A note on the end of the world: Tírechan's 'dies erdathe'

A note on the end of the world: Tírechán's *dies erdathe**

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Aufsatz gibt eine Etymologie für das Wort *erdathe* in einem Abschnitt von Tírecháns *Collectanea*, wo es sich auf eine anscheinend vorchristliche Vorstellung bezüglich des Weltuntergangs bezieht. Es wird vorgeschlagen, *erdathe* als den Gen. Sg. eines Substantivs **erdath* aufzufassen, dessen zweite Silbe eine Reflex der idg. Verbalwurzel **d*^{h}*weh*$_2$- 'Rauch machen' enthält. Dazu passen etliche (sowohl heidnische als auch christliche) Textzeugnisse, in denen der Weltuntergang als die Zerstörung der Erde durch gewaltige Feuer- und Wassermassen beschrieben wird.

A passage in Tírechán's seventh-century *Collectanea*[1] narrates how king Lóegaire refuses to be baptised, in spite of Saint Patrick's efforts to convert him. The king's address to Patrick includes the mysterious Irish word *erdathe*:

> Perrexitque ad ciuitatem Temro ad Loigairium filium Neill iterum, quia apud illum foedus pepigit, ut non occideretur in regno illius; sed non potuit credere, dicens: 'Nam Neel pater meus non siniuit mihi credere, sed ut sepeliar in cacuminibus Temro quasi uiris consistentibus in bello' (quia utuntur gentiles in sepulcris armati prumptis armis) 'facie ad faciem usque ad diem <u>*erdathe*</u>' (apud magos, id est iudicii diem Domini) 'ego filius Neill et filius Dúnlinge imMaistin in campo Liphi pro duritate odi[u]i ut est hoc'.
>
> 'And he [i.e. Patrick] proceeded again to the city of Tara to Loíguire son of Níall, because he made a pact with him that he should not be killed within his realm; but (Loíguire) could not accept the faith, saying: "My father Níall did not allow me to accept the faith, but bade me to be buried on the ridges of Tara, I son of Níall and the sons [*sic*] of Dúnlang in Maistiu in Mag Liphi, face to face (with each other) in the manner of men at war' (for the pagans, armed in their tombs, have their weapons ready) until the day of *erdathe*' (as the druids call it, that is, the day of the Lord's judgement), because of such fierceness of our (mutual) hatred'.[2]

Tírechán specifies that *erdathe* was the term used by the druids for the end of the world. Here this term is apparently inflected in the genitive case (*dies erdathe* = 'day of *erdath*'), a fact which seems to be confirmed by the only other attestation that has been claimed for this word, occurring in the ninth-century text known as *The monastery of Tallaght*,[3] in a passage dealing with monastic regulations on fasting:

> Aon troscut hi riagail comgeild .i. i*n*d cetain ria caisc. Trí t*r*oisciud imm*ur*co t*antu*m la colum cilli in ando … INd ai*n*e im*murgu* in chesta dosf*or*slaicde [la] col*um* cill*e* f*or* noebaib here*n*n fobithi*n* atbathatar dend ai*n*e si*n* sruithi iar sircacht i*n* chorgis Ba <u>erdath</u> + ba lith mor iar*um* la col*um* cill*e* a*n*n dogress dona

* I wish to thank Prof. Michael Clarke, Dr Graham Isaac, Prof. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, Prof. Patrick Sims-Williams and Dr Jürgen Uhlich, who provided a number of corrections and suggestions. Part of the research for this paper has been supported by the Millennium Fund of NUI, Galway.

[1] For the date of the *Collectanea*, cf. CHARLES-EDWARDS 2000: 439f. ('*c.* 688 X 693 AD').

[2] Text and translation from BIELER 1979: 132–3, §12; cf. also *Thes.* II, 45.8.

[3] For the date of this text, cf. GWYNN & PURTON 1911-1912: 122, 124.

> braithribh ass ni*n*gna*m*a doib a*n*n nobithe tre*m*si ocaurcill*iud* + oc legcud*e* usce trit feil na naire*m*on leiso*m* i*n*si*n* fobithi*n* is a*n*n f*or*centai anas.
>
> There is one fast in Comgall's rule—namely, the Wednesday before Easter. However, Colum Cille recognized three fasts only in the year: … However, Colum Cille relaxed the fast of the Passion for the saints of Ireland, because old men died of that fast after the long privations of Lent. A great festivity and merrymaking was regularly allowed by Colum Cille thereafter to the brethren: the growth of the crops was given to them then: three months were spent in tending and watering them. He called that the Feast of the Ploughmen, because it was then that the crops reached their full growth.[4]

In this passage, the terms *erdath* and *lith mor* are translated as 'a great festivity and merrymaking' by the editors, who suggest in their commentary that *erdath* represents a variant or garbled version of *airddach* (cf. GWYNN & PURTON 1911-1912: 172, and *DIL* s.v. *airtach*). I shall return to the meaning of *erdath* in this passage at the end of this brief contribution; in the meantime, it will suffice to observe that *erdath* looks like the nominative singular of the term which had been used approximately two hundred years earlier by Tírechán.

