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following accusative and dative singular
talmain



Chantal Kobel

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A NOTE ON THE USE OF A FEMININE ADJECTIVE FOLLOWING ACCUSATIVE AND DATIVE SINGULAR *TALMAIN*¹

ABSTRACT

This brief note provides examples showing that, similar to other masculine consonantal stems, the accusative or dative singular of masculine *n*-stem *talam* can also be qualified by a feminine attributive adjective in the Middle Irish period.

THE noun *talam* ‘ground, earth’ was originally a consonantal stem, to be precise a masculine *n*-stem, although later it also adopted an *o*-stem inflection.² The accusative and dative singular form was *talmain*, ending in a palatal final, with a short dative *talam* also attested, e.g. *.i. as intalam fessin*, ‘i.e. from the earth itself’, *MI*. 45d13.³ Any attributive adjective following *talmain/talam* would be masculine in gender, in accordance with the grammatical rules of the Old Irish period.⁴ In Middle Irish, adjectives could take feminine inflection when following masculine consonantal stems, such as guttural stems, *s*-stems, and extending into *i*-stems, in the accusative or dative case, e.g. *dom rīg rāin* (:grāin), *SR* 7861; *i Slēib bleaig Blod* (:Breguin), *LL* 25896; *gana comsid costadaig*, *LL* 12061.⁵ However, no examples of masculine *n*-stems occurring with a following feminine adjective have been noted yet. The purpose of this note is to present examples that I have collected from verse of the accusative and dative singular of masculine *n*-stem *talam* + attributive feminine *ā*- or *u*-stem adjective.

My first three examples are found in the tenth-century *Saltair na Rann*. In the following couplet, the gen. sg. *nlfirn* rhymes with the feminine acc. sg. *tind* (of *tend* ‘firm’):

¹I am grateful to Liam Breatnach, Mícheál Hoyne and David Stifter for discussing various aspects of an earlier draft of this note. I am also thankful to the editors of this journal and the anonymous reader for their comments and suggestions. I am of course solely responsible for any remaining errors.

²See *DIL* s.v. *talam* for examples. For a general discussion of the morphology of *n*-stems, see Stüber (1998). For *talam* as an *o*-stem, see McManus (1994: 379).

³David Stifter has pointed out to me that the dative is exclusively *talam* throughout the Milan glosses (see for instance, 44c1, 68c4, etc.). For examples of dative singular *talam* in the Würzburg glosses, see *hitalam*, *Wb*. 7c8; *inim etalam*, 21a13; *italam*, 21d4. See also: *ostalam*, *Karlsruhe Bede* 33b1 (*Thes* ii, 20); *i talam*, *Poems of Blathmac* (Carney 1964), l. 744. There are no examples of accusative singular *talam* in the Würzburg glosses (see Kavanagh 2001: 844). The earliest known example of an accusative singular *talam* cited in *DIL* s.v. *talam* is as follows: *ro lín flaith Dé Athar/nem, talam la trethan*, ‘the kingdom of God the Father has filled heaven, earth and sea’, *Fél. Prol.* (Stokes 1905), ll. 215–16.

⁴See *GOI* §361.

⁵This phenomenon has been discussed by O’Brien (1954; 1958) and Breatnach (1994: 252). For Classical Modern Irish, see McManus (1994: 380 and 384), e.g. *ós glinn guirm*, *IGT* ii, 1503.

[...]
corp lobtha hi talmain tind
is anmain dochum nIfirn. (ll. 1351–2)

‘[...] the rotting body going into the firm earth and the soul to Hell.’⁶

In the next example, the accusative of *talam* is followed by the feminine adjective of *tinach*, rhyming with *ninaig*:

Ticfa nēl derg teinntide
a tuaisciurd nime ninaig,
grānna gēr garb geintide,
lethfaid dar talmain tinaig. (ll. 8025–8)

‘A red fiery cloud will come from the north of shining heaven, it will spread over the many-sided (?) earth, hateful, sharp, harsh, heathen.’⁷

In the third example, the feminine forms of the *o/ā* stem adjectives *trén* and *torbach* follow *talmain*:

[...]
dūs in fagbad, érimm ngrinn,
talmain trēin tarbaig tírimm. (ll. 2567–8)

‘[...] to see whether it [the dove] would find, a perfect intelligence, firm profitable dry land.’

