemporary holders of power and willingly giving retrospective validation to those who had only recently achieved it'.<sup>506</sup> The use of biblical history and genealogy to construct the origins of the Irish indicates the strong Christian character of the Mandarin conception of history, and the use of this material to legitimate political dynasties suggests that this perspective was closely associated with their ideology of kingship.

Ó Corráin also detected this ideology in the vernacular tales, which he considered to be 'legitimist' and 'aetiological'.<sup>507</sup> As evidence of this, Ó Corráin used some examples that had

---

<sup>502</sup> Carney, 'The State of Research', 127.

<sup>503</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Irish Origin Legends', pp. 52, 55.

<sup>504</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Irish Origin Legends', pp. 57-60, 64, 68.

<sup>505</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', p. 33. Ó Corráin, 'Irish Origin Legends', pp. 69-72.

<sup>506</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Irish Origin Legends', p. 69.

<sup>507</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Irish Origin Legends', p. 80.

previously been used as evidence for sacred kingship, but read these in ‘the context of dynasty, time and place’. A major example, to which he returned a number of times, was *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin*.<sup>508</sup> Previously, this tale had been read as evidence for the enduring relevance of the sovereignty goddess for early Irish kingship ideology.<sup>509</sup> For Ó Corráin, however, the importance of this text lay in how the characters and events could be read as an allegory for the current political pecking order between the Uí Néill, Uí Briúin, Uí Fíachrach, Uí Ailella, and Uí Fergusa.<sup>510</sup> For this reason, he valued *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* as evidence for ‘Uí Néill propaganda of the eleventh century’, not as evidence for the sovereignty goddess.<sup>511</sup> Another familiar example, reinterpreted by Ó Corráin, was *Geneamuin Chormaic*.<sup>512</sup> This tale had previously been used by Ó Cathasaigh as evidence of *fír flathemon* because of the episode in which Cormac corrects the false judgement of king Lugaid.<sup>513</sup> Instead, using what he called ‘the historical approach’, Ó Corráin argued that this tale was significant because of the relationships between the various characters (especially fosterage), which he believed to be symbolic of the relations between their descendants at the time in which the tale was written.<sup>514</sup>

In addition to the legitimation of specific dynasties, Ó Corráin also detected a general cultivation of ideological support for centralised and authoritarian kingship. He identified two main manifestations of these developments in the contemporary literature. One of these was the ‘exhortation to rule rather than reign’.<sup>515</sup> Ó Corráin found examples of this attitude in *De duodecim abusivis*, the prologue to *Féilire Óengusso* ‘The Calendar of Óengus’, and *Cert cech ríge*.<sup>516</sup> The second manifestation was an ideological affirmation of the right to

---

<sup>508</sup> Ó Corráin, ‘Legend as Critic’, pp. 31-33. Cf. Ó Corráin, ‘Irish Origin Legends’, pp. 77-84. Ó Corráin, ‘Historical Need’, pp. 144-46.

<sup>509</sup> See O’Rahilly, ‘*Érainn* and *Ériu*’, 17.

<sup>510</sup> See Ó Corráin, ‘Legend as Critic’, pp. 31-33. Cf. Ó Corráin, ‘Irish Origin Legends’, pp. 77-84. Ó Corráin, ‘Historical Need’, pp. 144-46.

<sup>511</sup> Ó Corráin, ‘Legend as Critic’, p. 33.

<sup>512</sup> Ó Corráin, ‘Historical Need’, pp. 147, 149.

<sup>513</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, *Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 63-66.

<sup>514</sup> Ó Corráin, ‘Historical Need’, pp. 147-49.

<sup>515</sup> Ó Corráin, ‘Nationality and Kingship’, p. 17. Cf. Wormald, ‘Further Thoughts’, p. 168

<sup>516</sup> Ó Corráin, ‘Nationality and Kingship’, pp. 17-18. Cf. Pádraig Ó Riain, *Feastdays of the Saints: A History of Irish Martyrologies* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 2006), pp. xxiii, 173. Aidan Breen, ‘Pseudo-Cyprian *De Duodecim Abusivis Saeculi* and the Bible’, *Irland und die Christenheit, Bibelstudien und Mission/Ireland and Christendom*, eds. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), pp. 230-245 (p. 231), Aidan Breen, ‘The

such rule. This approach was more subtle and more pervasive than the former, but is perhaps best illustrated by the work of the synthetic historians who, from the ninth to the eleventh centuries, 'elaborated the idea of the over-kingship of all Ireland and projected it backwards into even the remote past', thereby legitimating over-kingship of an increasingly large scale through fabricated historical precedents.<sup>517</sup> For Ó Corráin, biblical and Latin learning overwhelmingly influenced this Mandarin ideology of kingship. Capital punishment, for example, was a particular aspect that he, Breatnach and Breen, considered to be 'purely biblical in concept and expression'.<sup>518</sup> This was an idea that was later supported by McCone and Wormald.<sup>519</sup>

Some scholars have since developed Ó Corráin's observation that certain vernacular texts were attempting to legitimate more authoritarian kingship, and some of the *tecosca* have been implicated in this. Ó Corráin originally observed that, in *Cert cech rí*g, 'the advice given [to the king] in regard to secular affairs is that he should be ruthless and effective'.<sup>520</sup> Byrne later picked up on this idea. Interpreting *Cert cech rí*g as advice directed towards an eleventh-century, Uí Néill over-king named Áed, Byrne highlighted how its content chimes well with the context in which he believed it to have been written:

The starkly realistic and unheroic tone suit better the problems facing a Northern high-king in the eleventh century. His primary duty is to avoid being assassinated, defenceless in his hut. [...] The clergy are to be freed from all secular obligations, but Áed must impose harsh rule against outlaws and criminals. The seven 'daughters of a king', who enforce his peace are Fetter, Gallows, Pit, Prison, Water, Blade, and Fire. Áed must first put his own house in order [...], many high-kings had been killed by their own followers; the Cenél nEógain in particular regard it as a glory to kill their kings and princes [...].<sup>521</sup>

---

Evidence of Antique Irish Exegesis in Pseudo-Cyprian, *De Duodecim Abusivis Saeculi*, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 87C (1987), 71-101.

<sup>517</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', pp.19-20.

<sup>518</sup> Ó Corráin, Breatnach, and Breen, 'Laws of the Irish', 389-91. Cf. Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', p. 17.

<sup>519</sup> McCone, 'Dubthach Maccu Lugair', 16-18. Wormald, 'Further Thoughts', p. 168.

<sup>520</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', pp.17-18.

<sup>521</sup> Byrne, 'Ireland and Her Neighbours', pp. 896.

In an article published in 2006, Ralph O'Connor contrasted the attitude taken towards rulership by *Cert cech rí*g to that taken by *AM* (B).<sup>522</sup> Citing Ó Corráin, O'Connor stated that the ideology of kingship had 'been undergoing convulsive changes ever since the B-recension of *Audacht Morainn* had been written', and that the changing tone taken by the *tecosca* reflected this.<sup>523</sup> Thus, *Cert cech rí*g recommends 'a zero-tolerance policy' towards rulership in place of the more 'compassionate approach' taken by certain segments of *AM* (B).<sup>524</sup> Even the compiler of *AM* (A) expunged four lines from the earlier B-recension that had favoured mercy.<sup>525</sup>

Generally speaking, Ó Corráin was unconcerned with discussing the themes and ideology of sacred kingship, preferring instead to focus on the more practical aspects of early Irish kingship. Through the 1990s and into the present, however, scholars began to revise the concept of sacred kingship in light of Ó Corráin's arguments. Whilst McCone wrote at length about the abundance of 'comparative evidence indicative of an appreciable pagan Celtic and Indo-European input into the early Irish concept of kingship', he also declared that 'there can be no doubt that the central tenets of this regnal ideology were fully attuned to clerical attitudes from at least the seventh century'.<sup>526</sup> McCone regarded the precepts of *AM* and *TC*, for instance, to be 'perfectly compatible with the teachings of the Church and Bible'.<sup>527</sup> He defended this assertion in several ways. First, he made an inverse comparison of the characteristics of unjust kingship that feature in the Latin wisdom text *De duodecim abusivis* with the characteristics of just kingship featured in the vernacular wisdom literature.<sup>528</sup> Secondly, he highlighted two paragraphs from *AM* and *TC* that explicitly associate the benefits of ideal kingship with divine favour.<sup>529</sup> *AM* (B) § 32 advises, for example:

---

<sup>522</sup> Ralph O'Connor, 'Searching for the Moral in *Bruiden Meic Da Réo*', *Ériu*, 56 (2006), 117-43, (138). See also O'Connor, *Da Derga's Hostel*, pp. 296-99.

<sup>523</sup> O'Connor, 'Bruiden Meic Da Réo', 138.

<sup>524</sup> O'Connor, 'Bruiden Meic Da Réo', 138, 137. Cf. *AM* (B), §§ 8-11.

<sup>525</sup> O'Connor, 'Bruiden Meic Da Réo', 138, 137. Cf. *AM* (B), §§ 5-8.

<sup>526</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 108, 139.

<sup>527</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 140-43.

<sup>528</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 139.

<sup>529</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 141-42.

*Apair fris, ad-mestar dúili dúilemon tod[a]-rosat amal to-rrósta; nach rét nad asa moínib míastar, nícope lántoruth toda-béra(?)*.

Let him estimate the creations of the creator who made them as they were made; anything which he will not judge according to its profits will not give them with full increase.

Similarly, in *TC* § 1.51 declares: ‘*ar is tre fír flaithemon do-indnaig márDía insin uile*’, ‘for it is through the ruler’s truth that great God bestows all that’. In addition to this, McCone noted that, according to Irish tradition, both Morann and Cormac had knowledge of God before the coming of Christianity. Therefore, he concluded, ‘these very ascriptions indicate that their authors regarded the texts in question as fundamentally compatible with Christian teaching’.<sup>530</sup>

McCone also proposed that the figure of the sovereignty goddess had been co-opted and transformed by early Irish monastic writers to suit their Christian ideals of kingship. He began by agreeing with O’Rahilly’s opinion that queen Medb was once a goddess but had been, in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, ‘degraded’ to ‘a strong-willed virago’, and then suggested several more ways in which early Irish writers could rationalise or adapt the supernatural female figures of early Irish legend.<sup>531</sup> Much of McCone’s argument lacked supporting evidence relevant to the theme of the sovereignty goddess, however. Instead, McCone had to rely on evidence for the euhemerisation of Manannán mac Lír in *Cóir Anmann*, and hence his conclusion that ‘there was no lack of obvious biblical models to which inherited Irish concepts of the female embodiment of sovereignty could at least partially be assimilated’ was far from convincing.<sup>532</sup> Slightly more compelling was his example from *Scél na Fír Flatha*, which refers to the *scál* ‘phantom’ from *Baile in Scáil* as a messenger from God.<sup>533</sup> By association then, McCone suggested that the female *flaith Érenn*, ‘sovereignty of

---

<sup>530</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 141-42. McCone did not, however, take the time to consider whether these traditions of pre-Patrician knowledge of God pre-dated or post-dated the attribution of the texts in question. If the legends of Cormac’s or Morann’s pre-Patrician revelation developed after the writing of our extant versions of *AM* (B) or *TC* § 1, then the authors of these texts could not have intended these attributions to imply compatibility with Christian teaching. This is a particularly interesting question in the case of *AM* (B), since there has been some disagreement over whether the word *dúilemon* refers to the creator God of Christian mythology or not. It could equally be the case that an appreciation for the wisdom of *AM* inspired its audience to retrospectively credit Morann with a pre-conversion knowledge of God. In any case, this is not an essential investigation for the purposes of the current enquiry.

<sup>531</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 148.

<sup>532</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 149-50,

<sup>533</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 156.

Ireland', also from *Baile in Scáil*, must have been intended as an agent of God. In sum, McCone's reassessment of the sovereignty goddess posed some interesting theories, but ultimately it fell quite short of justifying his conclusion that:

A hierogamous pagan Irish sacral kingship and associated mythology had by about the seventh century AD been subtly but nonetheless comprehensively converted by churchmen into a Christian ideology of monarchy by God's grace with a marked Old Testament stamp.<sup>534</sup>

A stronger argument for the Christian reinterpretation of the sovereignty goddess was presented by Máire Herbert in her contribution to the 1992 publication *Women and Sovereignty*. By comparing the roles performed by female representations of sovereignty in Gaulish and Irish sources, Herbert was able to suggest that the importance of the woman of sovereignty diminished over time. Herbert noted that the Gaulish princess in the foundation legend of Massalia performed a role very similar to that of Medb Chrúachna and Medb Lethderg.<sup>535</sup> In this tale, the Gaulish princess chooses her own spouse, who is also to become king. This character is also comparable to the women of sovereignty in *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* and *Baile in Scáil*, in that the Gaulish princess indicates her choice with the bestowal of a drink.<sup>536</sup> Despite these similarities, however, Herbert noticed a crucial difference between the male and female roles in these tales. She observed that 'the combined evidence from Gaul of iconography, epigraphy, and traditional legend privileges the female'.<sup>537</sup> Herbert likened this to the presentation of the two Medbs, who usually take an active role in choosing their male partners. In *Baile in Scáil*, however, Herbert noted that the male figure, Lug, decides on whom the female sovereignty figure should bestow her drink. In this instance, it is Conn Cétchathach and his descendants. Thus, 'the locus of power has shifted from female to male [...] while retaining the image of partner in a sacred marriage, the female role is, in fact, relegated from that of subject to that of object'.<sup>538</sup> Herbert observed the same gender dynamic in the tale *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin*. In this tale, Niall Noígiallach makes the decision to have sex with the female

---

<sup>534</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 158.

<sup>535</sup> Herbert, 'Goddess and King', pp. 265-66.

<sup>536</sup> Herbert, 'Goddess and King', pp. 266-67.

<sup>537</sup> Herbert, 'Goddess and King', p. 269.

<sup>538</sup> Herbert, 'Goddess and King', pp. 269-70.

representation of sovereignty, who thus 'functions once more as an object to be appropriated'.<sup>539</sup>

According to Herbert, this fundamental change in the presentation of the female sovereignty figure reflected the religious and political developments in the Old and Middle Irish periods. In her explanation of this development, she agreed with McCone that the traditional theme of the sovereignty goddess was being changed by clerical writers, who, in her opinion, 'sought to promote a Christian ideology in which the overseer and legitimator of royal power was not the goddess but the male God of Christianity'.<sup>540</sup> Thus, it was possible for Herbert to interpret Lug, in *Baile in Scáil*, as the representative of this (male) Christian authority.<sup>541</sup> Similarly, in a different literary context, Herbert proposed that the female characters of Deirdre and the Morrígan were diminished and demonised in accordance with the patriarchal perspective of Christianity.<sup>542</sup> Finally, Herbert suggested that theories about the decline of the sovereignty goddess indicate that myth of the sacred marriage itself had diminished in importance in early medieval Ireland. In its stead, the political message of Uí Néill hegemony had taken centre-stage, and this was represented by the active male roles of Lug, Conn, and Niall.<sup>543</sup> This interpretation is, of course, in accord with that of Ó Corráin, who had previously read *Baile in Scáil* and *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* as attempts to legitimate dynastic authority. Importantly, however, Herbert's interpretation took into account the origins and development of the sovereignty goddess and the concept of sacred kingship.

With McCone and, to a lesser extent, with Herbert, the sacred kingship was understood to have been a pre-Christian concept that was adapted in the early medieval period to suit the new religious and political needs of the time. The same might be said of O'Connor also,

---

<sup>539</sup> Herbert, 'Goddess and King', p. 271.

<sup>540</sup> Herbert, 'Goddess and King', p. 268.

<sup>541</sup> Herbert, 'Goddess and King', pp. 269-70.

<sup>542</sup> Máire Herbert, 'The Universe of Male and Female: A Reading of the Deirdre Story', *Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples: Proceedings of the Second North American Congress of Celtic Studies* (Halifax, N.S.: St Mary's University, 1992), pp. 53-63. Máire Herbert, 'Celtic Heroine? The Archaeology of the Deirdre Story', *Gender in Irish Writing*, eds. Toni O'Brien Johnson and David Cairns (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), pp. 13-22. Máire Herbert, 'Transmutations of an Irish Goddess', *The Concept of the Goddess*, eds. Sandra Billington and Miranda Green (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 141-51. NB that Herbert regarded it too simplistic to view either Deirdre or the Morrígan as simply sovereignty goddesses.

<sup>543</sup> Herbert, 'Goddess and King', pp. 269-72.

who has remarked that ‘direct links between the state of the natural world and the ruler’s justice (*fír flathemon*) or injustice (*gáu flathemon*) were as much a part of Christian kingship ideology as they are (claimed to be) relics of pre-Christian mythology’.<sup>544</sup> More recently, in his monograph on *TBDD*, O’Connor discussed at some length the compatibility of contemporary Christian ideals of kingship and certain literary themes and texts associated with sacred kingship from early Ireland.<sup>545</sup> N. B. Aitchison also argued along similar lines, but presented a cynical view on the development and use of ideology and literature:

The sacral character of Irish kings, whether Christian or pagan, may be identified as an ideological strategy. This calls into question the very validity of the concept of ‘sacred kingship’. Rather than royal office and power evolving from the sacral status and duties of kings [...] kings gained office through the exercise of power. They then assumed a sacral mantle that was central to the legitimation of their rank.<sup>546</sup>

In this quotation, Aitchison comes close to denying the existence of a concept of sacred kingship in the early medieval period. He suggests that for the kings, and presumably also for those that wrote the literature of kingship, sacrality was seen to be something of a gimmick. This view would seem to have more in common with Ó Corráin than McCone or Herbert. Having said that, Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen had previously argued that Irish canonists, inspired by the book of Samuel, were urging for the anointment of early Irish kings.<sup>547</sup> This would seem to least suggest a Christian concept of sacred kingship was being cultivated.

Bart Jaski is another scholar who has cast doubt over the existence of a concept of sacred kingship in the early medieval period. According to Jaski, the authority of kings derived from their status as lords: ‘kings were nominally subject to the same norms and values and rules and regulations as lords, and were tied to the same social and political conventions’.<sup>548</sup> He

---

<sup>544</sup> Ralph O’Connor, ‘Searching for the Moral in *Bruiden Mac Da Réo*’, *Ériu*, 56 (2006), 117-43 (130).

<sup>545</sup> O’Connor, *Da Derga’s Hostel*, pp. 250-85.

<sup>546</sup> N. B. Aitchison, ‘Kingship, Society, and Sacrality: Rank, Power, and Ideology in Early Medieval Ireland’, *Traditio*, 49 (1994), 45-75 (70). Aitchison’s statement says a lot more about his own world-view than it does about historical reality. The question of whether or not people in power, ancient or modern, genuinely believe in the ideologies that support them is surely impossible to prove or disprove in anything other than individual basis.

<sup>547</sup> Ó Corráin, Breatnach, Breen, ‘Laws of the Irish’, 398.

<sup>548</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 26-27, 57.

has argued for a completely desacralized kingship, refusing both the survival of any pre-Christian concept of sacred king, and any notion that the king held an especially Christian position. Jaski was not convinced that the clerical ordination of kings occurred in pre-Norman Ireland (except perhaps in two exceptional cases), and he claimed that the Old Testament idea of an anointed king was 'difficult to reconcile with the existence of an equal relationship between king and people as explained in the native law'.<sup>549</sup> Above all else, Jaski wished to emphasise that it was the people who ordained the king, and thus the king could not have been elevated above them in any sacred or religious way.<sup>550</sup>

In his argument, Jaski made a case against the continued relevance of each of the main themes of sacred kingship. This included a persuasive criticism of the *banais rígi* as a form of *hieros gamos*, and an equally convincing one against an active belief in *gessi*.<sup>551</sup> His consideration of *fír flathemon* is most relevant, however, since it directly involved *Audacht Morainn*. Put simply, Jaski argued that *fír flathemon* did not concern kings exclusively, but all people.

The concept of ruler's truth applies particularly to the royal office, but in its scope and meaning not uniquely. Hence it cannot be held as an aspect of sacral kingship in the historical period, for the relationship between king and the (super)natural world is not particular to the office alone, and is encapsulated in Christian concepts of divine favour or punishment.<sup>552</sup>

Jaski's argument had two main points. The first concerned the association of *fír flathemon* with the verbal pronouncement of truth or falsehood.<sup>553</sup> Jaski did not deny that there was association of *fír flathemon* with verbal judgement, but he did deny that this was limited to kings. His doubt sprung from the semantic range of the word *flaith*, and the prominent use of this word in connection with *fír flathemon* and the pronouncement of truth or falsehood. Having cited some of the narrative evidence for *fír flathemon*, previously used by Ó Cathasaigh, Jaski wrote:

---

<sup>549</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 60-63.

<sup>550</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 57-60.

<sup>551</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 63-72, 82-88. Jaski's views on the *banais rígi* and *geis* will be discussed later, in the sections dedicated to these themes in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

<sup>552</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, p. 81.

<sup>553</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 75-77.

One will note that *Audacht Morainn* and the above examples do not speak of a *rí* but of a *flaith*. Their precepts do not concern kings only, although these are often singled out, but every person who is a *flaith* with a responsible position over subjects: kings, lords, abbots and bishops.<sup>554</sup>

In support of this, Jaski pointed-out that the terms *firflaith* ‘true ruler’ and *anflaith* ‘false ruler’ are used in some vernacular law texts to refer to lords of all grades.<sup>555</sup> His argument is worthy of serious consideration, for *flaith* can indeed mean ‘ruler’, ‘prince’, or ‘lord’.<sup>556</sup> Furthermore, it should be remembered that even Dillon, who first introduced the concept of the Act of Truth to the study of Irish kingship theory, did not believe that the concept was limited to kings. As discussed previously in this chapter, Dillon argued that a belief in the magic power of Truth lay behind *fir flaith* ‘ruler’s truth’ and *fir fer* ‘men’s truth’.<sup>557</sup> For reasons unclear, in the scholarship that followed Dillon, most scholars chose to focus on *fir flaith* and *fir flathemon*, to the exclusion of *fir fer*.<sup>558</sup>

Jaki’s second point, in his case against *fir flathemon* and sacred kingship, concerned the human provocation of natural disasters.<sup>559</sup> It has already been shown in this thesis that many scholars have associated *fir flathemon*, and the well-being of the kingdom with kingship. The benefits of *fir flathemon* include fertility, abundance, peace, and prosperity. Conversely, the price of *gáu flathemon* is the opposite of all these things. Jaski did not dispute the association of *fir* and *gáu flathemon* with these positive and negative effects. Jaski did not agree, however, that these things were seen as being exclusively the responsibility of the king. Jaski derived this belief from the evidence of the vernacular law texts. In the *Heptads*, *Córus Béscnai*, *Senchas Már*, *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid*, and *Críth Gablach*, he identified a number of examples in which the responsibility for the protection of the realm from natural disasters, and so forth, was not limited to the king.<sup>560</sup> Instead, Jaski has shown that a general obligation to honour contracts and maintain the legal status quo

---

<sup>554</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, p. 76.

<sup>555</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>556</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. *flaith*.

<sup>557</sup> Dillon, ‘Archaism’, 251.

<sup>558</sup> A notable exception is an article by O’Leary in which he discusses *fir fer* as an aspect of heroic ideology in early Irish narrative. Philip O’Leary, ‘*Fir Fer*: An Internalised Ethical Concept in Early Irish Literature?’, *Éigse*, 22 (1987), 1-14.

<sup>559</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 77-82.

<sup>560</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 78-80.

amongst the population was encouraged by these sources, lest the country suffer plagues, war, famine, and social disorder.<sup>561</sup>

Jaski's observations were insightful, but his use of evidence is not completely satisfactory. One problem stems from an obvious bias in favour of the vernacular laws. Jaski readily admitted that the narrative sources focus on the king as the sole party responsible for *fír flathemon*, but completely dismissed their testimony in favour of that of the vernacular laws.<sup>562</sup> Thus, when the vernacular laws 'give the concept of *fír flathemon* a place in a larger whole', Jaski accepts this as the truth.<sup>563</sup> In his defence, he claimed that 'in narrative literature the king forms the focus of attention, probably because kings rather than noble men or ordinary people form the main characters in this genre'.<sup>564</sup> This is a blatant example of circular reasoning. As for Latin sources, Jaski simply does not consult them in this analysis, although he had previously denounced hagiographical accounts of kingship as ideological and hence untrustworthy.<sup>565</sup> Whilst this was, of course, overly dismissive, there was no doubt an element of truth to it. The question is, however, why could the vernacular laws not be equally ideological?

In the course of the last century, then, there have been some significant changes in how scholars think about kingship and kingship ideology. Scholarship has moved away from seeing kingship solely in terms of pre-Christian or Indo-European inheritance. They have come to acknowledge the copious evidence for post-conversion development, whether it be in the form of biblical influences or those of contemporary, political machinations. Once again, approaches to literature have guided these developments, and this has been closely entwined with a conception of the learned orders. Nevertheless, despite this considerable shift, the literary themes that were originally associated with sacred kingship have remained relevant to theories of kingship ideology. Ó Corráin, Herbert, and McCone have argued that the sovereignty goddess became a vehicle for dynastic, patristic, and biblical conceptions of sovereignty. Similarly, McCone and Jaski offered a Christian reinterpretation of *fír flathemon* as an expression of divine grace and favour. Unsurprisingly, the *tecosca*

---

<sup>561</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>562</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 58, 74-75.

<sup>563</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, p. 79.

<sup>564</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, p. 81.

