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The Language and the Date of *Amrae Coluimb Chille*

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The main reason why *Amrae Coluimb Chille* (the ‘Elegy of Colum Cille’, hereafter ACC) is so well known even among non-specialists of early Irish language and literature is undoubtedly its presumed extraordinary antiquity, which, if demonstrated, would make of it one of the oldest complete literary works that we possess in the Irish language, if not *the* oldest: according to a tradition already attested in the version of the Middle Irish preface to the *Amrae* preserved in the eleventh-century *Liber Hymnorum*, the elegy would have been composed by the *ollam* Dallán Forgaill within a short time of Colum Cille’s death in 597 AD.¹

This ascription to the seventh or even late sixth century has always been popular, and has been restated many times in print, until very recently, basically becoming the *communis opinio*: indeed, the traditional dating was accepted by eminent scholars such as Kuno Meyer (1917: 26), Rudolf Thurneysen (1933: 207), D. A. Binchy (1960: 82),² James Carney (1978–1979: 424) and Calvert Watkins (1963: 219),³ just to mention a few. The most recent editors of the *Amrae*, Patrick Henry (1978: 191), Thomas Clancy and Gilbert Márkus (CM: 96) have also expressed themselves in favour of an early date.

Nevertheless, this dating was explicitly rejected in 1896 by John Strachan, who tried to demonstrate that the *Amrae* should rather be ascribed to ‘the early part of the ninth century’ (Strachan 1896: 44). His conclusions were accepted by Whitley Stokes, who three years later published in *Revue Celtique* the most famous edition of the elegy (cf. Stokes 1899: 32). Another scholar who appeared to be uncomfortable with the traditional date was James Kenney (1929: 427), and even Daniel Binchy stated, at a later stage of his life, that he shared David ‘Greene’s doubts about the degree of archaism which should be attributed to *Amra Choluim Chille*’ (Binchy 1978–1979: 47).

¹ Cf. Stokes 1872: 156–157; Atkinson and Bernard 1898: 162–164.

² Cf. also Binchy 1958: 164; Binchy 1972: 29–30.

³ Cf. also Watkins 1995: 121, 263, 515.

In his *Early Christian Ireland*, Thomas Charles-Edwards pointed out that Strachan's ninth-century dating cannot stand, since he was relying on outdated conceptions about Old Irish (Charles-Edwards 2000: 302, n. 98). I believe this statement is only partially correct, as it will be shown later.

In any case, the fact remains that no detailed linguistic analysis of the *Amrae* was ever published after Strachan's early attempt.

Before dealing directly with the language of the text, some aspects of its manuscript tradition need to be introduced here. ACC is preserved in the following ten manuscripts,⁴ none of which is *descriptus*:

- (1) H: Dublin, TCD MS 1441 (*olim* E.4.2) *Liber Hymnorum* (late 11th / early 12th century).
- (2) U: Dublin, RIA MS 23.E.25 *Lebor na hUidre* (12th cent.).
- (3) R: Oxford, Bodl. Lib. MS Rawlinson B 502 (12th cent.).
- (4) Y: Dublin, TCD MS 1318 (*olim* H.2.16) *Yellow Book of Lecan* (1390–1391 AD).
- (5) B: Dublin, RIA MS 23 P 16 *Lebor Brecc* (1408–1411 AD).
- (6) I: Dublin, NLI MS G 466 (15th / 16th cent.?).
- (7) E: London, BL MS Egerton 1782 (1517 AD).
- (8) S: Dublin, RIA MS Stowe C III 2 (16th cent.).
- (9) L: Oxford, Bodl. Lib. MS Laud 615 (1st half of the 16th cent.).
- (10) G: Dublin, NLI MS G 50 (17th cent.).

This is obviously not the right place for a full-blown description of the relationship between these copies, let alone for the establishment of a *stemma codicum*. It will suffice to mention here one of the most striking aspects of this tradition: its remarkable uniformity. Indeed, all manuscripts present the same recension of the elegy, and a relatively low degree of variation. What is more, since all manuscripts share several sections of the Middle Irish (hereafter MIr.) preface and

⁴ Several lines of ACC (with *scholia*) can also be found in a glossary to the *Amrae* preserved in the sixteenth-century TCD MS 1337 (*olim* H.3.18), pp. 610b–614b. Moreover, a few lines of ACC were interpolated in the so-called Middle Irish Homily on the Life of Saint Columba (cf. Herbert 1988: 180–286, esp. pp. 242–247 and 264–269). These fragments, however, are not determinant for the critical establishment of the text, and can be omitted from the present discussion.

a common core of glosses, we must conclude that all the copies derive from a lost archetype which already contained a preface and a considerable amount of *scholia*.

In a famous article, Máire Herbert dated the composition of the preface to the early eleventh century, on account of a reference to Ferdornach, *comarba* of Columba in 1007–1008 AD, whose name already appears in the three earliest copies of the *Amrae*, that is H, U and R (cf. Herbert 1989: 68).

Linguistic evidence confirms Herbert’s dating, and supports the idea that this early eleventh-century redaction could actually coincide with the archetype which underlies all our copies of ACC. The following two cases should be enough to illustrate this relatively straightforward point.

1) In the metrical Introductory Prayer (hereafter IP) which precedes the elegy proper, we find two lines which have been printed as follows by Clancy and Márkus (CM: 104, ll. 7–8 = Stokes 1899: § 4): *Día mór mo anacol / de múr theinntide* (‘Great God, my defence against the fiery wall’).⁵ The MSS variants for the latter line confirm the spelling of the adjective with final *-e*:

de múr theinntide *et sim.* H U, de múr teintide *et sim.* R L G, de múr thendtidi Y, de múr thentigi I, de múr teinntige *et sim.* E S⁶

Now, it is quite clear that, the preposition *de* being regularly followed by the dative case in Old Irish, the reading *theinntide* must be here emended to *theinntid[iu]*. It is hardly possible that all nine manuscripts would have independently altered *-iu* into *-e*, especially if we consider that final *-iu* is faithfully preserved elsewhere in the text. For instance, at ACC § III, 1 (CM: 106 = Stokes 1899: § 33) we can see that six MSS preserve the correct reading, whereas only two modernise:

• (h)a(i)rbriu archa(i)ngliu H U R Y E S; airbri arcaingliu L; hairbri archangle G

It is therefore most likely that the archetype already read *theinntide*, presenting a M^{Ir}. spelling with *-e* clearly posterior to the collapse of final vowels into shwa.