My fourth example is from the poem *Ádam óenathair na ndóene*, also known as the metrical *Banshenchas*, preserved in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster and composed by Gilla Mo Dutu úa Casaide in 1147:

Ingen Buirg buredaig Érne
on ainmnigther in loch lir.
is Cruachu o Chruachain chrodeirg.
ruathair moir co mórfeirg mir.
Cruachu inailt d’Étain adbail
narb écain ar talmain tig. (LL 16713–18)

⁶Text and trans. Greene and Kelly (1976: 47).

⁷For this and the following example I use David Greene’s edition and translation of *Saltair na Rann* which is available on the website of the School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (<https://www.dias.ie/celt/celt-publications-2/celt-saltair-na-rann/>). I have consulted Oxford, Bodleian Library Rawlinson B. 502 to confirm that the form *talmain* is written unambiguously, i.e. as *talmain*, in all of the above instances (Rawl. B. 502, fol. 22rb40; 25va7; 39v22). An independent copy of *Saltair na Rann* is preserved in RIA MS 24 P 27 (see Mac Eoin 1982: 1). Unfortunately the text ends at l. 1105 of Stokes’s edition (1883).

‘The daughter of Burg Buredach was Erni from whom is named the oceanlike lake. Cruachu is named from bloodred Cruachan (a great onset with sudden fury). She was handmaiden of great Etain who was no senseless wanderer (?) on the solid earth.’⁸

The metre of the poem is *sétrad fada* and this particular verse contains six lines.⁹ The palatal final of *tig* (*u*-stem adjective *tiug* ‘solid’) is confirmed in this instance by end-rhyme with *mir* and *lir*.

The next example is preserved in a Middle Irish poem in a text concerning an encounter between Cú Chulainn and the poet Senbecc úa Ébricc. Only one copy of this version survives in volume four of the composite manuscript TCD MS H 3.18 (1337).¹⁰

[...]
 Nícon fil for talmuin tigh
 nādhcon targa dīa soighid (p. 60a30).

‘There is no one upon the solid earth who would not come to visit it.’¹¹

Here the feminine form of the adjective *tiug* ‘solid’, with palatal final -g, is confirmed by end rhyme with the verb *saigid*.

To conclude then, the five examples here consist of an accusative or dative singular masculine *n*-stem *talmain* followed by a feminine attributive adjective, i.e. in three instances by an *ā*-stem adjective and in two by a *u*-stem adjective. The similarity between masculine and feminine *n*-stem and *ā*-stem nouns, both having a palatalised accusative and dative singular, allowed for the natural development of a feminine adjective following the masculine *n*-stem *talam* in such cases. This development in turn may have been a contributing factor to the change of *talam* from masculine to feminine *n*-stem in Classical Modern Irish, with the fluctuation of declension continuing into the modern language.¹² As such, it is possible to extend the rule concerning feminine declension of attributive adjectives following masculine consonantal stems to include *n*-stems

⁸Trans. Dobbs (1930: 323).

⁹Some verses in this poem contain six lines, others contain eight, and one contains ten lines, i.e. LL 16965–74. For an overview of this metre, see Breatnach (2015: 76–7).

¹⁰This volume (i.e. pp. 59–87) is dated to c. 1520, for which see Ó Cuív (1954: 30; 1985: 113). For a description of the sections of the manuscript, see Breatnach (2005: 4–5). This text has hitherto not been printed, and I am currently preparing an edition and translation of it.

¹¹My translation.

¹²See *DIL* s.v. *talam* for examples of *talam* as an *o*-stem; most *n*-stems were treated as feminine, for which see McManus (1994: 378–9). The editor points out to me that this variation in declension continues into Modern Irish, with both *talaimh* (masc.) and *talún* (fem.) recognised in the modern language. The gen. sg. *talaimh* and *talún* (and *talúna*) are found in Connemara; cf. de Bhaldraithe (1953: §§1, 132). *Talaimh* is the normal gen. sg. in Mayo (*talúna* confined to certain phrase(s); Mhac an Fhailligh (1968: §502). *Talaimh* is the gen. sg. form in Northern Irish. Mícheál Hoyne also brought it to my attention that the gen. sg. *talún* is found in Munster; cf. Ó Sé (2000: §§ 173, 264).

also, thereby reflecting the simplification of the agreement behaviour of adjectives in the Middle Irish period. Finally, the above collection is by no means exhaustive and a more detailed search in the future could possibly provide us with further examples of masculine *n*-stems with following feminine adjectives in prose.

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CHANTAL KOBEL

Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies