# An Irish collection of remedies for gynaecological and obstetrical conditions

Deborah Hayden

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# AN IRISH COLLECTION OF REMEDIES FOR GYNAECOLOGICAL AND OBSTETRICAL CONDITIONS


## Abstract

This contribution presents a semi-diplomatic edition and translation of a collection of remedies for gynaecological and obstetrical conditions that was written around the beginning of the sixteenth century and is now preserved in two separate Irish medical manuscripts (RIA MSS 23 N 29 [467] and 24 B 3 [445]). The collection forms part of a much larger remedy book compiled by the north Connacht physician Conla Mac an Leagha (*fl.* 1496–1509) and is noteworthy as a witness to the transmission in Ireland of material relating to the twelfth-century ensemble of Latin texts on women's medicine known as the *Trotula*. The text sheds light on the processes of vernacularisation of this material in the Insular world during the later Middle Ages and offers insight into the use of the prosimetrical and enumerative forms for medical writing in Irish. It also informs our understanding of the circulation of Irish medical remedy collections and is of considerable lexicographical significance, containing several word-forms and meanings that are not recorded in the *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language* (*eDIL*).


## Introduction

This article presents an edition and translation of a collection of remedies for gynaecological and obstetrical conditions preserved in an early sixteenth-century Irish manuscript that is now split between two distinct codices.[1] The collection forms a single chapter in a much larger remedy book containing over 920 different cures for ailments of the entire body, broadly arranged in the head-to-toe order typical of such collections throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages. The remedy book in question was written primarily by the north Connacht physician Conla Mac an Leagha (*fl.* 1496–1509), with possible assistance in one instance from his brother Máel Eachlainn, who


[1]I am especially grateful to Sharon Arbuthnot, Siobhán Barrett, David Stifter, the editors of this volume and the anonymous reviewer for offering many insights into, and important corrections on, previous drafts of this work. I also wish to thank the other attendees of the Irish Medical Texts Reading Group at Maynooth University in Autumn 2025 (Benedetta D'Antuono, Mairéad Finnegan, Chantal Kobel and Cassandra Pruetz) for their perceptive contributions to our discussion of the text. I alone am responsible for any errors or shortcomings that may remain. This work has been produced as part of the project *LEIGHEAS: Language, Education and Medical Learning in the Premodern Gaelic World*, funded by a Consolidator Laureate Award from Research Ireland (grant agreement no. IRCLA/2022/2922; https://leigheas.maynoothuniversity.ie).




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was *ollamh* in medicine to the two Mac Donnchaidh lords in Co. Sligo and is known to have been active in the first quarter of the sixteenth century.[2] The work as a whole is significant in being the only prosimetrical medical text to survive from medieval Ireland, containing over forty passages in verse, many of which are versified remedies.[3] In a previous volume of this journal, I published an edition and translation of the chapter of cures, charms and prayers for andrological ailments that immediately precedes the present text.[4] Together, these chapters constitute the portion of the treatise that might now be designated 'Conla Mac an Leagha's Remedy Book' dealing with conditions of the generative organs.

Conla Mac an Leagha is known to have been a practising physician in the service of the Mac Diarmada family in the lordship of Magh Luirg, located in what are now the baronies of Boyle and Frenchpark, Co. Roscommon. He appears to have moved around several different locations in that area while compiling his remedy collection, apparently for his own use.[5] His treatise is now preserved, however, as part of two distinct, composite manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy. The majority of the text (thirty-two vellum leaves) is found in its original location, RIA MS 24 B 3 (445), pp. 33–[90], 90a, 90b and 91–3. A further eight paper leaves, which became separated from the vellum at an unknown point in the transmission of the work, are now found in RIA MS 23 N 29 (467), fols 1–4 and 6–9. Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha has established the correct collation of these leaves as follows:

RIA MS 24 B 3 (445), pp. 33–70;
RIA MS 23 N 29 (467), fols 1–4;
RIA MS 24 B 3 (445), pp. 71–4;
RIA MS 23 N 29 (467), fols 6–9;
RIA MS 24 B 3 (445), pp. 75–93.[6]

[2]Paul Walsh, 'An Irish medical family – Mac an Leagha', in Colm Ó Lochlainn (ed.), *Irish Men of Learning: Studies by Father Paul Walsh* (Dublin, 1947), 206–18; Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha, 'An Irish medical treatise on vellum and paper from the 16th century', in Pádraig Ó Macháin (ed.), *Paper and the Paper Manuscript: A Context for the Transmission of Gaelic Literature* (Cork, 2019), 111–25, at 113.

[3]For editions of three of these remedies, as well as discussion of their wider stylistic context, see Deborah Hayden, 'Three versified medical recipes invoking Dían Cécht', in Anders Ahlqvist and Pamela O'Neill (eds), *Fír Fesso: A Festschrift for Neil McLeod* (Sydney, 2018), 107–23. Two further metrical remedies from the collection have been published in Deborah Hayden, 'A versified cure for headache and some lexicographical notes', *Keltische Forschungen* 8 (2019), 7–22, and Deborah Hayden, 'Medieval Irish medical verse in the nineteenth century: some evidence from material culture', *Irish Historical Studies* 45/168 (2021), 1–19.

[4]Deborah Hayden, 'A sixteenth-century Irish collection of remedies for ailments of the male reproductive organs', *Celtica* 33 (2021), 248–76.

[5]Nic Dhonnchadha, 'An Irish medical treatise', 113.

[6]Nic Dhonnchadha, 'An Irish medical treatise', 111. For a discussion of this manuscript in relation to other composite paper and vellum codices from late-medieval Ireland, see Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'The emergence of the Gaelic paper manuscript: a preliminary investigation', in Pádraig Ó Macháin (ed.), *Paper and the Paper Manuscript: A Context for the Transmission of Gaelic Literature* (Cork, 2019), 21–43, at 31.

This collation is of particular relevance for the present contribution, because Conla's chapter on gynaecological and obstetrical conditions spans a portion of the original manuscript that is now split across the two codices: it begins on one of the paper leaves, fol. 9v8 of RIA MS 23 N 29 (467), and then continues to pp. 75–78.26 of the vellum leaves in RIA MS 24 B 3 (445).