2) If we turn to morphology, good evidence for a M^{Ir}. dating of the archetype is provided by ACC § I, 4⁷ (CM: 104–105 = Stokes 1899: § 8). CM (pp. 104–105)

⁵ My translation. CM (p. 105) provide a slightly freer rendering: ‘Great God, protect me / from the fiery wall’.

⁶ This section of ACC is not extant in MS B.

⁷ Here, as in the rest of the present article, passages from ACC are cited according to the textual subdivision adopted by CM. For ease of reference, the position of the equivalent *locus* in Stokes’s 1899 edition will also be indicated in parentheses.

printed this line as *dífulaing riss ré as[-indet]*, which they translated as ‘unbearable the tale this verse tells’. The actual manuscript readings for this passage are as follows (a comma separates orthographical variants; a semicolon separates grammatical variants):

ris re asnei H; ris(s) ré a(i)sneid U R I, ris re faisneid E, ris re [...]d⁸ L; resi roaisne Y;
ris re faisneiss G

On the whole, the emendation *as·[indet]* appears to be too radical. Moreover, even if we accept *as·[indet]*, it is still not clear why this sentence-final verb should be in the deuterotonic form.

Four manuscripts (U, R, I and E) attest a conjunct form of the M^{Ir}. verb *aisnéidid* ‘to tell, to relate’ (*aisneid*), while in G *aisneid* was simply replaced by the late form of its verbal noun, *faisneiss*. The reading *asnei* attested in H is probably only a banal scribal mistake.⁹ The reading of Y *resi roaisne* is more difficult to account for: the scribe seems to have changed here the noun *ré* into the preverb *ro-*, but it is not easy to tell which particular form of *aisnéidid* he had in mind.¹⁰

I think it is reasonable to assume that the original text rather contained a pres. indic. 3rd sg. prototonic form of *as·indet*, that is *aisndet*, in accordance with Bergin’s law:¹¹ such form could have been very easily changed into *aisnéid* by any Middle Irish scribe. The complete agreement of the MSS in presenting some form of Middle Irish *aisnéidid* suggests that this substitution had already taken place by the time of the archetype, which probably read *aisnéid*.

Now, despite the Middle Irish date of the archetype, there is no doubt that ACC is an Old Irish text (for the moment including in this term both the Early and the Classical phase). This fact is apparent, for instance, from the relatively frequent

⁸ In MS L this word is covered by a stain and is basically unreadable.

⁹ For a similar mistake, cf. ACC § VII, 3 (= Stokes 1872: 167, § 93 = Atkinson and Bernard 1898: 177): *custói* H vs. *custoid* U BL.

¹⁰ The presence of *ro-* could perhaps suggest a 3rd sg. pret. *·aisnedh*, and the omission of *-dh* might represent an early example of vocalisation of /ɣ/ in absolute auslaut.

¹¹ ‘Bergin’s law’ was thus described by Bergin himself (who by the way never used the term ‘law’): ‘when the verb does not stand at the head of its clause, particularly when it follows its subject or object, it takes the dependent form, that is, a simple verb has the conjunct ending and a compound verb is prototonic’ (Bergin 1938: 197). This type of construction is frequent enough in ACC (cf. e.g. § V, 3; § VI, 21; § VIII, 13).

presence of suffixed pronouns, infixes employed according to the rules set for Old Irish, *s*-subjunctives and *t*-preterites. It is also remarkable that unaugmented preterites still constitute the great majority in ACC, this feature being in contrast with the general MIr. trend towards the spread of augmented forms beyond their original boundaries.¹²

If on the one hand all this is quite straightforward, on the other hand several linguistic features of ACC have been proposed by scholars as indications of an Early Old Irish (hereafter EOIr.) date of composition. Obviously, a detailed treatment of all such features would exceed by far the fairly limited scope of the present contribution. I will present here only three specific cases, in the hope that this will be enough to reveal the need for a new thorough examination of the language of ACC. The reader should therefore understand that I do not consider in any way the following discussions as a fulfillment of such *desideratum*.

1) In ACC we find twice the form *Conuail* (ACC §§ VIII, 4, 10 = CM: 112 = Stokes 1899: §§ 118, 121): this is the regular outcome of /kunowalī/, form actually attested in Ogam inscriptions as <CUNOVALI> (cf. McManus 1991: § 6.3, § 6.21) and immediate pre-form of Classical OIr. *Conaill* (gen. sg. of *Conall*). *Conuail* shows the seventh-century retention of post-consonantal *-w-* (cf. McCone 1996: 130), and there is no doubt that this is a genuine EOIr. form.¹³

Yet, I do not believe this is a good enough proof of a seventh-century date of composition. First of all, it is well known that anthroponyms possess a status which distinguishes them from other ‘common’ nouns. Indeed, different forms of the same personal name (diverging because of diachronic, diatopic and / or diastratic factors) can co-exist on the same synchronic axis.¹⁴ Besides, we have reasons to think that

¹² The figures are as follows: out of 58 preterital forms (both active and passive; in this count I do not include repeated instances of the same form, as well as three verbs which cannot take the augment: *ránic* [§§ III, 1–4; pret./perf. 3rd sg. of *ro-icc*], *ro-...-cúalammar* [§ V, 16, in tmesis; pret./perf. 3rd sg. of *ro-cluinethar*] and *ro-fess* [§ IV, 6; pret./perf. 3rd sg. pass. of *ro-fítir*]), 44 are unaugmented (75.86%) against only 14 augmented (24.13%).

¹³ *Conuail* seems also to preserve a lenited *-n* preceding the delenition known as MacNeill’s law. The frequent fluctuation between geminated and non-geminated spellings in Old and Middle Irish, however, makes this point quite uncertain (cf. Stüber 1998: 39–44).

¹⁴ For the higher degree of conservativeness associated with Old Irish personal names, see Ó Máille 1910: 45–46, 67, where it is shown, for instance, that the old spelling <Áedo> tends to be preserved in

pseudo-archaic orthographies with consonant plus unstressed *-ua-* spread during the Classical OIr. period in the high ‘rhetorical’ linguistic register, precisely due to the sporadic survival of etymological EOIr. forms such as *Conuail*.¹⁵ Indeed, an analogous orthography with *-ua-* can be found elsewhere in ACC: the form *coluain* appears twice in the text, respectively as acc. and dat. sg. of the *i*-stem noun *colainn* ‘flesh’ (ACC § VII, 23; § IX, 6 = CM: 110, 114 = Stokes 1899: §§ 110, 135). In this case, however, *coluain* cannot be the inherited form, as both OIr. *colainn* and its Middle Welsh cognate *celein* must derive from **kolani-* (cf. LEIA C-156). Obviously, the presence in the *Amrae* of such a clear example of pseudo-archaic orthography diminishes considerably the significance of *Conuail* as a dating feature.

