Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 6

Records of the discussions at the conference room on 23-11-2016

In attendance: David Stifter (chair), Elizabeth Boyle, Deborah Hayden, Gearóid Úa Conchubhair, Chantal Kobel, Siobhán Barrett, Anne Harrington, Bernhard Bauer, Fangzhe Qiu, Romanas Bulatovas, Lars Nooij (scribe)

Practicalities

Lára Ní Mhaoláin, Elliott Lash and Brian Ó Catháin have sent their apologies. The activities of the reading group are resumed after a few weeks break.[1]

Matters arising

During the previous meeting a number of issues remained unresolved. A central question concerned the nature of Old Irish. No conclusion was reached, but it was considered that it might be necessary to shift our definition towards a slightly earlier period (see previous proceedings). This question will remain with us for some time yet [this is Dutch understatement (DS)].

Another matter concerned the need to add references to later manuscripts containing OIr. texts. It was considered that – for the purposes of the grammar – it would be best to cite the texts themselves, rather than the manuscripts in which they are contained. David now briefly notes that the significant question of what texts we would actually want to include has not yet been addressed. These questions will also stay with us for some time.

The e-mail mystery (found in footnote 2 of the previous proceedings: in brief, Elliott claimed to have sent an email to David, which had inexplicably become lost) has in all likelihood been solved. Due to opening the e-mail on his phone, the e-mail was likely merged into a stacked group of e-mails, which David presumably then deleted as a whole, without noticing the e-mail in question.

Gearóid asked whether there are any good internet-resources/-courses for the learner of OIr.; we shall address this in a future meeting.

Neil McLeod responded to the fourth proceedings, asking whether anyone has commented in print on Carney's dating of *Saltair na Rann*. We do not know.

Elizabeth reports that she has supplied Liam Breatnach with hardcopies of the previous proceedings.

Elliott (in absentia) mentioned to David that he had found two reviews of the GOI from the late 40s. David has read these reviews. The first is Máirín O Daly's in Éigse 6 (1948–52) and is largely positive. Its author seems to imply that Thurneysen did not contribute much to the revision, and that Duignan essentially did most of the work on translating the *Handbuch* and that Binchy and Best proceeded to revise it. She also added some comments on the grammar, curiously mostly on words starting in *sech-*.

The second review was by Kenneth Jackson in Speculum 23 (1948) and – to some extent – goes against the other review. According to Jackson, the GOI was "corrected and modified by Thurneysen himself". It is indeed implied that the contribution of Binchy and Best was limited largely to their notes at the end of the grammar. Jackson gives some general praise, whilst also stating that more could have been done. His main criticism is that it is essentially a grammar of the glosses and that it does not include Primitive and Middle Irish (then again, the focus on Old Irish was explicitly set out by Thurneysen himself, in stating his aims for the grammar). Jackson also questions its lacking treatment of syntax (however, compared to other grammars of the day, it offers a lot on syntax). Nonetheless, he concludes that it is

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[1] Elizabeth: "I thought you [David] would do a joke on a 'hiatus'". David: "I did not think of that. It would have been a great joke. But I am sure Lars will record it now anyway."

"a treasure-house which will probably never be superseded".[2] He then raises a number of valid questions – added in small script below the main part of the review – on Irish grammar.[3]

Archaic sources (§10)
"…some even as early as the sixth century". This is, perhaps, too optimistic. The statement is not found in the *Handbuch*. If these archaic sources are to be included as sources of a new grammar (pending a shift of focus to the earlier period), these sources should not be treated separately from the other material. These introductory words should then be moved to the main introduction of the sources.

It is now known that a significant amount of texts found in later manuscripts date back to the 7th century. It is considered that, given the improvements made in our philological understanding of these texts, these may now be regarded as potential sources for the grammar. Recently, Liam Breatnach (in *Codices Hibernenses Eximii I– Lebor na hUidre*, p. 54) argued that preference should still be given to those sources found in contemporary manuscripts. David counters that there are, strictly speaking, almost no manuscripts that are strictly contemporaneous to the composition of any of the OIr. texts, even in the case of the manuscripts that date back to the OIr. period. Almost all extant texts are manifest copies. Moreover, he suggests that there may be different levels to the language, which may all be differently affected by the complications of a long transmission. The phonology might most easily be altered, the morphology perhaps less so (although morphology is, of course, also tied into phonology). The syntax is perhaps the most stable (although one does have to account for the possibility of conscious archaizing), especially in poetry. The opinion is raised that the syntax of poetry is particularly unnatural, as it is strongly influenced by the demands of metre. Still, it is argued, poetry does restrict itself and does not go beyond certain limits, which may well be informative of the syntax of less stilted language. Additionally, the nature of the early sources – being largely made up of glosses on Latin texts – is not strictly natural, or unproblematic either. The best solution might be to devise a system to unambiguously flag items found in texts from post-Old Irish manuscripts; i.e. with separate flags for prose and metrical texts.