The chief aim of this article is to make this text available in a modern edition and translation with a view to highlighting its significance for the lexicography of the Gaelic languages and for the historical sociology of knowledge, as well as to provide a basis for future, more in-depth studies of its sources and manuscript transmission. Some preliminary remarks in this regard might, however, be made here for contextual purposes.

## Medieval Irish gynaecology and obstetrics in their European context

The collection edited here comprises seventy-eight separate remedies for gynaecological and obstetrical conditions. Over one third of these are for menstrual irregularities, chiefly excessive blood flow or retention of the menses. This emphasis in content is in keeping with other European sources on women's medicine: Monica Green has noted, for example, that of some 250 medicinal substances listed in the most popular pharmaceutical authority in western Europe, the *Circa Instans*, eighty-seven – over a third – are stated to be good for menstrual disorders.[7] A similar preoccupation with regulation of the menses can be found in the 'Book on the Conditions of Women' (*Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum*), the first of three Latin texts on women's medicine that, after several stages of independent revision, were brought together by the end of the twelfth century to form the ensemble of texts now known as the *Trotula*.[8] Here again, over one-third of the work is taken up with sections on the general physiology and pathology of menstruation, menstrual retention, paucity of the menses and excess menstruation.[9]

A focus on menstruation in medieval texts on women's medicine is not surprising, since, as Green has further observed, this physiological phenomenon 'formed the bedrock of medieval concepts about how the female body functioned': it was seen as the end result of a whole bodily process of purification and a prerequisite for conception.[10] Accordingly, disruption of the menses was understood as the cause, and not merely the symptom, of a whole range of other disorders affecting the female body, and addressing such issues could in turn influence matters of an obstetrical nature.[11] For example, preparations for bringing on menstruation, or emmenagogues, 'were not necessarily seen

[7] Green, 'Flowers, poisons and men: menstruation in early medieval Europe', in Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie (eds), *Menstruation: A Cultural History* (Basingstoke, 2005), 51–64, at 54.

[8] For a discussion of the evolution and contents of the *Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum*, see Monica Green (ed. and trans.), *The Trotula. A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia, PA, 2001), 17–37.

[9] Green, *The Trotula*, 21.

[10] Green, 'Flowers, poisons and men', 53.

[11] Green, Flowers, poisons and men', 54. The physiological rationale underlying medical approaches to menstrual irregularities is discussed in detail in Green, *The Trotula*, 19–22.

as abortifacients but may well have had a deliberately prenatal purpose', since it was understood that the womb had to be successfully cleaned out before it could provide a suitable place for implantation of the seed.[12] The physiological link between menstruation and obstetrical concerns is clearly articulated in the Irish treatise on health known as *Regimen na sláinte*, dating to the mid-fifteenth century:

> Et bīt*h* a f*h*is agad gurab c*úis* c*h*oiméda sl*áint*i don m*ac*l*ac* ⁊ don mnaī faicsin na f*ol*a m*īst*a a cāil*id*eacht ⁊ a caindiacht ⁊ a n-aims*ir* imc*h*ub*aid* do r*ēir* gnāth*uigth*e an g*ach* uile aims*ir*, ⁊ gurab c*úis* c*h*oimēda ō g*ach* uile urc*h*ōid; ⁊ do-nī sī iat geanmnaid maill*e rē* b*eac*ān āilg*is* coimriachtana. Et as ī as meadh c*h*omt*h*rom do f*h*lux na f*ol*a m*īst*a, .i. a beith ūair an g*ach* aen-mī. *Agus* nī hēigin a beith co[m]mōr *nō* coimb*eac* an g*ach* aen-mnaī […] mur claec*h*l*uigth*ear an f*huil* m*īst*a ōna suig*iugad* n*ādūrda* fēin as c*ūis* anfhainne ⁊ claec*h*l*uigth*i na f*uir*me dona mnāib sin, ⁊ as cūis tearcacht don gein*eam*ain ⁊ toirrc*his* mairb sin. Mās ead dēntur deithneas innus nach claec*h*l*uig*i an f*huil* m*īsta* ōna hord n*ādūrd*a.
>
> 'And we know that seeing the menstrual blood in proper quality and quantity and at the appropriate time according to custom in every period of time is a cause of conservation of health for the uterus and for the woman, and a cause of conservation from every harm; and it makes them chaste with little desire for coition. And the even measure for the menstrual discharge is that it should occur once in every month. And it need not be equally large or equally small in every woman […] when the menstrual blood is changed from its own natural disposition that is a cause of weakness and of change of form for women, and that is a cause of scant conception and of a dead foetus. Therefore, let care be exerted that the menstrual blood does not change from its natural order.'[13]

That Conla Mac an Leagha was not merely a scribe but also a practising physician who probably made use of the remedies in his collection is indicated by a note he wrote in RIA MS 24 B 3 (445), p. 109, where he observed that he had finished copying a lapidary after attending Cathal Bearrtha Mac Diarmada Gall, who had been dangerously wounded by an arrow.[14] His inclusion of a chapter on gynaecological and obstetrical cures in the same manuscript suggests that he was also involved in the practice of women's medicine. Such a range of clinical expertise accords with a broader trend across Europe in

[12] Green, 'Flowers, poisons and men', 53.

[13] Séamus Ó Ceithearnaigh, *Regimen na sláinte: Regimen sanitatis Magnini Mediolanensis*, 3 vols (Dublin, 1942–4), i, 99–100 (ll. 2656–81); trans. Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha, 'Irish medical writing, 1400–1600', in Angela Bourke (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Vol. 4* (Cork, 2002), 341–57, at 352.