2) The next element is probably the most well known archaism contained in the *Amrae*. In three lines of the elegy we can find the *o*-stem noun *axal* (ACC § III, 1 *axalu* [acc. pl.]; § IV, 9 *axal* [gen. pl.]; § VI, 21 *axal* [acc. sg.] = CM: 106, 108 = Stokes 1899: §§ 33, 47, 82). After vain attempts of both medieval glossators and modern scholars to elucidate the word’s meaning,¹⁶ the right solution was found by D. A. Binchy, who published in 1958 a very short but nonetheless remarkable note in which he explained *axal* as a ‘*Cothrige*’ borrowing from Lat. *apostolus*, presenting the replacement of Lat. *p* with **k^w* (> *k*) as well as the development of intervocalic *-st-* to *-ss-*. The early term *axal* would have later been ‘ousted by the *Pátraig* loanword

entries of the Annals of Ulster as late as 932 AD, instead of <*Áeda*>, despite the development OIr. /aiðo/ > /aiða/ > MÍr. /aiðə/.

¹⁵ Meyer’s comment on EOIr. forms such as *Bresual*, gen. *Bresuail*, to be found in the rhymeless Leinster poems, is tell-tale: ‘solch alte Formen waren den Gelehrten noch im 9. Jahrhundert aus der älteren Literatur bekannt’ (UÄID II, 4, n.2; cf. also Corthals 1999: 93 and 96). One should also notice that the spelling <*Conuail*> is preserved in the MÍr. *scholia* to ACC (cf. Stokes 1899: § 121): this archaic-looking form must have still appeared as acceptable and recognisable even to such late scribes.

¹⁶ In the oldest MSS *axal* was explained as (1) the name of an angel who used to converse with Colum Cille, (2) as a form deriving from Lat. *auxilium*, (3) as a word meaning *immacallaim* ‘conversation’ (cf. O’Dav. 190), (4) as a Latin-Irish compound (*axalu .i. uca 7 sola .i. comsuidigud o Latin 7 o Góedelg* ‘*axalu* i.e. *uca* “choice” and *sola* “only”, i.e. a compound of Latin and Irish’; cf. Stokes 1899: 172–173). Stokes explained *axal* as ‘cogn[ate] with Ir[ish] *saigim* “I say”’ (Stokes 1899: 173, n. 2), while Meyer took it for the verbal noun of *ad-com-sel*, therefore meaning ‘approach, visit’ (Meyer 1917: 26). For more details on these interpretations, cf. Binchy 1958 and LEIA A-106.

apstal’, and ‘would have disappeared completely had it not been preserved in the Amra’ (Binchy 1958: 164). In conclusion, Binchy maintained that

‘the reason for its survival here is [...] that this ancient “rhetoric” [i.e. ACC] came to be regarded as a quasi-magical incantation, rather like the Vedic hymns, in which every word had its peculiar virtue and any alteration would impair the efficacy of the whole’ (*ibid.*)

Now, even though Binchy’s analysis of *axal* is undoubtedly correct, yet I believe that this term’s significance as a dating feature has been much exaggerated.

First of all, in its ground-breaking study on the chronology of Latin loan-words in Irish, Damian McManus (1983) demonstrated the substantial groundlessness of a diachronic distinction between two groups of borrowings from Latin (an early ‘*Cothrige* series’ and a later ‘*Pádraig* series’),¹⁷ showing that in fact we can recognise ‘only one continuous series of loans, or one period of borrowing’ (McManus 1983: 40). In addition to that, McManus proved that the phoneme /p/ must have been naturalised in Primitive Irish (PIr.) at a much earlier stage than it was previously thought, i.e. some time before the Irish lenition, as it is shown by forms like OIr. *pólire* ‘writing tablet’ < Vulg. Lat. **pugllāria* < Lat. *pugillāria* or OIr. *pridchid* < Lat. *praedicāre* (McManus 1983: 37–41, 48–49). Indeed, loan-words with *p* can also be found in ACC: **screptar* < Lat. *scriptūra* and *corp* < Lat. *corpus* (both appearing in the text in the gen. sg.: § V, 11 *screptra* / *screptra*[e] and § VII, 13 *cuirp*), the former of which must have been borrowed in Irish before vowel affection (cf. McManus 1983: 37).

The great antiquity of *axal* is of course beyond question, and its prehistory can be reconstructed as follows:

Lat. *apostolus* > PIr. **ak^wossolas* [adapted to the *o*-stem inflection] > [Irish lenition] **aχosolah* > [apocope] **aχosol* > [syncope] EOIr. **aχ^ʰsol* (= **<axol>*) > OIr. *axal* (= /aχsə1/) (cf. McManus 1983: 48).

Notwithstanding that, we cannot conclude that a certain text is ancient simply because it contains an ancient loan-word. The main issue here is not the antiquity of *axal*, but rather the date of borrowing of the undoubtedly later form *apstal*. Binchy maintained that the latter ‘ousted’ the former, implicitly arguing that ACC was

¹⁷ Cf. McManus 1983: 21–31 for an account of previous scholars’ views on the chronology of Latin loan-words in early Irish.

composed before the adoption of *apstal* in Irish. This is impossible, for a very simple reason: *apstal* must also derive from a pre-syncope borrowing. Orthographical fluctuations such as Thes. 246.15 *apstol* / Thes. 247.13 *abstolaib* (both from the Cambrai Homily), Wb. 5b15 *apstil* / Wb. 10c16 *abstal* show that EOIr. *apstol* and OIr. *apstal* were pronounced respectively as /abstol/ and /abstəl/; this can only mean that the Irish received this word from Britain, either from British Latin /abostolus/ or from a British Celtic form **abostol* (Welsh *abostal*, Cornish and Breton *abostol*; cf. LEIA A-81). PIr. **abostol*¹⁸ subsequently underwent regular syncope (cf. GOI § 919), by means of which we get the EOIr. form **abstol* / *apstol*, attested, as we have seen, already in the Cambrai Homily. Since syncope can be dated approximately to the middle of the sixth century AD, the presence of both *apstal* and *axal* in post-syncope Irish demonstrates that the two loan-words must have existed side by side for a certain period, at least in the learned language, before *apstal* eventually superseded the older form *axal*. Now, if we admit this, then nothing prevents us from thinking that this co-existence could in fact have lasted until the end of the Classical Old Irish period, the ‘archaic’ and high-register *axal* becoming an increasingly rare and bookish by-form of *apstal* through a process which eventually led to the former’s complete demise.¹⁹

As we will see, a closer study of the glossarial material on *axal* provides us with precious information on the actual duration of such a co-existence.