"…the remainder are too scanty to permit of our establishing an earlier stage of the language for more than a few isolated forms." This is too strong a statement. Jürgen Uhlich is working on a grammar and very thorough description of the contemporaneous archaic sources. The current progress of his work is unknown to us. He has spoken about aspects of this at conferences and in university modules.

The Würzburg *prima manus* is, of course, a valid source. It is noted, however, that we should not forget that the *prima manus* amounts to but a handful of glosses.

Compared with GOI, the *Handbuch* is less precise in discussing the Cambrai Homily, stating that it is a Latin text interspersed with some Irish sentences. It is much rather the other way around. The statements in the grammar are not particularly helpful, as the stress put on the spelling mistakes – due to the fact that the scribe of the attested copy clearly did not speak Irish – gives the appearance that the text is very corrupt. In fact, the spelling mistakes are not dissimilar to those in late vernacular manuscripts transmitting OIr. texts, and the original can generally be securely restored.

The Cambrai Homily was originally considered to be a 7th-century text contained in an 8th-century manuscript, copied without modernizations (due to the fact that the scribe did not speak Irish). However, Uhlich has convincingly argued that some forms were modernized and that there must therefore have been an intermediate stage (an Irish-speaking 'middle man') between the composition of the original and the present manuscript. Nonetheless, Cambrai is a significant source and may well constitute the oldest continuous text in Irish found in a manuscript from the OIr. period.

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[2] We shall see.

[3] David particularly liked his suggestion that hiatus should be marked with a trema (combining diaresis) $<\ddot{}>$, a practice which he himself favours strongly now (but did not follow in *Sengoídelc*).

As a student, David imagined the Cambrai Homily to be a garbled, illegible text, but when he obtained high-resolution images of the text as part of a complex academic discussion on the original form of the word *feda* (or, as was claimed, *fedo*), later *fíada* 'lord', he found the text to be written in a neat style and posing no fundamental palaeographic or philological difficulties.[4] David showed the high-resolution images of the text. In closing, the Cambrai Homily is also of historical and cultural interest for its contents as the different types and colours of martyrdom are mentioned in them.

We now turn to the 'Minor Glosses'.[5] "Three manuscripts in Paris and Florence contain some Irish glosses, perhaps originally the work of Adamnan (Ir. Adomnán…)" We do not know the validity of this claim; what is it based on? It is not found in the *Handbuch*. It is noted that the OIr. spelling of names is always to be preferred.

These glosses are on Philargyrius' commentaries on Virgil' *Bucolica*, a poetic handbook on farmin-and one of the centrepieces of the early medieval classroom. The three manuscripts go back to the same archetype and, although they are also copied by non-Irish-speakers, the variant readings aid in reconstructing the original.

Little comment is made on the Naples manuscript of the Philargyrius glosses, nor is much said on the glosses found on the single folio palimpsest in Turin noted in the GOI.

A significant amount of other sources from this period have since been discovered. David excerpted a provisional list from Dagmar Bronner's catalogue of OIr. sources (see there for further information):

München computus (718/9)
Città del Vaticano Pal. lat. 68 (early 8th c.)
Dublin TCD 55, dry-point glosses in Codex Usserianus Primus (7th c.)
Einsiedlen computus (689–719)
Milan, words in Antiphonary of Bangor (680–691)
Milan, Ars Ambrosiana, 1 (!) gloss (ca. 700)
Napels, Grammar of Charisius (7th/8th c.)
Napels, Ars Malsachani (end 7th c.)
Paris BN lat. 10399
Saint Omer, Book of Amos, 6 glosses (7th c.)
Turin BNU F.V.1, 1 gloss
Turin, Codex Taurinensis F.IV.24
Dublin, note in Book of Durrow

A significant portion of these are found in manuscripts dealing with the computus, a topic which occasionally allows for very precise dating. Unfortunately, the dating of the manuscripts does not always allow one to date the glosses contained therein, as these may be both older, or younger. Some of the newly-found glosses are dry-point glosses, which may help explain why they eluded scholars

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[4] The discussion, which has significant implications for the development of the Irish language, hinged on the reading of the Cambrai manuscript, which included the earliest mention of this word. Originally, David followed McCone in believing that the reading was *-o*, solely on the basis of linguistic arguments, rather than actual study of the manuscript. However, Sims-Williams (FS Meid) argued on the basis of the reading *-a*. Having looked at the photographs of the manuscript, David now unconditionally accepts the reading *-a*. An <o> was written at exactly this place on the other side of the folio and the impression of an <o> is merely due to this letter shining through the vellum. As such, combined with other evidence, Sims-Williams' point of view that the sequence *-onts* yielded *-a*, rather than *-o* in OIr. is to be preferred. The *-o* found in words which originally ended in *-onts* must have acquired this vocalism by means of analogy with the oblique cases (see Aaron Griffith, '*-n(C)s in Celtic', in *Die Sprache* 45/1-2 (2005), 44-67; with an appendix that reflects David's views on the manuscript reading *feda*).