[14] Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha, 'Medical writing in Irish', *Irish Journal of Medical Science* 169/3 (2000), 217–20, at 220.

the later Middle Ages, when gynaecological care, as well as certain aspects of emergency obstetrical care, were frequently in the hands of male practitioners.[15] That this was the case in Ireland as elsewhere is indicated by a colophon written in another medical manuscript of the sixteenth century, where the Irish physician Corc Óg Ó Cadhla stated that on 22 March 1578 he was in 'Gráinseach na Manach' (apparently Graiguenamanagh, Co. Kilkenny) in the house of Brian Caomhánach, having just treated Brian's daughters for a menstrual irregularity.[16]

Other gynaecological matters and obstetrical conditions are the focus of most of the remedies in the second half of Conla Mac an Leagha's collection. Some fifteen of these address problems with conception or infertility, while four (§§58, 61, 64, 65) are concerned with inducing or facilitating a successful birth. The terse format of medical remedies, which do not always include headings explicitly stating their purpose (although this can sometimes be inferred from the text of the immediately preceding remedy in the collection) means that it is not always clear whether remedies for ensuring successful parturition were considered distinct from those more explicitly recommended for abortion (*toglúasacht*) or removal of a dead foetus from the womb (§§51–2, 57, 66, 70–1, 78–9, 80).

A glimpse into the sociohistorical context of our remedy collection is provided by the nine cures that are recommended for influencing the gender of an unborn child (§§41–3, 53, 55–6, 62–3 and 73), all but two of which (§§41 and 43) indicate a preference for male offspring. This teaching may ultimately derive from a source such as the *Natural History* of the Roman historian Pliny the Elder, who claimed that 'If the uterus of the hare is taken in food, it is believed that males are conceived; the same result is obtained by eating its testicles and rennet' (*si vulva leporum in cibis sumatur, mares concipi putant, hoc et testiculis eorum et coagulo profici*).[17] Three remedies with a similar purpose are found in the Latin *Trotula* tradition, specifically the section of the *Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum* concerned with 'impediments to conception'.[18] Monica Green has observed, however, that 'Neither here nor in the vast majority of medieval medical texts are there any explicit instructions on how to conceive females'.[19] She notes only two exceptions to this, one being a late antique or early medieval treatise known as '*De passionibus mulierum* A', which recommends that the two partners drink the dried vagina of a hare in order to conceive a girl. The other is a recipe in the fifteenth-century Middle English work '*Sekenesse of Wymmen* 2', which misinterprets instructions in §76 of the Latin *Trotula* advising the woman to drink the testicles of a hare in order to conceive a male child.[20] The remedies in §§41 and 43 of our Irish

[15] Monica Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford, 2008), x.

[16] RIA MS 24 P 14 (443), p. 170a36–8; noted in Nic Dhonnchadha, 'Irish medical writing', 342.

[17] W. H. S. Jones (ed. and trans.), *Pliny. Natural History, Volume VIII: Books 28–32*, Loeb Classical Library 418 (Cambridge, MA, 1963), 166–7 (XXVIII.lxxvii).

[18] Green, *The Trotula*, 94–5 (§§76–8).

[19] Green, *The Trotula*, 34.

[20] Green, *The Trotula*, 220, referring to pp. 94–5 of her edition and citing the Middle English

text can thus be added to this list of exceptions to the apparent preference for conceiving male children that is expressed in many medieval medical sources.

The mysterious and often unpredictable nature of conception and childbirth is intimated by the inclusion of two remedies that might be termed 'magical' or 'ritualistic' in nature, both of which are instructions for creating amulets to be worn on the body. As I have noted elsewhere, the remedy in §64 of our text, which is stated to be for ensuring childbirth without danger, is an Irish reflex of the popular ritual motif of the holy mothers, sometimes referred to as the '*peperit* charm', variations of which circulated widely in Europe throughout the Middle Ages. Its core formula consists of an enumeration of biblical instances of miraculous childbirth, and the version in our text is similar to that transmitted in the Anglo-Norman tradition, which expanded the roster of holy mothers to include Anna, mother of Mary, and Celina, mother of Remigius.[21] The remedy in question also includes a reference to the so-called '*Sator* square', a palindrome consisting of the five Latin words *sator*, *arepo*, *tenet*, *opera* and *rotas*. This ritual came to be closely associated with childbirth in the Middle Ages by virtue of its inclusion in the Latin *Trotula* tradition, where the reader is advised that the words may be written on cheese or butter and then consumed by the woman in order to facilitate the parturition of a dead foetus.[22] I have as yet found no parallel for the instructions in §63, which counsel a woman suffering from the 'affliction' of bearing daughters to tie a horse's tooth in a sealskin thong, take it to seven masses (?) and wear it around the neck.

A concern for postpartum conditions such as retention of the afterbirth is expressed in the remedies in §§76 and 77. There is no direct correspondence between the instructions given for this purpose in our text and similar remedies in the Latin *Trotula* tradition, apart from the recommendation in §76 to apply fumigations to the genitalia, a procedure that was also used for conditions such as menstrual retention and uterine pain.[23] For example, the use of a *stól toll* or *sella perforata* 'perforated chair' or 'stool' for this purpose, as noted in §§24 and 36 of the Irish text (for menstrual retention and conception, respectively), is attested several times in the Latin *Trotula*, as in the following advice for curing 'paucity of the menses':[24]

> Accipe zinziber, folia lauri, et sauinam, tere et simul pone in olla rudi super carbones uiuos, et super sedem perforatum sedeat

text edited by Beryl Rowland, *Medieval Woman's Guide to Health: The First English Gynaecological Handbook* (Kent, OH, 1981), 168–9.

[21] Deborah Hayden, 'Premodern Irish rituals for conception and childbirth in their Insular context', in Deborah Hayden and Sarah Baccianti (eds), *Medicine in the Medieval North Atlantic World: Vernacular Texts and Traditions* (Turnhout, 2025), 415–37, at 418–20; see also Marianne Elsakkers, ' "In pain you shall bear children" (Gen. 3:16): medieval prayers for safe delivery', in Anne-Marie Korte (ed.), *Women and Miracle Stories: A Multidisciplinary Exploration* (Leiden, 2001), 179–209.

[22] Green, *The Trotula*, 100–1.

[23] See Green, *The Trotula*, 102–3 (§§104–11).

[24] See Green, *The Trotula*, 76–9 and 116–17 (§§13, 25 and 134); suffumigation is recommended in §108 of the Latin text.