<sup>565</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, p. 62.

have continued to be useful, providing evidence for the theories Ó Corráin, Herbert, and Jaski. Of course, these scholars were not without their differences. Ó Corráin avoided any supernatural entanglements, whilst McCone and Herbert still seem to have regarded the king as an intermediary between the divine and the mundane. In contrast, Jaski denied that the king had any such role, yet he still argued that *fír flathemon* was an active, supernatural concept in early Ireland.

## Analysing the *Tecosca*

### *Rí* and *Flaith*

As revealed in the third chapter of this thesis, part of Jaski's rebuttal of the concept of sacred kingship revolved around the terminology used in *Audacht Morainn* and other texts associated with kingship ideology. Jaski pointed out that the word *flaith* 'ruler, prince' was used in conjunction with the themes of kingship ideology, particularly *fir flathemon*, more often than the word *rí* 'king'. This point may be said to cast some doubt over the intended audience of the *tecosca*. If *flaith* and *flathem* were not reserved for kings, and if *AM* refers to *flaith/flathem* and not *rí*, then it is legitimate to ask whether the intended audience of *AM* was in fact royal.<sup>566</sup> If this is so, should the same question be asked of the other *tecosca*? Do they speak of *flaith* rather than *rí*? Interestingly, there has been a hitherto unacknowledged divergence of opinion on the translation of *flaith* between the editors of the *tecosca*. Kelly and Meyer, for instance, chose to render *flaith* as 'lord' in their editions of *AM* and *TC*, but O'Donoghue preferred to translate it as 'prince' in *Cert cech rí*g and *Diambad*. This is not insignificant, but these scholars remained silent on these editorial decisions. In any case, the decision to render *flaith* as 'lord' rather than 'prince' or 'king' does not necessarily mean that they did not consider the intended audience to be kings.<sup>567</sup> Indeed, as this thesis has shown, the vast majority of scholars have regarded these texts as advice for kings.

Besides Jaski, Henry is the only other scholar to have raised the issue of *flaith* in connection with the *tecosca*. In an article criticising Kelly's edition of *AM*, he expressed his opinion that the narrative context of *AM* meant that *flaith* ought to be translated as 'prince'.<sup>568</sup> Henry undoubtedly raised a crucial point: if the semantic range of *flaith* is broad, then context

---

<sup>566</sup> *Flathem* also means 'a ruler, prince'. It is related to the word *flaith*, but has a narrower semantic range than that word, generally being applied only to persons. In the eighth-century legal text on status, *Míadsléachta*, *flathem* is used to refer to a rank of freeman whose honourprice is payable in kine. MacNeill explained this use of *flathem* thus: '*flathem* may be explained to mean 'lordlike' (< *vlati-samos*) [...] The three grades of *flathem*, instead of landed vassals such as are under a *flaith*, have tenants bound to the land, in number respectively three, two, and one. The likeness to lords is therefore slight'. This use of the word seems to be unique to the *Míadsléachta*, and there is no obvious reason to suspect that any of the *tecosca* would share this idiosyncratic use of the word. Eoin MacNeill, 'Ancient Irish Law: The Law of Status or Franchise', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, 36 (1921-4), 265-316 (312).

<sup>567</sup> Cf. Kelly, *AM*, p. xiiv.

<sup>568</sup> Henry, 'The Cruces of *AM*', 37-38, 47-49.

must be examined in order to establish what the correct translation is – an obvious point, no doubt, but one that seems to have gone largely unaddressed by scholars. This is unsurprising, for discussion of the term *flaith* has been thin on the ground. Several scholars have acknowledged, at least, the applicability of the term to both kings and lords of various grades, mostly in the context of the early Irish legal texts on status.<sup>569</sup> But even the most substantial look at the use of *flaith*, made by Colmán Etchingham, was a mere page or two concerning its use in the context of the Annals of Ulster. Unfortunately, Etchingham found the term difficult to pin down:

Terms which are readily translated by the vocabulary of ‘lordship’ do not necessarily signify something appreciably different in kind from, and having more limited sway than a ‘king’ [...] the clustered and seemingly haphazard incidence of these terms would appear to bespeak little more than scribal fashion [...] and perhaps some other subjective considerations.<sup>570</sup>

There is certainly not the scope in the present study to address the semantic range of *flaith* in serious detail. Even so, given the ambiguity of the term, and its context-sensitive nature, it would be unwise not to address its use in the *tecosca*. What follows, then, is an examination into the ways in which this word is used in the *tecosca*, and what these might indicate about the intended audience of these texts.

Before beginning this investigation, it will be helpful to say a little more about Jaski’s theory, which has its origins in an argument originally put forth by Wendy Davies.<sup>571</sup> In her 1982 article ‘Clerics as Rulers’, Davies argued that the Church in early medieval Ireland had more substantial political, fiscal, and legal authority than modern scholars had previously acknowledged.<sup>572</sup> There were several main threads to her argument. The first was that a number of Latin sources refer to clerical authority using terms normally reserved for secular

---

<sup>569</sup> D. A. Binchy, *Críth Gablach* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies: Dublin, 1970), p. 91; Kim McCone, ‘Aided Cheltechair maic Ulthechair: Hounds, Heroes and Hospitallers in Early Irish Myth and Story’, *Ériu*, 35 (1985), 1-30 (28-29); Thomas Charles-Edwards, ‘A Contract Between King and People in Early Medieval Ireland? *Críth Gablach* on Kingship’, *Peritia*, 8 (1994), 107-19 (110, 112).

<sup>570</sup> Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland, AD 650-1000* (Maynooth: Laigin Publications, 1999; rpt, 2002), pp. 146-47.

<sup>571</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, p. 76 n. 79. Wendy Davies, ‘Clerics as Rulers: Some Implications of the Terminology of Ecclesiastical Authority in Early Medieval Ireland’, *Latin and Vernacular Languages in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. Nicholas Brooks ([Leicester]: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 81-98.

<sup>572</sup> Davies, ‘Clerics as Rulers’, pp. 81-98.

authority elsewhere in Europe.<sup>573</sup> The second was that this use of secular terminology was complemented by clerical claims to considerable secular authority (i.e. political, fiscal, and legal).<sup>574</sup> Finally, her third point was that the political, fiscal, and legal powers of kings in Ireland were relatively limited and shared with the other noble grades of society (i.e. secular lords, *brithemain*, *filid*, bishops, and abbots).<sup>575</sup> Davies's argument has direct implications for the study of the *tecosca*, as the following quotation makes clear:

[Kings] represented only one of several sections of the *túath* which had political authority: a noble, like a king, was also a *flaithem*; both had *flaith* (authority) and both had duties of protection and restraint. By definition the king had the greatest political authority [...] but it was not confined to him. Hence, the writer of *Audacht Morainn* used *flaithem* rather than *rí* when classifying the qualities of kings. Hence, the glossators characteristically used *flaithem* not *rí* for *rex*, and *flaith* or *flaithemnacht* for *regnum*: the type of authority kings held, even if greater than that of others, was the same as others' [...] Bishops and abbots, therefore were seen to possess *flaith* too, like nobles and kings.<sup>576</sup>

There is, however, a problem with Davies' argument here: at no point did she provide direct evidence of *flaith* or *flaithem* being used to refer to ecclesiasts or ecclesiastic authority. Instead, her association of bishops and abbots with *flaith* depended upon her demonstration that 'the terminology of rule in secular kingdoms has been used to describe the functions of clerics, and apparently employed as a matter of course'.<sup>577</sup> But this terminology did not include *flaith*. *Flaith* was implicated, rather, because of a notional comparison that she made between the *De principatu* chapter of *Collectio canonum hibernensis* (which she argued was written for abbots) and the precepts of *AM*.<sup>578</sup> To then decide that 'clerics were a type of *flaithem*' was nothing more than speculation.<sup>579</sup>

Unfortunately, this presumption was then carried over into the work of Jaski, who thought it sufficient to cite Davies when asserting that *flaith* could mean secular and ecclesiastic

---

<sup>573</sup> Davies, 'Clerics as Rulers', pp. 83-85.

<sup>574</sup> Davies, 'Clerics as Rulers', pp. 86-89.

<sup>575</sup> Davies, 'Clerics as Rulers', pp. 90-92.

<sup>576</sup> Davies, 'Clerics as Rulers', p. 90.

<sup>577</sup> Davies, 'Clerics as Rulers', p. 84.

<sup>578</sup> Davies, 'Clerics as Rulers', p. 91.

<sup>579</sup> Davies, 'Clerics as Rulers', p. 92.

lords equally.<sup>580</sup> This is particularly unfortunate as, at roughly the same time that Jaski published his book, two articles were going to print that would cast significant doubt over Davies' main argument. These articles, by Colmán Etchingham and Jean-Michel Picard, have demonstrated that the *princeps* was not necessarily an abbot or bishop (as Davies had argued) nor even necessarily an ecclesiast.<sup>581</sup> In short, Davies appears to have over-estimated the extent to which the secular terminology of lordship was used for ecclesiasts in early Ireland, and her association of *flaith* with clerics is particularly dubious.

Nevertheless, Davies and Jaski were correct to point out that *AM* uses *flaith* and *flathem*, but they were wrong to say that it does not use *rí*. Whilst *AM* undoubtedly prefers to use *flaith* and *flaithem*, *rí* is still present. In *AM* (B), *flaith* and *flaithem* are used to refer to a person thirty-nine times, whilst *rí* is used thrice (39:3).<sup>582</sup> In *AM* (A), *flaith* and *flaithem* are used of a person thirty-three times, and *rí* is used twice (33:2).<sup>583</sup> In both recensions, *flaithem* is used more frequently than *flaith*, but there does not appear to be any significant difference in the way in which they are used. Often, they appear in the same line or paragraph. *Flaith* is often used to form compounds, such as *anflaith*, *fírflaith*, *cíallflaith*, *tarbflaith*, etc. *Flathem* is never used to form a compound, but is used exclusively for the famous '*is tre fír flathemon*' collocation, which accounts for its more frequent appearance. Why *AM* uses the phrase *fír flathemon*, rather than *fír flatho*, is not clear. Whatever the reason, it seems that whoever compiled these texts did not wish to deviate from *fír flathemon*, or from *fírflaith* etc.

In *TC*, the use of *rí* versus that of *flaith* and *flathem* is much more balanced. In Fomin's edition of *TC*, *flaith* and *flathem* are used nine times, whilst *rí* is used eight times (9:8).<sup>584</sup> On the other hand, in Meyer's edition, the same sections provide an 8:5 ratio of *flaith/flathem* to *rí*. The main reason for this difference is that Meyer's edition simply lacks

---

<sup>580</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, p. 76.

<sup>581</sup> Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 25-26, 53, 59. Jean-Michel Picard, '*Princeps* and *Principatus* in the Early Irish Church: A Reassessment', *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne*, ed. Alfred P. Smyth (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 146-60 (pp. 157, 155).

<sup>582</sup> The total for *flaith/flaithem* does not include instances in which *flaith* refers to 'rule' or 'sovereignty', which occurs four times.

<sup>583</sup> The seven occurrences of *flaith* meaning 'rule' or 'sovereignty' have not been counted in this total.

<sup>584</sup> Again, these figures do not include the use of *flaith* for 'rule, sovereignty', which occurs once. The word *flaithemnas* 'rule, sovereignty' is also used once.

the corresponding lines. Meyer himself admitted that he did not use all of the available manuscripts, and both Ireland and Fomin noted further omissions.<sup>585</sup> Interestingly, the only use of *flathem* in *TC* is in the phrase '*is tre fír flathemon*'.<sup>586</sup>

In *Diambad* and *Cert cech rí*, the ratios are very different from those observed in *AM* (A) and (B). *Diambad* has six references to *flaith* and twelve to *rí* (6:12), whilst *Cert cech rí* has six references to *flaith* and seventeen references to *rí* (6:17). In addition to this, *Cert cech rí* also uses *ruiri* 'a king, supreme ruler' twice, and *rígan* 'a queen or noble lady' once.<sup>587</sup> It must also be noted that neither of these texts use *flathem*. In fact, *Diambad* even uses the phrase *fírinni flatho*, instead of *fír flathemon*, and it does so in conjunction with the familiar abundance imagery that has been associated with sacred kingship and the theme of *fír flathemon*. Again, there seems to be no obvious significance to the variation. Perhaps it is due to Etchingham's 'scribal fashion'. Given that *AM* and *TC* originate in the Old Irish period, and *Diambad* from the Middle Irish, this is a strong possibility. Finally, *TCús* and *BCC*, hardly use *rí* or *flaith* at all. *BCC* refers once to a *tig ruirech*, and *TCús* to *anflathi*.<sup>588</sup>

By merely looking at the frequency of use alone, then, it becomes clear that the testimony of *AM* cannot not speak for the other *tecosca*. The frequency of use of the words *rí*, *flaith*, and *flathem* is diverse. Ultimately, however, only so much can be learned from these quantitative observations. Whilst the frequency of these words might say something about the general orientation of these texts, it is necessary to dig deeper than either Davies or Jaski have done in order to get a more accurate picture. What is surely more important than the frequency with which these words occur, are the contexts in which they are used. To this end, it must be noted that *rí*, *flaith*, and some other, isolated terms for leaders or rulers, may be used to refer to different figures. These uses can be roughly separated between the application of these terms to the advisor, the advisee, and also to third-party figures.

An examination of *AM* reveals that *flaith* is predominantly used to refer to hypothetical, third-party figures that can be described as being archetypal or exemplary: an ideal to

---

<sup>585</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, pp. 43-5; Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 147, 425 ff.

<sup>586</sup> *TC*, § 1.51.

<sup>587</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. *ruiri*, s.v. *rígan*.

<sup>588</sup> *BCC*, § a, l. 3470. *Cath Airtig*, § 3.

which the advisee, and hence presumably the audience, is to aspire. Davies and Jaski were largely correct, then, to assert that *AM* is concerned with *flaith* and not *rí*, for *flaith* is used almost always to refer to this exemplary figure. Perhaps the most striking, and certainly the most well-known, example of this is the hypothetical, truthful ruler, whose *fír* forms the subject of thirteen sections of *AM* (B), and sixteen sections in *AM* (A). Conversely, *rí* is used of an exemplary figure only once, in *AM* (B) § 46. Even then, it is used in conjunction with *flaith*: ‘*Ad-mestar fíallchu forme fírflaitho, air is cach rí g réime recht*’, ‘Let him estimate the war-bands which accompany a true lord, for the rule of his retinue belongs to every king’.<sup>589</sup> This section is missing in *AM* (A). Elsewhere in *AM*, *rí* is used to refer to the advisee, Feradach himself, or tertiary figures related to the narrative conceit.<sup>590</sup> These examples most likely say much less about the intended audience than the use of *flaith* as exemplar.

In addition to these examples there is one other noteworthy use of *flaith* in *AM*. In *AM* (B), § 25, ‘*cech flathemon fírióin*’ is named the direct beneficiary of *fír flathemon*.<sup>591</sup> In the context of a series of paragraphs in which the benefits and beneficiaries of *fír flathemon* are listed, it seems unlikely that these true lords are benefitting from their own *fír*. It makes more sense that they are benefitting from the *fír* of a single over-ruler, represented by the narrative advisee, Feradach. As such, this stanza might imply that the intended audience was a *flaith* of superior grade or status. One whose *fír* was greater than those *flaithi* who would benefit from it as a result, perhaps even a *rí* like Feradach. To this end, it is worth pointing out that there are no instances in either *AM* (A) or *AM* (B) in which a clear distinction between *rí* and *flaith* is made. Although it would be unwise to make too much of this isolated example within the context of *AM*, similar examples will be observed in some of the other *tecosca* below.

Whilst it has been observed that the frequency of *rí* and *flaith* is much more balanced in *TC* than in *AM*, the context of use is more complicated. In contrast to *AM*, *TC* clearly takes the *rí* as the exemplary figure whom the advice concerns in §§ 1 and 2. In both paragraphs, this is indicated by the opening question: ‘*Cid as dech do rí g?*’, ‘What is best for a king?’, and: ‘*Cate cóir rechta rí g?*’, ‘What [constitutes] the right way of authority for a king?’ Curiously,

---

<sup>589</sup> *AM* (B), § 46.

<sup>590</sup> *AM* (B), §§ 2-3. *AM* (A), §§ 3, 52.

<sup>591</sup> *AM* (B), § 25: ‘every true lord’.

however, both of these sections conclude with a reference to *flaith*.<sup>592</sup> The first paragraph ends with ‘*ar is tre fír flaithemon do-indnaig márDía insin uile*’, ‘for it is through the ruler’s truth that great God bestows all that’, and § 2 ends with ‘*ar it é téchta flatha for túatha insin uile*’, ‘for it is all those things [that constitute] the entitlement of a lord [to rule] over his kingdoms’.<sup>593</sup> By opening with one term and concluding with the other, and with no change in subject otherwise indicated, §§ 1 and 2 suggest either that *flaith* is being used as a synonym for *rí*, or that both lords and kings are being addressed simultaneously. This impression is underscored by the use of these words in direct parallel between § 2.22 and § 2.22a, which give both the *cáttu* ‘dignity, honour, esteem’ of the *rí* and the *forsmailt* ‘authority, prerogative’ of the *flaith* as the ‘*coir rechta rí*’.<sup>594</sup> Of course, it could be argued that a distinction is understood here also: that the *cáttu* of a king distinguishes him from a lord, even though they both have *forsmailt*. This would suggest that both lords and kings were being addressed.

Such parallel use of *rí* and *flaith* can be witnessed again in *TC* § 6. The opening question to this section asks: ‘*Cate téchta flatha?*’, ‘What is the entitlement of a lord?’. Yet, this section concludes by stating ‘*ar is trisna téchtaib-sin do-midetar rí g 7 flaithi*’, ‘For it is according to these dues that the kings and the lords are judged’.<sup>595</sup> Here, again, the use of one term to open and another to close the section is perhaps indicative that both are being addressed. In addition to this, the use of *rí g 7 flaithi* side-by-side in the final line is also reminiscent of their parallel use in § 2.22-22a. This suggests that a distinction between the *rí* and *flaithi* can be made, but in this context the two are, for all intents and purposes, alike. The use of the word *flaith* to form the subject in the opening question would suggest a broader, lordly audience. The parallel use of *rí*, however, does not permit one to discount *rí* as a significant aspect of the intended audience.

*TC* § 4 also begins with a question that takes *flaithi* as part of its subject-matter. It asks: ‘*Cateat ada flatha 7 chuirmthige?*’, ‘What are the prerogatives of a lord and of an alehouse?’

---

<sup>592</sup> *TC*, § 1.2, § 2.2.

<sup>593</sup> *TC*, § 1.51, § 2.37.

<sup>594</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. *cáttu*. s.v. *forsmailt*. *eDIL* considers *forsmailt* to be, primarily, a pejorative term meaning, but notes that this does not seem to be the case in *TC* § 2.22a. Fomin translates *fursmaltaib* as ‘prerogatives’ in his edition. This makes sense, given the context, but according to *eDIL* this is an early modern meaning.

<sup>595</sup> *TC*, § 6.2. *TC*, § 6.40.

From this it is clear that this section is about *flaithi*, but it does not necessarily follow that this section is therefore for *flaithi*. In his monograph on *Instructions for Kings*, Fomin opted to translate only the sections of *TC* which ‘specifically deal with kingship and related matters’.<sup>596</sup> In defence of his decision to include § 4 he pointed out that ‘from other early Irish texts one can infer that an ale-house and its proper functionality used to be central to the legitimate character of the rightful rulership’.<sup>597</sup> Fomin was no doubt correct, but he did not consider the important distinction between ‘about whom’ and ‘for whom’. This distinction must be observed here if the central question of this chapter is to be answered. In this spirit, a close inspection of § 4 indicates that this section probably does not assume the perspective of a *flaith*, but that of one who is subordinate to him. For example, when § 4.4 advises that one must be ‘*costud im dagflaith*’, ‘disposed around a good ruler’, it assumes that the audience is in some sort of subordinate position to the *dagflaith*. Similarly, § 4.11 makes the figure of a lord an object of adoration: ‘*tigerna do charthain*’, ‘a lord for loving’. Finally, much of the advice concerning the ordering of the ale-house in § 4 is of a general character, for a general audience. Lines 13-17, for example, describe the desired circumstances that surround the *flaith* in an ale-house.

*Scélugud gairit*  
*Gnúissi fáilidi*  
*Fáilte fri dáma*  
*Tóe fri comad*  
*Cocetla binni*

Short story-telling  
 Cheerful faces  
 Welcome towards companies  
 Silence for a poem  
 Melodious choruses.

These seem to prescribe the correct behaviour required of everyone in the ale-house, and as such cannot be advice for the *flaith* alone. Contrast this with the advice contained in §§ 1, 2, and 6, which stipulate the appropriate behaviour and character of the *rí* and/or *flaith*, and it is evident that the intended audience of § 4 is not quite the same.

---

<sup>596</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 146-47.

<sup>597</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 171.

TC § 5 is also relevant to the current enquiry. This section asks: ‘*Cid asa ngaibther flaithemnas for túathaib 7 chlanaib 7 chenélaib?*’, ‘What is it by reason of which the sovereignty is taken over kingdoms and families and kindreds?’ It could be argued that the intended audience here is any person that possesses *flaithemnas* ‘rule, sovereignty’, i.e. a fairly broad audience incorporating lords of all grades. However, the stipulation that *flaithemnas* be held over *túatha*, *clanna*, and *cenéla*, would suggest that it specifically addresses a *flaith* (or even a *rí* in the case of *túatha*), at the more powerful end of the spectrum. If this is indeed the case, then this section would complement the hints towards this sort of audience detected in §§ 1, 2, and 6. A closer analysis of the themes and content of these sections will help determine how far this may be the case. For now, though, it is interesting to observe how the interpretation of term *flaith* is very sensitive to context, and that the use of this term over and above *rí* does not necessitate an unrestricted audience.

The opening line ‘*diambad messe bad rí réil*’, ‘if I were an illustrious king’, establishes a hypothetical situation that enables the advisor of *Diambad* to enumerate the behaviour and characteristics of an ideal king.<sup>598</sup> It should be a clear indication that what follows is not only about kings, but also specifically for them. The use of the ‘*rí Caisil cruind*’, ‘the king of round Cashel’ as an exemplar for the correct course of action in provincial politics by §§ 6 and 7 reinforces this, and suggests that a particularly powerful king was the intended audience. Stanzas 9 and 10 use *rí* and *flaith* in parallel. Stanza 9 gives ‘*trí gáire buada do rígh*’, and § 10 echoes this by giving ‘*trí gáire dimbuaid do flaith*’. In this context, it seems very possible that the audience remains essentially the same, or very similar. In § 8 parallel use can also be observed between what is best for a *flaith* and what is worst for a king’s honour. Elsewhere, in §§ 15 and 17, the perspective shifts to that of a *flaith*. In the latter section, ‘*síd i tuathaib*’ and ‘*termann cell*’ are two of the things that are proper for the *flaith*, and this is possibly an indication of quite a high-ranking lord or even a *rí*.

The foregoing examples in support of a royal or high-ranking lordly audience cannot, however, be taken as indicative of *Diambad* as a whole. In reality, the royal perspective so succinctly established by the opening line is not maintained. Stanzas 11 and 12, for instance, directly advise ‘*ócthigerna*’, a term which refers to a ‘young lords’ or an ‘inferior

---

<sup>598</sup> *Diambad*, § 1.

grade of nobility or landed gentry'.<sup>599</sup> This assumed perspective of a lower grade of lord is underscored by the prescription in § 11 that the *ócthigern* give tribute to a *flaith*. Besides *ócthigern*, there is one other anomalous lordly term in this *tecosc*. This is *muire*, to whom the advice in § 3 is directed. This term appears to denote some sort of leader or chief, but 'the precise sense is uncertain and prob[ably] varied in different ages'.<sup>600</sup> Despite this ambiguity, the context here suggests that the perspective of a *rí* is actually maintained, for this *muire* is advised to take hostages from the *Fir Lugach*. Whilst the exact identity of this population group is uncertain, taking hostages from what appears to be a *túath* or dynasty of some degree, is surely the prerogative of a king. In fact, given the bellicose implications of hostage taking, *muire* has likely been selected because the word seems to have some martial connotations, and not to make any sort of statement about grade of lordship.<sup>601</sup>

More problematic for the question of intended audience is the fact that a large number of the stanzas in this *tecosc* do not actually contain any advice at all. Stanzas 13-14, 16, 18-26, and 34-35 are not precepts. They are perhaps best described as aphorisms, which Ireland defines as 'self-evident statements of observed fact'.<sup>602</sup> Essentially, they are for everyone, and no one at all. On the other hand, §§ 18, 23, 24, and 35 do seem to take on the perspective of a lord, given that they are partially concerned with political matters, but these represent only a fraction. Stanzas 27-33 are even more problematic for discerning audience. These stanzas concern the sons of men of different occupations and suggest that they are to follow in their fathers' footsteps. O'Donoghue has rendered the relevant lines in the jussive mood. Thus, he gave 'let the abbot's son enter the church [...] let the farmer's son go to the land' etc. If this is correct, then these lines have the character of precepts, but the target audience is constantly shifting. Another interpretation might be that there is an over-arching addressee of this *tecosc*, such as a king, whose responsibility it is to guarantee that every son succeeds his father in this way. If this is the case, then this matter is really a thematic/ideological concern, and similar sentiments about the succession of sons to their fathers' occupations can be found in other *tecosca*. In this capacity, these stanzas will be discussed later. Having said that, this interpretation seems very unlikely

---

<sup>599</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. *ócthigern*.