[5] It is considered that Elliott would, had he been present, certainly have stated that these glosses are not minor, even if small by comparison to the larger corpora, and that they are highly significant. He has clearly succeeded in influencing us on this matter.

until relatively recently. Of these the Einsiedeln glosses look particularly old: they contain ordinals ending in *-met*, rather than *-mad*, retaining the old vocalism, not distinguishing radical /t/ from /θ/ and retaining final /θ/ (later > /ð/).

It is noted that a study of the Minor Glosses thought to derive securely from the 9th-century might be valuable to demonstrate the developments of the language relative to that of the 8th-century.

The Irish names in Latin works such as the *Vita Columbae* by Adomnán are indeed of use. The *Vita Columbae* was probably written in the early 690's (on text-internal grounds). The chief manuscript of the text (kept in Schaffhausen, Switzerland) was written by Adomnán's pupil Dorbbéne[6], who died in 713 AD. The text is also found in later manuscripts, but these are not usually much regarded on account of Dorbbéne's unique closeness to the original. However, David has noted readings from these manuscripts in passing and thinks they might sometimes include forms that look older than those found in the Schaffhausen Columba. This deserves further research.

Other 7th-century sources to be considered
Among the law tracts, Liam Breatnach has argued that *Senchas Már* was assembled between 660–680. Some parts, in particular *Bechbretha* (bee laws) and *Coibnes Uisci Thairidni* (a tract on mills) may be even earlier; they seem to share the same author and there is a reference to Congal Cáech, the sole Ulidian King of Tara (d. 637), who was soon purged from the king lists – implying that the tracts were composed not too long after his death) certainly belong to the 7th century. *Cáin Ḟuithirbe* (only fragmentary) has also been dated to this period.

Poetry is more controversial. There are some poems ascribed to Colmán mac Léneni (d. 607), which are thought to be genuine. However, it is conceivable that these poems may have had an oral transmission before being committed to writing. *Amra Choluim Chille* was traditionally thought to be an early 7th-century poem, but Jacopo Bisagni favours a 9th-century date.

Early sections of the genealogies may be genuinely old. Moreover, the genealogies sometimes include poems and short legends even in the early sections (e.g. in the Book of Leinster), rendering them a source with some potential. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, speaking on the Book of Ballymote, argued that parts of the early sections include political information which is only compatible with the early 7th century. Moreover, he suggests that the writing of genealogies in the usual format was strongly influenced, or indeed triggered by Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, which likely reached Ireland by the middle of the seventh century. However, some of the earliest genealogies follow a different format that might best be explained as being pre-Isidorean (= early 7th-century at the latest). These sections also mention tribal groupings and peoples that are essentially meaningless in the later period.

The Annals of Ulster already include what appears to be genuine historical information before the end of the 7th century, but it is difficult to decide when the attested tradition of contemporary record-keeping began. Fangzhe explains that for the early period, there are a lot of duplicate entries, as well as some entries which appear to have been interpolated from other (linguistically younger) sources. Moreover, the formulaic format of the annals forces one to at least allow for the possibility that early, Latin entries were replaced by younger, Irish entries at a later point. As such, the potential for the Annals to yield actual 7th-century Irish remains difficult to decide with any real certainty.

Narrative texts must also be considered. One example is *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*, which formed part of *Cín Dromma Snechtai* and has been argued to consist of two distinct parts (Edel Bhreatnach in *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 2005, 49–68). In this tale a succession of Kings of Tara are mentioned and elaborated upon. Following Fínṡnechtae Fledach (665–695) the style changes markedly and it has therefore been argued that the story was composed during the reign of this very king. The second part was subsequently added during, or shortly after the reign of the final king mentioned in the text, aue Coircc (= Cathal mac Finguine? d. 742).

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[6] 'Little worm'.

Cáin Adomnáin is the final text considered during this meeting. This law is said to have been promulgated by Adomnán in 697 AD. However, it is attested only as a massively composite text, including distinct strands (some of which date to the Middle Irish period). Removing the sections that are undoubtedly late, one ends up with a good, OIr. text, but it does not look much like the writing of Adomnán as attested in the *Vita Columbae*. Was the text, perhaps, updated in the 720's? Or might it even be a pseudo-archaic, 9th-century law text? On the other hand, Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha (*Peritia* 1) has argued on historical grounds that the guarantor list included in the text looks like it genuinely belongs to the late 7th century. The guarantors are very nearly all known figures of the time and their titles and positions at times reflect the status they had in the late 7th century, rather than in the early 8th century.

In closing, everyone should feel free to give some thought to whether they think other texts should be considered in this list for the next meeting.