> mulier, et fumum recipiat per inferiora, et sic menstrua redibunt. Fiat ter uel quarter uel pluries. Mulier autem que huiusmodi fomenta frequentat, necesse est ut uuluam suam ungat intus frigidis unguentis ne nimis calefiat.
>
> 'Take ginger, laurel leaves, and savin. Pound them and place them together in a plain pot on live coals, and let the woman sit upon a perforated seat, and let her receive the smoke through the lower members, and thus the menses will return. Let this be done three or four times or even more often. But for the woman who frequently makes applications of this kind, it is necessary that she anoint her vagina inside with cold unguents lest she becomes excessively heated.'[25]

Conla Mac an Leagha's chapter on gynaecological and obstetrical conditions also includes a few miscellaneous remedies, such as the tetrad in §15 for easing a sharp pain (*greim*) or the cure for 'tightness' (*tendus*) in the woman at the birth of her child, possibly a reference to labour contractions. §§54 and 69 appear to be concerned with the birthing of calves and may reflect the agricultural milieu in which a rural practitioner like Conla might have been called to work on occasion. The purpose of the remedies in §§16, 17 and 32 is not clearly stated, although the first two involve the use of a clyster or enema to inject medicinal liquid into the vagina. Familiarity with the medical equipment used throughout medieval western Europe at this period is also indicated in §§29–31, 35, 42, 46 and 48, which involve the use of a pessary, or tampon-like wad of cotton or some other material into which medications could be wrapped or poured.[26]

## Verse, tetrads and vernacularisation

In addition to its inclusion of numerous versified remedies, several chapters in Conla Mac an Leagha's Remedy Book begin with verse excerpts, many of which were evidently intended to summarise or introduce the ailments for which the following cures in the chapter are deemed efficacious.[27] These are typically in the common Irish metre known as *deibhidhe*, which consists of four heptasyllabic lines in which line *a* rhymes with *b* and line *c* rhymes with *d*. End-rhymes in this metre are between words of unequal syllabic length; the final of the second line of each couplet has a syllable prefixed to the syllable that forms a rhyme with the final of the first line.[28] The chapter on women's medicine edited here likewise begins with two quatrains, but

[25] Green, *The Trotula*, 78–9 (§25).

[26] See Green, *The Trotula*, 30–3, for references to such equipment in the Latin text, as well as illustrations of pessaries, fumigation pots and stools in a fifteenth-century copy of the Dutch translation of the *Trotula* (Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, MS GKS 1657, fols 29r and 32r). In our text, the creation of the pessary is only described explicitly in §31, but its use can be inferred in the other remedies noted.

[27] For other examples, see Hayden, 'A sixteenth-century Irish collection', 269–70.

[28] See Eleanor Knott, *Irish Syllabic Poetry 1200–1600*, 2nd ed. (Dublin, 2005), 18–19.

rather than presenting a list of ailments, they contain information of a more theoretical nature and appear to be a versification of teaching found in the section of the *Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum* concerned with 'excessive flux of the menses' (*De nimio fluxu menstruorum*).[29] This begins by explaining that 'Sometimes the menses abound beyond what is natural, which has happened because the veins of the womb are wide and open, or because sometimes they break open and the blood flows in great quantity' (*Habundant quandoque menstrua preter naturam, quod contigit quia uene matricis sunt ample et aperte, uel quia quandoque crepantur et fluit inde sanguis in multa quantitate*).[30] The second quatrain (§3) may be inspired by the passage immediately following this explanation in the Latin *Trotula*, which offers a humoral rationale for why menstrual flux might be yellow, red or white in colour: it is stated that a yellow excretion is caused by excess bile, white by excess phlegm and red by excess blood.[31] It is then observed that 'Illnesses of this kind emerge on account of corrupt humors within, which corruption Nature refuses to sustain' (*Huiusmodi egritudines emergunt propter humores interius corruptos, quam corruptionem natura dedignatur sustinere*). §25 of our chapter also contains a quatrain of verse, but in this case, it is a prescription for retention of the menses, albeit lacking any explicit instructions regarding the preparation or administration of the remedy, as is common in other versified cures.

Verse renditions of material belonging to the *Trotula* are attested in other geographically proximate linguistic traditions: one metrical version of the work survives in Latin from the thirteenth century and another was produced in Anglo-Norman French around the same time, both of them copied in England.[32] Tony Hunt has observed that the Anglo-Norman verse translation (preserved in Cambridge, Trinity College MS O.1.20) appears to be based on the first redaction of the *Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum*, the first of the three texts that constitute the standardised Latin ensemble.[33] This is also the portion of the work that has been argued above to be the source of the Irish quatrains in §§2 and 3 of our remedy collection, although the corresponding section in the Anglo-Norman version bears little resemblance to the Irish rendition.[34] While

[29] Green, *The Trotula*, 80–3 (§§29–44).

[30] Green, *The Trotula*, 80–1 (§29).

[31] Green, *The Trotula*, 80–1 (§30). The inclusion of the colour brown in our text (§2) appears to be an innovation on the part of the author of the verse, perhaps to complete the quatrain. For another Irish version of this section of the *Trotula* text, see Winifred Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook of gynaecology and midwifery preceded by a section on the grades and on the treatment of wounds and some good counsel to the physician himself finishing with a discussion on the treatment of scabies', in J. Fraser, P. Grosjean and J. G. O'Keefe (eds), *Irish Texts Fasciculus V* (London, 1934), 12–74, at 20. The humoral rationale underlying different colours of excretion in this context might be compared with an episode in *Acallam na Senórach*, where the protagonist Caílte is given a purgative and produces five different colours of vomit: see Ranke De Vries, 'The healing of Caílte in *Acallam na senórach*', *North American Journal of Celtic Studies* 5/1 (2021), 49–82, at 60–8.

[32] Green, 'Obstetrical and gynecological texts in Middle English', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 14 (1992), 53–88, at 64. The Anglo-Norman verse translation has been edited by Tony Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1994–7), ii, 68–128.

[33] Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, ii, 72.

[34] See Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, ii, 86.

it is tempting to suggest that the three quatrains in this chapter of Conla Mac an Leagha's Remedy Book represent traces of a full Irish verse rendition of the *Trotula* that is no longer extant, it is also possible that they are merely ornamental flourishes intended to demonstrate the stylistic versatility of the scribe. Conla Mac an Leagha was inclined to Gaelicise his medical texts in other ways, such as by attributing individual remedies to figures of Irish mythology, switching to ogham script, or including elaborate illuminated initials in a style typical of Gaelic vernacular manuscript culture at this period.[35] Demonstrating his capacity to compose verse in traditional Irish metre, however rudimentary, would fit well within this wider context.