Entries on *axal* can be found in several early Irish glossaries, where the term is generally explained as *aingeal* ‘angel’ (cf. e.g. O’Cl. 369) or *imagallaim* ‘conversation’ (cf. e.g. O’Dav. 190 = Stokes 1862: 56; Pearson 1942: § 312),²⁰ interpretations which probably derived directly from the MIr. glosses to ACC (see note 16 above).

Cormac’s Glossary (hereafter Corm.), on the other hand, presents a more interesting situation. The *Lebor Brecc* (B) version of Corm. reads:

Axal. l- axail ab auxilio quod angeli hominibus prebent (B, p. 263a = Stokes 1862: 3)
(‘*axal* or *axail*, from the help that angels offer to men’).

¹⁸ Since both Brit. Lat. /abostolus/ and Brit. **abostol* would have ended up as pre-syncope PIr. **abostol* (the former through PIr. **abostolas* [m. *o*-stem] > **abostolah* > **abostol*), it is impossible to give an exact date for this borrowing: the Irish syncope, though, provides us with a *terminus ante quem*.

¹⁹ This must in any case have occurred before the early eleventh century, as the commentary to ACC shows.

²⁰ Cf. DIL s.v. *axal* for further examples.

The Yellow Book of Lecan version, instead, was thus printed by Kuno Meyer:

Axail .i. ab auxilio [auxilium MS.] (.i. ōn c[h]omuirli dobeir-sium do c[h]āch) quod [angeli] hominibus praebent .i. ōn furtacht dobeir-sium do chāch (Meyer 1913: 5, § 47) ('*Axail*, i.e. from the help (i.e. from the help he gives to every one) that [angels] offer to men, i.e. from the help he gives to every one').

As we can see, the presence of the word *angeli* here is actually due to the intervention of the editor, who 'completed' the gloss presumably on the basis of the *Lebor Brecc* version cited above. In fact, *angeli* is absent not only in Y, but also in the version of Corm. contained in the Book of Uí Maine (hereafter M), where we read:

axail .i. auxilium quod hominibus praebent (Dublin RIA MS 1225, fol. 119rb) ('*axail*, i.e. the help that they offer to men').

Even if, on the one hand, we must acknowledge the possibility that both glosses derived from a common copy in which *angeli* had been omitted, on the other hand it is more likely that Y and M preserve here the original version: *angeli* could have then been added at a later stage by a scribe who knew the interpretation of *axal* in ACC as the name of an angel, perhaps by the scribe of *Lebor Brecc* himself (who, as we know, did copy the *Amrae*).²¹

Indeed, in the oldest copies of the commentary to the *Amrae*, the glosses explaining *axal* as an angelic name or as a form of Lat. *auxilium* are still well distinct:

H: *ránic-som co dú i tá Axal angel l- ránic du hi tabar auxilium do chách .i. co himmed árchangel* etc. ('he came to the place where the angel Axal is, or he came to the place where help [*auxilium*] is given to every one, i.e. to the crowd of archangels'; cf. Bernard and Atkinson 1898: 171).

U: *ránic-som co du i tá Axal aingel l- axalu .i. auxilium* etc. ('he came to the place where the angel Axal is, or *axalu* means *auxilium*'; cf. Best and Bergin 1929: ll. 688–689).

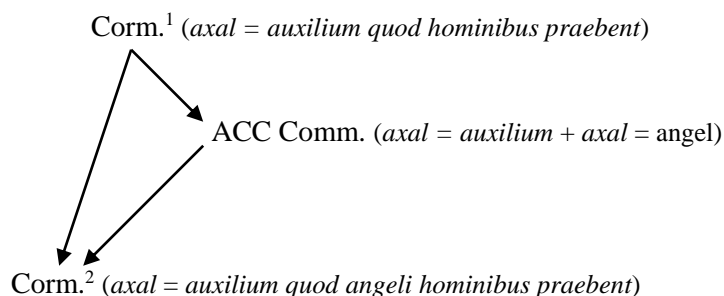
R: *ránic-sium co dú i ta Axal angel l- a[xalu .i.] huca súla l- axalu .i. auxilia* etc. ('he came to the place where the angel Axal is, or *axalu* means "choice of eye", or *axalu* means *auxilia*'; cf. Stokes 1899: 172).

It seems then quite likely that the gloss contained in Corm. B represents in this case a late conflation (which I will refer to as Corm.²) of two entirely separate

²¹ The *stemma codicum* reconstructed for Cormac's Glossary supports this view. Y and B appear to derive from a common sub-archetype *x*, M and *x* deriving then from an earlier copy (cf. Russell 1996: 156). For this reason, a reading shared by Y and M against B is likely to be closer to the original. I wish to thank Dr Pádraic Moran for his help with the manuscript tradition of Cormac's Glossary.

interpretations of *axal*,²² one of which (*axal* = Lat. *auxilium*) could in its turn have been based on an earlier version of Cormac’s Glossary (Corm.¹, as attested in Y and M).

This process can be schematised as follows:



Let us now look again at Corm.¹:

axail .i. auxilium quod hominibus praebent.

Nothing in this gloss prevents us from thinking that its author was actually aware of the real meaning of *axail*, that is ‘apostles’. Indeed, we may well paraphrase this entry as

axail ‘apostles’, [stands for] the help (*auxilium*) that they offer to men’.²³

The ‘help’ mentioned here could refer to the teaching and preaching activity of the apostles; indeed, Wb. 10c16 provides a nice parallel:

.i. hore am abstal 7 am forcitlid do chách cainip-sa sóir ce dugnén cach ngním?

(‘since I am an apostle and I am a teacher to every one, should I not be free though I did every deed?’).

Several kinds of ‘help’ offered by the twelve apostles to mankind are also explicitly mentioned in the Gospels. For instance, in Lc. 9, 1–2; 9, 6 (cp. Mt. 9, 35; 10, 1) we read:

¹Convocatis autem duodecim apostolis, dedit illis virtutem et potestatem super omnia daemonia, et ut languores curarent, ²et misit illos praedicare regnum Dei et sanare infirmos [...]. ⁶Egressi autem circumibant per castella evangelizantes et curantes ubique.

²² Unfortunately, ACC § III, 1 (whose commentary would have contained the gloss to *axal*) is not extant in MS B.