<sup>600</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. 1 *muire*.

<sup>601</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. 1 *muire*. 'Some of the exx. given below suggest the sense of a military leader or officer in command of a division.'

<sup>602</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 5.

because of the preceding aphoristic material, as well as the unstable perspective throughout. Indeed, one could even dispute O'Donoghue's translation, for those lines which he has rendered in the jussive mood actually lack verbs. Thus, § 27 reads '*mac ind abbad isin cill [...] mac in trebthaig issin tír*'. Alternatively, it might be better to translate these lines in accordance with the opening line of § 26: '*roscáiled do chāch a ord*'. Such an interpretation would see these lines as aphoristic statements, not jussive precepts. Thus, one might read §§ 26-27 along the following lines: 'for each his task has been appointed [...] the son of the abbot in the church [...] the son of the farmer on the land' etc. If correct, this re-interpretation would mean that the majority of this *tecosc*, nearly every stanza from §§ 13-33, is not really advice at all, but observation.

*Cert cech rīg* exhibits all of the same contextual uses of *rí* and *flaith* that have been observed in the other *tecosca* hitherto. Both *rí* and *flaith* are used to refer to hypothetical, exemplary figures. Thus, § 15 states '*madat fīrē flaith · biaid cech maith rit lind*', and § 16 advises '*cendaig ith is blicht · for slicht cech rīg rēil*'. These two stanzas, and the following one, also provide an example of parallel use implying synonymy. The phrase *fírén flaith* in § 15 is of course reminiscent of *fír flathemon*, the famous phrase used extensively in *AM* and once in *TC*, and which has been associated with the idea that just or truthful rule can bring peace, fair weather, milk, crops, and fish. This concept is present in §§ 15-17, which refer again to a *flaith*.

*Nā cocair in fell · nā hacair for cill  
madat fīrēn flaith · biaid cech maith rit lind.*

*Cendaig in mes mór · ocus tess ingrēin  
cendaig ith is blicht · for slicht cech rīg rēil.*

*Cen gūbreith do breith · for saith nach for maith  
acht in changen fīr · sed as dīr do flaith.*

Do not plot treachery, do not sue the clergy;  
if you be a just prince all will be well during your time.

Purchase the goodly mast, and heat from the sun;  
purchase corn and milk, as every famous king has done.

Giving no false judgement on the bad nor the good,  
but (finding) the true facts, that is fitting for a prince.

It would appear that these three stanzas do not switch their target audience from *flaith*, to *rí*, and back to *flaith*, but use both terms for the same audience. The key question then is: was the intended audience a mixture of *ríg* and *flaithi*, or *ríg* that are sometimes referred to as *flaithi*? Given the reasonably convincing case for the actual recipient of this *teosc* being Áed mac Néill meic Máel Shechnaill, it is surprising to find that the evidence of terminology in context does not favour a royal audience, even despite the high frequency of use of *rí* over *flaith*. Stanzas 15-17 use both *rí* and *flaith* in conjunction with the concept of *fír flathemon*, a theme that has been traditionally associated with kingship. In the wake of Jaski's revision of the case for sacred kingship, however, one can no longer presume that *fír flathemon* applied only to kings. The only other use of *flaith* as an exemplary figure (§ 3) is in regard to regard proper relations with '*airchinnich na cell*', 'the rulers of the churchlands'; a matter which might have concerned lords and kings equally.<sup>603</sup> The use of *rí* in § 11 cannot be taken as an indication of intended audience because of the aphoristic nature of this gnome, and whilst § 12 is a precept, the fact that it addresses both *rí* '*tír is túaith*', 'of a country and of a tribe', perhaps undermines any argument for an audience of uniform character. There are, however, four instances in which *rí* is used in the vocative case in this *teosc* (§§ 24, 40, 68, and 69), and even one instance of *ruiri* in the vocative, implying a particularly high grade of king is being addressed.

One of the most striking assertions made by both Davies and Jaski was that the term *flaith* could apply equally to secular and clerical rulers. This is something that the use of *flaith* in *Cert cech rí* does not allow for. Stanzas 3 and 15 explicitly advise a *flaith* on his relations with the clergy. Similarly, §§ 14, 18, 19, and 20-23 also give precepts on this subject, and although they do not name either a *rí* or a *flaith* specifically as the recipient, it is beyond doubt that the intended audience is not a member of the Church. Instead, the relationship implied by these precepts is one in which the advisee stands in a position of power and authority over the Church, and from without it. Thus, they are advised to physically protect it (§§ 20, 23), not to tax it (§ 14), take hostages from it (§ 21), and to give donations to it (§§ 19, 22). That said, the power of the intended audience over the Church should not be overstated: the very fact that the author of *Cert cech rí* wrote such precepts belies a

---

<sup>603</sup> Cf. *eDIL*, s.v. *airchinnech*.

certain confidence in their ability to win these concessions from their audience. Indeed, § 3 seems to imply that the authority of the *flaith* over certain church leaders was limited:

*Tūatha Teamrach Truimm · airchinning na cell  
o flaith cen iarair · acht riagail a cend.*

The people of Tara of Tromm, the rulers of the church-lands,  
no prince must seek from them aught beyond the rule of their superiors.

Nevertheless, the position of the intended audience outside of the Church hierarchy seems unquestionable, as does the use of *flaith* to the exclusion of members of the clergy in the context of this *teosc*.

The *teosca*, then, show considerable variation in their use of the key words *flaith* and *rí*. In the first instance, it is clear that testimony of *AM* cannot speak for the other texts on this matter. *AM* uses *flaith* much more than it does *rí*. The use of these terms, however, assumes the perspective of high-rank and authority, and no sharp distinction is discernible between their use. In contrast to *AM*, *TC* is much more balanced in its frequency of use of *rí* and *flaith*, but the meaning of these words in context is less straightforward. In § 1 and § 2, *rí* and *flaith* are used synonymously to imply a royal audience. Paragraph 6, on the other hand, seems to make a distinction between the two words, but addresses both at the same time. Paragraph 4 seems to assume the perspective of quite a low ranking *flaith*, whereas § 5 would seem to advise a more high-ranking *flaith* or *rí*. These observations confirm what Fomin has said about the text being heterogeneous, but they not do support his claim ‘that the whole composition can be interpreted as moving progressively downward through the aristocratic hierarchy’.<sup>604</sup> The changes of perspective are evidently more complicated than this statement implies.

It would be tempting to apply Fomin’s description of the progressively changing perspective of *TC*, quoted above, to *Diambad*, but close inspection reveals this to be an over-simplification also. Stanzas 1, 6 and 7, seem to use the word *rí* in a way that implies a royal audience, and perhaps a high-ranking one. Stanzas 8, 9, and 10, seem to suggest a mixed lordly and royal audience, but §§ 11-12 explicitly advise a lower ranking lord. Stanzas 15 and 17 seem to return to the perspective of a more substantial type of lord, but at this

---

<sup>604</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 179-80.

point the wisdom offered starts to become more general in nature. Some stanzas, such as §§ 18, 23, 24, and 35, show concern for political authority, but the implied audience is uncertain. Many of the stanzas in the latter half of texts are observational and aphoristic, implying no specific audience. This is in sharp contrast with *Cert cech rí*, which maintains a strong didactic tone throughout, as well as a focus on addressing kings. Even so, there is clearly some overlap in meaning between the use of *flaith* and *rí* in this text, and there are indications that some stanzas were directed to both kings and lords.

Finally, *BCC* and *TCús* are almost impervious to this method of analysis because they hardly use the terms *rí* or *flaith* at all. Only one line from *TCús* is relevant, which advises Cúscraid to ‘doerad anflaithi’, ‘enslave the oppressor’.<sup>605</sup> *Anflaith* typically refers to a ‘non-lord’ or a ‘tyrant’.<sup>606</sup> In his sense, the advice here seems to presume that the audience is in position to correct another lord who is abusing their power, which would of course suggest a high-ranking lord or king was the intended audience. In *BCC*, on the other hand, Lugaid is advised not to get too drunk ‘*hi tig rurech*’, ‘in the house of a great king’.<sup>607</sup> This is interesting because the narrative framework of *BCC* makes it clear that Lugaid is about to become the king of Tara, high-king of Ireland. Yet the perspective of this advice seems to presume that the audience is beneath the grade of a *ruirech*.

It is tempting to consider the evidence for the use of *flaith* and *rí* in conjunction with what is known about the use of advisee characters, which was examined in the second chapter of this thesis. *AM*, *TC*, *TCús*, and *BCC* cast characters from the vernacular saga tradition in the roles of advisor and advisee. In each of these instances, the advisee is a royal figure; a king, or one who is to become king. With these texts, the attribution of the royal advisee seems secure, since they are named explicitly either at the beginning of the *tecosca*, or within them. For each of these examples, the narrative context in which the *tecosca* is delivered is easily discernible. With *BCC* and *TCús*, this context is very explicit, as both *tecosca* survive only within larger narrative tales that form the immediate context. Similarly, certain versions of *AM* provide reader with this information in the form of an introductory paragraph. *TC* would seem to be the odd one out here, since the introduction,

---

<sup>605</sup> *Cath Airtig*, § 2.

<sup>606</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. *anflaith*.

<sup>607</sup> *BCC*, § a, l. 3470.

which features only in some manuscripts, merely provides a run-down of Cormac's qualities. The only surviving indication of the context in which Cormac gave his wisdom to Cairbre is given by Keating, and this is quite late.

On this subject, *Cert cech rí* and *Diambad* form a suit by themselves. The narrative framing for both of these texts is thin on the ground. Nevertheless, some scenarios can be postulated. A strong case has been made by Byrne that the text was purporting to be the advice of the Saint Fothad na Canoine for the benefit of the high-king, Áed Oirdnide, and it seems likely that the redactor of the Laud manuscript version of *Diambad* had a similar scenario in mind when they wrote '*Fingin cecinit do Chormac mac Cuilennain*'. Although much less secure, it seems that Fingen was a learned figure and Cormac a successful and pious king of Caisel. The attribution of *Diambad* to Dubh dá Thuath in three other manuscripts may hint at a similar scenario, in which a learned man, or an ecclesiast, advises a king. This potential association of these wisdom texts with pious figures could also be compared to *AM* and *TC*. As McCone has pointed out, Irish tradition attributed to both Morann and Cormac knowledge of God before the coming of Christianity.<sup>608</sup> It is clear that the compilers of *Cert cech rí* and *Diambad* were aware of these texts, so it is very possible that they tried to emulate this aspect.

Taken as a whole, the use of advisee characters, and of the terms *flaith* and *rí* in the *tecosca*, would suggest that these texts purported to be addressed to kings, but that their intended audience often included lords as well. This conclusion would chime well with the opinion of Ireland, who observed that the *tecosca* 'assume the viewpoint of nobility'.<sup>609</sup> However, given the critique of Davies's theory presented here, it would be unwise to follow her and Jaski in asserting that this audience included ecclesiastic lords. This is particularly true of *Cert cech rí*, which speaks to its audience about the Church in such a way as to imply that the audience was not part of the Church. Given these considerations, one might prefer to interpret the *tecosca* in the manner prescribed by Charles-Edwards: as advice given by the learned orders to the military nobility, through the figurehead of the king.<sup>610</sup>

---

<sup>608</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 141-42.

<sup>609</sup> Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom*, p. 7. See Chapter One of this thesis.

<sup>610</sup> Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 139. See Chapter One of this thesis.

## ***Fír Flathemon***

The third chapter of this thesis has revealed how *fír flathemon* has come to be regarded as one of the quintessential themes of kingship ideology. Originally, it was viewed as an aspect of sacred kingship, inherited from the pre-Christian past, and later as a vehicle for Christian concepts of divine favour and justice. In both instances, certain *tecosca* have been used as evidence. This is unsurprising as, in the first chapter of this thesis, it was established that the theme of *fír flathemon* has been closely associated with the *tecosc*-corpus. Indeed, the theme has been instrumental in establishing a historical and conceptual link between the Irish *tecosc*-tradition and the wider genre of *speculum principum*. Despite this persistent association, however, *AM* has frequently provided the bulk of the evidence.<sup>611</sup> Otherwise, only *TC* and *Diambad* have been used very sparingly.<sup>612</sup> This state of affairs warrants a reconsideration of *fír flathemon* in relation to the *tecosca*.

Many scholars have provided their own definitions of *fír flathemon*, and some of these have been quoted already in this thesis.<sup>613</sup> These definitions vary in length and detail but all have concerned the positive effects that result from *fír flathemon*. The inverse of *fír flathemon*, *gáu flathemon*, has sometimes been taken into account, and this is usually defined by an inversion of the effects of *fír flathemon*. On the subject of the benefits that accrue from *fír flathemon*, there has been some general agreement. A combination of social and environmental factors, such as fertility for man and beast, an abundance of food produce, favourable weather, peace, and social stability, are often highlighted. As stated above, however, many scholars have based their descriptions of *fír flathemon* upon *AM*. More specifically, most have based their descriptions of *fír flathemon* on §§ 12-21 and 24-28 of *AM* (B).<sup>614</sup> More recently, Fomin has analysed in some detail the benefits of *fír flathemon*

---

<sup>611</sup> Binchy, *CASK*, p. 10. Wagner, 'Celtic Civilisation', 8. Kelly, *AM*, p. xvii. Henry, Review of *AM*, 208. Watkins, 'Marginalia', 181. Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, p. 8. Mac Cana, 'Regnum and Sacerdotium', 447. O Leary, 'A Foreseeing Driver', 13-4. McCone, *PPCP*, p. 108.

<sup>612</sup> For *Diambad*, see Dillon, 'Archaism', 250-51. For *TC*, see McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 139-48.

<sup>613</sup> For some definitions of *fír flathemon* see Binchy, *CASK*, p. 10. Kelly, *AM*, p. xvii. Henry, Review of *AM*, 208. Watkins, 'Marginalia', 181. Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, p. 8. Mac Cana, 'Regnum and Sacerdotium', 447. O Leary, 'A Foreseeing Driver', 13-14. McCone, *PPCP*, p. 108. Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 27.

<sup>614</sup> Binchy, *CASK*, p. 10. Wagner, 'Celtic Civilisation', 8. Kelly, *AM*, p. xvii. Henry, Review of *AM*, 208. Watkins, 'Marginalia', 181. Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, p. 8. Mac Cana, 'Regnum and Sacerdotium', 447. O Leary, 'A Foreseeing Driver', 13-4. McCone, *PPCP*, p. 108.

and the detriments of *gáu flathemon*, as they appear in *TC* and *AM* (A).<sup>615</sup> Fomin did not, however, compare his findings to the other *tecosca* that form the subject of this thesis. It will be necessary, therefore, to make this comparison here.

The frequency of occurrence of the phrase *fír flathemon* in the *tecosca* is perhaps the best place to start this investigation. Surprisingly, this term appears only in *AM* and *TC*, although *Diambad* employs the phrase '*fírinni flatha*', which is of course very similar.<sup>616</sup> As will be discussed below, the context in which this text uses *fírinni flatha* suggests that the author was referring to the same concept as *fír flathemon*. The absence of the phrase *fír flathemon* in the other three *tecosca* (*TCús*, *BCC*, and *Cert cech rí*g) is striking. Just because the phrase is lacking, however, does not mean that the concept is too. Therefore, in order to establish whether or not these texts employ the concept of *fír flathemon*, it will be necessary to look at the possible use of themes and motifs associated with it.

The phrase *fír flathemon* is used quite extensively in *AM*. It is used as the opening formula for fifteen paragraphs in *AM* (B) (§§ 12-21, 24-28), and for eighteen paragraphs in *AM* (A) (§§ 10a-21, 22-26). This opening formula can be normalised as '*is tre fír flathemon*', 'it is through the ruler's truth'.<sup>617</sup> The paragraphs in question list both the benefits that accrue from *fír flathemon*, and the actions that characterise it. In contrast to both recensions of *AM*, the phrase *fír flathemon* is used only once in *TC*. The final line of § 1 reads: '*ar is tre fír flathemon do-indnaig márDía insin uile*', 'for it is through the ruler's truth that great God bestows all that'.<sup>618</sup> The retrospective nature of this line would seem to suggest that the contents of the entire paragraph pertain to *fír flathemon*. Much like the '*is tre fír flathemon*' series in *AM*, *TC* § 1 contains a mixture of prescribed behaviour and imagery of good fortune and abundance that would be best explained as the actions and benefits that characterise *fír flathemon*. The opening question for *TC* § 1 ('*Cid as dech do rí*g?', 'what is

---

<sup>615</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 185-91, 203-12.

<sup>616</sup> *Diambad*, § 37. Cf. *eDIL*, s.v. *fírinne*.

<sup>617</sup> Note that this is Fomin's translation of the phrase. Kelly has translated '*is tre fír flathemon*' as 'it is through the justice of the ruler'.

<sup>618</sup> *TC*, § 1.51.

best for a king?') would indicate that the content in this paragraph is indeed directed towards a king.<sup>619</sup>

Concerning the results or effects of *fír* and *gáu flathemon*, most scholars have spoken generally of themes of fertility, abundance, stability, and fair weather. For the most part, *AM* and the narrative literature have informed scholarly perceptions of this aspect of *fír flathemon*. This began with Dillon, who, in his two seminal articles from 1947, provided lengthy quotations from *AM* (A) in order to illustrate what he called '*fírinne flatha*' or 'Prince's Truth'.<sup>620</sup> Although Dillon also provided some comparanda from *Diambad* and *Geneamuin Chormaic*, 'The Birth of Cormac', it would be some time before anyone would use these examples again, and his translation of the relevant segments of *AM* would remain the only available English translation of the text until Kelly's edition of *AM* (B) in 1976.<sup>621</sup> In his highly influential O'Donnell lectures, *AM* formed the sole source for Binchy's description of *fír flathemon*. His description has been quoted already in this thesis, but it is worth partially repeating here because it lists the perceived benefits of *fír flathemon* so succinctly:

Through *fír flathemon* come prosperity and fertility for man, beast, and crops; the seasons are temperate, the corn grows strong and heavy, mast and fruit are abundant on the trees, cattle give milk in plenty, rivers and estuaries teem with fish; plagues, famines, and natural calamities are warded off; internal peace and victory over external enemies are guaranteed.<sup>622</sup>

---

<sup>619</sup> *TC*, § 1.2.

<sup>620</sup> Dillon, 'Archaism', 250-51. Dillon, 'Act of Truth', 138-39.

Let him magnify Truth, it will magnify him.

Let him strengthen Truth, it will strengthen him.

Let him preserve Truth, it will preserve him.

Let him raise up Truth, it will raise him up.

For so long as he preserves Truth, good will not be lacking to him, and his reign will not fail.

For by the prince's truth great peoples are ruled

By the prince's truth great mortality is warded off from men.

By the prince's truth great battles are driven off into the enemies' country.

By the prince's truth every right prevails and every vessel is full in his reign.

[...]

By the prince's truth fair weather comes in each fitting season, winter fine and frosty, spring dry and windy, summer warm with showers of rain autumn with heavy dews and fruitful. For it is the prince's falsehood that brings perverse weather upon wicked peoples, and dries up the fruit of the earth.

<sup>621</sup> Dillon, 'Archaism', 250-51.

<sup>622</sup> Binchy, *CASK*, p. 10.

Two works by Ó Cathasaigh, published in the late 1970s, bucked this trend by focussing instead upon the evidence of the narrative literature.<sup>623</sup> Several vernacular tales (*Geneamuin Chormaic*, *Cath Maige Mucrama* ‘The Battle of Mag Mucrama’, and *Aided Meic Con* ‘The Death of Mac Con’) relate an episode from the life of Cormac mac Airt in which he corrects a false judgement made by his king, Lugaid mac Con. In these tales, the false judgement of Lugaid provokes the partial collapse of the house in which it was made.<sup>624</sup> In *Cath Maige Mucrama*, however, it is also stated that Lugaid was subsequently deposed because the grass, trees, and crops failed to grow.<sup>625</sup> In his *Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt*, Ó Cathasaigh regarded these as the detrimental results of Lugaid’s *gáu flathemon*.<sup>626</sup> In ‘The Semantics of *Síd*’, Ó Cathasaigh considered the evidence for *fír flathemon* in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*. This time, his analysis emphasised the importance of *síd* ‘peace’ as a ‘symptom’ of *fír flathemon*.<sup>627</sup> It is noteworthy that, in both instances, *AM* was the only non-narrative example employed by Ó Cathasaigh.<sup>628</sup> In ‘The Semantics of *Síd*’ he declared that ‘the doctrine of *fír flathemon* is set out in the celebrated wisdom text *Audacht Moraind*’, and he stated that ‘much the same doctrine finds narrative expression in some of the king tales’.<sup>629</sup>

Following Ó Cathasaigh, the next scholar to look at the effects of *fír* and *gáu flathemon* in any real depth was McCone in 1990.<sup>630</sup> Once again, *AM* is regarded as containing ‘a rather comprehensive list of the benefits of *fír flathemon*’, but McCone also drew comparison with a number of vernacular narratives and went into more detail concerning these. In *Scél na Fír Flatha*, McCone drew particular attention to the benefits of *mes 7 clas 7 murthorud* (‘fruit of tree and earth and sea’), *síd 7 sáime 7 subae* (‘peace and ease and pleasure’), the absence of *guin* and *díberg* (‘slaughter’ and ‘reaving’), and proper inheritance.<sup>631</sup> He noted also the emphasis upon ‘social stability’, in validation of Conchobar’s reign in *Mescad Ulad*.<sup>632</sup> As for

---

<sup>623</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, *Cormac mac Airt*. Ó Cathasaigh, ‘Semantics of *Síd*’.

<sup>624</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, *Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>625</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, *Cormac mac Airt*, p. 65.

<sup>626</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, *Cormac mac Airt*, p. 65.

<sup>627</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, ‘Semantics of *Síd*’, p. 24.

<sup>628</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, *Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 64-65. Ó Cathasaigh, ‘Semantics of *Síd*’, p. 22.

<sup>629</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, ‘Semantics of *Síd*’, p. 22.

<sup>630</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 129-30, 139, 143.

<sup>631</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 129.

<sup>632</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 129.

*gáu flathemon*, he provided narrative examples for famine, specifically involving a lack of grain, mast, fish, and milk, and poor weather from a tale involving the usurper Cairbre Cinn Chait.<sup>633</sup> McCone also used the example of the failure of the grass, leaves, and corn in *Cath Maige Mucrama* following the false judgement of Lugaid that Ó Cathasaigh had previously pointed out. Finally, McCone pointed to how ‘in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* hostile incursions and mayhem signal the beginning of the end for Conaire’.<sup>634</sup>

After McCone, a number of scholars briefly treated the effects of *fír* and *gáu flathemon*. Unfortunately, these involved the same examples and the same general observations, and added nothing relevant to current investigation.<sup>635</sup> It would be pointless to discuss these here, except to note the achievement of a consensus view that vernacular narrative and *AM* portray very similar ideas about the benefits of *fír flathemon* and the detriments of *gáu flathemon*. It was not until Fomin’s *Instructions for Kings* (2013) that the effects of *fír* and *gáu flathemon* were analysed in systematic detail. Fomin examined both recensions of *AM*, his own normalised edition of the relevant sections of *TC*, and the ninth *abusio* of *De duodecim abusivis*. Fomin also made comparisons with various narrative examples, many of which were previously considered by Ó Cathasaigh or McCone. It will not be necessary to consider these in detail here. It will, however, be profitable to summarise some of Fomin’s findings with respect to *AM* and *TC*, so that they can be compared to the other *tecosca*.

Concerning the benefits of *fír flathemon*, Fomin noticed a number of parallels. The phrases ‘*torud ina flaith [...] talam toirthrech*’, ‘fruits in his reign [...] earth fruitful’, from *TC* § 1.20 and § 1.25, and ‘*cach soad soinnech, cach tír toirthrech*’, ‘every well-being is prosperous, every land is fertile’, from *AM* (A) § 14, display verbal and notional similarities for the expression of general fertility and fruitfulness.<sup>636</sup> Fomin also looked at the triad of *ith* ‘corn, grain’, *blicht* ‘milk’, and *mes* ‘tree-fruit’, which was originally identified by McCone in the

---

<sup>633</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 129-30.

<sup>634</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 130.

<sup>635</sup> Aitchison, ‘Kingship, Society, and Sacrality’, 62-63. Rob Meens, ‘Politics, Mirrors of Princes, and the Bible: Sins, Kings, and the Well-Being of the Realm’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 7 (1998), 345-57 (350-51). Daniel Bray, ‘Sacral Elements of Irish Kingship’, *This Immense Panorama: Studies in Honour of Eric J. Sharpe*, eds. Carole M. Cusack and Peter Oldmeadow (Sydney: Schools of Study in Religion, University of Sydney, 1999), pp. 105-16 (p. 111).