Also noteworthy with regard to the stylistic form of the remedies in this text is the inclusion of two tetrads in §§14 and 15. Although tetrads are far less common than triads or heptads in medieval Irish literature, with numerous examples of the latter spanning subjects such as topography, literature, social structures and legal principles, cataloguing concepts or information in groups of four undoubtedly served the same aphoristic and mnemonic function as the triadic and heptadic genres.[36] To my knowledge, no Irish tetrads concerned specifically with medicine have been published before, but given the technical nature of medical learning, which would have likely involved the need to memorise lists of ingredients or nosological classifications, it is not surprising to find such formulations in this context as well.[37] I am aware of two other examples of medical tetrads: one pair is found in NLI MS G 11, p. 250b14–17, where the scribe provides contrasting lists of 'four large cold seeds' (*síla móra*) and 'four small cold seeds' (*síla beca*), presumably a reference to recipe ingredients and their properties. Another, more strikingly visual example of this mnemonic form is found in Dublin, TCD MS H 2. 13 (1315), a fifteenth-century medical manuscript written by an anonymous scribe.[38] In the lower margin and space created by tapering of the text on p. 3a of this manuscript, the scribe has recorded the three causes of sighing; the three types of dropsy and their three causes; the four causes of flux; and the four causes of constipation. He arranges each item diagrammatically and draws lines linking each rubric

[35]On mythological attributions in the text, see Deborah Hayden, 'Attribution and authority in a medieval Irish medical compendium', *Studia Hibernica* 45 (2019), 19–51. Conla switches to ogham script when copying a tract on uroscopy preserved elsewhere in RIA MS 24 B 3 (445); for discussion, see Deborah Hayden and David Stifter, 'Ogham, cryptography and healing charms in the nineteenth century: observations on "The Minchin Manuscript" ', *PRIA* 125C (2025), 345–88, at 351–2. For examples of illuminated initials in Conla's remedy book, which typically mark the beginning of individual chapters, see RIA MS 24 B 3 (445), pp. 33, 46, 48 and 54.

[36]The most recent account of triads and heptads in early Irish tradition, with comparisons to Welsh material, is Fergus Kelly, *The Triads of Ireland: An Old Irish Wisdom Text*, Early Irish Texts Series 2 (Dublin, 2025).

[37]For discussion of triads in Irish medical texts, see Deborah Hayden, 'Observations on the "doors of death" in a medieval Irish medical catechism', in Liam P. Ó Murchú (ed.), *Rosa Anglica: Reassessments*, ITS Subsidiary Series 28 (London, 2016), 26–56, at 35–8.

[38]It may be relevant, as Siobhán Barrett has pointed out to me, that this manuscript contains a close copy of a text on eye ailments written by Conla Mac an Leagha's brother, Máel Eachlainn, and preserved in Dublin, King's Inns Library MS 15.

to a sub-rubric or relevant text.[39]

## Parallels in other Irish texts

Copies or variant versions of some of the remedies in our text are found in other Irish medical manuscripts of the later Middle Ages. The largest overlap (at least thirteen remedies) occurs with a collection of cures in RIA MS 23 F 19 (473), fols 88–95. This fifteenth-century codex includes an Irish treatise on gynaecology that derives in part from the Latin *Trotula* text, and which Winifred Wulff published in 1934 using variants from RIA MS 23 M 36 (472) and TCD MS E 4.1 (1436).[40] All the parallels that I have identified in our text (§§27–8, 30–2, 35–7, 40–2 and 47–8 below) correspond to remedies in a portion of Wulff's edition (§§59–61) for which she could find 'no Latin original',[41] although, as observed in the notes below, many of them are similar to remedies found in the version of the standardised *Trotula* ensemble that has since been published by Green. It is possible, therefore, that they ultimately derive from a different version of the Irish *Trotula* text from the one published by Wulff. The transmission of the Latin *Trotula* ensemble is complex, and its translation into Irish coincided with renderings in many other European vernaculars during the later Middle Ages, including Dutch, English, French, German, Hebrew and Italian.[42] Monica Green has noted, however, that the Latin texts comprising the *Trotula* ensemble, which existed in fifteen distinct versions, were particularly popular in the Insular world, with more than three dozen of the 118 extant Latin *Trotula* manuscripts having been copied in England.[43] It may be instructive in future to investigate further the relationship between the Irish transmission of this material and other Insular texts deriving from the *Trotula* tradition.[44]

[39]Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha, 'Catalogue record for Dublin, Trinity College MS 1315', available on *ISOS*: https://www.isos.dias.ie/TCD/TCD_MS_1315.html (accessed 11 February 2026).

[40]Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook'; Wulff (p. xi) incorrectly gives the shelfmark of RIA MS 23 M 36 (472) as '24 M 36'. Fol. 24 of RIA 23 F 19 (473) bears the date 1352, but as noted in Kathleen Mulchrone et al., *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*, 8 vols (Dublin, 1926–70), ii, 1235, 'this must apply to the original compilation, as the ms. is of later date'.

[41]Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', xiv.

[42]On these, see especially Monica Green, 'A handlist of the Latin and vernacular manuscripts of the so-called Trotula texts, Part 2: the vernacular translations and Latin re-writings', *Scriptorium* 51 (1997), 80–104, and the appendix to Monica Green, *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West: Texts and Contexts* (Aldershot, 2000).

[43]Green, 'Obstetrical and gynecological texts', 64. Tony Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, ii, 70–1, similarly observes that 'It is noteworthy that approximately one third of the Latin "Trotula" MSS come from England, 36 copies being certainly insular, and a further 5 emanating either from England or N. France.'