To my knowledge, the exact meaning and origin of this word have never been adequately explained. As far as I know, the earliest attempt at an etymology of *erdath* is that by Henri D'ARBOIS DE JUBAINVILLE who, in the first volume of his *Cours de littérature celtique* (1883: 188–9), wrote:

> Il semble un peu téméraire de chercher actuellement l'explication de ce mot [i.e. *erdathe*] … Cependant on pourrait proposer de considérer *erdathe* comme un composé de la particule *er* ou *air*, qui veut dire « vers, pour, dans, » mais qui souvent n'a qu'une valeur augmentative, et d'un dérivé du substantif *dath*, « couleur; » le jour d'*erdathe* serait celui où le mort reprend sa couleur. Mais on peut aussi croire que *dathe*, dans *erdathe*, est identique à *data* que O'Clery rend par l'irlandais moderne *dathamhail*, « agréable, » et qui a penétré [*sic*] avec ce sens dans les glossaires d'O'Brien et d'O'Reilly. Le jour d'*erdathe* serait donc simplement le jour agréable.

While the relative *naïveté* of the French scholar's tentative analysis is apparent, 20th-century attempts to explain the origins of this word do not seem to have been much more successful.

Looking for *erdath* in *DIL*, we are re-directed to *airddach* as in Gwynn & Purton's edition; in its turn, *airddach* is indicated in *DIL* as a variant spelling of the lemma *airtach*, for which two sets of meanings are provided: (a) 'act of refreshing, restoring' and (b) 'act of celebrating; festival, ceremony'. Beside the semantic difficulties inherent in any attempt to explain Tírechán's use of *erdath* on the basis of *airtach*,[5] no justification is provided for the puzzling fluctuation *-th*/*-ch*. Of course,

---

[4] Text and translation from GWYNN & PURTON 1911-1912: 155–156, §68.

[5] Supposedly, the meaning 'doomsday' could have developed out of 'celebration' in a Christian context (the Day of Judgement could be seen as the ultimate triumph over death for those who will be saved). Indeed, Patrick Sims-Williams has kindly pointed out to me that *erdath* could be a borrowing from Welsh *er* (i.e. *yr*) *dathl* (a univerbated lexicalisation of the definite article + *dathl*; cf. Fr. *lingot*, probably < Fr. def. art. *l'* + Engl. *ingot*), where *dathl* would presumably be a substantivised form of the adj. meaning 'famous, celebrated' (thus, *er dathl* 'the famous, celebrated one [i.e. day]'; cf. *GPC* s.v. *dathl*), already found in a poem from the Book of Taliesin, *Marwnat Corroi m*[*ab*] *Dayry* ('The Elegy on [the Irish hero] Cú Roí mac Dáiri'), recently edited and translated in SIMS-WILLIAMS 2011: 45–7 (l.

one could always invoke a scribal error as *deus ex machina*: in that case, however, the same peculiar error should have occurred independently in the *Collectanea* and *The monastery of Tallaght*, a rather unlikely event, to say the least. Moreover, in the commentary to his edition of the *Collectanea*, BIELER (1979: 218) writes:

> *Erdathe* is probably gen. sg. of a fem. *ā*-stem **erdath*. The R.I.A. *Dictionary* links *erdath* with *airtach* (*ertach*, *erddach*) 'festival, ceremony, etc.', but as this is an *o*-stem its gen. sg. is *airtaig* (*ertaig*).[6] Dr. Binchy tentatively suggests that *erdathe* could be for *íardaige* (earlier *érd-*), one of whose meanings is 'fate, unhappy end'.

The connection with *íardaige* (listed in *DIL* s.v. *íartaige*, *íardaige*) was rejected by John CAREY in an article on Irish eschatology, where he wrote (1996: 44):

> D. A. Binchy's suggestion that *erdathe* might represent *iartaige*, "result, (unhappy) end, remnant," although it involves a very plausible explanation of the word's first syllable as the preposition *ēr* > *iar* "after," also posits a substitution of *-th-* for *-g-* that would be anomalous at any point in the Old Irish period.