<sup>636</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 205.

vernacular sources.<sup>637</sup> All three occur together in the legal tract *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid* ‘On the Confirmation of Right and Law’, the narrative tale *Aided Chrimthain* ‘The Death of Crimthann’, and in *AM* (B), but they also occur in various combinations in the context of abundance and rulership in other sources too.<sup>638</sup> In *AM* (B) §§ 17-19, these three occur as ‘*manna mármeso márfedo* [...] *mlechti márbóis* [...] *cech etho ardósil imbeth*’, ‘abundances of great tree-fruit of the great wood [...] milk-yields of great cattle [...] abundance of every high, tall corn’. *AM* (A) §§ 15-16 are very similar, but lack any reference to dairy produce: ‘*cach etha ardúasail immed* [...] *mesrada mórfheda ath- manna milisi –mblaissiter*’, ‘an abundance of every high corn [...] tree-fruits of a great forest are tasted [like] sweet manna’. *TC*, on the other hand, makes reference only to ‘*mess for crannaib*’, ‘mast upon trees’.<sup>639</sup> Concerning the absence of *blicht* in *AM* (A), Fomin has suggested that:

The compilers of the texts must have been aware of the formula *ith 7 mblicht 7 mess*. Given the later character of Recension A [...] it is however possible that the compilers [...] either considered the inclusion of milk-yields to be redundant, or presumed that mentioning two of the three would be enough to convey the underlying concept.<sup>640</sup>

The fertility of man and beast is another theme connected to the imagery of *fír flathemon*. Fomin has noted the following examples from *AM* (B) §§ 20, 21, 25, and 27: ‘*aidble éisc i sruthaib snáither* [...] *clanda caini cain-tussimter* [...] *corosaig cech bó cenn a h-ingelte* [...] *comrara comge cethre caith torith críchat*’, ‘abundance of fish swim in streams [...] fair children are well begotten [...] each cow reaches the end of its grazing [...] enclosures of protection of cattle [and] of every produce extend’.<sup>641</sup> He also found the following parallels in *AM* (A) §§ 14, 18, and 23: ‘*lám nad lánchóir* [...] *com(b)r rar comgi cecha cethra* [...] *a huisciu íasc tonnaib*’, ‘parturition is wholly proper [...] an enclosure of protection of each cow [...] fishes out of waters [in the midst of] streams’.<sup>642</sup> Clearly, the later of the two recensions has less to say on the subject, and this time the verbal parallels are not as strong. In addition

<sup>637</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 121. Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 205-7 *eDIL*, s.v. *ith*, s.v. 1 *blicht*, s.v. 2 *mes(s)*.

<sup>638</sup> McCone, *PPCP*, p. 121. Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 205-7.

<sup>639</sup> *TC*, § 1.23.

<sup>640</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 207.

<sup>641</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 207-8.

<sup>642</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 208.

to this, Fomin himself has pointed out ‘the paucity of comparative data in *TC*’, which provides only ‘*íasc i n-indberaib*’, ‘fish in river-mouths’.<sup>643</sup>

Comparing this imagery of fecundity with the four *tecosca* not considered by Fomin yields mixed results. Neither *BCC* nor *TCús* make reference to *ith*, *blicht*, *mes*, *íasc*, *bó*, or any similar agricultural imagery. *BCC* does show concern, however, for the increase of human progeny. Paragraph b, line 3477, reads: ‘*Mrogatar genealaigi gésci úa genit [h]er gein*’, ‘Let the branches of genealogy from which offspring is born be extended’.<sup>644</sup> *TCús*, on the other hand, makes a clear association between fecundity and the behaviour of the king:

*Bid dluithi rechtge do dligeð naro ecoillet do mifoltæ (.i. do mignim)  
tromtortha na tuath forollat (.i. atat) for do greiss.*

Let the law of thy rule be consolidated lest thy misdeeds ruin the heavy fruits  
of the people that increase under thy protection.<sup>645</sup>

This paragraph shows an awareness of the mechanics of *fír flathemon*. However, it is interesting to note that the trigger for this mechanism is not specifically *fír*, but would seem to be law and rule.<sup>646</sup>

A comparison with *Cert cech ríð* and *Diambad* is more fruitful. Both of these texts feature the triad of *ith*  $\gamma$  *blicht*  $\gamma$  *mes*. *Cert cech ríð* § 16 gives:

*Cendaig in mes mór · ocus tess ingréin  
cendaig ith is blicht · for slicht cech ríð réil.*

Purchase the goodly mast, and heat from the sun;  
purchase corn and milk, as every famous king has done.

*Diambad* § 37 reads:

*Fírinni flatha rofess : tress dobeir na catha i cess  
dobeir in mblicht isin mbith : dobeir in n-ith is in mess.*

<sup>643</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 208.

<sup>644</sup> Fomin, ‘*Bríathartheosc Con Culainn*’, pp. 98-99.

<sup>645</sup> *Cath Airtig*, § 3.

<sup>646</sup> The meaning of *mifoltæ* is not entirely clear. Perhaps it derives from *folud* and should be understood to mean something similar to *anfolad*, ‘injury, wrong, injustice’. *eDIL*, s.v. *folud*, s.v. *anfolad*.

A prince's truthfulness – it is known – is a conflict which brings debility on hosts; it brings milk into the world, it brings corn and mast.

In both examples, a fourth item is added to the familiar triad. The addition of 'heat from the sun' by *Cert cech rí* seems to be unique. Fomin has highlighted the theme of fair weather in *AM* (A) § 25 and *TC* § 3a, but these focus on the seasons, and neither mentions the sun specifically.<sup>647</sup> A comparison may be made, however, with the following line from *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*: 'ní taudcha[i]d nél tar gréin ó gabais flaith ó medón erraich co medón fogmair', 'a cloud has not come over the sun since he took up sovereignty from the beginning of spring to the middle of autumn.'<sup>648</sup> The addition of 'debility on hosts' by *Diambad* is reminiscent of *AM* (B) § 15 and *AM* (A) § 11, both of which attribute to *fír flathemon* the dispatch of a ruler's battalions against his foes.<sup>649</sup> The use of the verb *cennaigid* 'buys, purchases' in connection with the effects of fecundity in *Cert cech rí* is unique, but it leaves no doubt as to the agency of the ruler over these benefits. Idiosyncrasies aside, it seems clear that the compilers of these two texts were familiar with the mechanics of *fír flathemon* and with the triad *ith 7 blicht 7 mes*. Since both of these texts are Middle Irish, Fomin's suggestion that *blicht* was omitted from *AM* (A), because it was deemed redundant by a Middle Irish writer, seems unlikely.

The other products of *fír flathemon* raised by Fomin lack any parallels in *BCC*, *TCús*, *Diambad*, and *Cert cech rí*. An abundance of ships in ports, fine clothing, mead and wine, and the high status of the men of art – none of these things are cited as the products of rulership in these texts.<sup>650</sup> Worth noting is how Fomin has regarded 'the picture of good weather as an aspect of righteous rule' to be 'extremely important' for *AM*, *TC*, and *Togail*

---

<sup>647</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 208-10.

<sup>648</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 209.

<sup>649</sup> *AM* (B) § 15.

*Is tre f. fl. ath- (mór)cathu fri crícha comnámát –cuirethar.*

It is through the justice of the ruler that he dispatches (great) battalions to the borders of hostile neighbours.

*AM* (A) § 11.

*Is tria fír flatheman at- a mórchatha for crícha comnámát –cuiredar.*

It is through the ruler's truth that he dispatches his great battalions towards the boundaries of his fellow fighters.

<sup>650</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 210-14.

*Bruidne Da Derga*.<sup>651</sup> This is obviously not the case for the other four *tecosca* and, in fact, it is possible that Fomin has overstated the case on this matter. Although the relevant paragraphs from *AM* and *TC* are verbally very similar, the fact is that *TC* § 3a does not explicitly associate good weather with rulership. This is a particularly important concern for a text such as *TC*, which contains a great deal of material patently unconnected to rulership. Furthermore, and as Fomin himself has noted, Recensions L and X place the paragraph in question in the middle of the text, making it § 17. By this stage, the *tecosc* has long since moved on from the topic of rulership. Fomin has chosen to follow the position of the paragraph in Recension N, placing it between those paragraphs concerned with the benefits of the kingdom and the prerogatives of a lord and an alehouse.<sup>652</sup> He is not necessarily wrong to do so, but these doubts should be borne in mind when considering whether the theme was indeed central to the concept of rulership in *TC*. In his notes for *TC* § 17 (3a), Meyer compared the ‘weather-prognostics’ of this paragraph with a passage in *Hibernica Minora*, which predicts the weather for each month based upon its calends.<sup>653</sup> In this context, there seems to be no need to associate weather portents with the ideology of rulership, although the compiler of Recension N may have wished to do so.

It has been shown already, in the third chapter of this thesis, that Ó Cathasaigh emphasised the importance of *síd* ‘peace’ as a symptom of *fír flathemon*. This assertion was one part of a two-part theory that sought to associate *fír flathemon* with the Otherworld. Ó Cathasaigh wrote:

Legitimate kingship has its source in the Otherworld, and [...] the reign of the righteous king is marked by peace (as well as plenty) in the land. That is as much to say that 1 *síd* denotes the source of *fír flathemon*, and 2 *síd* its symptom.<sup>654</sup>

Fomin did not investigate Ó Cathasaigh’s claim specifically, but did observe that ‘the text of *AM* preserved a number of passages devoted to the topic of peace as one of the constituents of the righteous ruler’.<sup>655</sup> *AM* (B) § 14, for example, states:

---

<sup>651</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 208-9.

<sup>652</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 169-70 n. 15.

<sup>653</sup> Meyer, *TC*, p. 55.

<sup>654</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, ‘Semantics of *Síd*’, p. 22.

<sup>655</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 193.

*Is tre f. fl. fo- síd sámi sube soad sádili –sláini.*

It is through the justice of the ruler that he secures peace, tranquillity, joy, ease, [and] comfort.

A version of this line appears in *AM (A) § 13*:

*is tria f.f. [foss] sláne, síd, subaigi, sám[a]e, soad, sothocath, somaíne, sádaili, slánchridi.*

It is through the ruler's truth that [there is] stability, health, peace, joy, tranquillity, well-being, good fortune, profit, repose, wholeness of heart.

As Fomin has stated, there is a clear association here been *síd, fír flathemon*, and ideal rulership. From *TC § 1*, Fomin cited line 11, '*síd do thúathaib*', 'peace to kingdoms', and line 42, '*úaiged cach síd*', 'let him join together every peace'.<sup>656</sup> As mentioned previously, § 1.51 retrospectively attributes the preceding lines of § 1 with *fír flathemon* and God's favour, and so *síd* must be understood in these terms. Fomin also cited § 2.11, '*omúaiged síd*', 'let him consolidate peace'.<sup>657</sup> Since § 2 takes as its subject matter the behaviour appropriate for a king, there can be no doubt that peace is here connected to the king's actions and character. Although, there is no indication of *fír flathemon* in this paragraph.

*BCC* and *TCús* do not mention *síd* at all, but *Diambad* mentions *síd* 'peace' twice. In § 17, peace does seem to be a hallmark of a good ruler:

*Cetharda dlegar do flaith : corop maith dó siu ocus tall  
síd i túathaib, termann cell : aisc for fell, fortacht na fann.*

There are four things a prince should have, in order that he may do well both here and hereafter: peace among his tribes, protection of churches, reproof of treason, help for the weak.

Peace is here treated as an important consideration, occupying as it does the first place in a list of ideal conditions of rule required for success in both this life and the afterlife. The second occurrence, in § 18, is quite a general observation and not necessarily the direct product of rulership: '*is ferr síd sohocad sruith*', 'better is peace than prudent goodly

---

<sup>656</sup> *TC*, § 1.11.

<sup>657</sup> *TC*, § 1.42: *Úaiged cach síd*, 'let him join together every peace'. *TC*, § 2.11: *Comúaiged síd*, 'let him consolidate peace'.

warfare'. Nevertheless, the occurrence of *síd* in two sequential stanzas like this emphasises its importance. Furthermore, and although their precise meaning is obscure, the other three lines in § 18 do seem to advise the correct course of action to ensure peace, which would suggest that the advisee was being held responsible for the procurement of this condition.<sup>658</sup>

*Cert cech rí* also mentions *síd* twice. In both instances, *síd* would seem to form an important subject of advice. In § 6, the text takes its typically pragmatic tone: '*ná geib síd cen gíall · fora tair do lám*', 'make not peace without a hostage, wherever your power extends'. This advice undeniably makes it the responsibility of the advisee to procure peace. The recommendation that peace should not be made without hostages reflects the importance of this practice in early Irish society. In the second instance, peace is associated with a good wife:

*Cuingidh a rígh raith · go sídh is go suth  
rígan féta fial · bus maith ciall is cruth.*

O gracious king, for peace and offspring, seek a generous modest queen, of good intellect and form.<sup>659</sup>

Ranking peace alongside offspring is potentially another indication of the sincerity of the theme in this text, and, again, it is made the responsibility of the advisee.

From these examples, it seems that most *tecosca* are generally concerned with *síd* 'peace', but not always in the same way. *AM* does indeed regard *síd* 'peace' as a typical product of *fír flathemon*, and it is comparable to Ó Cathasaigh's theory about the important connection between *síd* and *fír flathemon*. *TC* is similar, in that it expresses the belief that *síd* 'peace' was the responsibility of the king, and a symptom of *fír flathemon*. However, it must be noted that *síd* is not elevated in either text in terms of its significance in relation to *fír flathemon*. *Diambad* and *Cert cech rí* also show considerable concern for peace. In the case of *Diambad* § 17, the association of *síd* with success in this life and the afterlife

---

<sup>658</sup> *Diambad*, § 18.

*Is ferr síd sochocad sruith : ní ar lín óc brister cath  
id ara fastas cech ech : a ellma as dech do cech rath.*

Better is peace than prudent goodly warfare; it is not by [mere] numbers a battle is won; ...; despatch is what is best for success.

<sup>659</sup> *Cert cech rí*, § 68.

imbues the concept with a sense of the supernatural that is reminiscent of depictions of *fír flathemon* elsewhere. In *Diambad* § 18 and *Cert cech rí* §§ 6 and 68, however, *síd* is achieved through prudent decision-making and savvy. In the examples from *Cert cech rí*, there is nothing supernatural about the source or results of *síd* that would suggest a connection with the Otherworld, *geis*, or *fír flathemon*. Given the relative chronology of these texts, then, it would seem that whilst *síd* continued to be a concern for these advice texts, there was a shift in how this concern was handled; from a direct association with *fír flathemon*, towards more pragmatic considerations.

Finally, it is necessary to consider the inverse of *fír flathemon*: *gáu flathemon*, the ‘falsehood of the ruler’. The phrase *gáu flathemon* itself does not actually appear in any of the *tecosca*, but the words *gáu* and *gó*, both meaning ‘falsehood’, and compounds using *gú-/gó-*, ‘false-’, can be found.<sup>660</sup> *AM* (B) § 54m sets up a clear conceptual opposition between *fír* and *gó* by advising ‘*to-léici gó do fír*’, ‘falsehood yields to truth’. A similar opposition is established in *TC* and *Diambad*. In *TC*, § 6.21-22 advises:

*Miscniged gói.  
Carad fírinni.*

Let him hate falsehood.  
Let him love righteousness.

Whilst *Diambad* § 8 observes:

*Anas dech flatha fria lá : fírinne trócaire tua  
anas messu d’inchaib rí : sechmall ar fír, fuilled gua.*

The things that are best for a prince during his reign are truth mercy and silence; those that are worst for a king’s honour are straying from the truth and adding to the false.

In these instances, these texts are using *gáu/gó* as an abstract concept. A more concrete use of these words can also be found, referring to either a lie or a false judgement. This can be seen in *AM* (A), §§ 31, 30, and 34, and *Cert cech rí* §§ 6 and 17, all of which advise against such falsehood. These examples will be discussed further below, when the thesis

---

<sup>660</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. *gáu*, s.v. 3 *gó*, s.v. *gú-*.

comes to consider the verbal pronouncement of truth and falsehood. For now, it is enough to note this usage.

Concerning the inversion of *fír flathemon* imagery, Fomin has identified some natural catastrophes in *AM* and *TC*. Paragraph 12 of *AM* (B) says *fír flathemon* has the power to ward off: ‘*mortlithi (mórslóg no) márlochét*’, ‘plagues [and] great lightnings’.<sup>661</sup> Kelly believed *mórslóg* to be ‘an erroneous gloss on *mortlithi*’, but Fomin translated the term as ‘great (invading) hosts’ and considered it to be a distinct catastrophe that could be prevented through *fír flathemon*.<sup>662</sup> He was led to this conclusion by the evidence of *De duodecim abusivis* and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, both of which include attacks on a kingdom by outside enemies in their descriptions of such kingdom-wide calamity.<sup>663</sup> Comparanda from *AM* (A) and *TC* are dubious, however, as Fomin has admitted:

Neither the great hosts nor great lightnings of B are mentioned in A. Even the meaning of A’s reading *morlaithi* is not clear. [...] As far as the relevant section of *TC* is concerned, it is mainly the natural course of events that brings various types of disasters which are not in any way tied with the ruler and his misdemeanours.<sup>664</sup>

*AM* (A), on the other hand, does state that *gó flatha* ‘falsehood of the ruler’ is to blame for *sína saeba* ‘deranged weather’, and that it *co[n]-sega talman torad* ‘dries-up the land’s produce’, which is as clear an inversion *fír flathemon* as one can imagine.<sup>665</sup> In the *tecosca* not considered by Fomin, it is difficult to find comparative examples for this. *TCús* comes the closest. Whilst it does not mention ‘*mortlithi (mórslóg no) márlochét*’, this text does warn of the ruin of *tromtortha* ‘heavy fruits’ as a direct result of the ruler’s misbehaviour.<sup>666</sup> This infertility of the land in response to a ruler’s actions likely reflect a conception of *gáu flathemon* here.<sup>667</sup>

---

<sup>661</sup> *AM* (B), § 12.

<sup>662</sup> Kelly, *AM*, p. 26. Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 186.

<sup>663</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 186-88.

<sup>664</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 186.

<sup>665</sup> *AM* (A), § 25.

<sup>666</sup> *Cath Airtig*, § 3.

<sup>667</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 189-90.

Given the frequent use of *AM* as evidence for *fír flathemon* by modern scholars, it should come as no surprise to find that this *teosc* deals with *fír flathemon* the most. More specifically, it is *AM* (B) that contains the most imagery of fertility and abundance in connection with just rulership. *AM* (A) and *TC* make considerable references to fecundity in connection with a the ruler's behaviour and character, but they do not repeat all of the motifs established by *AM* (B). What is more surprising, perhaps, is the lack of comparative evidence in the other *teosca*. *Diambad*, *Cert cech rí*, and *TCús* each demonstrate an awareness of the fecundating effects of ideal rulership, but show considerably less interest in this than *AM* (B), or even *AM* (A) and *TC*. Finally, *BCC* makes no use of such imagery. Given that the imagery of *fír flathemon* is most abundant in the Old Irish *teosca* (*AM* (B) and *TC*), and least so in the Middle Irish examples (*TCús*, *BCC*, *Cert cech rí*, and *Diambad*), it would be tempting to propose that the theme became somewhat redundant as time went by. Jaski, for example, has suggested that the theme of *fír flathemon* became a literary cliché.<sup>668</sup>

It is impossible to prove or disprove Jaski's claim, but it is worth pointing out that the evidence of narrative literature suggests a continued interest in *fír flathemon* in the Middle Irish period. Tales such as *TBDD*, *Buidne Meic Da Réo*, and *Cath Maige Mucrama* describe the success or ruination of kings and kingdoms in response to the ethics of royal behaviour, yet each of these texts only reached their extant forms in the later Old or Middle Irish periods. On the other hand, Jaski's suggestion might explain why the expression of *fír flathemon* in the four later *teosca* is so meagre, but still allow for the continued use of the theme. In defence of this, one could point to how *Diambad* and *Cert cech rí* dedicate only one stanza each to the imagery of abundance, and in both cases repeat the familiar triad of *ith* > *blicht* > *mes*. Even Fomin has suggested that, by the time *AM* (A) was being compiled, this triad had become formulaic. Nevertheless, the fact that neither *teosc* simply regurgitates the triad, but rather adapts it, is perhaps more indicative of a living tradition than a fossilised one. Furthermore, it has been shown how both *Cert cech rí* and *TCús* display an awareness and of the mechanics of *fír/gáu flathemon* without explicitly mentioning either term. This could be read as an indication of familiarity with the concept, without being over-reliant on formulaic clichés.

---

<sup>668</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, p. 80.

Bhreathnach and O'Connor are two scholars who have each attempted to explain the disparity of tone and content between the Old Irish and Middle Irish *tecosca* in ways that can help explain the different use of *fír flathemon*. Bhreathnach has argued that:

The *speculum* texts in Irish [...] follow a pattern identified in Anglo-Saxon England and on the Continent: the development from an ideal theoretical kingship to a practical medieval Christian kingship in which the concerns of the Church, state and an orderly society are crucial.<sup>669</sup>

In defence of this idea, Bhreathnach used *Cert cech rí* as a prime example. In this *tecosc*, she observed that 'the theory of the ideal king is given but a passing reference' and, instead, the text 'provides a more realistic image of the concerns of an early medieval Irish provincial king'.<sup>670</sup> O'Connor has articulated a similar idea:

Kingship ideology had been undergoing convulsive changes ever since the B-recension of *Audacht Morainn* had first been written, and by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as Donnchadh Ó Corráin has put it, "rule over the entire island of Ireland had become, for good or for ill, the prize in the political game".<sup>671</sup>

According to O'Connor, the political necessities of the Middle Irish period are reflected in the increasingly pragmatic nature of the advice contained in the *tecosca*: 'the tone of mirrors for princes changed: the tenth- or eleventh-century *Cert cech rí co réil* [...] rejects the compassionate approach [...] of *Audacht Morainn* [...], recommending instead a zero-tolerance policy involving forceful subjugation, harsh tribute levied and plenty of hostages taken'.<sup>672</sup> These theories might explain why the later *tecosca* dedicate fewer lines to the subject of *fír flathemon*, but they need not suggest that the theme became a mere cliché.

Finally, the privileged position of *AM* in modern scholarship on kingship ideology must also be acknowledged here. *AM* (B) contains the earliest and the most extensive consideration of *fír flathemon* of any text. As such, it is seminal and unique, yet it has been used extensively by scholars to construct a universal concept of *fír flathemon*. To a certain

---

<sup>669</sup> Edel Bhreathnach, 'Perceptions of Kingship in Early Medieval Vernacular Literature', in *Lordship in Medieval Ireland: Image and Reality*, eds. Linda Doran and James Lyttleton (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), pp. 21-46 (p. 31).

<sup>670</sup> Bhreathnach, 'Perceptions of Kingship', p. 29.

<sup>671</sup> O'Connor, '*Bruidne Meic Da Réo*', 138.

<sup>672</sup> O'Connor, '*Bruidne Meic Da Réo*', 138. Cf. O'Connor, *Da Derga's Hostel*, pp. 298-99.

extent, asking how far any *tecosc* displays evidence of *fír flathemon* is not so different from asking how similar it is to *AM* (B). There are different ways to explain why *AM* contains more evidence for *fír flathemon* than the other *tecosca*, but ultimately the diversity of these texts is the most important lesson learned.

## The Verbal Pronouncement of Truth and Falsehood

The verbal pronouncement of true or false judgements has frequently been considered a major component of *fír flathemon* and of sacred kingship in early Ireland.<sup>673</sup> Consideration of this aspect has its origins in Dillon's concept of an Indo-European 'Act of Truth', and arguably reached maturity with Ó Cathasaigh's exposition of the cosmic effects of true and false judgements.<sup>674</sup> Since then, Jaski has argued strongly against the idea that the verbal pronouncement of truth by a ruler was an essential component of *fír flathemon*.<sup>675</sup> Jaski was obviously concerned with historical practice, whilst Ó Cathasaigh was more interested in the literary expression of ideology. Ó Cathasaigh relied upon the evidence of narrative literature, whilst Jaski trusted the testimony of the vernacular laws almost exclusively. What, then, do the *tecosca* have to say on the matter? Watkins once defined 'Ruler's Truth' as 'an intellectual force, verbally expressed' and claimed that 'nowhere in Irish is the ideology of Ruler's Truth more clearly depicted than in *Audacht Morainn* Recension B'.<sup>676</sup> Thirty years earlier, however, Dillon (who had greatly influenced Watkins on the matter) had asserted that *AM* contained 'no specific Act of Truth'.<sup>677</sup> These discrepancies make the present investigation all the more important.

The following quotation is taken from *Cath Maige Mucrama*. It relates the false judgement of Lugaid Mac Con and the responding true judgement of Cormac mac Airt. According to Ó Cathasaigh, this passage is 'the *locus classicus* of *gáu flatha* in Irish literature'.<sup>678</sup>

*Fecht in didiu dofeotar cáirche glassin na rigna indí Lugdach. Táncais ir-réir Maic Con. 'Atberim,' or Mac Con, 'na cáirig ind.' Roboi Cormac 'na mac beg for dérgud inna farrad. 'Acc a daeteac,' or se. 'Ba córu lomrad na cairech il-lomrad na glasne: ár ásfaid in glassen, ásfaid ind oland forsnaib cáirib.'*

*'Is í ind fírbreth ón,' or cách. 'Is é dano mac na fír-[f]latha rod fuc.'*

<sup>673</sup> Cf. Dillon, 'Archaism', 247 ff. Ó Cathasaigh, *Cormac mac Airt*, pp. 63 ff. Watkins, 'Is tre fír flathemon', 181 ff. Ó Cathasaigh, 'Cath Maige Tuired', pp. 138 ff. Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 74 ff. William Sayers, 'Qualitative and Quantitative Criteria for Prosperous Royal Rule: Notes on *Audacht Morainn* and a Vedic Indian Analogue', *Studia Celtica*, 48 (2014), 93-106 (102 ff.).

<sup>674</sup> See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>675</sup> See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>676</sup> Watkins, 'Is tre fír flathemon', 181-82.