²³ Of course, the original gloss might have been **axail .i. ab auxilio quod hominibus praebent*, since the pattern ‘[Lemma] .i. ab [Latin word in the abl.]’ is more common in Cormac’s Glossary. Note moreover that the palatal quality of the final consonant in *axail* suggests that the form was here quoted in the nom. pl., therefore agreeing perfectly with the verb *praebent*. The nom. pl. might be here justified by the fact that apostles are usually referred to as a group (of twelve).

Christ's commands to the apostles are also telltale in this sense; cf. Mt. 10, 8:

Infirmos curate, mortuos suscite, leprosos mundate, daemones eicite; gratis accepistis, gratis date.

True, the word *apostoli* does not appear in Corm.¹ (**auxilium quod apostoli hominibus praebeant* would of course have been more explicit), but this is not particularly worrying, since the same happens in the entry concerning *apstal*:

B: *Apstal .i. ab posdulo [= Lat. postulo] .i. ad Dominum posdulo .i. tóchuirimm* (Stokes 1862: 5).

Y: *Apstol .i. ab postulo [MS apostulo] ad Deum .i. tochuirim* (Meyer 1913: 8, § 77).

The contemporary existence of two different loan-words borrowed from the same Latin term at different times, even if relatively rare, is not unique. Binchy himself, ironically, mentioned a good parallel (cf. Binchy 1958): OIr. *ortha* 'prayer', an early derivative of Vulg. Lat. *orātio* (Class. Lat. *ōrātio*) showing the effects of Irish lenition and syncope, survived even when the later form *oróit* (also from *orātio*) was adopted into Irish, having meanwhile acquired the secondary and more specialised meaning 'charm'.²⁴ An even closer case is represented by OIr. **Laiten*²⁵ < *Latīna*: the <-t-> = /-d-/ obviously shows this borrowing's post-lenition date of acquisition as well as its British origin (Lat. *latīna* = Brit. Lat. /*ladīna*/), but, at the same time, it is 'hardly unreasonable to suggest that the name of the Latin language might have been adopted into Irish at an early stage' (McManus 1983: 35). Indeed, as McManus points out, the gen. sg. of an earlier *ā*-stem form **Laiten* might have survived as a deliberate archaism in the name of the Irish glossary known as *Dúil Laithne* (cf. *ibid.*).

For the foregoing reasons, *axal* is not useful for dating purposes: this term's original meaning might have been known to Irish monastic scholars up to the Late Old Irish period, the only *terminus ante quem* for its complete disappearance being the date of composition of the commentary to ACC (i.e. the early eleventh century), where *axal* is no more correctly understood.

²⁴ However, cf. McManus 1984: 156, n. 42, where it is pointed out that *ortha* 'might be a recent back-formation from a form like OI acc. sg. **orthain* (< *ōrātiōnem*), which could originally have been an *ā*-stem with a nom. sg. **orthan*'. Nonetheless, it is clear that such late back-formation would have been possible only if the posited older form **orthain* had survived until Middle Irish side by side with *oróit*.

²⁵ The nom. sg. *Laiten* is not attested, but its existence can be inferred from the gen. and the dat. sg.; cf. McManus 1983: 35.

3) As is well known, the linguistic changes which allow us to distinguish between EOIr. and Classical OIr. mainly regard phonology, morphology being therefore less relevant from this point of view. Nonetheless, one particular point deserves to be discussed here.

In his recent (and excellent) Old Irish tutor-book *Sengoídelc*, David Stifter (2006) suggested that the form *ní-m-reilge*, attested in the fourth line of the IP (cf. Stokes 1899: § 3), could present an EOIr. pres. subj. 3rd sg. conjunct ending *-e*. *Prima facie*, this proposal is quite attractive, as **.léice* (syncopated to *-l̥ce / -l̥ge* in the prototonic form) would indeed be the expected form, while the Classical Old Irish ending *-(e)a* is likely to be due to a later analogical development.²⁶ Previous editors and translators of the *Amrae* have also considered *ním-reilge* as a hortative subj. 3rd sg., essentially due to the fact that in the preceding lines God is referred to in the third person (‘God, God may I pray **him**, before I go into **his** presence’ etc.).

In spite of all that, *-reilge* does not *need* to be an EOIr. 3rd singular here, and is in fact much more likely to be a perfectly ‘normal’ Classical OIr. pres. subj. 2nd singular.

Sudden shifts from the 3rd to the 2nd person and *vice versa* are a prominent feature of the style of the Psalms. Two examples among many: in Psalm 11, in the first line we can read *Salvum me fac Domine*, with an imper. 2nd sg., while we have a 3rd sg. verb at line 4 (*Disperdat Dominus*), and again a 2nd sg. at line 8 (*Tu Domine servabis nos*). In Psalm 17 the shift is even more abrupt: *Quoniam tu accendis [2nd sg.] lucernam meam Domine. / Deus meus illuminat [3rd sg.] tenebras meas. / Quoniam in te [2nd sg.] aggrediar hostium turmas / et in Deo meo [3rd sg.] transiliam murum.*²⁷

Now, the idea that the Psalms could indeed have provided here a model for poetic person-switching is supported by the fact that several other aspects of both style and contents of the IP are strongly reminiscent of the Psalter.²⁸ In addition to that, Patrick

²⁶ **.léice* is the expected outcome of **l̥ε̄g̥eä < *l̥ε̄g̥eyāh < *l̥g̥^wiyāθ* (for the transformations which occurred between PIE and OIr. in **li-n-k^w*- cf. Schrijver 1993: 44 and Schumacher 2004: 455). It is likely that this form was subsequently replaced by analogical *.léic(e)a*, probably in order to avoid confusion with the otherwise identical 2nd sg. *.léice*. The analogical origin of the ending *-(e)a* is also implicit from McCone 1994: § 26.6.

²⁷ Cf. also, e.g., Ps. 19 (20), 7–10 and Ps. 22 (23), 3–4.

²⁸ Such influence was explicitly recognised by R. Macalister (1937: 77); cf. also CM 240, n. 22.10. Compare, for instance, § IP, 1 *Día Día do-rrógus* (‘God, God may I pray’) and Ps. 22: 2 *Deus, Deus meus, quare me dereliquisti?*; § IP, 4 *Día nime ní-m-reilge* and Ps. 27: 9 *ne me reicias / neque*

Sims-Williams has recently shown that person-shifting between the 2nd and the 3rd person was a not uncommon feature of Irish versification even at a relatively early date.²⁹ As a final point, we may notice that the exact same verbal form *ní-m-reilce* (2nd sg.) can be found, in a context quite similar to that of our prayer, in the poem *Bráth ní ba beg a brisim*, dealing with the Day of Judgement.³⁰

For all these reasons, it is quite reasonable to assume that *ní-m-reilce* simply means ‘may you not abandon me’. There is probably nothing archaic here.

As far as morphosyntax and syntax are concerned, elements such as the rarity of the definite article, the presence of archaic conjunctions like *scéo* and infixes *-ch*, Bergin’s construction and Tmesis, even if very interesting phenomena in their own right, have been largely discredited as dating features. In fact, they can be found throughout the Old Irish period and are more likely to pertain to literary genre and linguistic register rather than date.³¹

Now, even though the foregoing treatment is far from being exhaustive, the need for a re-assessment of the allegedly EOIr. linguistic features of ACC should nevertheless have been made clear enough by the fact that some of this text’s most prominent ‘archaic’ features actually reveal themselves as illusory to a closer scrutiny.

derelinquas me, Deus salutis meae; § IP, 10–12 *Día ... cluines mo donuail / de nim-íath nél* (‘God ... who hears my lament from the heaven-land of clouds’) and Ps. 18: 7 *exaudivit de templo suo vocem meam* etc.

²⁹ Cf. Sims-Williams 2005: 319: ‘person-switching was already well established in Gaelic poetry by the tenth century, both as an acceptable figure (for some poets) and as a fault (for others)’.

³⁰ Cf. O’Keefe 1907: 30, § 17, *Ar do báidhi, a báidhathair / ar do cennsa, a Rí nime / ní-m-reilce isin searbc[h]arcair / itáit osnadhá ili* (‘Of Thy fondness, O fond Father, of Thy gentleness, O King of Heaven, **cast me not** into the bitter prison in which there are many groans’ [the translation is O’Keefe’s; my boldface]).

³¹ Cf., for instance, Kim McCone’s remarks on Bergin’s construction (which we could easily apply to the other features listed above): ‘Bergin’s construction is not archaic as such [...] and [...] its presence does not constitute grounds for giving a text an early as opposed to a mainstream Old Irish date’ (McCone 2000: 156). The same author observed elsewhere that ‘the principal diagnostics used to differentiate Archaic from Old Irish belong to the spheres of phonology and syntax, especially word order, rather than morphology, and it has recently been shown that the relevant syntactic features in particular by no means necessarily point to a pre-eighth-century date’ (McCone 1997: § XII, 1).

As Kim McCone wrote ‘only the cumulative and consistently accurate presence of [Early Old Irish features] in a text can provide reasonably convincing grounds for assuming a seventh-century original’ (McCone 1997: § XII, 1). Indeed, it is precisely the lack of such a ‘cumulative and consistently accurate presence’ of seventh-century elements that makes so difficult to believe the traditional date ascribed to the *Amrae*. Of course, one could always argue that several early features were obliterated by scribal modernisation in the course of manuscript transmission. Yet, the circularity of this argument, in which the accuracy of what must be demonstrated is simply assumed *a priori*, is evident.

These results allow us to consider with a clearer mind some of the Late OIr. features that John Strachan recognised in ACC. Strachan articulated his short article in seven points, and we can confidently state that at least five of them are plainly wrong. For instance, as Thomas Charles-Edwards pointed out (2000: 302, n. 98), Strachan erroneously considered suffixed pronouns and *ro*-less preterites as late features. Nonetheless, I believe that two of his seven points still deserve our attention.

1) First of all, Strachan (1896: 42) observed that in four verbal forms the *s*-pret. 3rd sg. conjunct deponential ending *-estar* seems to have spread to otherwise active verbs; these are ACC § VII, 5 (= Stokes 1899: § 94b) *ní-ellastar*; § VIII, 8 (= Stokes 1899: § 120) *desestar*; § VIII, 19 (= Stokes 1899: § 127) *figlestar*; § VIII, 20 (= Stokes 1899: § 127) *glinnestar*. As is well known, the spread of this ending, already attested in a few examples from the Old Irish glosses³², reached its peak in Middle Irish, even though Thurneysen pointed out that this feature had already become ‘common towards the end of the ninth century’ (GOI § 675). Indeed, *ro-carcrastar* from *Amra Senáin* (§ 6.1) as well as a few forms from Broccán’s Hymn (cf. Thes. ii, xxxix) show that by the ninth century this type of formation had become acceptable even in the poetic language.

The first two examples cited by Strachan, *ní-ellastar* and *deisestar*, are highly controversial, and their discussion would lead us too far. I will therefore limit myself to *figlestar* and *glinnestar*.

³² Cf. e.g. Wb. 4c38 *ru-muinestar*; Ml. 36a29 *ro-dligestar*; Ml. 63a14 *ru-n-éillestar*.

The former is the *s*-pret. 3rd sg. deponent of the denominative verb *figlid* ‘keeps vigil’ (from *figel* ‘vigil’ < Lat. *uigilia*).³³ *Figlid* is an active weak verb, so that the expected *s*-pret. 3rd sg. would have been *figlis* in the absolute flexion and **figil* in the conjunct flexion (or possibly *figli*, to judge from *SR 1079 ro-figli*). In this case, scribal modernisation cannot be invoked in order to explain the presence of such a late formation in the *Amrae*; if we consider that *figlis* was still used by the author of *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* (cf. *AMC* 648, 649), it is highly unlikely that a Middle Irish scribe would have felt the need to alter a perfectly understandable form *figlis* (or possibly rel. **figles*) to *figlestar*. Moreover, the Middle Irish glossators of the *Amrae* did not encounter any problem in understanding the meaning of *figlis* at ACC § II, 2, which they correctly interpreted as *do-rigni figil* ‘he made vigil’ (cf. Stokes 1899: § 23). For these reasons, it is quite clear that the late form *figlestar* must have been part of the original text.

A similar explanation can be applied to the other form, *glinnestar*, *s*-pret. 3rd sg. conjunct³⁴ deponent of *glinnid* ‘makes sure, settles’. Once again, the expected OIr. preterital forms of this verb would rather be absolute *glinnis* and conjunct **glinn*. Interestingly enough, however, an analogous preterite *ro-d-glinnestar* can be found in the ninth-century Broccán’s Hymn (Thes. ii, 399.1).

Lines which contain such late verbal forms can hardly be ascribed to the seventh century, and may either be interpreted as the result of a ninth century re-elaboration of older material, or as ninth-century compositions altogether.

2) Strachan further observed that in a few verbs of ACC ‘the deponent has begun to give place to the active’ (Strachan 1896: 43). The forms he cited are:³⁵ § IP, 11 (= Stokes 1899: § 5) *clunes*; § V, 8 (= Stokes 1899: § 57) *sexus*; § VI, 31 (= Stokes 1899: § 89) *nadngeilsigfe*; § VII, 21 (= Stokes 1899: § 108) *dorumeóin*; § VIII, 21 (= Stokes 1899: § 128) *congein*. Furthermore, § VIII, 14 *atgáill* was also mentioned as a possible case, ‘but the interpretation is uncertain’ (*ibid.*).

³³ The absolute form would of course have been **figlestair*. However, rather than being in the conjunct flexion, *figlestar* can be interpreted as a relative form.

³⁴ The conjunct flexion is here normal, the verb being in Bergin’s construction (the whole line § VIII, 20 reads *ó gním glinnestar*).

³⁵ Forms will be here quoted as they are spelt in Strachan’s article.

Now, § V, 8 *sexus* can be immediately excluded from the present discussion, as the presence of a suffixed pronoun (in this case 3rd pl. *-us*) always causes the shift to the active inflection. As for *nadngeilsigfe*, *congein* and *atgáill*, these forms would necessitate a more lengthy account than can be provided here. Consequently, I will limit myself to a discussion of the remaining two instances.

Clu(i)nes is straightforward and surprising at the same time; it obviously looks as an active pres. indic. 3rd sg. relative of *ro-cluinethar*, and indeed all editors simply translated it as ‘who hears’.³⁶ The problem is of course that the expected OIr. form would have been *ro-chluinethar*. The active verb *cluimid* is frequently encountered in MIr. texts, but why should this form be found in the *Amrae*?

Nowadays we know that ‘the formal differentiation of separate deponent and non-deponent inflections [...], being conditioned by purely lexical factors [...], was beginning to be eroded even in the Old Irish Glosses’ (McCone 1997: § XII, 6.4.1), although it seems that this phenomenon did not start to spread to the formal-literary linguistic register before the late eighth / early ninth century. If we study the distribution of active *cluimid* within the extensive collection gathered by Strachan in his ‘Contributions to the History of the Deponent Verb in Irish’ (1894), we can observe that its diffusion is impressive both in MIr. compositions and in MIr. copies of OIr. Texts.³⁷ It seems at least possible, then, that de-deponential by-forms of *ro-cluinethar* already existed in Late OIr., particularly since the regular non-deponent forms of the preterite (such as *ro-cúala*) could have provided a model for the creation of new active forms in other tenses as well. In any case, though, one cannot avoid noticing that the presence of *cluines* in ACC is hard to square with an Early Old Irish date of composition.

³⁶ Cf. Stokes 1899: 157; Henry 1978: 195 (‘a chluineann’); CM: 105; Henry 2006: 17. Both CM and Henry (2006) printed *c[h]luines* in their Old Irish text, but this emendation is unnecessary: lenition of the initial of relative forms is not found before the Middle Irish period (cf. e.g. McCone 1997: § XII, 3.2c).

³⁷ Forms of active *cluimid* can be found in *Táin Bó Regamna* (cf. Strachan 1894: 497), in the Book of Leinster version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (*ibid.*: 502; three exx. from *roscada*), in *Fled Bricrend* (*ibid.*: 509), in *Tochmarc Emere* (*ibid.*: 514), in one of the ‘short stories of a religious character’ from the Book of Leinster (*ibid.*: 515), in Fland Mainistrech’s poems (*ibid.*: 524), in *Saltair na Rann* (*ibid.*: 525; seven exx.), in *Scéla na Essergi* (*ibid.*: 527), in the Book of Leinster story on the ‘deaths of Goll and Garb’ (*ibid.*: 528), in the *Bórama* (*ibid.*: 529); in *Togail Troí* (*ibid.*: 530), as well as in a few more late texts (cf. *ibid.* 532).

The last of the above-mentioned forms, *do-ruméoin*, was explained by Stokes (1899: 279) as an augmented pret. 3rd sg. of *do-muinethar* ‘thinks, considers’,³⁸ but CM (p. 246) have more recently proposed to take it as a form of *do-ruimmethar* ‘forgets, leaves behind’, which makes better sense in the context. In any case, it seems obvious that we are here dealing with a compound of **muinithir*: this is the reason why a deponent suffixless pret. *do-ruménair* would have been the expected OIr. form.

Stefan Schumacher (2004: 474) has suggested (convincingly, in my opinion) to explain the deponent pret. (·)*ménair* as analogical on the preterite of the structurally similar verb *gainithir*, i.e. (·)*génair*; (·)*ménair* would in fact have replaced a reduplicated perfect **me-mon-e*. Although it is not clear whether deponent (·)*ménair* supplanted the older form in Insular Celtic or in Primitive Irish, it is nevertheless certain that our form *do-ruméoin* from ACC cannot represent the direct outcome of a theoretical **dī-ro-me-mon-e*, since the first *-m-* would have regularly disappeared by dissimilation (cf. McCone 1996: 124), giving ***do-róemain*.

Do-ruméoin can be more easily explained as a de-deponential form. Its ending may be analogical on the type found, for instance, in *·géoin* (< **ge-gn-e*), suffixless pret. 3rd sg. of *·gnin* ‘knows’, as was already proposed by Strachan (1894: 549, n. 1).

From the foregoing discussion it appears not only that several elements previously presented as proofs of an Early Old Irish date of composition of ACC are in fact inconclusive, but also that several forms of this text are in clear contradiction with such an early date, and rather point to the Late Old Irish period.

Should we then simply conclude that the *Amrae* is the product of a ninth-century archaising poet, as Strachan and Stokes did? Probably not. Such a clear-cut answer would not do justice to the complexity of the problem we are dealing with. In particular, it must be recognised that some aspects of the *Amrae*’s contents make us reluctant to abandon completely the idea of a seventh-century date of composition. While on the one hand the fact that the author seems to be looking at the event of Columba’s death from an almost contemporary standpoint³⁹ is not particularly

³⁸ Stokes was here followed by Henry (1978: 198: ‘dhein sé a mhachnamh’; cf. Henry 2006: 69: ‘He spent time in meditation’).