To this we may add the simple fact that, even accepting the bizarre case of '*-th-* for *-g-*', we would strictly speaking expect to find something like ***usque in diem erdathi* in the Book of Armagh, the OIr. gen. sg. of the *io*-stem noun *íartaige* being *íartaigi*.[7]

In the above-mentioned article, CAREY does not offer any new explanation or etymology of *erdath(e)*. Nevertheless, he observes as follows (*ibid.*):

> So mysterious a word is unlikely to be the result of pure invention. It would not be hard to imagine Tírechán concocting the notion that the druids had their own beliefs about the Day of Judgement, much as the author of the Middle Welsh *Mabinogi* sought to add a touch of historical verisimilitude to his account of pre-Christian Britain by saying that Pryderi was baptized "with the baptism which they had in those days" – but where did he get the name that he claims the druids used, a term unparalleled elsewhere in the literature and so far resistant to analysis? On the basis of these considerations I take Tírechán's testimony to be authentic here: a precious scrap of information from the final waning of Irish paganism.

7, *Dathyl oed y glot kyn no'e adneu* 'Renowned was his fame before his interment'; the spelling *dathyl* probably shows an epenthetic vowel). The greatest appeal of this suggestion is that it allows to explain simultaneously both the passage from the *Collectanea* and the one from *The monastery of Tallaght*. However, I see at least two problems with this hypothesis: first of all, while on the one hand a meaning such as 'celebration' or 'celebrated (day)' would suit Christian eschatological beliefs, on the other hand Tírechán explicitly refers to *erdath* as a term used by pagan *magi*, as I further stress later in this article. Secondly, we are here completely left in the dark as to the circumstances and reasons for such a remarkable borrowing from an otherwise completely unattested Welsh idiom for 'doomsday'. As a result, the entirely *ad hoc* nature of this explanation makes it somewhat unsatisfactory to my mind.

[6] The same objection is raised in CAREY 1996: 44.

[7] Admittedly, this argument should be taken *cum grano salis*, considering that some early examples of confusion between *-i* and *-e* due to their merger into [ə] can already be found in the OIr. glosses (for several examples of this phenomenon from the Würzburg and Milan glosses, cf. STRACHAN 1903: 51–2; cf. also MCCONE 1985: 87).

Later on, CAREY refers to another passage from Tírechán's *Collectanea*, concerning a four-sided stone that stood in the 'well of Findmag, which is called Slán':[8] here we read that 'some [deceased] wise man had made for himself a shrine in the water under the stone to bleach his bones perpetually because he feared the burning by fire'.[9] By comparing this passage with a reference to Strabo's famous account of eschatological beliefs among the druids of Gaul,[10] as well as with a stanza from the Icelandic *Völuspá* offering a description of *Ragnarök* (the end of the world in Norse mythology),[11] CAREY (1996: 45f.) tentatively suggests that the *Collectanea* may be here preserving the notion of 'a pre-Christian prophecy foretelling a catastrophic conflagration'.[12]

Carey himself admits that 'this is … a selective presentation of complex and far from uncontroversial evidence' (CAREY 1996: 47). However, I believe that the etymology of the word *erdath* itself, which will be proposed in this article, may lend considerable support to Carey's hypothesis.

First of all, Binchy's identification of this term's first syllable as a prefix appears to make very good sense from the point of view of both spelling and morphology, although it is not clear whether we are here dealing with <*er-*> for *íar-*, as suggested by Binchy (cf. *DIL* s.v. *1 íar*, col. 15, ll. 65–66), or rather with one of the following two 'intensive' prefixes listed in *DIL*: (1) *air-* (cf. *DIL* s.v. *air-*, 'prepositional prefix meaning "before, for" but later also with merely intensive force') and (2) *ér-* (cf. *DIL* s.v. *2 ér-*, *ér-*, 'an intens. particle, usually as pref.').

In the present context, much more significant is the word's second syllable. I propose that *-dath* is a reflex of the PIE verbal root $*d^{h}\text{◻}eh_2$- 'to make smoke' (cf. *LIV*^{2} 158: 'Rauch machen'; *IEW* 261–7), that is the well-known root underlying not only verbs such as Greek θύω 'to offer sacrifice (by burning)'[13] and Latin *suffiō* 'to fumigate', but also nominal forms such as Vedic *dhūmá-*, Latin *fūmus*, Old Prussian *dumis* 'smoke', and probably Greek θυμός 'soul, spirit' (all from PIE $*d^{h}uh_2$*-mó-*; cf. also DE VAAN 2008: 249, s.v. *fūmus*).[14]

---

[8] Cf. BIELER 1979: 152–3, §39: *fontem Findmaige qui dicitur Slan*. According to Tírechán (*ibid.*), the spring was sacred to the druids: *honorabant magi fontem et immolauerunt dona ad illum in modum dii* ('the druids honoured the well and offered gifts to it as to a god').

[9] *Ibid.*: *quidam profeta mortuus fecit bibliothicam sibi in aqua sub petra, ut dealbaret ossa sua semper, quia timuit ignis exust<ion>em*.