[44]On the Irish translations of the *Trotula*, see most recently Sharon Arbuthnot, 'Women's medicine in late medieval Ireland: The *Trotula* texts', in Salvador Ryan (ed.), *Birth and the Irish: A Miscellany* (Dublin, 2021), 40–4, and also Sharon Arbuthnot, 'The Irish versions of the *Trotula* texts on women's medicine', *CMCS* 91 (Summer 2026), 1–29. The latter article came to my attention at an advanced stage in the preparation of this contribution, and I am grateful to Dr Arbuthnot for sharing it with me prior to publication. Arbuthnot presents persuasive evidence to suggest that the *Trotula* was translated into Irish more than once and argues that the Irish treatise on gynaecology edited by Wulff contains material that probably derives from a version of the Latin proto-ensemble (on which see Green, *The Trotula*, 52–5), alongside two chapters and possibly

The manuscript witness with the next largest collection of parallel remedies known to me is NLS MS Adv. 72.1.3, fol. 80r–v, which includes copies of at least ten remedies also found in our text (§§9–13, 70–1, 73–4 and 77). In this source, which has been tentatively dated to the fifteenth century and was subsequently associated with the Beaton family of medical practitioners in Gaelic Scotland, the gynaecological and obstetrical cures in question are included in a more varied remedy collection described by the manuscript's cataloguer as

> Treatments, including charms, for various conditions: colic, wounds, burns, felon, insanity, loss of speech, lack of sleep, and after letting a vein; charm for safe childbirth; epilepsy, erysipelas, sterility; to ensure the birth of a male child; to abort a dead foetus; menstruation; to stem the flow of blood from a vein; charm against all evil, etc.[45]

Copies of the two instructions for making textual amulets in §§63–4 are preserved among various charms added to the margins and blank spaces of TCD MS H 3.17 (1336), a composite manuscript consisting primarily of legal texts.[46] A further four remedies (§§60, 63–4 and 72) are also found in 'a compilation of cures, charms and prayers against obstetrical and gynaecological problems' preserved in NLI MS G 11, pp. 268b1–269b32.[47] G 11 is a large and diverse medical manuscript compiled in the fifteenth century by the Ó Bolgaidhe family of medical scribes in Leinster; a colophon on p. 268a records the murder, in 1468, of Thomas, Earl of Desmond, and may have been written at the Ó Bolgaidhe home at Woodstock, west of Athy.[48]

In a recent discussion of Old English remedy collections, Conan Doyle observed that 'finding the source of every individual recipe […] is a task akin to untangling the Gordian knot', one that might ultimately have to be solved using digital methods of neural network computing.[49] A similar point might be made regarding the identification of variant versions of remedies in the large corpus of unpublished Irish medical manuscripts and the challenge of establishing their relationships. While it is beyond the scope of this contribution to do much more than 'tease at the strands of the knot',[50] it is hoped that publishing a semi-diplomatic edition of such a large collection of this material may serve as a starting point for further investigation of such texts. I have thus noted

other extracts that were based on a later development of the Latin ensemble.

[45] Ronald Black, *Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland*, available on *ISOS*: https://www.isos.dias.ie/NLS/NLS_Adv_MS_72_1_3.html (accessed 11 February 2026); see also John Bannerman, *The Beatons: A Medical Kindred in the Classical Gaelic Tradition* (Edinburgh, 1998), 38 and 49.

[46] On these, see R. I. Best, 'Some Irish charms', *Ériu* 16 (1952), 27–32 and Hayden, 'Premodern Irish rituals'.

[47] As observed by Nessa Ní Shéaghdha, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland, Fasciculus I: Mss. G1–G14* (Dublin, 1967), 77.

[48] Ní Shéaghdha, *Catalogue*, 66.

[49] Conan Doyle, *The Reception of Latin Medicine in Early Medieval England: The Evidence from Old English Texts*, Health and Healing in the Middle Ages 8 (York, 2025), 107.

[50] To adapt the turn of phrase used by Doyle, *The Reception of Latin Medicine*, 107.

relevant parallels from the above-mentioned manuscripts, where identified, in the notes to the edition but have only transcribed these other copies in cases where they clarify the readings in our text or present significant variants.

## Text and translation

The edition presented here is based on what was once a single witness but is now found across two manuscripts: RIA MSS 23 N 29 (467), fol. 9v8–z and 24 B 3, pp. 75–78.26. In the presentation of the text below, expansions noted in the manuscript are indicated by italics, and length-marks, where not found in the manuscript, are marked using a macron over vowels. Missing letters are indicated (and supplied where possible) in square brackets, with the exception of lenition, which is only rarely (and inconsistently) marked by the scribe. Nasalisation is marked by the scribe in just three instances and has been reproduced as in the manuscript. Word-division and punctuation are editorial, and textual or semantic ambiguities are discussed in the notes.

A note of caution should be sounded regarding the translation of plant names in particular. As Monica Green has observed, 'The translation of pharmaceutical ingredients is the most vexing aspect of working with texts such as these, since all identifications carry a certain amount of imprecision.'[51] Names of ingredients may become deformed in transmission or may have referred to several different plants, and in some cases, species may now be extinct or their chemical properties may have changed slightly over the last several hundred years.[52] In the case of Irish plant names, dialectal differences and the limitations of our lexicographical sources, many of which do not incorporate information from medical texts, may also come into play; this is certainly the case for *eDIL*, where translations of plant names are often tentative, ambiguous or even contradictory. In translating the plant names given in this text (some seventy-seven in total), I have otherwise chiefly relied on the definitions given in a handful of late-medieval medical glossaries;[53] on the translations provided in Micheál Ó Conchubhair's edition of Tadhg Ó Cuinn's fifteenth-century *Materia medica*;[54] and on entries in modern collections of Irish plant-names, such as Hogan's *Luibhleabhrán*,[55] Uí Chonchubhair and Ó Conchúir's *Flóra Chorca Dhuibhne*,[56] and Williams's *Díolaim Luibheanna*.[57] Problematic or uncertain translations are discussed in the textual notes to the edition.

[51] Green, *The Trotula*, 62.

[52] Green, *The Trotula*, 62.

[53] Whitley Stokes, 'On the materia medica of the mediaeval Irish', *RC* 9 (1888), 224–44 and Whitley Stokes, 'Three Irish medical glossaries', *ACL* 1 (Halle, 1900), 325–47.