³⁹ For instance, at line § I, 8 (= Stokes 1899: § 11) we read that ‘it is recent that he [i.e. Colum Cille] is not’, whereas line § VIII, 1 (= Stokes 1899: § 115) suggests that Áed mac Ainmirech († 598 AD), king

compelling (as he may have wanted us to believe so),⁴⁰ on the other hand the coherent nature of the religious themes which pervade the whole text is remarkable.⁴¹

For instance, as Pádraig Ó Néill pointed out in an article published in 1987, some striking similarities exist between the *Amrae* and the (at least partially) seventh-century *Apgitir Chrábaid* for what concerns biblical and patristic sources; in particular, Ó Néill drew attention to the direct acquaintance with the works of Cassian shown by the authors of both texts,⁴² furthermore observing how the significant role played in the *Amrae* by the sapiential books of the Old Testament finds an echo in the *Apgitir*'s consistent organisation of its material in triads and tetrads strongly resembling several passages of the Proverbs and of the Ecclesiastes (cf. Ó Néill 1987: 207–209; cf. also Charles-Edwards 2000: 287). In a nutshell, the mindset of the author of ACC seems to agree particularly well with what we know of the monastic culture of the sixth and of the early seventh century.

A closer look at the distribution of the Late OIr. features in the text might help us to solve this ostensible contradiction between linguistic data and contents. Indeed, it is perhaps significant that the majority of 'late' elements is to be found in the Introductory Prayer and in the second half of the elegy proper, and that this situation coincides with the distribution of the lines containing references to Colum Cille's

of the Northern Uí Néill and cousin of Colum Cille, may have commissioned the composition of the *Amrae*.

⁴⁰ This would certainly not be the only case in which words are put in the mouth of an ancient and venerable poet in order to enhance a text's *auctoritas*. A good parallel is offered by the eighth-century *rosc* from the pseudo-historical prologue to the *Senchas Már* (cf. McCone 1986: 6–8, 28–35), which was deliberately composed as if uttered by the legendary poet-judge Dubthach maccu Lugair, allegedly a contemporary of Saint Patrick. In that text, the frequent use of verbs in the first person singular is an elementary way of giving authority and credibility to the literary fiction (cf. e.g.: § vi *áiliu Dúa, dírged mo sét* 'I beseech God that he make straight my path'; § viii *fo-m-roir fír Fíadat* 'may the Lord's truth help me'; § ix *fetar fis [n]déodaie* 'I know divine knowledge'; § xii *seichim iar mo baithis Pátraic* 'I follow Patrick after my baptism' [all translations are McCone's]).

⁴¹ We should also observe that two historical figures of Columba's time are mentioned in the text: Áed mac Ainmirech is named at § VIII, 1 (= Stokes 1899: § 115), while the Conall whose name appears at § VIII, 4 (= Stokes 1899: § 118) could be Conall mac Comgaill, king of Dál Riata.

⁴² The name of Cassian is explicitly mentioned at ACC § V, 6 (= Stokes 1899: § 55). The name of another patristic author, Basil, appears at ACC § IV, 10 (= Stokes 1899: § 48).

family connections and to the Columban monastic *familia*, also to be found predominantly in §§ VII–X.⁴³

At this point, a reasonable guess would be that an ancient, possibly Early Old Irish core-text was re-elaborated and / or augmented to some extent in, say, the ninth century. It is of course very difficult to be more precise on the actual degree of this supposed intervention; in other words, it is not easy to understand whether we are here dealing with minor ‘adjustments’, with interpolations, or with a thorough revision of the hypothetical older material, and it seems to me that better results could be achieved in this field through a careful study of the text’s contents rather than by means of a linguistic analysis, no matter how detailed.

Historians will undoubtedly be able to test the likelihood of these suppositions against the social and political background of the ninth century better than I can do here. For the moment, I will limit myself to observing that at least some indications that celebrations in memory of Colum Cille continued during the Late Old Irish period can be found in the Annals of Ulster: for instance, the entries for AD 831 and AD 849 read respectively *Diarmait do thiachtain i nErinn co mindaibh Coluim Cille* (‘Diarmait went to Ireland with the reliquaries of Colum Cille’), and *Indrechtach abbas Iae do thiachtain dochum n-Erenn co mindaibh Coluim Cille* (‘Indrechtach, abbot of Iona, went to Ireland with the reliquaries of Colum Cille’). Admittedly, as Máire Herbert pointed out, it is not easy to tell whether the expression *co mindaibh Coluim Cille* ‘represent[s] a continuation of a regular process of bringing the saint’s relics on circuit, or whether the purpose at that time was to deposit sacred objects in safety in Kells’ (Herbert 1988: 71). Nevertheless, we can suppose that the gradual decline of Iona’s prestige in the course of the ninth century would have been at least likely to trigger some kind of response from the Columban foundations in Ireland (especially Kells) aimed at contrasting this negative tendency. This response would have presumably manifested itself through a reaffirmation of the monastic *familia*’s glorious past and traditions: display of the founder’s relics and production of texts in

⁴³ Columba’s familiar connections and lineage (whose importance in the text has been also recognised by CM, cf. pp. 117–118) are referred to in the following passages: § I, 1; § VII, 15; § VIII, 1; § VIII, 10; § VIII, 16; § VIII, 21–22; § IX, 1; § X, 6. The lines in which we can find more or less clear allusions to Columba’s monastic *familia* are: § II, 10; § VII, 3; § VII, 5–6; § VII, 10–11; § VIII, 12; § IX, 10.

his honour would have been obvious parts of such an attempt. An eulogy like the *Amrae* could then fit this hypothetical framework quite comfortably.

In addition to that, we may also notice that the above-mentioned relatively frequent references to Columba's origins contained in the second half of ACC would not be particularly surprising either, since we know that connections between the Columban *familia* and Cenél Conaill continued to play a significant role during the late ninth century (cf. Herbert 1988: 74–75).⁴⁴

To conclude, even though convincing results will only be achieved after a thorough investigation, the elements gathered so far appear nonetheless to suggest what follows as a likely scenario (which of course should not be considered as anything more than a preliminary working hypothesis):

an elegy may have been composed in honour of St Colum Cille in the late sixth or early seventh century by an Irish monastic scholar (probably belonging to a foundation of the Columban *familia*); this original composition was subsequently re-elaborated, and perhaps enlarged, by an unidentified ninth century reviser, whose degree of intervention on the hypothetical earlier material is however difficult to determine with exactness. On the whole, it seems quite possible that large sections of the second half of the *Amrae* were actually composed in the Late Old Irish period by an author who was eager to highlight Columba's family connections with the Uí Néill, and especially with the Cenél Conaill. This redaction of the text may be what we know as *Amrae Coluimb Chille*.

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⁴⁴ The following three late ninth- / early tenth-century abbots of Iona were undoubtedly of Cenél Conaill descent: Flann mac Maíle Dúin († 891); Máel Brigte mac Tornáin († 927); Dubthach († 938). Besides, 'while we lack full genealogical data for the abbots of Derry, available indications point to Cenél Conaill dominance of the office' (Herbert 1988: 74).

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