[10] Cf. Strabo, *Geographica*, IV, 4.4: ἀφθάρτους δὲ λέγουσι καὶ οὗτοι καὶ [οἱ] ἄλλοι τὰς ψυχὰς καὶ τὸν κόσμον, ἐπικρατήσειν δέ ποτε καὶ πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ, 'Not only the Druids, but others as well, say that men's souls, and also the universe, are indestructible, although both fire and water will at some time or other prevail over them' (text from MEINEKE 1852–1853: vol. 1, p. 270; translation from JONES 1917–32: vol. 2, p. 245).

[11] Cf. *Völuspá* §57: *Sól tér sortna, sígr fold í mar, / hverfa af himni heiðar stiǫrnor; / geisar eimi við aldrnara, / leicr hár hiti við himin siálfan*, 'The sun turns black, earth sinks in the sea, the hot stars down from heaven are whirled; fierce grows the steam and the life-feeding flame, till fire leaps high about heaven itself' (text from NECKEL & KUHN 1983: 13f.; translation from BELLOWS 1923: 24). For a similar comparison of Celtic and Norse eschatological traditions (referring specifically to Strabo and the *Völuspá*), cf. also DAVIDSON 1988: 187–9.

[12] The following pages of Carey's article deal with the role of eschatology in the context of Saint Patrick's missionary activity, an issue which is not directly relevant to the present discussion. As for the correlation between the expression *dies erdathe* and the Christian Latin 'translation' of this phrase in Tírechán (*iudicii dies Domini*), this issue has been briefly discussed in Ó CEARÚIL 2003: 3–5.

[13] Cf. CLARKE 1999: 80, fn. 47: 'When θύω refers to sacrifice [in Homer] the offering is always *burnt*, and the defining element of the ritual is the rising-up of the smoke' (my italics).

[14] Alternatively, given the orthographical fluctuation between *-rd-*, *-rt-* and *-rth-* in words such as *íartaige*/*íardaige*, *arthraigid(ir)*/*ardr-*/*artr-* etc., it may be tempting to explain <*erdath*> = **ertath* on the basis of the PIE root $*teh_2$- 'thaw, melt' > Proto-Celtic **tā-* 'melt, fade, die away' (cf. *LIV*^{2} 616;

The semantic link between ‘making smoke’ and ‘burning’ is of course unproblematic.[15] As for the reconstruction of the possible pre-forms of *-dath*, the following hypothesis can be formulated. First, (-)*d-* may be the regular Irish outcome of PIE *(-)d^hw-,[16] while the vowel *$\bar{a}$ < PIE *eh_2 would have been shortened in unstressed position already before the Irish apocope.[17] Second, the final *-th* can be analysed as what remains of one of the following dental suffixes: either (1) *-*tu*-, forming deverbal abstract *u*-stem nouns,[18] or (2) *-*to*-/-*tā*-, the ancient formant of the past participle, which in Irish is discernible as one of the morphological constituents of several secondarily-lexicalised adjectives and nouns.[19] The former represents an especially attractive solution,[20] considering that to this formation belong several terms pertaining to the spheres of ‘religion, law and cosmology’.[21]

The main objection that can be raised against a derivation of *(er)dath* from Proto-Celtic *-*dā-tu*- (or Primitive Irish *-*ðā-θu*-) is of course that its genitive should be **erdatho*, not *erdathe*. On the other hand, it is well known that ‘feminine nouns which … were originally *u*-stems are declined like *ā*-stems’ (*GOI* §308).[22] Indeed, in

---

KPV 627–8; MATASOVIĆ 2009: 374; *IEW* 1053–4). However, that kind of spelling variation seems to be found mainly (only?) when the second element of the cluster was voiced (cf. examples involving stops in *GOI* §31); indeed, **karatākos* > OIr. *Carthach*, never **Cardach*.

[15] In this context, it is worth mentioning the Tocharian B secondary middle verb *twasastär* ‘burns, glows’, also listed in *LIV*^{2} 158 s.v. *d^hweh_2-. This semantic link is explicitly accepted in *LIV*^{2} in a note to the root’s meaning ‘Rauch machen’: ‘Daraus auch ‘Feuer machen’ → ‘anzünden’ (← intr. ‘brennen’)’.

[16] Cf. MCCONE 1996: 103: ‘Loss of *w* after an initial dental is attested in both Irish and British … The same development also occurs at the beginning of an internal syllable’.

[17] Cf. MCCONE 1996: 110, listing among three ‘crucial Primitive Irish developments’ the well-known ‘shortening of unstressed long vowels except before *-h*’, which must have taken place before the apocope, as shown, e.g., by the prehistory of OIr. *srathar* ‘pack-saddle’ < **sraθor* < **sraθora* < **sraθūra* < Vulgar Lat. **stratūra* < Lat. *strātūra*, or OIr. *figor* ‘figure’ < **fiγora* < **fiγura* < Lat. *figūra*.