[54] Micheál P. S. Ó Conchubhair (ed. and trans.), *An Irish Materia Medica*, interim edition (1991), available at https://celt.ucc.ie/published/G600006/index.html (accessed 11 February 2026).

[55] Edmund Hogan, John Hogan and John C. MacErlean, *Luibhleabhrán: Irish and Scottish Gaelic Names of Herbs, Plants, Trees, etc.* (Dublin, 1900).

[56] Máirín Uí Chonchubhair and Aodán Ó Conchúir, *Flóra Chorca Dhuibhne: Aspects of the Flora of Corca Dhuibhne* (Ballyferriter, 1995).

[57] Nicholas J. A. Williams, *Díolaim Luibheanna* (Dublin, 1993).

**§1** RIA MS 23 N 29 (467), fol. 9v8

Do gal*ur* na *m*ban bud*est*a.

On the sickness of women from here on.

**§2** 9v9–11

IMad cuislend bīs gu p*r*ap
isna lesaib ⁊ sa m*ac*l*og*:
is ūatib gala*r* na mban
re robur is re n-imad.

A venous excess that comes suddenly
in the thighs and in the womb:
it is from them that the sickness of
women [comes]
before a copious flow and an excess.

Cet*r*i data th*ec*aid dī
dat*h* bān ⁊ dat*h* buid*h*e
dat*h* d*er*g, ūa*r* is caom a bl*ad*
mar aon ⁊ d*a*t od*h*a*r*.

Four colours come from her,
the colour white and the colour yellow
the colour red, for its renown is noble,
as well as the colour brown.

**§3** 9v12–13

Ar gal*ur* na mban .i. cac eic*h* do
c*umus*c a*r* u*isce* ⁊ ūan lemn*achta*
ar a ūacht*ur* ⁊ a tab*air*t gan fis *dí*
⁊ a ōl gu cend *nómaid*e gach laī.

For the sickness of women, i.e.
horse-dung should be mixed with water
and froth of new milk [should be put] on
top of it, and it should be given to her
without her knowledge and it should be
drunk every day for a period of nine
days.

**§4** 9v14

Do toirm*us*c fola .i. būafall*án*
l*íath* do bruit a*r* fīn nō a it*h*i fūa*r*
le fī*n*.

For retention of blood, i.e. mugwort
should be boiled in wine or eaten cold
with wine.

**§5** 9v15

IN lus *cét*na do bruit a*r* u*isce* ⁊ a
ibi ⁊ dober in fuil.

The same plant should be boiled in water
and drunk, and it brings on the blood.

**§6** 9v16–18

Do toirm*us*c fola .i. grut dīgērta
do bruit*h* a*r* llemn*acht* fo t*r*ī a
tāt*h*. ⁊ brister *con*ad men ⁊ c*ur*tur
līach do mil air ⁊ im úr ⁊ cantur
umnum dicat ⁊ p*aidi*r fo t*r*ī an*n* ⁊
b*er*b*aig*tur tenga ēnāi*n* ⁊ l*us* na
sub a*r* medg, ⁊ a ōl. ⁊ a tīrib g*rég*
t*u*cud.

For retention of blood, i.e. unsoured (?)
curds should be boiled in fresh milk
three times [to make] solidified cheese.
And let it be grated until it is a fine
powder, and let a spoonful of honey and
fresh butter be put on it and let a
*Hymnum dicat* and a *Pater* be sung three
times over it, and let stitchwort and
strawberry be boiled in whey, and it
should be drunk. And it has been
brought from the lands of the Greeks.

**§7** 9v19–20

Ar rit fola .i. tenegal ⁊ mecun rata, brister a*r* u*isce* ⁊ b*er*b*aigth*ur ⁊ do*nī*ter liti dē ⁊ c*urtur* ūsca *nó* im inti ⁊ bīd aige gu mbī slán.

For a flow of blood, i.e. let houseleek and root of a fern be crushed in water and boiled and let a porridge be made of it, and let lard or butter be put into it, and let her have it until she is healthy.

**§8** 9v21–22

Ar rit fola: adarc gabai*r* do sg*r*is ⁊ mil do cum*u*sc uirre ⁊ a caitem ⁊ is mait*h* īcas.

For a flow of blood: the horn of a goat should be scraped and mixed with honey and eaten, and it heals well.

**§9** 9v23–24

Ar robur fola do mnaī īa*r* tuismed .i. rūsc na t*r*ī ndres ⁊ a*rget* lūacra do bruit tre as ⁊ liti do dēna*m* air do men cr*uithnechta* ⁊ psal*ann* urre [⁊] a caitem ⁊ īcaid.

For excessive bleeding of a woman after giving birth, i.e. the bark of the three briars and meadowsweet should be boiled with milk and a porridge should be made with [lit. on] it with wheat flour and salt [put] on it [and] it should be eaten, and it heals.

**§10** 9v25–6

Arin c*ét*na .i. craide mīl muige do cur tre detaig g*um*bī c*r*ūaid ⁊ a scris ⁊ aonbrochān dē ⁊ īc*aid*.

For the same, i.e. the heart of a hare should be smoked until it is hard and it should be scraped and a single pottage [made] from it, and it heals.

**§11** 9v27

Ar robu*r* f*ola* a*r* mbreit leni*m* .i. iba*r* tal*main* do bruit*h* a*r* u*isce* ⁊ a ō[l].

For an excessive flow of blood after the birth of a child, i.e. juniper should be boiled in water and drunk.

**§12** 9v27–8

A*r* i*n* c*ét*na .i. samad bō do bruit ar lemn*acht* ⁊ c*eir*īn dē a*r* com*h*ai*r* an m*a*cl*og* ⁊ bīd slān.

For the same, i.e. garden sorrel should be boiled in new milk and a poultice made from it for the womb and she will be healthy.

**§13** 9v29

Ar rob*ur* f*ola*, cac gabar ⁊ brēt līn nūa uime ⁊ b*er*b*aigtur* a*r* lem*nacht* ⁊ ib*edh* ⁊ nā bīd a fis aicce.

For an excessive flow of blood, i.e. [take] goat dung and [put] a new linen cloth around it and let it be boiled in new milk and let her drink [it], and let her not know about it.