<sup>677</sup> Dillon, 'Act of Truth', 139.

<sup>678</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, 'Cath Maige Tuired', p. 139.

*Lais-sain focherd leth in taige fon aill .i. in leth ir-rucad in gúbreth. [...]*

*Bliadain do iarsain ir-rígu i Temraig 7 ní thánic fer tria thalmáin, na duil[le] tre fídbuid, ná granni i n-arbur. Ron-dlomsat didiu fir Herenn assa rígu ar ropo anflaith.<sup>679</sup>*

Once upon a time, then, (trespassing) sheep cropped the grassplot of Lugaid's queen. (The question of liability) was submitted to Mac Con's decision. "I adjudge," says Mac Con, "the sheep (to be forfeited) for it (the grass)." Cormac, then a little boy, was lying on a couch near him. "Nay, O fosterfather," saith he. "It is juster (to award) the shearing of the sheep for the cropping of the green. For (the grass) will grow on the green, (and) the wool will grow on the sheep." "That is the true judgement!" says everyone. "It is the son of the true prince that delivered it". With that (one) side of the house fell over on the other, namely, the side on which the false judgement was delivered. [...] For a year after that was he in kingship at Tara, and no grass came through ground, nor leaf through trees, nor grain into corn. Then the men of Ireland rejected him from his kingship because he was a false prince.

Undoubtedly, there could not be a more clear association of the verbal pronouncement of falsehood by a ruler with resultant natural disaster and political upheaval. The question is, do the *tecosca* display anything comparable to this?

The theme of judgement appears once in the lengthy '*is tre fír flathemon*' series in both recensions of *AM*.<sup>680</sup> *AM* (B) § 13 states: '*is tre fír flathemon conid(?) máirthúatha mármóini midethar*', which Kelly has translated as: 'it is through the justice of the ruler that he judges great tribes [and] great riches.' This line would seem to make the ruler the agent of judgement, and seems to associate this judgement with political success and economic prosperity. The ruler's ability, or authority, to judge is clearly associated with his 'truth'. *AM* (A) § 10a reads: '*ar is tria fír flatheman condat- túatha móra –midet[h]ar*', which Fomin has rendered: 'for it is through the ruler's truth that they judge great tribes.' Once again, the ability to judge, or the authority to do so, stems from *fír flathemon*.

Evidence for the efficacy of a ruler's judgement is provided by the *Ad-mestar* series in *AM* (B).<sup>681</sup> This section of the text opens with the statement:

<sup>679</sup> Whitley Stokes, 'The Battle of Mag Mucrime', *Revue Celtique*, 13 (1892), 426-74 (460-63).

<sup>680</sup> The *Is tre f. fl.* series spans the following sections in each recension: *AM* (B) §§ 12-21 and 24-28, *AM* (A) §§ 10a-26.

<sup>681</sup> *AM* (B), §§ 32-52. *eDIL*, s.v. *ad-midethar*: (a) 'aims at, essays', (b) 'evaluates, estimates'.

*Apair fris, ad-mestar dúili dúilemon tod[a]-rósat amal to-rrósata; nach rét nad asa moínib míastar, nícope lántoruth toda-béra(?)*.

Tell him, let him estimate the creations of the creator who made them as they were made; anything which he will not judge according to its profits will not give them with full increase.<sup>682</sup>

The text then proceeds to name different aspects of nature (the earth, animals, metals etc.) and society (war-bands, unfree persons, old men etc.) that the ruler should estimate according to their products or qualities. The key to understanding this series may lie with William Sayers's suggestion that 'the king's estimating or assessing [...] entails more than a simple quantitative measurement of objectively observable phenomena'.<sup>683</sup> According to Sayers, the *Ad-mestar* series might be related to Dillon's 'Act of Truth', in the sense that:

The act of measuring and communication of its results may be seen not only as a true statement of both present fact and ideal outcome but also a performative utterance that effects the increase in communal well-being through the ever-renewed cyclic progression that is just and effective rule.<sup>684</sup>

Sayers' theory would seem to make sense of the *Ad-mestar* series. Certainly, its imagery compares well to the imagery of fecundity that has generally been associated with benefits of *fír flathemon*: *torad*, *ith*, *blicht*, animals, and precious metals.<sup>685</sup> The proper functioning of society is also implicated via the ruler's estimation of different categories of person and what is due to them.<sup>686</sup> Thus, the *Ad-mestar* section of *AM* (B) undoubtedly associates the ruler's judgement with prosperity, abundance, and the proper functioning of society, even if there is no direct association between these estimations and the phrase '*fír flathemon*' here.

There is no *Ad-mestar* series in *AM* (A), but this later recension does display its own concern for proper judgement. In §§ 30, 31, and 34h, this recension gives three warnings against falsehood and false judgement.

---

<sup>682</sup> *AM* (B), § 32.

<sup>683</sup> Sayers, 'Quantitative and Qualitative', 102. Cf. Marilyn Gerriets, 'The King as Judge in Early Medieval Ireland', *Celtica*, 20 (1988), 29-52, (49-50).

<sup>684</sup> Sayers, 'Quantitative and Qualitative', 103.

<sup>685</sup> *AM* (B), §§ 32-45.

<sup>686</sup> *AM* (B), §§ 46-52.

*Abhair fris, naba rannaire rúamnae góe, ar ní-cumgat góa bai i cathrē.*

Tell him, let him not be a distributor of the colours of falsehood, for lies are not able to achieve (anything of) profit on the battlefield.<sup>687</sup>

*Abhair fris, ní-fuiglea co ngoí cathroe, ar ní-fríth ní-fuigbither brithem bas fíriu cathróe.*

Tell him, let him not, in falsehood, submit the matter to adjudication by combat, for there was not found [and] will not be found a judge more just than a combat.<sup>688</sup>

*Dligid cach gūbrethach garsē[c]le 7 athsuidi 7 díbdud.*

Every false-judging [person] is entitled to shortness of life, deposition from office and death.<sup>689</sup>

The shadow of violence and death that looms over these paragraphs is a notable contrast with the references to judgement in *AM* (B). Rather than describing the benefits of true judgements, *AM* (A) is concerned with the retribution that follows false judgment. Perhaps this emphasis may be related to the author's decision, as observed by O'Connor, to remove four lines from *AM* (B) that had encouraged mercy.<sup>690</sup> Also noteworthy, is the loss of office as a result of falsehood specified by § 34h. This sentiment does not occur in *AM* (B), but it is very reminiscent of the fate of Lugaid mac Con in *Cath Maige Mucrama*, as outlined above. One can only guess as to why the *Ad-mestar* series was omitted from *AM* (A), but perhaps it has something to do with this shift in emphasis towards more negative expressions of the theme of *fír/gáu* in the context of rulership.

*TC* is very concerned with judgement, making eight references to judgements by a ruler, between §§ 1 and 6.<sup>691</sup> In addition to these, one could add a number of other statements that refer to the promotion of truth and the suppression of falsehood, such as § 1.50 '*canad*

---

<sup>687</sup> *AM* (A), § 30.

<sup>688</sup> *AM* (A), § 31.

<sup>689</sup> *AM* (A), § 34h.

<sup>690</sup> O'Connor, '*Bruiden Meic Da Réo*', 138.

<sup>691</sup> *TC*, § 1.13: '*bretha fíra*', 'true judgements'. § 1.37: '*bered fírbretha*', 'let him give just judgements'. § 1.47: '*aisnéided réilbretha*', 'let him declare clear judgements'. § 6.12a: '*r. fénech*', 'let him be a judge'. § 6.18: '*bered fírbretha*', 'let him give just judgements'. § 6.33: '*mestar cách iarna thochus*', 'each should be judged according to his possessions'. § 6.35: '*rop midtid cach iarna míad*', 'let him be the one who judges everyone according to their honour'. § 6.39: '*roptar áithi étromma a bretha 7 a chocerta*', 'let his judgements and adjustments (to them) be sharp and not too harsh'.

*cach fír*, ‘let him sing every truth’, and § 1.35 ‘*oirced góí*’, ‘let him slay falsehood’.<sup>692</sup> Paragraph 3 also highlights the importance of judgements, although not necessarily by a king.<sup>693</sup> Suffice to say that judgement, truth, and falsehood were important concerns for whoever compiled *TC*. But did they consider these things to promote fecundity or cause catastrophe at all? Paragraph 1 bundles together a mixture of prescribed actions for the ruler with a number lines describing fecundity, the latter of which have been discussed above in connection with *fír flathemon*.<sup>694</sup> It has also been noted already that § 1.51 retrospectively attributes the contents of § 1 to *fír flathemon* and *márDía*, ‘great God’, so it seems reasonable to attribute the various benefits included in this section to the actions prescribed, including true judgements. As for §§ 3 and 6, there is no association in §§ 3 or 6 of judgement with supernatural effects. It is interesting, then, to note that these paragraphs take as their subjects: ‘*Cia dech do les túaithe?*’, ‘What is best for the benefit of a kingdom?’, and ‘*Cate téchta flatha?*’, ‘What is the entitlement of a lord?’. At the beginning of § 1, however, Cairbre asks: ‘*Cid as dech do rí?*’, ‘What is best for a king?’. It is perhaps significant that the only section that associates judgement with fecundity is the one that is most explicitly concerned with *ríg*. Thus, it appears that *TC* does associate the true judgement of a king (and specifically that of a king) with fecundity and *fír flathemon*, even if judgement does not hold a monopoly over these things.

References to judgement by a ruler are much less frequent in the remaining four *tecosca*. Scarcer still are indications that the compilers of these texts associated a ruler’s judgement with supernatural effects. Out of these, perhaps the closest case comes from *Cert cech rí*. Stanza 17 of this text reads:

*Cen gúbreith do breith · for saith nach for maith  
acht in chaingen fír · sed as dír do flaith.*

Giving no false judgement on the bad nor the good, but (finding) the true facts, that is fitting for a prince.

This section specifically advises against false judgement, and makes it clear that it is the ruler’s responsibility to ascertain the truth of legal claims (*caingen*). This is a strong

---

<sup>692</sup> See also *TC*, § 6.21-22.

<sup>693</sup> *TC*, § 3.28 ‘*Bretha fíra*’, ‘Just decisions’, § 3.44 ‘*Brithemnas co roscadaib*’, ‘Judgements based on maxims’, § 3.47 ‘*Gill fri bretha*’, ‘Pledges along with judgements’.

<sup>694</sup> *TC*, §§ 1.20, 1.23-29.

statement on the authority of the ruler's judgement, but there is no direct link to supernatural benefits or detriments. However, an indirect link can be established if one considers § 17 in relation to § 16, which attributes the benefits of *ith 7 blicht 7 mess* and *tess ingréin* to the actions of the ruler. It is not clear what action the ruler should undertake in order to invoke these benefits, he is merely advised to *cendaig* 'purchase' these things, but it was perhaps the intention that these benefits be associated with the emphasis on judgement found in § 17. If the audience of *Cert cech rí* was familiar with *AM (B)*, *TC*, or any of the narrative examples of the efficacy of a ruler's truth that have been observed by Ó Cathasaigh, then it seems likely that they would have made this connection.

*Diambad* makes only one mention of judgement by a ruler, and its significance is a little uncertain. Stanza 25 of the text is an eclectic mix of aphoristic observations. Only the last of these is relevant here, but the whole stanza is provided below to illustrate the context in which it is found.

*Doberar fail for bec mbúair : atchota mac trebar tír  
is fiach o gelltar ri nech : is fairchi breth briathar rí.*

A small herd is neglected; a prudent son obtains land; a promise made is a debt incurred; a king's word is the judgement of a parish (?).

There is no obvious thematic connection between the final line of this stanza and the preceding three. Nor does the judgement of the king complement either the following or the preceding stanzas of this *tecosc*, which are similarly heterogeneous. Thus, it seems necessary to consider this aphorism in isolation from its closest neighbours. O'Donoghue translated this line as 'a king's word is the judgement of a parish (?)', but obviously he was in doubt over the correct translation of '*fairchi*'. O'Donoghue took this to be *fairche* 'a parish or monastic house', but a more appealing translation would be a figurative use of the word *forcha*, 'a beetle, mallet'.<sup>695</sup> This maxim would then translate as something like 'the word of a king's judgement is a mallet'. This would be strong statement of the authority of a king's judgement, which would be very in tune with some of the other sentiments expressed in this *tecosc*. Stanzas 1 and 3-7, for example, all encourage strong rulership, albeit primarily through the exaction of hostages. In any case, although advocating a strong

---

<sup>695</sup> eDIL, s.v. *fairche*, s.v. *forcha*.

judicial function, *Diambad* does not associate the judgement of the king with the imagery of fecundity that appears at the end of the text.<sup>696</sup>

As for the other *tecosca*, *BCC* features no imagery of fecundity or catastrophe, and neither does it make reference to judgements. It can be passed over here. *TCús* features one reference to judgement, it reads: ‘*Bat firen firbrethach cen forbrisiu n-indsciu etir tethrai tren 7 trug*’, ‘Be just and righteous in judgement, not suppressing speech between the *tethra* of the strong and the weak’.<sup>697</sup> The word ‘*tethra*’ is obscure. Best was unable to suggest a translation, and none has come to light since then, but this does not prevent the analysis of this line here. The line obviously advises Cúscraid to make true judgement, with a double emphasis on truth. This line does not, however, grant these true judgements any supernatural effects. Instead, it seems as though *TCús* is more concerned with the social and ethical implications of judgement, apparently prescribing an equality of judgement over the weak and the strong. Of course, it is difficult to decide if this interpretation is accurate without knowing the definition of *tethra*, but it would at least be consistent with a similar sentiment expressed in *TC* § 6.17: ‘*turbad lobru la triunu*’, ‘let him exalt the weak together with the strong’.<sup>698</sup>

As with *fír flathemon*, the evidence for true judgements shows that *AM* (B) and *TC* are most comparable to the vernacular narratives in their representations of the verbal pronouncement of truth and falsehood. *AM* (B) and *TC* dedicate the most amount of attention to the importance of true judgements, and clearly connect these with *fír flathemon*, fecundity, abundance, prosperity etc. As before, this connection has a supernatural and idealistic dimension to it. Once again, *TCús*, *Cert cech rí*g, and *Diambad* display and awareness of key elements of the theme in question, but appear more willing to adapt these to their own needs. These Middle Irish *tecosca* emphasise the importance of truthful judgement for a ruler, but, for the most part, these three texts do not seem to connect a ruler’s judgement with cosmic benefits or detriments of the kind associated with *fír flathemon*. *Cert cech rí*g may be an exception here since the reference to royal judgement comes directly after the only stanza in which the concept of *fír flathemon* is

---

<sup>696</sup> *Diambad*, § 37.

<sup>697</sup> *Cath Airtig*, § 3.

<sup>698</sup> Cf. Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 218.

expounded. The reference to the ruler's judgement in *Cert cech rí*, however, seems to be understood in a legal sense within its own stanza. Interestingly, *TCús* takes an egalitarian tone, insisting upon equality before the law. This sentiment is perhaps similar to that of *Cert cech rí*. *Diambad*, on the other hand, strongly advocates the ruler's power and authority in matters of judgement, likening it to a mallet. It appears to be, both physically and notionally, quite removed from the imagery of *fír flathemon* at the end of the *tecosc*. Otherwise, its position amongst miscellaneous gnomes does not seem to be designed to affect its interpretation in any direct way. Finally, *AM (A)* presents an interesting case, choosing as it does to focus exclusively on the negative repercussions of false judgement, or *gáu flathemon*. In doing so, it seems to reflect Lúgaid mac Con's experience the most out of all the *tecosca*, but with an added emphasis upon the personal and violent aspects of the resultant destruction.

## **Geis**

In the third chapter of this thesis it was shown that *geis*, ‘taboo’, has been considered a component of sacred kingship by a number of scholars. In particular, *geis* has been viewed as being related to the concepts of Truth and *fír flathemon*. More than this, however, some scholars have even suggested a functional equivalence between *geis* and the *tecosca*.<sup>699</sup> Before examining the use of *geis* in the *tecosca*, it is worth saying a little more about the use of this concept in early Irish vernacular literature in general. To begin, it must be stated that *geis* is quite a multivalent concept. To show that this is the case, one can point to the diversity of contexts in which *geis* is used in early Irish literature. It is best to start with the *gessi* of two well-known royal characters: Conaire Mór and Cormac Conloinges. These two figures are the protagonists of the tales *TBDD* and *Bruiden Da Choca*, respectively. In these tales, these royal figures each receive a series of prohibitions that they eventually transgress, leading to their untimely deaths. These are prime examples of the sort of *gessi* that have led to their close association with sacred kingship. However, this narrative sequence, in which the *gessi* are pivotal, is not unique to royal characters. Heroes such as Cú Chulainn and Diarmuid Ua Duibhne, for example, also breach personal prohibitions on the way to their deaths.<sup>700</sup> Even much less significant characters, such as Bláí Briugu, can die as a direct result of breaching their *gessi*.<sup>701</sup>

One might argue, at least, that the foregoing examples of *geis* are unified by their prohibitive nature, their application to an individual, and their fatal consequences once transgressed. These aspects are the most commonly discussed components of *geis* amongst modern scholars. It can be surprising to discover, then, that none of these three components are guaranteed. Some *gessi*, for example, are positive, in the sense that they compel action rather than prohibit it. This is seen most clearly in the tale *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne*, ‘The Pursuit of Diarmaid and Gráinne’, in which Gráinne puts

---

<sup>699</sup> Charles-Edwards, ‘Geis’, 46-47. Sjöblom, *Early Irish Taboos*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>700</sup> Whitley Stokes, ‘Cuchulainn’s Death (abridged from the Book of Leinster, ff. 77, a 1-78, b 2)’, *Revue Celtique*, 3 (1876-78), 175-185. Standish Hayes O’Grady, *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne: The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne*, 2 vols (Dublin: Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, 1880).

<sup>701</sup> Kuno Meyer, *The Death-Tales of the Ulster Heroes*, Todd Lecture Series, 14 (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1906).

Diarmait under a *geis* to elope with her against his better judgement.<sup>702</sup> Similarly, O'Leary has argued that '*geis* demanding protection could be invoked as part of a set ritual in early Ireland'.<sup>703</sup> O'Leary has cited a number of examples from the narrative literature to illustrate his point. It must be noted, however, that none of O'Leary's examples actually use the word *geis*, but this in itself only gives greater cause for caution when attempting to define *geis*. More will be said on this below, but for now a clearer example of *geis* as a positive injunction can be found in *Tromdámh Guaire*, 'Guaire's Burdensome Company'.<sup>704</sup> In this tale, a *geis* is placed upon a group of offending poets, obliging them to recite the *Táin* to their disgruntled host. Importantly, the forfeit for this *geis* is not the death of the poets. Instead they are simply prevented from resting until their task has been completed.<sup>705</sup> This example is also noteworthy for the fact that the *geis* is here placed upon a collective, and not an individual. The idea that *gessi* can be placed on a group or category of person is also suggested by the text *Geasa agus Buadha Riogh Éireann*. As mentioned previously in this thesis, the *gessi* in this text are not personal, but attached to the office of one of five kingships (Tara, Leinster, Munster, Connacht, and Ulster).<sup>706</sup> It is noteworthy too that a failure to observe the *gessi* in *Geasa agus Buadha Riogh Éireann* is not associated at all with a tragic end of the sort that tends to befall the heroes of the narrative literature. Instead, this text prefers to express the benefits that might be expected by observing the *gessi*.<sup>707</sup>

The concepts that modern scholars casually refer to as *geis* are not always labelled as such in the sources. One reason for this is that there appear to have been a number of synonyms for *geis*. In *Geasa agus Buadha Riogh Éireann*, for example, each list of prohibitions is given in both prose and verse forms. In the prose sections, the word *urgart* or *airgart*, 'something prohibited; prohibition, ban, prevention', is used, and *geis* does not feature at all.<sup>708</sup> In the poetic sections, however, both terms are used interchangeably. In the narrative literature,

---

<sup>702</sup> O'Grady, *Dhiaruada agus Ghráinne*. Cf. Carney, *SILH*, pp. 192-3. Philip O'Leary, 'Honour-Bound: The Social Context of Early Irish Heroic Geis', *Celtica*, 20 (1988), 85-107, (99).

<sup>703</sup> O'Leary, 'Honour Bound', 98.

<sup>704</sup> O'Leary, 'Honour Bound', 96.

<sup>705</sup> O'Leary, 'Honour Bound', 96.

<sup>706</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>707</sup> See in particular the final paragraph of the text, which has been quoted in full previously. Dillon, 'Taboos', 24-25.

<sup>708</sup> Dillon, 'Taboos', 4. Cf. *eDIL*, s.v. *airgart*.

a reasonably common synonym for *geis* is *airmbert*, also *airmert* or *airmit* (although *geis* has been acknowledged to be ‘by far the most frequent term for denoting taboos’).<sup>709</sup> According to Charles-Edwards these synonyms are linked to a semantic broadening of *geis* that occurred during the Middle Irish period and peaked toward the beginning of the early Modern Irish period: ‘*geis* had by then taken over territory previously occupied by words such as *airmbert* and, to some extent, *bés*, and had dragged *airmbert* along in its train as a synonym’.<sup>710</sup> This semantic expansion can help explain the diversity of *geis* that can be witnessed in the narrative literature. Indeed, Charles-Edwards related the semantic development of *geis* to the appearance of *geis* as positive injunctions in the tales *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne* and *Longes Mac nUislenn*, ‘The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu’.<sup>711</sup> Finally, by comparing cognate episodes from Recensions I and II of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Charles-Edwards has shown how, over time, the concept of *geis* expanded to include challenges to honour, particularly for enticement to combat.<sup>712</sup>

The foregoing discussion has provided a very brief overview of some of the various manifestations of *geis* in Irish literature. The multifaceted nature of *geis* has long been acknowledged by modern scholars, and the theory that the meaning of *geis* expanded over time has been equally long-serving and widely accepted. When modern scholars have disagreed over *gessi*, it has generally been in regard to their function. The most significant disagreement has concerned the extent to which *geis* was merely a literary device for driving narrative. Carney can be credited with making the most contentious remark on this subject when he suggested that certain, and especially later, *gessi* were ‘usually nothing more than an author’s lazy method of motivating action’.<sup>713</sup> His opinion was prefigured by that of Hull, who reckoned that the *gessi* were of ancient origin but no-longer made sense to the medieval writers of the extant literature.<sup>714</sup> Later, Greene concurred both with Hull and with Carney. He regarded *geis* to be a magical plot-device, employed by writers who scarcely understood its original purpose.<sup>715</sup> In opposition to this trend, O’Leary took an

---

<sup>709</sup> Sjöblom, *Early Irish Taboos*, p. 51. Cf. O’Leary, ‘Honour Bound’, 85 n. 5.

<sup>710</sup> Charles-Edwards, ‘*Geis*’, 57. Cf. Carney, *SILH*, p. 193. Greene, ‘Tabu’, p. 9.

<sup>711</sup> Charles-Edwards, ‘*Geis*’, 57-8.

<sup>712</sup> Charles-Edwards, ‘*Geis*’, 54-7.

<sup>713</sup> Carney, *SILH*, pp. 192-3.

<sup>714</sup> Hull, ‘Tabus’, 46.

<sup>715</sup> Greene, ‘Tabu’, pp. 12, 14, 18-9.

anthropological approach and argued for the contemporary social significance of *gessi*, remarking that ‘taboo is a profoundly social institution’.<sup>716</sup> O’Leary’s position was later supported, most notably, by Charles-Edwards, who further investigated the range of potential functions employed by *geis* and attempted to explain how this diversity might have developed: ‘*geis* is not an isolated, and therefore mysterious phenomenon. It is a literary device which has obvious parallels in real life’.<sup>717</sup> More recently, O’Connor has attempted to reconcile a literary appreciation of *gessi*, whilst upholding a sense of their contemporary social significance:

*Gessi* are widespread in early medieval Irish saga-literature [...] their effect varies widely from saga to saga and depends in particular on two variables: the place of *gessi* within the saga’s literary structure, and the precise socio-cultural meaning of the term *geis* as it seems to be understood by the saga-author.<sup>718</sup>

It is clear then that the concept that modern scholars refer to as *geis* shows great diversity of expression and use in the sources. Many are clearly unconcerned with kings or kingship. This diversity has not gone unacknowledged or unexplained, and the most recent scholarship on the subject of *geis* has even emphasised it. Sjöblom, for example, has suggested that *geis*, like the Otherworld, was not a monolithic entity but a plurality of concepts:

In addition to some general, vaguely defined notions of what taboo is, the representations of taboos were built on situationist logic. There was no clear doctrine of taboos in early Irish tradition.<sup>719</sup>

Nevertheless, Sjöblom was unable to resist the temptation to compare them to the *tecosca*: ‘*gessi*, at least in some cases, might in reality be narrative adaptations of *tecosca*’.<sup>720</sup> In any case, it is now necessary to examine the *tecosca* themselves to determine to which concept of *geis*, if any, do they subscribe?

---

<sup>716</sup> O’Leary, ‘Honour Bound’, 92.

<sup>717</sup> Charles-Edwards, ‘*Geis*’, 58.

<sup>718</sup> O’Connor, *Da Derga’s Hostel*, p. 72.

<sup>719</sup> Sjöblom, *Taboos*, p. 193.

<sup>720</sup> Sjöblom, *Taboos*, p. 96. Cf. Charles-Edwards, ‘*Geis*’, 46-47.