[18] While a large number of these formations are based on the zero-grade of the root, some instances of formation with *e*-grade can be mentioned, e.g. *mess* ‘judgement’ < **med-tu-s*, *recht* ‘law’ < **re1-tu-s*, and *recht* ‘outburst (of anger)’, possibly < **rep-tu-s* (cf. DE BERNARDO STEMPEL 1999: 288; cf. also *GOI* §§723, 729).

[19] Cf. DE BERNARDO STEMPEL 1999: 439–44. As shown by DE BERNARDO STEMPEL (*ibid.*), while on the one hand the original participial formation would have required the zero-grade of the root, on the other hand several masc. and fem. nouns based on an innovatory *e*-grade can also be found (e.g. fem. *bert* ‘burden’ < Proto-Celtic **ber-tā*)**.**

[20] For the lack of *u*-colouring in *erdath*, cf. MCCONE 1996: 111: ‘Unstressed *a* … was not affected by *u*-colouring’, although, as kindly pointed out to me by Jürgen Uhlich, the deciding factor here is probably the presence of *-th-* = /θ/, rather than the unstressed condition of the vowel. Indeed, note the absence of *u*-colouring in forms with stressed *a* such as *cath* ‘battle’ < **katu*- (with its compound *cocad* ‘war’), *math* ‘bear’ < **matu*- etc. (cf. *GOI* §307), as well as the fact that the only example provided by McCone in the above-mentioned passage is *marbad* < EOIr. **marbath* < **marwaθu*-.

[21] Cf. DE BERNARDO STEMPEL 1999: 291–2, citing OIr. *recht* ‘law’, *úath* ‘fear, terror’, *fáth* ‘prophecy’, and *bráth* ‘judgement’.

[22] Theoretically, we may even think of *-e* as not being an Irish genitival ending at all, but rather the Latin ending *-ae* = /-e/, in agreement with the model for code-switching introduced by Carol Myers-Scotton (the so-called *Matrix Language Frame Model*); according to this model, certain types of ‘system morphemes’ (such as case endings) should always come from the Matrix Language (which, in the context of the *Collectanea*, is undoubtedly Latin) in sentences presenting code-switching (cf. MYERS-SCOTTON 2002: 17–8). This pattern is relatively common in Hiberno-Latin writings (although the fact that Latin case-endings are usually attached to proper names makes the evaluation of these instances as code-switching somewhat controversial); cf., e.g., the following passage from the same paragraph of Tírechán’s *Collectanea* where we also find *erdathe*: *Perrexitque ad ciuitatem Temro ad Logair**ium** filium Neill iterum* (cf. BIELER 1979: 132, §12; my boldface). On the other hand, it is not clear why Tírechán would have attached a 1st-declension Latin ending to a masculine (or neuter) *u*-stem

this case the adoption of the feminine gender (and the subsequent automatic transfer to *ā*-stem inflection) may have been analogically motivated by the fact that two common OIr. words for 'smoke / steam', i.e. *dé* (gen. *diad*) and *dethach* (*ā*-stem), are also feminine.[23] Otherwise, it is of course quite possible to consider *erdath* as the lexicalised reflex of an ancient feminine in **-tā*.[24]

At this point, the prehistory of *-dath* may be reconstructed as follows: PIE **d^hweh$_2$-*[25] > Proto-Celtic **(-)dwā-tu-/-tā* > Primitive Irish **-ðā-θu-* / *-ðā-θā* [lenition + **ðw* > *ð*] > **-ðaθu-* / *-ðaθa* [shortening of unstressed *ā*] > EOIr. *(er)dath*[26] (standing for **airdath*, **érdath* / *ćrdath*, or **íardath*).

According to this interpretation, behind Tírechán's *dies erdathe* could lie an Irish formula designating the end of the world, such as **laithe (n-)airdathe* or **laithe (n-)érdathe*, whose original meaning may have been something like 'day of (the) great smoke/steam'[27] (or, alternatively, **laithe (n-)íardathe* 'day of the final smoke/steam', although this is semantically more difficult).

---

noun (***erdathī* would have been more likely in that case). It is interesting to notice that, if *erdath* was instead inflected as an *ā*-stem, the Irish and the Latin genitival endings would have been basically homophonous.

[23] It is worth observing that both OIr. *dé* and *dethach* are also probably related to the PIE root **d^hweh$_2$-* (cf. *LEIA* D-28; MATASOVIĆ 2009: 111). Other OIr. terms listed in *LEIA*, which could derive from the same root, are: *dáistir* (impersonal verb for 'becoming furious'; cf. *LEIA* D-14 'il y a fureur'), *dúil* 'desire' (*LEIA* D-215) and ('p[eut] ê[tre]') *dumach* 'cloud' (this form is however basically rejected as a false example at *LEIA* D-222). Interestingly, the same root might also be preserved in the Gaulish term *duman(n)i* (probably gen. pl. of **dumanos* or **dumanios*), designating the second month in the Coligny Calendar, about which DELAMARRE (2003: 154) tentatively writes: 'Le sens du mois est peut-être de nature sacrificielle: mois des fumigations?'

[24] Beside *bert* (cf. fn. 19 above), DE BERNARDO STEMPEL (1999: 443–4) mentions a few more feminine nouns (concrete nouns and *nomina actionis*) in **-tā* based on the full grade of the root, e.g. *mess* 'fosterling' < **med-tā*, *gelt* 'grazing' < **gel-tā*, *celt* 'covering, garment' < **kel-tā*.

[25] It is worth noting here that the *e*-grade of this root seems to be poorly attested, if we rely on the material provided in *LIV*^{2} 158, where the only form possibly showing primary full grade is Hittite *antuwaḫḫaš* < **en-d^hwéh$_2$-os*. Thus, while not particularly problematic *per se* from the formal point of view, positing an *e*-grade pre-form of *-dath* is admittedly somewhat *ad hoc* (although theoretically the OIr. impersonal verb *dáistir* mentioned in fn. 23 above could present stressed *ā* < **eh$_2$*).

[26] Note that we need to posit nom. sg. *erdath* here, with Early Old Irish (EOIr.) preservation of *-th* = /-θ/ (later > *-d* = /-ð/, cf. MCCONE 1996: 133), in order to harmonise with the seventh-century date of composition of the *Collectanea*.

[27] Note that the visualization of a final cataclysmic event as a large mass of billowing steam seems to be particularly well in tune with the reference to both fire *and* water as destructive forces in the above-mentioned passages from Strabo and the *Völuspá* (cf. fn. 10 and 11 above). These two elements are also found in association in the following passage from the Middle Irish *Immram Snédgusa ocus Maic Ríagla* that Carey quotes in part at the end of his article: *Maith ind inis i tám, ar is indi atá Éile ⁊ Enocc … Atáit dá loch isin tír seo, loch uisci ⁊ loch tened, ⁊ ricfatis ó chianaib for Érinn manipad Martain ⁊ Patraic oc guidi leó* (*Immrama* 85, ll. 107-12), 'Good is the island wherein we are, for in it are Elijah and Enoch … There are in this land two lakes, a lake of water and a lake of fire, and they would have come long ago over Ireland had not Martin and Patrick been praying for them (the Irish)' (STOKES 1888: 23; cf. also Ó CEARÚIL 2003: 32; a different interpretation of this passage's conclusion can be found in CAREY 1996: 53: 'a lake of water and a lake of fire, and they would have covered Ireland long ago had Martin and Patrick not been beseeching them' [*scil.* the lakes]). Note that the Morrígan's prophecy on the end of the world at the end of *Cath Maige Tuired* (*CMT*^{2} §167) might also contain a reference to fire, if that is indeed the right way of interpreting the element *-thine* in the word *bainbthine* (line 833; 'fire of Banb'? This section of the prophecy is extremely obscure, and was left untranslated by the editor; I wish to thank Dr Graham Isaac for drawing my attention to this passage). Irish texts of more obvious Christian contents also mention fire in an eschatological context (sometimes in association with water), cf. e.g. *Collectanea pseudo-Bedae*: *Dic mihi tres uictorias ignis. Prima uictoria, in qua apparuit spiritus sanctus; secunda, quae eleuauit Eliam; tertia, quae comburit peccatores et terram in die iudicii*, 'Tell me the three victories of fire. The first victory, in which it

Notwithstanding the presence of analogous beliefs in other Indo-European traditions (cf. fn. 10 and 11 above), I shall not commit fully to an evaluation of *erdath* as the linguistic reflex of a pagan or Christian notion, since, as CAREY himself points out (1996: 47), eschatological motifs involving an all-destroying conflagration 'can be cited from Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic texts' as well.[28] Nevertheless, Tírechán's explicit reference to *dies erdathe* as terminology which was employed *apud magos*, if combined with the plainly residual/petrified status of *erdath*, is at least strongly suggestive of a possible pre-Christian origin.[29]

The only remaining problem concerns the above-mentioned apparent attestation of the term in question in *The monastery of Tallaght*, where *erdath* rather seems to mean 'celebration, festivity'. While we could speculate endlessly on the possible semantic changes which might have transformed the meaning of *erdath* from 'great smoke / steam' (or 'end of the world') to 'festivity', it is in fact more likely that this is a red herring. While on the one hand the ascription of Tírechán's *erdathe* to the lemma *airtach* in *DIL* is untenable both semantically and morphologically, on the other hand it must be recognised that the meaning of *airtach* 'festival, ceremony' works perfectly when applied to the context *ba erdath ₇ ba līth mōr iarum la Colum Cille* etc. After all, if we consider that, as far as *The monastery of Tallaght* is concerned, we are dealing with the fifteenth-century copy[30] of a ninth-century text (and not, as in the case of the *Collectanea*, with the ninth-century copy of a seventh-century text), and if we add that in that copy 'a good many passages seem to be corrupt' – the manuscript occasionally presenting 'an eccentric method of spelling' (cf. GWYNN & PURTON

---

appeared as the Holy Spirit; the second, which raised up Elias; the third, which burns sinners and the earth on the Day of Judgement' (BAYLESS & LAPIDGE 1998: 130-1, §80); *The fifteen tokens of Doomsday* [concerning the events of the ninth day before Doom]): … *nell derg teinntidhi do eirgi a rann deiscertach nimi ₇ a lethadh tar clár an talman uili, ₇ gress fola fordergi co lasair tonngairb tinntidhi do ferthain asin nell sin, ₇ co línfad sé an domun uile* etir *muir ₇ tír, ₇ lasracha teined ruithenta tar* cethri *rannuibh an betha, ₇ talamchumscugud mór for in mbith uili, ₇ crithir dermair do eirgi an gach aird don talm*ain, *₇ an muir cona hilmilib do dhul dar a múruibh amach isin ló sin*, '…a red, fiery cloud will rise from the southern part of the sky and spread over all the surface of the earth, and a rush of crimson blood, with a rough-waved fiery flame, will pour out of that cloud, so that it would fill the whole world, both sea and land; and flames of flashing fire (will be) over the four parts of the globe, and a mighty earthquake on the whole world, and a vast spark will rise at every airt of the earth, and the sea with its many thousands will go forth over its ramparts on that day' (STOKES 1907: 310–13, §7). Further parallels could undoubtedly be provided (cf., e.g., the numerous sources discussed in MCNAMARA 2007).

[28] Indeed, as pointed out by ALLISON (2003: 155), the 'Jewish tradition … links fire and water together as symbols of judgement, as in Isa. 43:2: "When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you" … Jewish tradition, presumably under the influence of Iranian eschatology, where a flood of molten metal burns up sinners but refines saints at the end of time, also combines fire and water into one eschatological symbol'. Also significant in the present context appears to be the Irish tendency to create a 'new eschatology' on the basis of little or no scriptural support, cf. GROGAN 1976: 47: 'The development in the early Irish Church of doctrines not mentioned in the Scriptures is significant. Topics such as purgatory, particular judgement, prayer for the dead, devotion to the saints, played an important role in the faith practices of the period, yet their scriptural basis is minimal or non-existent'.

[29] It is most likely that the etymological meaning 'great smoke/steam' proposed in this article was no longer synchronically relevant, or even known at all, at the time of composition of the *Collectanea*. If this is true, then *erdath* would have been a purely traditional and semantically non-transparent designation already in the seventh century.

[30] *The monastery of Tallaght* is preserved in Dublin, RIA MS 3 B 23 (pp. 33a–47a, 51a–52b), a manuscript probably written in the second half of the 15th century by Tadg ua Rigbardan (cf. GWYNN & PURTON 1911-1912: 115, 117f.).

1911-1912: 123–4) –, it is quite plausible that this instance of *erdath* is, in fact, nothing more than a misspelling of *airtach*.[31]

If this carries conviction, Tírechán's *erdathe* deserves to be seen as the unique survival of a remarkable cultural-linguistic fossil.

References

(Abbreviated textual references listed in *DIL* are used without explanation)

ALLISON, Dale C., 2003: ‚The eschatology of Jesus'. In: Bernard MCGINN, John J. COLLINS & Stephen J. STEIN (eds), *The Continuum history of apocalypticism*. London & New York: Continuum, 139–165.

BAYLESS, Martha, & Michael LAPIDGE (eds.), *Collectanea pseudo-Bedae*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1998.

BELLOWS, Henry Adams, 1923: *The poetic Edda. Translated from the Icelandic with an introduction and notes*. Two volumes in one. New York: American-Scandinavian Foundation / London: Humphrey Milford / Oxford: Oxford University Press.

BIELER, Ludwig (ed.), 1979: *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

CAREY, John, 1996: ‚Saint Patrick, the druids, and the end of the world', *History of Religions* 36.1, 42–53.

CHARLES-EDWARDS, Thomas Mowbray, 2000: *Early Christian Ireland*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CLARKE, Michael, 1999: *Flesh and spirit in the songs of Homer*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

CMT[2]: Elizabeth A. GRAY (ed.), *Cath Maige Tuired. The second battle of Mag Tuired*. Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1982.

DAVIDSON, Hilda Roderick Ellis, 1988: *Myths and symbols in pagan Europe. Early Scandinavian and Celtic religions*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

D'ARBOIS DE JUBAINVILLE, Henri, 1883: *Cours de littérature celtique. I. Introduction a l'étude de la littérature celtique*. Paris: Thorin.

DE BERNARDO STEMPEL, Patrizia, 1999: *Nominale Wortbildung des älteren Irischen*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

DELAMARRE, Xavier, 2003: *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise*. 2[e] édition revue et augmentée. Paris: Errance.

DE VAAN, Michiel, 2008: *Etymological dictionary of Latin and the other Italic languages*. Leiden & Boston: Brill.

DIL: *Dictionary of the Irish language* (and *Contributions to a dictionary of the Irish language*). Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1913-75; compact edition 1983.

GOI: Rudolf THURNEYSEN, *A grammar of Old Irish*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1946; reprinted with supplement 1975.

GPC: *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*. 4 vols. Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1967-2002.

[31] Interestingly, at p. 38a the scribe wrote <*randaich*> for *randaid* (cf. GWYNN & PURTON 1911-1912: 139, §31); note also the peculiar <*roscithet*> (occurring twice, pp. 34b and 38a), undoubtedly standing for some form of the verb *scuchaid* 'finishes, comes to an end' (cf. GWYNN & PURTON 1911-1912: 130, §8, and 140, §32), and therefore possibly showing *th* for *ch*.

GROGAN, Brian, 1976: ‚Eschatological teaching in the early Irish Church'. In: Martin MCNAMARA, *Biblical studies. The medieval Irish contribution*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 46–58.

GWYNN, Edward John, & Walter J. PURTON (eds), 1911-1912: ‚The monastery of Tallaght', *PRIA* 29C, 115–179.

IEW: Julius POKORNY, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. 2 vols. Bern & München: Francke, 1959, 1969.

Immrama: Anton Gerard VAN HAMEL (ed.), *Immrama*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1941.

JONES, Horace L., 1817–32: *Strabo. Geography*. 8 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

KPV: Stefan SCHUMACHER, 2004: *Die keltischen Primärverben*. Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachen und Literaturen der Universität Innsbruck, Abteilung Sprachwissenschaft.

LEIA: Joseph VENDRYES, Éduard BACHELLERIE & Pierre-Yves LAMBERT (eds), *Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies / Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1959–.

LIV^{2}: Helmut RIX et al., *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben. Die Wurzeln und ihre Primärstammbildungen*. Zweite, erweiterte und verbesserte Auflage bearbeitet von Martin KÜMMEL und Helmut RIX. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2001.

MATASOVIĆ, Ranko, 2009: *Etymological dictionary of Proto-Celtic*. Leiden & Boston: Brill.

MCCONE, Kim, 1985: ‚The Würzburg and Milan Glosses: our earliest sources of "Middle Irish"', *Ériu* 36, 85–106.

MCCONE, Kim, 1996: *Towards a relative chronology of ancient and medieval Celtic sound change*. Maynooth: Department of Old and Middle Irish, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.

MCNAMARA, Martin, 2007: ‚The (fifteen) signs before doomsday in Irish tradition', *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 20, 223–254.

MEINEKE, August (Hrsg.), 1852–53: *Strabonis geographica*. 3 vols. Leipzig: Teubner.

MYERS-SCOTTON, Carol, 2002: *Contact linguistics. Bilingual encounters and grammatical outcomes*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

NECKEL, Gustav, & Hans KUHN (Hrsg.), 1983, 1968: *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern.* I. Text. 5. verbesserte Auflage, 1983. II. Kurzes Wörterbuch. Dritte umgearbeitete Auflage, 1968. Heidelberg: Winter.

Ó CEARÚIL, Micheál, 2003: *Torann a Dheireadh! Leas ar an eascateolaíocht, ar an mBean Sí agus ar an Lia Fáil*. An Daingean: An Sagart.

SIMS-WILLIAMS, Patrick, 2011: *Irish influence on medieval Welsh literature*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

STOKES, Whitley, 1888: ‚The voyage of Snedgus and Mac Riagla', *Revue Celtique* 2, 14-25.

STOKES, Whitley, 1907: ‚The fifteen tokens of Doomsday', *Revue Celtique* 28, 308–326.

STRACHAN, John, 1903: ‚On the language of the Milan glosses', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 4, 48–71.

National University of Ireland, Galway Jacopo BISAGNI
jacopo.bisagni@nuigalway.ie