In truth, the *tecosca* have very little to say on the subject of *geis*. Although *geis*, or a derivative of it, is used in five texts from this corpus (*AM*, *TC*, *BCC*, *Cert cech rí*, and *Diambad*), each of these makes use of the term only once. In addition to this, these examples do not seem to display any direct association between the concept of *geis* and sacred kingship. Perhaps the strongest case can be made for *AM*, or more precisely *AM (A)*, as the corresponding paragraph does not feature in *AM (B)*. Paragraph 52 of *AM (A)* reads:

*Dia-nderna inso huili, bid sen, bid suthain, bid sírsaeglach, bid cernach, bid cathbúadach, bid rí(i), bid rúanaid, bid rorathmar, bid slúagach sothnge suithchernsa, bid saidbir, bid sogessi, bid lán do cach maith, ro-sia an con-ña, a acobur, don-icfa, biaid cach mí inna bláth, is úad gébthar hÉriu co bráth.*

If he does all this, he will be old, he will be long-lived, he will be continually long-lived, he will be victorious, he will be triumphant in battles, he will be a king, he will be a champion, he will be highly beneficent, he will be warlike [and] eloquent [and] generous, he will be wealthy, he will be observing his *gessi*, he will be full of every good (thing), he will reach what he will seek, his wish will he get, every month will be in its blossom, it is from him that Ireland will be inherited forever.

This paragraph clearly lists a series of aspects that characterise ideal rule. As § 52 is the penultimate paragraph of *AM (A)*, it could be argued that these aspects here are associated with the observance of the advice contained in this *tecosc* as a whole. If this is the case, then it seems that *sogessi*, ‘good *gessi*’, are to be considered part of ideal rulership by this text.<sup>721</sup> Indeed, the other conditions listed in this paragraph seem to resonate with early Irish notions of successful kingship witnessed elsewhere, such as long-life, military prowess and victory, wealth, and fertility.

A counter argument to this interpretation can, however, be made. First, consider the immediate context of *AM (A)* § 52, which is formed by §§ 50-53. These paragraphs can be shown to constitute a loose unit by contrasting them with the preceding one: §§ 44-48. Paragraphs 44-48 are conceptually unified by their exposition of a four-fold classification of rulers (*flaith congbála*, *cíallflaith*, *fírflaith*, and *tarbflaith*) and a direct parallel for this can be found in *AM (B)* §§ 58-62.<sup>722</sup> Paragraphs 50-53 of *AM (A)*, by contrast, ‘consist of

<sup>721</sup> *eDIL* s.v. 2 *so*, *su*. *eDIL* s.v. *geis*.

<sup>722</sup> For a useful comparison of these parallel sections, see Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 141-43.

miscellaneous matter', in the words of Fomin, and find no parallel in *AM* (B).<sup>723</sup> It would be tempting to include *AM* (A) § 49 in this miscellaneous unit, except that Fomin has observed that this paragraph is paralleled by *AM* (B) § 57, immediately preceding the four-fold classification of rulers.<sup>724</sup> It seems as though this paragraph has simply changed position in the later version. In any case the miscellaneous nature of *AM* (A) §§ 50-53 could be cause to doubt the importance of the statement being made by § 52 in the overall scheme of *AM*. Similarly, even though the presence of *sogeis* indicates that *geis* was considered part of the concept of ideal rulership, it must be acknowledged that *geis* occupies no special place here. The aspects of ideal rule in this list do not seem to be organised in any hierarchy of importance or preference. Although, this latter point could just as easily be reason to rank it as equal amongst the many other aspects of ideal rule listed in § 52.

A similar use of *geis* can be observed in *TC* § 6. As is often the case in *TC*, this paragraph opens with an introductory question from Cairpre: '*Cate téchta flatha*', 'What is the entitlement of a lord?'.<sup>725</sup> Cormac's response is a lengthy list (running to thirty-seven lines in Fomin's edition) of the qualities and behaviour that befit an ideal *flaith*.<sup>726</sup> The third line of Cormac's response reads: '*rop sogeis*', 'let him be having good *geisi*'.<sup>727</sup> The similarity between this line and '*bid sogessi*' from *AM* (A) §52 should be immediately apparent. Indeed, Fomin has discussed the striking similarities between *AM* (A) § 52 and *TC* § 6 in general, and has suggested that these can be attributed to the existence of 'a common pool of ideas concerning ideal kingship'.<sup>728</sup> If correct, this interpretation would reinforce the notion that *sogeis* was a standard component of the early Irish conception of ideal rulership. The similarity of context in which *sogeis* appears in *TC* § 6 and *AM* § 52 should also be obvious, both being lists of ideal characteristics, and so the same paradox of what this says about the importance of *geis* to *AM* (A) applies to the use of *sogeis* in *TC*.

---

<sup>723</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 143.

<sup>724</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, p. 143.

<sup>725</sup> *TC*, § 6.2.

<sup>726</sup> It is worth pointing out here as well that the significance of the term *flaith* in the opening question of *TC* § 6, as well as the use of the terms *ríg 7 flaithi* in its closing statement, has been discussed in this thesis already. It seems likely that the author of *TC* § 6 considered the terms synonymous in this particular context and that the content of this paragraph might apply to *ríg* and *flaithi* equally. See Chapter 4.2.

<sup>727</sup> *TC*, § 6.6.

<sup>728</sup> Fomin, *Instructions*, pp. 197-98.

The use of *geis* in *BCC* is quite different from that of *AM* (A) and *TC*. In this text, *geis* seems to be used to refer to an action, rather than a condition. Thus, Fomin has translated *geis* as a type of injunction or command. Line 3487 reads; ‘*ní géis co ansa*’, which Fomin has translated as ‘do not beseech in a tough way’.<sup>729</sup> This rendering makes sense in context. The line in question falls within a section of the text that Fomin has characterised as ‘condemn[ing] a ruler’s maltreatment of his people’.<sup>730</sup> The section reads:

*Ní pá míthomtinach o neoch.  
Ní géis co ansa.  
Ní ettis nech cena domanches.*

Do not be thought ill of by anyone.  
Do not beseech in a tough way.  
Do not repudiate anyone unless he serves badly.<sup>731</sup>

This interpretation is also consistent with the character of the preceding section, which advises moderation in acts of speech.

*Ní fresnesea co labur.  
Ní aiséisea co glórach.  
Ní fuirse, ní chuitbe, ní faitchither senóri.*

Do not answer garrulously.  
Do not ask vociferously.  
Do not mock, do not deride, do not intimidate old men.<sup>732</sup>

Another key difference in the use of *geis* here is that the word seems not to refer to a prohibition but to a positive injunction or demand. This use of *geis* could be considered evidence for a Middle Irish date for this text, if one were to follow the semantic development of the word proposed by Charles-Edwards. In certain Middle Irish tales, Charles-Edwards has observed that *gessi* are used to ‘compel positive action rather than avoidance’.<sup>733</sup> If this is true, then the use of *geis* in *BCC* would support the opinion of Carey, who argued that *BCC* was written by the Middle Irish redactor of *SCC*.<sup>734</sup> Of course, this

---

<sup>729</sup> *BCC*, § d, l. 3487.

<sup>730</sup> Fomin, *BCC*, p. 100.

<sup>731</sup> *BCC*, § d.

<sup>732</sup> *BCC*, § c. Note that Fomin presents lines 3483-85 as a single line.

<sup>733</sup> Charles-Edwards, ‘*Geis*’, 58.

<sup>734</sup> Carey, ‘The Uses of Tradition’, p. 82.

could be a circular argument, for Fomin made use of both Carey and Charles-Edwards in his work on *BCC*.<sup>735</sup> On the other hand, Fomin's translation of *geis* was preceded by Smith, who had rendered '*ní géis co ansa*' as 'demand nothing difficult'.<sup>736</sup> It is clear that Smith, publishing in 1925, could not have been influenced by Charles-Edwards's theory on the semantic development of *geis*.

*Cert cech rí* makes use of *geis* in § 33. It reads:

*Cairpri, Conall cas · nosmolam cen geis  
cosambia nambāig · bíit dot lāim deis.*

Cairpre, Conall the curly-haired; I advise that they be without prohibitions, together with all who are in alliance with them; let them be at your right hand.<sup>737</sup>

Here, *geis* is used in the sense of a prohibition. It will be noted, however, that in this instance *geis* does not apply to the advisee of this *tecosc*, but instead to the third-party figures, Cairpre and Conall. It has already been discussed, in the second chapter of this thesis, that the intended audience of this *tecosc* appears to have been one Áed mac Néill meic Máel Shechlainn, an Uí Néill over-king with other rulers under his authority. From this perspective, *geis* here seems to be an injunction made by a ruler on his subjects. This is an interesting use of *geis*, which presents it as a practical tool of rulership, rather than a supernatural condition of ideal kingship. This is much more comparable to the use of *geis* in *BCC*, than in *AM* (A) and *TC*.

*Diambad* makes the following use of the word *geis*:

*Adaltras coilles cach clú : ní dú do neoch acht rop rí  
do gesib cáich dibe cāsc : nī cian o thásc nech dus gní.*

Adultery ruins every good name, it is not proper provided he be a king; it is tabu for all to deny (?) the paschal time; he who does so is not far from death.<sup>738</sup>

---

<sup>735</sup> Fomin, '*BCC*', 94, 116.

<sup>736</sup> Smith, 'On the *BCC*', 188-9.

<sup>737</sup> *Cert cech rí*, § 33.

<sup>738</sup> *Diambad*, § 35.

The two couplets of this stanza seem to have two different target audiences. Whilst the first advises on the behaviour of a king, the second admonishes everyone. The use of *geis* occurs in the latter instance. Hence, *geis* is not portrayed here as an aspect of kingship ideology. It is neither an injunction placed upon a ruler, nor by a ruler upon a subject. It is interesting, however, that this use of *geis* does have a supernatural force: those who neglect to observe Paschal are destined to die. In this way, it is quite unlike the use of *geis* in the other Middle Irish *tecosca*, *BCC* or *Cert cech rí*, in which the concept appears to be a mundane one. The mortal stakes of this *geis* are actually more comparable to the use of *geis* found in the narrative literature, in which the transgression of a *geis* leads to death.

These then are the examples of *geis* in the *tecosca*. Before concluding, however, it is necessary to consider some of the other words associated with this term. For instance, it has been noted already in this chapter that Charles-Edwards has argued convincingly that by the late Middle-Irish period the words *airmbert/airmert*, and *airmit* had become synonyms of *geis*. *Airmbert/airmert* does not feature in these texts at all, but a version of *airmit* appears once in *AM* and in *TC*. Nevertheless, it seems fairly certain that in neither of these instances does the word seem to denote a prohibition or taboo. *AM* (B) § 48 reads:

*Ad-mestar sinu suidib sinser somoínib ilib airmiten.*

Let him estimate old men in the seats of their ancestors with numerous benefits of respect.

The word *airmiten* here is derived from *airmitiu*, which itself seems to be the source of *airmit*.<sup>739</sup> The primary meaning of *airmitiu* is an ‘act of honouring, respecting; honour, respect’. This is surely the sense employed here, since it would be less likely that anyone would honour another by placing injunctions or prohibitions on them. *Airmitiu* is also used in much the same sense in *TC* § 1.18, which recommends ‘*airmitiu filed*’, ‘honouring of poets’.<sup>740</sup> This line occurs in response to Cairpre’s question, ‘what is best for a king?’. As such, it clearly refers to the appropriate behaviour of a king, but the meaning of *airmitiu* here is not a taboo or an injunction of any sort. This conforms with the sentiments of the

---

<sup>739</sup> eDIL, s.v. 1 *airmitiu*, s.v. *airmit*.

<sup>740</sup> *TC*, § 1.18.

surrounding lines which encourage the giving of respect where it is due.<sup>741</sup> Since the language of *AM* (B) and *TC* is Old Irish, it is unsurprising that they do not use *airmitiu* as a synonym of *geis*, as the semantic expansion of *geis* is thought to have occurred in the Middle Irish period.

*Búaid* (pl. *búada*) is another term associated with *geis*. In the Middle-Irish text *Geasa agus Buadha Riogh Éireann*, *geis* and *búaid* are treated as a conceptual pair. The most common translation of *búaid* is ‘victory, triumph’, but in the aforementioned text *búaid* is clearly being used as an antonym of *geis*. In this sense, *búaid* can be translated as a ‘prescription’, or sometimes ‘prerogative’, although there is no accurate English translation for this usage. In his introduction to this *Geasa agus Buadha Riogh Éireann*, Dillon described the *búada* thus: ‘beside each list of taboos is a corresponding list of prescriptions, things which the king should do, or should enjoy, in order to ensure his prosperity and that of his people’.<sup>742</sup> It is worth quoting the seven *búada* of the king of Tara here for illustrative purposes:

*A sheacht mbúadho .i. íascc Bóinne, fiadh Luibhnighe, mess Manann, fráechmess Brígh Léithi, biror Brossnaighi, uisci thopuir Thlachtga, mílrath Náissi nó Maisten. Hi kalaind Auguist dorochtis sin uile do rígh Themruch. In blíadain dano i toimliuth insin ní théghed i n-áirim sháeghuil dó, agus is ríam no maidith for gach leth.*

His seven prescriptions, namely: the fish of the Boyne, the deer of Luibnech, the mast of Mana, the bilberries of Brí Léith, the cress of the Brossnach, water from the well of Tlachtga, the hares of Naas (or of Maistiu). All of these to be brought to the king of Tara on the first of August. And the year in which he used to consume them did not count against him as life spent, and he used to be victorious in battle on every side.<sup>743</sup>

The use of the nature imagery, alongside the rewards of long-life and victory, is quite reminiscent of the cosmic benefits that have been associated with *fír flathemon*. The word *mess*, ‘tree fruit, mast’, which is particularly associated with the benefits of *fír flathemon*, even appears here twice (once as part of a compound, *fráechmess*). All of this reinforces the idea that the concept of sacred kingship may lie behind these *búada*. Having said this,

---

<sup>741</sup> *TC*, § 1.17. *Mórad nemid*, ‘Magnifying of the privileged persons’. *TC* § 1.19. *Arad Dé máir*, ‘Glorifying of the great God’.

<sup>742</sup> Dillon, ‘Taboos’, 2.

<sup>743</sup> Dillon, ‘Taboos’, 8-9.

the *búada* of the other four kings in this tract are of a more social or martial nature.<sup>744</sup> They tend to encourage games, hostage-taking, hosting, despoiling, and drinking. Perhaps their more martial tone is related to the fact that the primary definition of *búada* is ‘victory’. In any case, their imagery is surely less similar to that of *fír flathemon* than the *búada* of the king of Tara.

Turning now to the *tecosca*, there are a number of instances in which *búaid* is used. In about half of these examples, the word is used in the sense of ‘victory’. These examples can be found at *AM* (B) § 63, *AM* (A) § 3.3, and *Diambad* §§ 9 and 10. There are some clear verbal similarities between the examples of *búaid* from *AM* (B) and (A), and they seem to be used in an identical sense. Both sections assert that by following the advice of Morann, victory can be attained.

*Forcmath mo bríathra,  
Bérait co búaid.*

Let him keep my words,  
They will bring him to victory.<sup>745</sup>

*Fírmaíni mo briathar  
rem bás berta[e]  
búaid dīrgi dlega[i]r  
cacha flathema[i]n in sin.*

It is the true treasures of my words  
before my death that bring  
victory: that is righteousness,  
which is required of each ruler.<sup>746</sup>

The examples in *Diambad* are somewhat different. Rather than being prescriptive, they are observational, which in itself is quite typical of *Diambad*. They read:

*Trí gáire buada do rígh : ina thír ar fiansa feib  
gāir ilaig iar coscor cruaid : gāir molta muaid, gāir im fíeid.*

---

<sup>744</sup> Dillon, ‘Taboos’, 12-21.

<sup>745</sup> *AM* (B), § 63, ll. 161-62.

<sup>746</sup> *AM* (A), § 3.3.

*Trí gáire dimbuid do fílaith : gāir glám dia guin cid cian gair  
gāir a ban i nnamat naidm : gāir a muintire iar maidm fair.*

Three shouts of victory for a king, because of the excellence of warriorship in his land, [are] a shout of triumph after a stiff victory, a shout of high commendation, a shout at a feast.

Three shouts of discomfiture for a prince are the shout of satires to wound him, be it far off or near, the cry of his women folk in the grasp of enemies, the cry of a household when he has been defeated in battle.<sup>747</sup>

In § 9, the translation of *búada* as ‘victories’ is suggested by the reference to *fiansa*, ‘warriorship’, before enumerating the three shouts. The first shout clearly makes reference to a military victory with the word *coscar*, ‘victory, triumph; slaughter’, and the feast mentioned in the third shout could likely be a celebratory one after such a victory.<sup>748</sup> Stanza 10 of *Diambad* refers to *dimbuid*, ‘defeat, discomfiture, disgrace’.<sup>749</sup> This word is obviously defined in opposition to *búaid* ‘victory’, which makes the translation of ‘victories’ for *búada* in the last stanza even more secure. In § 10, the martial aspect is just as prominent as in § 9. The word *maidm*, meaning ‘breaking (a battle); defeat, rout, flight’, is used twice here.<sup>750</sup>

There are some examples in the *tecosca* that make use of *búaid* in the secondary sense of ‘virtue’. In this sense, *búaid*, is closer to its use as the antithesis of *geis*. Once again, *AM* (B), *AM* (A), and *Diambad* provide the examples. The first appearance of *búaid* in *AM* (B) occurs in § 2, lines 8-12:

*At-ré, tochomla,  
A mo Neiri Núallgnáith.  
Noíthiut búaid ngoire,  
Gor intech ara-folmaither,  
Fasaich, forbeir fír.*

Arise, set forth,  
O my Neire accustomed to proclaiming.  
The virtue of dutifulness makes you known,  
Dutiful the journey you undertake,  
Announce, increase truth.

---

<sup>747</sup> *Diambad*, §§ 9-10.

<sup>748</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. *coscar*.

<sup>749</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. *dimbúa[i]d*.

<sup>750</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. *maidm*.

The single appearance of *búaid* in *AM* (A) is obviously parallel to that in *AM* (B):

*Comé[i]rig, a Neire Núallgnáith.  
Noíthiut búaid ngaire,  
Gor intech ara-folmaither co Feradach Find Fechnach  
Fásaig fírinne fírforbo[i]r flatha féig.*

Arise, o Neire accustomed to proclaiming,  
The virtue of dutifulness makes you known,  
Dutiful the journey you undertake [to Feradach Find Fechnach],  
Announce the truly powerful justice of a sharp-sighted ruler.<sup>751</sup>

It is abundantly clear that in these passages the advisor character, Morann, is referring to Neire's *búaid*, not to that of Feradach, the advisee character. Therefore, this use of *búaid* cannot attest to *geis* as a component of sacred kingship. The second use of *búaid* meaning 'virtue' in *AM* (B), however, does apply to the royal advisee character. It reads:

*Beir dó búaid ndírge,  
Dligther cech flathemoin,  
Dia téis sech cech rí.*

Bring him the virtue of rectitude,  
Which each ruler must have,  
If you go past every [other] king.<sup>752</sup>

In this context, *búaid* seems to be used in much the same sense as in the preceding one. However, this section is clearly paralleled by the one in *AM* (A) § 3 that has already been quoted above. In Fomin's translation of this parallel passage in *AM* (A), he has translated *búaid* as 'victory', not 'virtue'. Nevertheless, the wording is suitably different to warrant his translation, although it does seem that 'virtue' would work equally well for *búaid* in *AM* (A) § 3. If one were to substitute 'victory' for 'virtue' in Fomin's translation, the sense would be essentially the same as that of Kelly's translation of *AM* (B) § 2. Either way, in the passages in which Kelly and Fomin have translated *búaid* as 'virtue' there is no indication that the word was intended to be an antonym of *geis*. These *búada* do not compel or recommend a specific action in the same way that the *búada* in the text *Geasa agus Buadha*

---

<sup>751</sup> *AM* (A), § 2.

<sup>752</sup> *AM* (B), § 2, ll. 15-17.

*Riogh Éireann* do. Furthermore, there is nothing supernatural about the virtues associated with *búaid* in these examples.

The final example of *búaid* from the *tecosca* is provided by *Diambad* § 11.

*Sluindfet a thrī buada ar bith : cech ócthigirn for rith raith  
frecor n-oīged, airt bīs : tairgnim do chill cís do flaith.*

I shall enumerate openly three virtues of every young chief in a successful career: attendance on guests while he lives, provision for the clergy, tribute to prince.

What is immediately obvious is that this paragraph speaks not of a *rí*, nor even a *flaith*, but a more subordinate type of leader; an *ócthigern* or ‘young lord’.<sup>753</sup> This instantly casts doubt over the possibility that this is an example of kingship ideology. Furthermore, the ‘virtues’ listed here, once again, have no sense of sacrality or the supernatural.

Why are references to *geis* so scarce in the *tecosca*? One reason might be that the concept of *geis* had a special relationship with the narrative literature. As Greene has highlighted, the word does not occur in either the legal literature or the annals.<sup>754</sup> Nevertheless, the inclusion of *sogeis* alongside the characteristics of ideal rule by *AM* (A) and *TC* would argue against following Carney, Hull, and Greene in regarding *geis* as merely a narrative plot device. Clearly the creators of these *tecosca* felt the need to include the concept of *geis* in these non-narrative texts as a component of ideal rule. Having said this, the fairly minor use of *geis* in the *tecosca* is still an indication that its importance was somewhat contingent upon its value as a plot device. Fomin has suggested that the near-identical uses of *sogeis* in *AM* (A) and *TC* may be due to a common pool of wisdom from which the texts have drawn. If this is indeed the case, then it might be that the wisdom tradition made almost as little use of the word *geis* as the legal tradition, although this speculation ought to be supported by an examination of the broader corpus of wisdom literature.

---

<sup>753</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. *ócthigern*.

<sup>754</sup> Greene, ‘Tabu’, 10-11. One obvious exception to this rule is the text *Geasa agus Buadha Riogh Éireann*.

## The Sovereignty Goddess

It has been shown that the sovereignty goddess has long been considered a major component of sacred kingship in early Ireland. If the *tecosca* are to be considered repositories of kingship ideology, then, one might expect the sovereignty goddess to make an appearance. Despite this, female representations of sovereignty are conspicuous for their absence in the *tecosca*. *AM*, *TCús*, and *BCC* make no mention of female figures at all. *TC*, *Cert cech rí*, and *Diambad* refer to women, but apparently not as the personification of sovereignty. In fact, when these texts speak of women, they are more likely to do so in a negative way. The most obvious example of this is undoubtedly *TC* § 16, which gives 122 lines of sustained invective against women.

*'A húi Chuind, a Chormaic,' ol Carpre, 'cia etargén mná?'*  
*'Ní hansa,' ol Cormac. 'Nosnetargén 7 nísnetargléim.*  
*Serba sír gnáise*  
*mórda tathigthe,*  
*drútha follaigthe,*  
*báetha comairle,*  
*sautacha tormaig,*  
*aigde aisnéise,*  
*debthaige frecnairce,*  
 [...]  
*feidle miscne,*  
*dermatcha seirce,*  
*ítfaide toile,*  
*deithide cairddine,*  
*cundamna écnaig,*  
*écuudla airechta,*  
*airrechtga ugrai.*

'O grandson of Conn, O Cormac,' said Cairbre, 'how do you distinguish women?'

'Not hard to tell,' said Cormac. 'I distinguish them, but I make no difference among them.'

They are crabbed as constant companions,  
 haughty when visited,  
 lewd when neglected,  
 silly counsellors,  
 greedy of increase,  
 they have tell-tale faces,  
 they are quarrelsome in company,  
 [...]

steadfast in hate,  
 forgetful of love,  
 thirsting (?) for lust,

anxious for alliance,  
accustomed to slander,  
dishonest in an assembly,  
stubborn in a quarrel.<sup>755</sup>

Among the *tecosca*, the closest associations between women and sovereignty are made in *Cert cech rí*g. There are two examples to be considered here. The first occurs in § 42:

*Secht ningena rí*g · *ic timdiba thūath*  
*ic feis ri cech mbōeth* · *cid lesc ri lūath*.

There are several royal maidens that ruin tribes,  
and sleep with every silly fellow, though an active warrior be willing.

The references here to ‘royal maidens’ and ‘*feis*’ are reminiscent of the sexual encounters from narrative literature that modern scholars have considered to be reflexes of the *hieros gamos*. As elucidated in the third chapter of this thesis, some have argued that such encounters between a female sovereignty figure and a royal male are symbolic of a sacred marriage between a king and the goddess of the land or kingdom.<sup>756</sup> However, § 42 of *Cert cech rí*g does not seem to meet the requirements for this theme. For one thing, there are seven ‘royal maidens’ in this stanza, and there is no other example in early Irish literature in which the sovereignty is represented by multiple women. Quite the opposite, in fact, for the argument that Medb Chrúachna and Medb Lethderg are reflexes of the sovereignty goddess is contingent upon the criterion that only they can be wedded to their respective kings.<sup>757</sup> Similarly, the male party in this stanza is many in number, and not specifically royal. If this stanza spoke of a single royal maiden, who slept indiscriminately with ‘every silly fellow’, resulting in the ruin of tribes, then it would be tempting to treat this as a metaphor for the break-down of legitimate succession. Instead, it seems to be a condemnation of women in general, portraying them as leading men astray. There is surely some significance to the specific number of maidens, but no explanation can be offered at this time.

General misogyny aside, § 42 also chimes well with a theme more specific to *Cert cech rí*g. O’Donoghue translated the phrase ‘*secht ningena rí*g’ as ‘seven royal maidens’, but an

<sup>755</sup> Meyer, ‘*Tecosca Cormaic*’, pp. 29-35, § 19.

<sup>756</sup> See: Ó Máille, ‘Medh Chruachna’, O’Rahilly, ‘Érainn and Ériu’, Carney, *SILH*, pp. 334-38, Binchy, ‘Tailtiu and Tara’.

<sup>757</sup> Ó Máille, ‘Medh Chruachna’.

alternative might be ‘seven daughters of a king’.<sup>758</sup> Since the political value of marriage in the medieval period is widely recognised, it is easy to see how any unlicensed sexual activity on the part of a king’s daughter could ‘ruin tribes’.<sup>759</sup> From this perspective, this stanza could be read as advice for a royal recipient to enforce his paternal authority over his daughters. Such a sentiment would be in perfect accord with other stanzas in this *tecosc*, which stress the importance of keeping political alliances in good order.<sup>760</sup> This would also resonate very strongly with the advice, expressed in § 32, that the advisee subordinate his brothers and sons under his own authority:

*Do bráthir sdo maic · nosláthaig fot chuit  
ciarbot maithi miadaig · curbat riarraig duit.*

Your brothers and sons, subdue under your own share  
though they be good and honourable, until they submit to you.

It seems likely, then, that § 42 is a continuation of the theme of keeping one’s own family in check.

The second reference to women in connection with sovereignty in *Cert cech ríog* occurs in § 68. It advises:

*Cuingidh a ríog raith · go sídh is go suth  
rígán fêta fial · bus maith ciall is cruth.*

O gracious king, for peace and offspring,  
seek a generous modest queen, of good intellect and form.<sup>761</sup>

It could be argued that the insistence that the queen be of ‘good intellect and form’ is reminiscent of the depiction of the sovereignty goddess in the tales *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* and *Cóir Anmann*. In these tales, the woman of sovereignty is transformed from an unattractive hag into a beautiful maiden through her sexual union with the royal

---

<sup>758</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. *ingen*.

<sup>759</sup> For an introduction to the status of women in relation to marriage and sexual activity, see Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, pp. 68 ff.

<sup>760</sup> See *Cert cech ríog*, §§ 4-8, 28-37. See also the discussion of *Cert cech ríog* in the second chapter of this thesis.

<sup>761</sup> *Cert cech ríog*, § 68.

heroes Niall Noígiallach and Lugaid Láigde.<sup>762</sup> Does this stanza, then, represent the transformation of the sovereignty goddess through the sacred marriage? There are reasons to think not. For one thing, the queen in this stanza is not transformed by her union with the king. Herbert has argued that, in the aforementioned tales, the physical transformation of these women by their royal consorts represents the diminution of the sovereignty goddess.<sup>763</sup> According to Herbert, the woman of sovereignty was previously depicted as an active figure, choosing her own consort, but in later literature the woman is portrayed as a passive figure, to be acquired and transformed by an active male figure. If the queen in § 68 of *Cert cech rí* is idyllic in her own right, and without being made so by her king, then she either does not represent the sovereignty goddess or her portrayal contradicts the development of the theme posited by Herbert.

Leaving aside this aspect of the sovereignty goddess, it is possible to approach § 68 from another angle. By associating the marriage of king and queen with *sídh* 'peace' and *suth* 'fruit, produce', § 68 comes tantalisingly close to the imagery of *fír flathemon*. However, since the overall tone of *Cert cech rí* is so relentlessly pragmatic, it is tempting to simply take this stanza at face value. Such an interpretation would resonate with the themes of family and family trust, which have already been highlighted here. On the other hand, there is no reason why this stanza could not encompass these mundane concerns and simultaneously invoke the concepts of the sovereignty goddess and *fír flathemon*. Nevertheless, this seems unlikely, since it can be argued that the concept of the sacred marriage was not an active one in the historical period and that the proposed connection between the sovereignty goddess and *fír flathemon* is tenuous.

Some scholars have suggested that *fír flathemon* and the myth of the sovereignty goddess articulate essentially the same ideology of kingship. In particular, it has been suggested that the sovereignty goddess represented the fertility of the land that is often seen as indicative of *fír flathemon*.<sup>764</sup> Speaking about the character Étaín, for example, O'Connor has suggested that she represents 'an incarnation of the mythological 'woman of sovereignty'

---

<sup>762</sup> See Stokes, 'The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Mugmedóin'. Sharon Arbuthnot, *Cóir Anmann: A Late Middle Irish Treatise on Personal Names*, 2 vols, Irish Texts Society 59, 60 (London: Irish Texts Society, 2005–07).

<sup>763</sup> Herbert, 'Goddess and King', pp. 265-70.

<sup>764</sup> See Mac Cana, 'King and Goddess', 84-85, McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 128-29, Herbert, 'Celtic Heroine?', p. 16, Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World*, p. 53.

or ‘sovereignty goddess’.<sup>765</sup> As such, ‘her physical perfection and sexual allure embody the king’s *fír flathemon* (‘ruler’s truth’) and the fertility of his realm, reflecting the symbolic union between the king and the (feminised) land he rules’.<sup>766</sup> In truth, this is only speculation. No one has demonstrated a causal link between the sovereignty goddess and the themes commonly associated with *fír flathemon*. Nowhere has it been shown that any interaction between the sovereignty goddess and an Irish king can directly affect the peace, fecundity, and/or well-being of a kingdom. Instead, if the woman of sovereignty can be shown to be related to any aspect of rulership in early Irish literature, it would seem to be the idea of dynasty. This has been demonstrated by Ó Corráin, using the tales *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* and *Baile in Scáil*.<sup>767</sup>

The association between the sovereignty goddess and the fertility of the land relate back to the concept of *hieros gamos*, derived from Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*.<sup>768</sup> There are, however, good reasons to doubt that the concept of the *hieros gamos* was an active one in early medieval Ireland. In particular, the evidence for the *banais rígi* being an Irish reflex of the *hieros gamos* is dubious. As Jaski has observed, there exists ‘no description of either a *banfheis rígi* or *comfled rígi* which connects it with a sacred marriage between king and goddess’.<sup>769</sup> The term *banais rígi* derives from Middle Irish sources or later, yet modern scholars have used this to create the impression of a continuous tradition of sacred marriage.<sup>770</sup> Proponents of this theory have placed great emphasis upon the etymology of the term. Primarily, *banais* means ‘wedding feast’, and the term is a compound of the words *ben* ‘woman’ and *feis*, which may mean ‘sleeping’, coition, or espousal.<sup>771</sup> Based on this etymology, O’Rahilly argued that the *banais rígi* was the Irish *hieros gamos*, and formed

---

<sup>765</sup> O’Connor, *Da Derga’s Hostel*, p. 58.

<sup>766</sup> O’Connor, *Da Derga’s Hostel*, p. 58.

<sup>767</sup> Ó Corráin, ‘Legend as Critic’, pp. 31-33. Cf. Ó Corráin, ‘Irish Origin Legends’, pp. 77-84. Ó Corráin, ‘Historical Need’, pp. 144-46.

<sup>768</sup> See for example McCone, who spoke of an ‘Indo-European institution, ideology and mythology of sacred kingship [...] based on the widely attested notion that the well-being of society and nature flowed from a ritual marriage between a goddess and the new ruler. The success of any such union was held to depend upon maintenance of the king’s ‘truth’ manifested by his physical perfection, social standing, justice and so on’. McCone, *PPCP*, p. 120.

<sup>769</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, p. 62.

<sup>770</sup> O’Rahilly, ‘Érainn and Ériu’, 14. Dillon and Chadwick, *Celtic Realms*, p. 93. Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 16-18. Mac Cana, ‘*Regnum and Sacerdotium*’, 448-50.

<sup>771</sup> *eDIL*, s.v. *banais*, s.v. 1 *ben*, s.v. 2 *feis(s)*, *fess*.

part of a king's inauguration.<sup>772</sup> More recently, however, Jaski has called such reasoning into question.

In the early medieval period *banfheis rígi* is not associated with any sexual act, and is nothing more than the usual term for the royal inauguration feast. The semantic roots of *banfheis rígi* say nothing about how a royal inauguration ceremony was conducted in the historical period.<sup>773</sup>

A brief consideration of *feis Temro*, the 'feast of Tara', can help support Jaski's reasoning here. Carney was the first to argue that *feis Temro* was the *banais rígi* specific to the kingship of Tara.<sup>774</sup> Carney found this phrase in the annals, in which *feis* was used to gloss the Latin word *cena*, and he asserted that 'even if the original entry was made in Latin it cannot be disputed that the Irish version gives us the exact terms in which the thought behind this entry was first formed'.<sup>775</sup> But it is difficult to see why this has to be the case. The Latin word *cena* simply means 'meal, banquet, dinner, supper', and does not have any nuptial or sexual connotations.<sup>776</sup> If the Latin writer had intended to imply some sort of symbolic marriage or marriage feast, why then did he not use a word like *nuptiae* 'marriage, marriage celebration, wedding', or *sponsalis* 'betrothal, engagement, betrothal gift or feast'?<sup>777</sup>

These, then, are all the possible references to the sovereignty goddess that these texts have to offer. None are convincing. Given how closely these texts have been associated with the concept of sacred kingship, the absence of the sovereignty goddess from the *tecosca* is striking. How might this be explained? One possibility relates to Herbert's theory that the sovereignty goddess was pacified and diminished over time. The absence of the sovereignty goddess in the *tecosca* could be a product of this policy, but the problem with this argument is that the gradual relegation of the goddess over time does not necessarily explain her total absence from the *tecosca*. Perhaps the limitations of the genre are to blame instead. In the *tecosca*, only two characters are guaranteed: the advisor and the advisee. The

---

<sup>772</sup> O'Rahilly, 'Érainn and Ériu', 14, 14 n. 3.

<sup>773</sup> Jaski, *EIKS*, p. 72.

<sup>774</sup> Carney, *SILH*, pp. 334-38.

<sup>775</sup> Carney, *SILH*, p. 334.

<sup>776</sup> Leo F. Stelten, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995; repr. 2011), p. 39.

<sup>777</sup> Stelten, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin*, pp. 174, 252.

advisee characters are always royal males, and the advisor characters are also uniformly male. The advisor is also senior to the advisee in age, and this arrangement would seem to reflect a very patriarchal point of view. Undoubtedly, a female representation of sovereignty would not reflect this patriarchal quality and perhaps it would have even been considered an affront to it.

If this is the case, then Herbert's theory might still be relevant here, for Herbert has argued that the motivation behind the relegation of the sovereignty goddess was both Christian and patriarchal: 'in the early centuries of Christian conversion, clerical writers sought to promote a Christian ideology in which the overseer and legitimator of royal power was not the goddess but the male god of Christianity'.<sup>778</sup> Similarly, Bhreathnach has argued that the *hieros gamos* was incompatible with Christian ideals of kingship because it 'elevated the king to the status of a sacred priest' whilst 'the new relationship needed to be between the king and the Christian god'.<sup>779</sup> Bhreathnach has argued that the *banais rígi* was purged from the Irish rite of royal inauguration as part of the same general process that oversaw the diminution of the sovereignty goddess in the narrative literature: 'the long process to Christianity necessitated that this primordial relationship between the land, as personified by a woman, and the king had to be altered to account for a new relationship'.<sup>780</sup> Arguably, this is what is happening in *AM* and *TC*.<sup>781</sup> Neither text mentions the sovereignty goddess, but both seem to allude to the Christian God. *AM* (B) § 32 reads '*ad-mestar dúili dúilemon tod[a]-rósat amal to-rrósata*', 'let estimate the creations of the creator who made them as they were made'. *TC* § 1.51 declares: '*ar is tre fír flathemon do-indnaig márDía insin uile*', 'for it is through the ruler's truth that great God bestows all that'. It could be the case that the creators of these texts decided to omit the sovereignty goddess altogether and focus instead upon *fír flathemon*. If this is true, then perhaps the authors of *AM*, *TC*, and *Diambad* had no need for the sovereignty goddess because the concept of *fír flathemon* was being

---

<sup>778</sup> Herbert, 'Goddess and King', 268.

<sup>779</sup> Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World*, p. 54.

<sup>780</sup> Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>781</sup> Kelly was quite sceptical about the nature of any possible Christian content in *AM* (B). He generally considered any Latin loan-words or potentially Christian content to be later additions to the text. He also entertained the idea, suggested by Binchy, that the phrase *dúili dúilemon* was originally a reference to a pre-Christian, Celtic creator-myth. McCone, on the other hand, argued strongly in favour of Christian influences on *AM* and *TC*. Subsequent scholars have agreed with McCone. See Kelly, *AM*, pp. xiv-xv, 43 and McCone, *PPCP*, pp. 140-43. For a recent, and excellent, contemplation of this and related matters, see O'Connor, *Da Derga's Hostel*, pp. 278 ff.

used instead. Maybe *fír flathemon* and the Old Irish *tecosca*, *AM* (B) and *TC*, were designed as alternatives to the myth of the sovereignty goddess, or to fill the widening gap left by her diminution.

## Conclusion

This thesis began with the intention to conduct a general reappraisal of the early Irish advice literature known as *teosc*. The ensuing discussion has been necessarily broad, and has taken into consideration the modern scholarly perceptions of these texts, the extent and nature of the corpus, the content and purpose of these texts, and their literary and historical contexts. At times, it has been necessary to go into detail regarding these things. At others, it has only been possible to give an overview. Such is the nature of a work of this length on a subject of this size. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the present study has been found enlightening and can serve as a starting point from which the *teosca* may be studied afresh. Undoubtedly, there is still a great deal of work to be done on these texts, not the least of which would be the production of new editions and translations of *TCús*, *Diambad*, and *Cert cech rí*. Such work would enable more in-depth comparisons of the *teosca* and help to redress the current imbalance of scholarship. As observed at numerous points throughout this thesis, the texts *AM* and *TC* have garnered more attention than these other *teosca*. At various times, this imbalance has been seen to have contributed to some general misconceptions about the corpus as a whole. For this reason, one of the most important conclusions to be drawn from this thesis is that *teosc* is a diverse and multifaceted genre, and that modern commentators have often overlooked this fact. Granted, it has been concluded that the *teosca* may be collectively defined as early Irish vernacular wisdom literature that purports to be the advice given to a royal figure, but beyond these similarities of form and conceit, there are a number of similarities and dissimilarities that deserve to be given more attention. By way of concluding, it will be profitable to summarise here some of these similarities and dissimilarities, as well as their implications.

The variety of names that modern scholars have given to the *teosca* reveal something of the diversity of the corpus itself, and of scholarly opinions about it. In particular, this terminology reveals the different ways in which the *teosca* can be, and have been, contextualised. The names discussed in this thesis include: *teosc*, *teosc rí*, *speculum principum*, *Fürstenspiegel*, and Instructions. Among these, the Irish-language terms indicate the origins of these texts in early medieval Ireland, whilst the Latin and German names reveal the wider, Continental context in which they have been viewed by certain

commentators. The use of Irish and Latin reflects also the dual intellectual heritage of the *tecosca*. Many scholars have viewed these texts as being, either wholly or partially, survivals from a pre-Christian and native past. Others, however, have preferred to emphasise the Latin and biblical influences. The perceived purpose of *tecosc*-literature is another aspect of its contextualisation that these genre-labels reflect. For instance, each name suggests a didactic purpose, whether it be literal (*tecosc* 'instruction') or metaphorical (*speculum* 'mirror'). Similarly, the intended audience of any text can be considered an aspect of its purpose and context, and some of these genre-names indicate to whom modern scholars believe these texts were directed. *Tecosc* is of course open ended, but *tecosc rí*g 'instruction for kings' leaves little room for confusion. The same cannot be said for the terms *speculum principum* and *Fürstenspiegel*, both 'mirror of princes', which imply an audience including, but not limited to, kings. In this thesis, however, the term *tecosc* has been preferred for two reasons. Firstly, the term is contemporary and attested by the texts themselves. Secondly, the term avoids the various entanglements that have often arisen when scholars have been too rigid in their identification of the audience of the *tecosca*. Nevertheless, it has become clear, in the course of this investigation, that any of the labels hitherto applied to this corpus has been correct to some extent, or in at least one instance. It has been shown, for example, how a fairly strong case can be made that the historical recipient of *Cert cech rí*g was an Uí Néill high-king. On the other hand, it has been shown that *TC* and *Diambad*, at times, shift the focus of their wisdom to address kings and lords of lesser grades.

The *tecosca* also show considerable variation in terms of their form and presentation. Each *tecosc* contains wisdom, no doubt, but this may take several forms. The majority of the material in these texts is didactic, but this may be either prescriptive or proscriptive. *BCC*, in particular, prefers negative admonition. Conversely, some of the wisdom in these texts has been characterised as aphoristic, meaning observational statements of general truth. The proportion of such material varies from text to text. *Diambad* contains the most aphoristic material, but only if one discounts the many sections of *TC* that do not concern rulership. Another shared aspect of their presentation is their use of narrative framing: no *tecosc* is a plain list of maxims. Even so, there is considerable variation between the *tecosca* concerning the extent and nature of this narrative framework. In *AM* and *TC*, the narrative context is spelled-out in the form of titles and introductions, or strongly implied by the use of pseudo-historical and legendary characters. *TCús* and *BCC* also have these markers, but

they have the additional consideration of being embedded within prose tales. In contrast, the comparative lack of narrative framing of *Cert cech rí* and *Diambad* mean that the modern scholar must work harder to establish the narrative context for these texts.

Questions surrounding the purported and actual audience of the *tecosca* have loomed large in this thesis, and with good reason. Undoubtedly, the most obvious common characteristic of the *tecosca* is the fact that they purport to address royal figures. This is conveyed by the attribution of royal recipients, the use of the terminology of rulership, and the use of themes associated with kingship. It is no wonder, then, that modern scholars have fixated on this aspect when treating these texts as a group. Nevertheless, it has become clear that a distinction ought to be made between the purported and actual audiences of these texts. Although each *tecosc* is presented as the advice given to a royal figure, their content would suggest that their target audiences were not exclusively royal. In this thesis, this has been made most apparent by the analysis of the terms *rí* and *flaith*. Jaski and Davies were correct to point out that *AM* does not speak of *rí* but of *flaith*, and to suggest that this text was not merely for kings. However, the present study has not upheld Jaski's implication that the audience of *AM* was unrestricted and universal in character. *AM* (B) indeed prefers to speak of *flaith*, but the use of that term in context would seem to imply an audience of high rank and authority. Ironically, *Diambad* and *Cert cech rí* use the term *rí* more frequently than *flaith*, but the use of these terms in reveals that the intended audience of their maxims was not uniform. This discovery is made all the more intriguing by the fact that a historical king has been suggested as the probable recipient of *Cert cech rí*. It would be naïve to suggest that an investigation into the use of *rí* and *flaith* can provide conclusive results about the intended audience of the *tecosca*. What is clear, however, is that the maxims found in the *tecosca* assume the perspective of different audiences, but that these were packaged together in texts that purported to be directed towards kings.

A considerable portion of this thesis has been dedicated to the concept of sacred kingship and its various literary themes and motifs. In origin, this concern with sacred kingship was related to the question of intended audience, and the purpose of the *tecosca*. It has been shown that the widely-held opinion that the *tecosca* constitute advice for kings most likely derives from the attribution of royal recipients and the use of the terminology of rulership in the *tecosca*. Nevertheless, this perception was later reinforced by the identification of *fír flathemon* as a component of early Irish kingship ideology. Scholars have detected *fír*

*flathemon* in several *tecosca*, but most extensively so in *AM*. In the 1970s, an inverse comparison of *fír flathemon* with the *rex iniquus* of the Hiberno-Latin wisdom text, *De duodecim abusivis*, led to a persistent association between the concept of *fír flathemon* and the genre of *speculum principum*. This tacit consensus has, however, concealed the diversity of the *tecosca* on the subject of *fír flathemon*. It has been shown in this thesis that the fascination with *fír flathemon*, shown in *AM*, is not shared by the other *tecosca*. *TC* comes the closest to replicating its predecessor, and treats *fír flathemon* as a central concept of ideal rulership, but still does not devote the same word-count to the phrase or concept. *TCús*, *Diambad*, and *Cert cech rí* have been found to show an awareness of *fír flathemon*, but these texts present the theme as one of many considerations. Finally, *BCC* provides no evidence for *fír flathemon*.

The evidence for an ethic-cosmic concept of Truth, and the importance of true judgements, closely parallels that of *fír flathemon*. *AM* (B) and *TC* both clearly associate judgement, truth, and falsehood with ideal rulership and connect these things to supernatural benefits and detriments that are strongly reminiscent of those attributed to *fír flathemon*. *AM* (A) also makes these connections but, crucially, does so in a rather negative way, preferring to emphasise the detrimental and violent repercussions of falsehood. *Cert cech rí*, *Diambad*, and *TCús* show much less interest in Truth and judgement, but each text does make the connection to ideal rulership. Of these three, however, only *Cert cech rí* makes the link with the supernatural, and this is less explicit than the examples that can be found in *AM* (B) and *TC*. Finally, *BCC* shows no interest in Truth, judgement, or *fír flathemon*. These results suggest that the concepts of Truth, judgement, and *fír flathemon* were conceptually linked. They also reveal the diversity of the *tecosca*, but at the same time they suggest a certain consistency of concern for these themes in the genre as a whole – even if enthusiasm for them appears to wane over time.

This thesis has also investigated the literary themes of *geis* and the sovereignty goddess. This has been done because of the long-standing association of these with the ideology of kingship and *fír flathemon*. The use of the term *geis* in the *tecosca* are quite diverse, but there are two examples, one in *AM* (A) and one in *TC*, that indicate that the compilers considered *sogeis* to be a component of ideal rule. Unfortunately, it is not entirely clear what *sogeis* entails in these instances, but they do not show any connection to any supernatural element, suggesting that their use does not imply some form of sacred

kingship. Other uses of the term, found in *BCC* and *Cert cech ríg*, are more mundane and not even necessarily connected to ideal rule. *Diambad* is unique, however, by placing *geis* in the context of Christian belief and divine punishment. Clearly, the compilers of the various *tecosca* had different conceptions of the word *geis*, and none were particularly interested in elaborating upon them. This relative disinterest is surpassed, however, by the total lack of references to anything resembling the myth of the sovereignty goddess.

The evidence of *geis* and the sovereignty goddess has implications not just for how one views the *tecosca* but also for early Irish literature and the ideology of rulership. The lack of enthusiasm for *geis* and the total absence of the sovereignty goddess present a clear distinction between the *tecosca* and the narrative literature. Why is it that themes such as *fír flathemon*, Truth, and judgement can be treated in both the *tecosca* and the sagas, but the sovereignty goddess can only appear in the latter? Why is *geis* such an important component of certain exemplary king-tales, but has only a very minor role to play in wisdom literature addressed to kings? Part of the reason is surely due the constraints of genre, but this does not exclude the possibility that the creators of *AM* and *TC*, for example, simply did not want to represent ideal rule in terms of *gessi* or goddesses. Despite the many, well-discussed, similarities between the representations of ideal rulership in texts such as *AM*, *TBDD*, *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* and so forth, there are also some very basic differences in the symbolic language being used – differences that modern scholars are yet to account for. Indeed, there is a great deal more work to be done on the differences between, and the limitations of, the various themes used to express the ideology of rulership in early Irish literature.

## Bibliography

### Editions and Translations

- 'The Adventure of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedóin', ed. and trans. Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, 26 (1903), 191-203.
- 'Advice to a Prince', ed. and trans. Tadhg O'Donoghue, *Ériu*, 9 (1921-23), pp. 43-54.
- Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, ed. and trans. Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1990).
- 'Ancient Irish Literature: Cormac's Instructions (Continued)', ed. and trans. John O'Donovan, *Dublin Penny Journal*, 1, no. 29 (Jan. 12, 1833), 231-232.
- The Annals of Clonmacnoise*, ed. and trans. Dennis Murphy (Dublin: Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, 1896).
- The Annals of Inisfallen (MS. Rawlinson B. 503)*, ed. and trans. Seán Mac Airt (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1944; repr. 1968, 1975, 1988).
- Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1616*, ed. and trans. John O'Donovan (Dublin: Hodges Smith & Co., 1856).
- The Annals of Tigernach*, ed. and trans. Whitley Stokes (*Revue Celtique*, 16, 1895-96; repr. Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 1993).
- The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*, eds. Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983).
- Audacht Morainn*, ed. and trans. Fergus Kelly (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976) [Rec. B].
- '*Audacht Morainn (Recension A)*', ed. and trans. Maxim Fomin, in Maxim Fomin, *Instructions for Kings: Secular and Clerical Images of Kingship in Early Ireland and Ancient India* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2013), pp. 367-421.
- Baile in Scáil: The Phantom's Frenzy*, ed. and trans. Kevin Murray, Irish Texts Society, 58 (London: Irish Texts Society, 2004).
- 'The Battle of Airtech', ed. and trans. R. I. Best, *Ériu*, 8 (1916), 170-90.
- 'The Battle of Mag Mucrime', ed. and trans. Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, 13 (1892), 426-74.
- '*Bretha Déin Chécht*', ed. and trans. D. A. Binchy, *Ériu*, 20 (1966), 1-66.

- '*Bríathartheosc Con Culainn* in the Context of Early Irish Wisdom Literature', ed. and trans. Maxim Fomin, *Ulidia 2: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales* (2009), pp. 92-125.
- '*Cert cech ríog co réil*', ed. and trans. Tadhg O'Donoghue, *Miscellany Presented to Kuno Meyer*, eds. Osborn Bergin and Carl Marstrander (Halle A S: Max Niemeyer, 1912), pp. 258-77.
- Cóir Anmann: A Late Middle Irish Treatise on Personal Names*, ed. and trans Sharon Arbuthnot, 2 vols, Irish Texts Society 59, 60 (London: Irish Texts Society, 2005–2007).
- 'Cormac's Instructions', ed. and trans. John O'Donovan, *Dublin Penny Journal*, 1, no. 27 (Dec. 29, 1832), 213-215.
- Chronicum Scotorum*, ed. William M. Hennessy (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1866).
- Cóir Anmann: A Late Middle Irish Treatise on Personal Names*, ed. and trans. Sharon Arbuthnot, 2 vols, Irish Texts Society 59, 60 (London: Irish Texts Society, 2005–07).
- Críth Gablach*, ed. D. A. Binchy (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies: Dublin, 1970).
- '*Cuchulainn Malade et Ailté; Grande Jalousie d'Émer*', trans. Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Cours de Littérature Celtique*, tome 5; *L'Épopée celtique en Irlande*, tome 1 (Paris: Ernest Thorin, 1892), 170-216 [sub-section '*Enseignement de Cúchulainn*', 189-191].
- 'Cuchulainn's death (abridged from the Book of Leinster, ff. 77, a 1-78, b 2)', ed. and trans. Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, 3 (1876-78), 175-185.
- 'Da Choca's Hostel', ed. and trans. Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, 21 (1900), 149–65, 312–27, 388–402.
- The Death-Tales of the Ulster Heroes*, ed. and trans. Kuno Meyer, Todd Lecture Series, 14 (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1906).
- '*Fingen Mac Flainn's Gedicht auf die Fír Arddae*', ed. Kuno Meyer, *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie*, 3 (1907), 291-8, 291-2.
- '*Fithels Ratschläge an seinem Sohn*', ed. Kuno Meyer, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 8 (1912), 112-113.
- Foras Feasa ar Éirinn le Seathrún Céitinn, D.D./The History of Ireland by Geoffrey Keating, D.D.*, ed. and trans. Patrick S. Dinneen, 3 vols., *Irish Texts Society* (1908), II.
- Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, ed. and trans. Joan Newlon Radner (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978).

- 'The Instruction of Cuchullin to a Prince', trans. Eleanor Hull, *The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature*, ed. Eleanor Hull (London: David Nutt in the Strand, 1898), pp. 229-234.
- The Instructions of King Cormac Mac Airt*, ed. and trans. Kuno Meyer, Todd Lecture Series, 15 (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, & Co., 1909).
- 'The Instructions of the King', trans. T. W. Rolleston, *The High Deeds of Finn and Other Bardic Romances of Ancient Ireland*, ed. T. W. Rolleston (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, 1910).
- Leabhar na g-Ceart, or The Book of Rights*, ed. and trans. John O'Donovan (Dublin: The Celtic Society, 1847).
- 'Morands Fürstenspiegel', ed. and trans. Rudolf Thurneysen, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 11 (1917), 56-106.
- Old Irish Wisdom Attributed to Aldfrith of Northumbria: An Edition of Bríathra Flann Fhína maic Ossu*, ed. and trans. Colin A. Ireland (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, c. 1999).
- On Christian Rulers, Sedulius Scottus*, ed. Edward Gerard Doyle (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1983)
- 'On the *Bríathartheosc Con Culainn*', ed. and trans. Roland Mitchell Smith, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 15 (1925), 187-192.
- '*Senbríathra Fíthail*', ed. Rudolf Thurneysen, *Zu irischen Handschriften und Litteraturdenkmälern, 1, Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse*, 14, no. 3 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1912-1913), 11-22.
- 'The *Senbriathra Fithail* and related texts', ed. and trans. Roland M. Smith, *Revue Celtique*, 45 (1928), 1-92.
- '*Serglige Conculaind*', ed. Ernst Windisch, *Irische Texte mit Wörterbuch*, 1 (Leipzig: Verlag Von S. Hirzel, 1880), 197-234.
- Serglige Con Culainn*, ed. Myles Dillon (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1953).
- 'The Sick-bed of Cuchulainn, and the only Jealousy of Eimer', ed. and trans. Eugene Curry, *The Atlantis: Register of Literature and Science*, 1 (Dublin: John F. Fowler, 1858), 362-92.
- 'The Sick-bed of Cuchulainn, and the only Jealousy of Eimer', ed. and trans. Eugene Curry, *The Atlantis: Register of Literature and Science*, 2 (Dublin: John F. Fowler, 1859), 98-124.
- 'The Sick-bed of Cuchulainn and the Only Jealousy of Emer', ed. and trans. Brian O'Looney, *Facsimiles of the National Manuscripts of Ireland*, 2, Appendix IV, eds.

Edward Sullivan and J. T. Gilbert (Dublin: Public Record Office of Ireland, 1874-1884).

'*Sprichwörtliches*', ed. Kuno Meyer, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 6 (1908), 260-261

'The Taboos of the Kings of Ireland', ed. and trans. Myles Dillon, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 54 (1951/52), 1-6, 8-25, 27-36.

'*Tecosca Cormaic* 'The Instructions of Cormac'', ed. and trans. Maxim Fomin, in Maxim Fomin, *Instructions for Kings: Secular and Clerical Images of Kingship in Early Ireland and Ancient India* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2013), pp. 145-275.

'*Le Testament de Morann*', ed. and trans. Anders Ahlqvist, *Études Celtiques*, 21 (1984), 151-70.

*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, ed. and trans. by Eleanor Hull (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1936).

*Tóruigheacht Dhiarmuda agus Ghráinne: The pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne*, ed. and trans. Standish Hayes O'Grady, 2 vols (Dublin: Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, 1880).

'The Trinity College Text of *Serlige Con Culainn*', ed. Myles Dillon, *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 6 (1949), 139-75.

'The Trinity College text of *Serlige Con Culainn*: corrigenda', Myles Dillon, *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 7 (1953), 88.

'The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn', trans. Myles Dillon, *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 7, (1951), 47-88.

'Wise Sayings from the Irish', ed. and trans. James Hardiman, *Irish Minstrelsy, or Bardic Remains of Ireland; with English Poetical Translations*, 2, ed. James Hardiman, (London, 1831), 396 & 397.

## Secondary

- Ahlqvist, Anders, 'Paragraph 16 of Audacht Morainn: Linguistic Theory and Philological Evidence', *Historical Linguistics and Philology*, ed. Jacek Fisiak (Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990), pp. 1-10.
- Aitchison, N. B., 'Kingship, Society, and Sacrality: Rank, Power, and Ideology in Early Medieval Ireland', *Traditio*, 49 (1994), 45-75.
- Anton, H. H., *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit* (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1968).
- Anton, H. H., 'Pseudo-Cyprian De duodecim abusivis und sein Einfluss auf den Kontinent, insbesondere auf die karolingischen Fürstenspiegel', *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter*, ed. Heinz Löwe, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982), II, 568-617.
- Avagianou, Aphrodite, *Sacred Marriage in the Rituals of Greek Religion* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991).
- Bhreathnach, Edel, *Ireland in the Medieval World, AD400-1000: Landscape, Kingship and Religion* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014).
- Bhreathnach, Edel, 'Tales of Connacht: *Cath Airtig, Táin bó Flidhais, Cath Leitreach Ruibhe, and Cath Cumair*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 45 (2003), 21-42.
- Binchy, D. A., 'Secular Institutions', in *Early Irish Society*, ed. Myles Dillon (Dublin: Colm O Lochlainn, 1954), pp. 52-65.
- Binchy, D. A., 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara', *Ériu*, 18 (1958), 113-38.
- Binchy, D. A., 'The Background of Early Irish Literature', *Studia Hibernica*, 1 (1961), 7-18.
- Binchy, D. A., 'The Passing of the Old Order', *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Celtic Studies, Dublin 1959* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1962), pp. 119-32.
- Binchy, D. A., 'Bretha Nemed', *Ériu*, 17 (1955), 4-6.
- Binchy, D. A., *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).
- Bray, Daniel, 'Sacral Elements of Irish Kingship', *This Immense Panorama: Studies in Honour of Eric J. Sharpe*, eds. Carole M. Cusack and Peter Oldmeadow (Sydney: Schools of Study in Religion, University of Sydney, 1999), pp. 105-16.
- Breatnach, Liam, 'The Cauldron of Poesy', *Ériu*, 32 (1981), 45-93.

- Breatnach, Liam, 'Canon Law and Secular Law in Early Ireland: The Significance of the *Bretha Nemed*', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 439-59.
- Breatnach, Liam, 'The Ecclesiastical Element in the Old Irish Legal Tract *Cáin Fhuithirbe*', *Peritia*, 5 (1986), 36-52.
- Breatnach, Liam, *Uraicecht na Ríar: The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law*, Early Irish Law Series, 2 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1987).
- Breen, Aidan, 'The Evidence of Antique Irish Exegesis in Pseudo-Cyprian, *De Duodecim Abusivis Saeculi*', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, 87 (1987), 71-101.
- Breen, Aidan, 'Pseudo-Cyprian *De Duodecim Abusivis Saeculi* and the Bible', *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission/Ireland and Christendom*, eds. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), pp. 230-45.
- Byrne, F.J., 'Church and Politics, c.750-c.1100', *A New History of Ireland: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, eds. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, T. W. Moody, and F. X. Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 656-679.
- Byrne, F. J., 'High Kings and Provincial Kings', *A New History of Ireland, IX: Maps, Genealogies, Lists*, eds. T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin, and F. J. Byrne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 189-210.
- Byrne, F. J., 'Ireland and Her Neighbours c.1014 – c.1072', *A New History of Ireland, 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, eds. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, T. W. Moody, and F. X. Martin, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.862-98.
- Byrne, Francis J., *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. ([n.p.]: B. T. Batsford, 1973; repr. 1987; Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001; repr. 2004).
- Carey, John, Review of *Pagan Past and Christian Present* by Kim McCone, *Speculum*, 67, (1992), 450-52.
- Carey, John, 'The Uses of Tradition in *Serglige Con Culainn*', *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, eds. J. P. Mallory and G. Stockman (Belfast: [n.pub.], 1994), pp. 77-84.
- Carney, James, 'Early Irish Literature: The State of Research', *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Celtic Studies, Galway 1979*, eds. Gearóid Mac Eoin with Anders Ahlqvist and Donncha Ó hAodha (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), pp. 113-30.
- Carney, James, 'The Impact of Christianity', *Early Irish Society*, ed. Myles Dillon (Dublin: Colm O Lochlainn, 1954; repr. 1963), pp. 66-78.
- Carney, James, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955).

- Canning, Joseph, *A History of Medieval Political Thought 300-1450* (London: Routledge, 1996).
- Chadwick, H. Munro and N. Kershaw Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature, Vol. 1: The Ancient Literatures of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932).
- Charles-Edwards, Thomas, 'Celtic Kings: "priestly vegetables"?', *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, eds. Stephen Baxter, Catherine Karkov, Janet L. Nelson, and David Pelteret (Ashgate: Surrey, 2009), pp. 65-80.
- Charles-Edwards, Thomas, 'A Contract between King and People in Early Medieval Ireland? *Críth Gablach* on Kingship', *Peritia*, 8 (1994), 107-19.
- Charles-Edwards, T. M., *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; repr. 2007).
- Charles-Edwards, Thomas, 'Geis, Prophecy, Omen, and Death', *Celtica*, 23 (1999), 38-59.
- Clancy, Thomas Owen, 'Mac Steléne and the Eight in Armagh: Identity and Context', *Éigse*, 26 (1992), 80-91.
- Cunningham, Bernadette, 'Keating, Geoffrey [Seathrún Céitinn] (b. c.1580, d. in or before 1644)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15224>> [accessed 18 Feb 2016].
- Davies, Luned M., 'Sedulius Scottus: *Liber de Rectoribus Christianis*, a Carolingian or Hibernian Mirror for Princes?', *Studia Celtica*, 26-27 (1991-1992), 34-50.
- Davies, Wendy, 'Clerics as Rulers: Some Implications of the Terminology of Ecclesiastical Authority in Early Medieval Ireland', *Latin and the Vernacular Languages in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. Nicholas Brooks (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 81- 97.
- Dillon, Myles, 'On the Text of *Serglige Con Culainn*', *Éigse*, 3 (1941), 120-9.
- Dillon, Myles, *The Cycles of the Kings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946; repr. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994).
- Dillon, Myles, 'The Archaism of Irish Tradition', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 33, (1947), 245-64.
- Dillon, Myles, 'The Hindu Act of Truth in Celtic Tradition', *Modern Philology*, 44 (1947), 137-140.
- Dillon, Myles, *Early Irish Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 1948; repr. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994).
- Dillon, Myles and Nora Chadwick, *The Celtic Realms* (London: Phoenix Press, 1967).
- Dillon, Myles, *Celt and Hindu* (Dublin: University College Dublin, 1973).

- Dillon, Myles, *Celts and Aryans: Survivals of Indo-European Speech and Society*, (Rashtrapati Nivas, Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1975).
- Doherty, Charles, 'Kingship in Early Ireland', *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, ed. Edel Bhreathnach (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 3-31.
- Draak, Maartje, 'Some Aspects of Kingship in Pagan Ireland', *La Regalità Sacra/The Sacral Kingship: Contributions to the Central Theme of the VIII<sup>th</sup> International Congress for the History of Religions (Rome, April 1955)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), 651-63.
- Dumville, David, Review of *Pagan Past and Christian Present* by Kim McCone, *Peritia*, 10, (1996), 389-98.
- Enright, Michael J., *Iona, Tara and Soissons: The Origin of the Royal Anointing Ritual*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1985).
- Etchingham, Colmán, *Church Organisation in Ireland, A.D. 650 to 1000* (Maynooth: Laigin Publications, 1999; rpt. 2002).
- Fomin, Maxim, 'Wisdom-texts from Early Christian Ireland: Aspects of Style, Syntax and Semantics', in *Perspectives on Celtic Languages*, ed. Maria Bloch-Trojnar (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, 2009), pp. 161-86.
- Fomin, Maxim, *Instructions for Kings: Secular and Clerical Images of Kingship in Early Ireland* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2013).
- Frazer, J. G., *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion. Part I: The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 2 vols., (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1911; repr. 1913).
- Gerriets, Marilyn, 'The King as Judge in Early Medieval Ireland', *Celtica*, 20 (1988), 29-52.
- Gerriets, Marilyn, 'Kingship and Exchange in Pre-Viking Ireland', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 13 (1987), 39-72.
- Greene, David, 'Tabu in Early Irish Narrative', *Medieval Narrative: A Symposium*, eds. Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Peter Foote, Andreas Haarder, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (Odense: Odense University Press, 1979), pp. 9-19.
- Grigg, Julianna, 'The Just King and *De Duodecim Abusiuis Saeculi*', *Parergon*, 27 (2010), 27-52.
- Hellmann, Siegmund, *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De xii abusiuis saeculi*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, 34 (Leipzig, 1909).
- Henry, P. L., 'The Cruces of *Audacht Morainn*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 89, (1982), 33-53.

- Henry, P. L., *The Early English and Celtic Lyric* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1966).
- Henry, P. L., Review of *Audacht Morainn* by Fergus Kelly, *Studia Hibernica*, 17/18 (1977/8), 203-10.
- Herbert, Máire, 'Goddess and King: The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland', *Women and Sovereignty*, ed. Olga Fradenburg, *Cosmos*, 7 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992) pp. 264-75.
- Herbert, Máire, 'The Universe of Male and Female: A Reading of the Deirdre Story', *Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples: Proceedings of the Second North American Congress of Celtic Studies* (Halifax, N.S.: St Mary's University, 1992), pp. 53-63.
- Herbert, Máire, 'Celtic Heroine? The Archaeology of the Deirdre Story', *Gender in Irish Writing*, eds. Toni O'Brien Johnson and David Cairns (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), pp. 13-22.
- Herbert, Máire, 'Transmutations of an Irish Goddess', *The Concept of the Goddess*, eds. Sandra Billington and Miranda Green (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 141-51.
- Hull, Eleanor, 'Old Irish Tabus, or *Geasa*', *Folklore*, 12 (1901), 41-66.
- Jackson, Kenneth, *The Oldest Irish Tradition: A Window on the Iron Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).
- Jaski, Bart, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).
- Kelly, Fergus, 'An Old Irish Text on Court Procedure', *Peritia*, 5 (1986), 74-106.
- Kelly, Fergus, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, *Early Irish Law Series*, 3 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988; repr. 2009).
- Kenney, James F., *The Sources for the History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical* ([n.p.]: Columbia University Press, 1929; repr. New York: Octagon Books, 1979).
- Mac Cana, Proinsias, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', *Études Celtiques*, 7 (1955), 76-114 & 356-413.
- Mac Cana, Proinsias, '*Regnum and Sacerdotium*: Notes on Irish Tradition', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 65 (1979), 443-81.
- Mac Cana, Proinsias, 'Praise Poetry in Ireland Before the Normans', *Ériu*, 54 (2004), 11-40.
- MacNeill, Eoin, 'Ancient Irish Law: The Law of Status or Franchise', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, 36 (1921-4), 265-316.
- McCone, Kim, '*Aided Cheltechair maic Ulthechair*: Hounds, Heroes and Hospitallers in Early Irish Myth and Story', *Ériu*, 35 (1985), 1-30.

- McCone, Kim, 'Dubthach Maccu Lugair and a Matter of Life and Death in the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már*', *Peritia*, 5 (1986), 1-35.
- McCone, Kim, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990).
- McCone, Kim, 'A Tale of Two Ditties: The Poet and Satirist in *Cath Maige Tuired*', *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney*, eds. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, and Kim McCone (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989), pp. 122-43.
- Meens, Rob, 'Politics, Mirrors of Princes, and the Bible: Sins, Kings, and the Well-Being of the Realm', *Early Medieval Europe*, 7 (1998), 345-57.
- Meyer, Kuno, *A Primer of Irish Metrics: with a Glossary and an Appendix Containing an Alphabetical List of the Poets of Ireland* (Dublin: School of Irish Learning, 1909).
- Ní Mhaonaigh, Máire, 'Cormac mac Cuilennáin: King, Bishop and "Wonderous Sage"', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 58 (2011), 109-28.
- Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1977).
- Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás, 'The Semantics of *Síd* (1977-79)', *Coire Sois*, ed. by Matthieu Boyd (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2014), pp. 19-34.
- Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás, '*Cath Maige Tuired* as Exemplary Myth (1983)', *Coire Sois*, ed. by Matthieu Boyd (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2014), pp. 135-54.
- Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás, 'Pagan Survivals: The Evidence of Early Irish Narrative (1984)', *Coire Sois: The Cauldron of Knowledge*, ed. by Matthieu Boyd (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2014), pp. 35-50.
- Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás, 'The Concept of the Hero in Irish Mythology (1985)', *Coire Sois*, ed. by Matthieu Boyd (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2014), pp. 51-64.
- Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás, 'Reflections on Compert Conchobuir and Serglige Con Culainn (1994)', *Coire Sois; The Cauldron of Knowledge, a Companion to Early Irish Saga*, ed. Matthieu Boyd (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2014), pp. 271-79.
- Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás, '*Gat* and *Díberg* in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', *Coire Sois*, ed. Matthieu Boyd (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2014), pp. 412-21.
- Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás, 'Introduction: Irish Myths and Legends (2005)', *Coire Sois; The Cauldron of Knowledge, a Companion to Early Irish Saga*, ed. Matthieu Boyd, (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2014), pp. 1-15.

- O'Connor, Ralph, *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel: Kingship and Narrative Artistry in a Medieval Irish Saga*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- O'Connor, Ralph, 'Searching for the Moral in *Bruiden Meic Da Reo*', *Ériu*, 56 (2006), 117-43.
- Ó Corráin, Donnchadh, 'Nationality and Kingship in Pre-Norman Ireland', *Historical Studies*, vol. XII: *Nationality and the Pursuit of National Independence*, ed. T. W. Moody (Belfast: The Appletree Press, 1978), pp. 1-35.
- Ó Corráin, Donnchadh, 'Irish Origin Legends and Genealogy: Recurrent Aetiologies', *History and Heroic Tale: A Symposium*, eds. Tore Nyberg et al (Odense: Odense University Press, 1985), pp. 51-96.
- Ó Corráin, Donnchadh, 'Historical Need and Literary Narrative', *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies, Oxford, 1983*, ed. D. Ellis Evans D. Ellis Evans, John G Griffith, and E. M. Jope (Oxford, 1986), pp. 141-58.
- Ó Corráin, Donnchadh, 'Legend as Critic', in *The Writer as Witness: Literature as Historical Evidence: Historical Studies XVI*, ed. Tom Dunne (Cork: Cork University Press, 1987), pp. 23-38.
- Ó Corráin, Donnchadh, Liam Breatnach, Aidan Breen, 'The Laws of the Irish', *Peritia*, 3, (1984), 382-438.
- Ó Cróinín, Dáibhí, 'Ireland, 400-800', *A New History of Ireland, 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, eds. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, T. W. Moody, and F. X. Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 182-234.
- Ó Daly, Máirín, 'A Poem on the Airgialla', *Ériu*, 16 (1952), 179-88.
- O'Donovan, John, *Leabhar na g-Ceart, or The Book of Rights* (Dublin: The Celtic Society, 1847).
- O'Leary, Philip, 'Fír Fer: An Internalised Ethical Concept in Early Irish Literature?', *Éigse*, 22 (1987), 1-14.
- O'Leary, Philip, 'A Foreseeing Driver in an Old Chariot: Regal Moderation in Early Irish Literature', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 2 (1986), 1-16.
- O'Leary, Philip, 'Honour-Bound: The Social Context of Early Irish Heroic Geis', *Celtica*, 20 (1988), 85-107.
- Ó Máille, Tomás, 'Medb Chruachna', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 17 (1928), 129-46.
- O'Rahilly, T. F., 'On the Origin of the Names Érainn and Ériu', *Ériu*, 14 (1946), 7-28.

- O'Reilly, Edward, 'A Chronological Account of Nearly Four Hundred Irish Writers, Commencing with the Earliest Account of Irish History, and Carried Down to the Year of Our Lord 1750; with a Descriptive Catalogue of Such of Their Works as are Still Extant in Verse or Prose, Consisting of Upwards of One Thousand Separate Tracts', *Transactions of the Ibero-Celtic Society*, 1.1 (1820).
- Ó Riain, Pádraig, *Feastdays of the Saints: A History of Irish Martyrologies* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 2006).
- Picard, Jean-Michel, 'Princeps and Principatus in the Early Irish Church: A Reassessment', *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne*, ed. Alfred P. Smyth (Four Courts Press: Dublin, 2000), pp. 146-60.
- Pokorny, Julius, 'Zu Morands Fürstenspiegel', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 13 (1921), 43-46.
- Reinhard, John Revell, *The Survival of Geis in Medieval Romance* (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1933).
- Robinson, Fred Norris, 'Satirists and Enchanters in Early Irish Literature', in *Studies in the History of Religions Presented to Crawford Howell Toy*, eds. David Gordon Lyon and George Foot Moore (The MacMillan Company; New York, 1912), pp. 95-130.
- Sayers, William, 'Qualitative and Quantitative Criteria for Prosperous Royal Rule: Notes on *Audacht Morainn* and a Vedic Indian Analogue', *Studia Celtica*, 48 (2014), 93-106.
- Sims-Williams, Patrick, Review of *Pagan Past and Christian Present* by Kim McCone, *Éigse*, 29 (1996), 179-96.
- Sjöblom, Tom, *Early Irish Taboos: A Study in Cognitive History*, *Comparative Religion* 5 (University of Helsinki: Helsinki, 2000).
- Smith, Roland Mitchell, 'The *Speculum Principum* in Early Irish Literature', *Speculum*, 2, (1927), 411-45.
- Stacey, Robin Chapman, *Dark Speech: The Performance of Law in Early Ireland*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
- Stacey, Robin Chapman, *The Road to Judgement: From Custom to Court in Medieval Ireland and Wales* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).
- Stelten, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995; repr. 2011).
- Thurneysen, Rudolf, 'Allerlei keltisches', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 13 (1921), 297-304 (298-99).
- Wagner, H., 'Studies in the Origins of Early Celtic Civilisation', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 31 (1970), 1-58.

- Warmind, Morten, 'Sacred Kingship Among the Celts', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 12 (1992), 196-206.
- Watkins, Calvert, 'Indo-European Metrics and Archaic Irish Verse', *Celtica*, 6 (1963), 194-249.
- Watkins, Calvert, '*Is Tre Éir Flathemon*: Marginalia to *Audacht Morainn*', *Ériu*, 30 (1979), 181-98.
- Watkins, Calvert. 'Preliminaries to a Historical and Comparative Analysis of the Syntax of the Old Irish Verb', *Celtica*, 6 (1963), 1-49 (36-39).
- Wooding, Jonathan M., 'Reapproaching the Pagan Celtic Past: Anti-Nativism, Asterisk Reality, and the Late-Antiquity Paradigm', *Studia Celtica Fennica*, 6 (2009), 57-74.
- Wormald, Patrick, 'Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kinship: Some Further Thoughts', *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach, with Virginia Darrow Oggins, (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1986), pp. 150-84.
- Yocum, Christopher Guy, 'Wisdom Literature in Early Ireland', *Studia Celtica*, 46 (2012), 39-58.