**§14** 9v30–1

Cetri menanda coisces in rit fola .i. men ēsc ⁊ men psalann mara ⁊ mein cogna ⁊ mein ragaim.

Four powders that prevent the flow of blood, i.e. powdered fish and powdered seasalt and powdered horn and powdered horseradish.

**§15** 9v32

Cetri losa do cobar in grema: simsān, selgān, samad lēna, fed coille.

Four herbs for helping a sharp pain: wood sorrel, spleenwort, meadow sorrel, rue.

**§16** 9v31; 33–4

Sug crūaici Pádraig ⁊ slánl[us] do cur tre clistire 'na fēil gu domain le hola arnā tī in sūg gu hoband esti ⁊ a dēnam gu menic gu rob slán.

Juice of greater plantain and ribwort should be put through an enema deep in her vagina with oil so that the juice does not come quickly from it, and that should be done often until she is healthy.

**§17** 9v35–37; then continues in RIA MS 24 B 3 (445), p. 75.1

Tuilleadh ele: cairt ōg darac ⁊ frēma ferna ⁊ droigin ⁊ cairtaind ⁊ a[b]la do bruit ar uisce ⁊ a sītlad ⁊ a cur a soithech bēlcumang imfair[sing], ⁊ in ben do suighe ann go himlind ⁊ nī don tsūg sin do sceirdiug 'na f[éle] gu domain tre clistire ⁊ a dēnam sin gu gnāthach.

Another one: fresh oak bark and the roots of an alder and of blackthorn and of rowan and of an apple-tree should be boiled in water and strained and put in a very spacious vessel with a narrow mouth, and the woman should sit in it up to the navel, and some of that juice should be squirted deep into her vagina through an enema, and that should be done regularly.

**§18** 75.2–3

Sūg crūachi Pādraig do cur do mnaī 'na fēle gu domain ⁊ mar tirmaiges as meodōn coisgid in rith fola.

The juice of greater plantain should be put deep in the woman's vagina and as it dries from within it prevents the flow of blood.

**§19** 75.4–5

Ar galur na mban and so .i. tene talman ⁊ pīnān, berbaigtur ar lemnacht ⁊ curtur salann ⁊ im ara let ⁊ in let 'na dig; bun copóige d'iti do mnaī ⁊ aincid in rit fola.

For an ailment of women here, i.e. boil meadow saffron and gooseberry in new milk and salt and butter are put in half of it, and [have her drink] the half in one draught, [and give] the stem of dock-leaf to the woman to eat, and it takes care of the flow of blood.

**§20** 75.6–10

Do togairm na fola m*ísta* na*ch* ticc do mnaī i*n*[*a*] hai*mser* b*u*dēi*n* .i. gab p*ré*ma soile ō*n* maoit*he* bīs[58] a*r* srut*h* ⁊ bent*ur* ⁊ berbt*ur* a fīn *nó* a n-uis*ce* ⁊ gab barr raidde ⁊ tūair*c* t*r*īt a cēle ⁊ dēna broch*án* dīb ⁊ cait*hed*,[59] ⁊ ibed in nī a*r* a mb*r*uiter na f*r*ēma fo laige ⁊ fo ērge ⁊ dā nderntur fo t*r*ī is an*n* ticc in fuil m*ísta*.

For inducing the menses that do not come to a woman in her own time, i.e. take the roots of a willow from the moist part that overhangs a stream, and let them be cut and boiled in wine or in water, and take the top of bog-myrtle and pound it together and let a broth be made of them and let her consume [it], and let her drink the thing in which the roots are boiled when going to bed and rising, and if it is done three times, it is then that the menses come.

**§21** 75.11

Dēnt*ur* urb*r*uit don ca*r*[t]l*ann* fās*us* et*e*r cloc*haib* ⁊ c*urtur* fona mnāib ⁊ dobeir in fuil mīsta foc*ét*oir.

Let a decoction be made of water-mint that grows between rocks and apply it to the women and it brings on the menses at once.

**§22** 75.12–14

Do tab*air*t na fola m*ísta* .i. gab gāi*rleóg* ⁊ berb a n-u*isci* ⁊ in ben do cur 'na suide isin u*isci* gu nuige a himlind nō a brised ⁊ a berb*ad* tre ola ⁊ a cur fōn mnaī ⁊ dobeir in fuil m*ísta*.

To bring on the menses, i.e. take garlic and boil [it] in water and make the woman sit in the water up to her navel, or it should be crushed and boiled in oil and applied to the woman, and it brings the menses.

**§23** 75.15–16

Eōl*us* do togai*r*m na fola m*ísta* ⁊ a*r* galur fūail .i. l*us* na c*r*oici do b*r*uit ar medg ⁊ u*isce* coisregta do cratad ai*r* ⁊ ibed īa*rum* ⁊ īc*aid*.

A cure for bringing on the menses and for urinary disease, i.e. fennel should be boiled in whey and consecrated water should be sprinkled on it and let her drink [it] then and it heals.

**§24** 75.17–19

Do tab*air*t f*ola* m*ísta*: sinaip do berbad a*r* u*isce* ⁊ a cur fōn mnaī ⁊ silfid a fuil, nō a fotrug*ad* gu himlind *nó* a detath do lēgen fūit*h*i ⁊ sī a*r* stōl toll ⁊ cadōg uimpi gu mait.

To bring on the menses: mustard should be boiled in water and applied to the woman and her blood will flow, or she should be bathed up to the navel or its smoke should be released under her when she is on a perforated stool with a wrap around her well.

[58] MS bis bis.
[59] MS *caitet*heth.

**§25** 75.20

Eōlus ele is eōl dam trā
ben nach tic a fuil místa
ticcfuit dī gu fīr a fuil
⁊ ibed fīn gabuir.

Another cure indeed I know
[for] a woman whose menses do not come
truly her blood will come from her
if she drinks goat wine.

**§26** 75.21–2

Ar tobairt fuil místa .i. lus creide
do bruit ar fīn *nó* ar linn *nó* ar
medg ⁊ a ōl ⁊ dobeir in fuil místa.

To bring on the menses, i.e speedwell should be crushed in wine or beer or whey and it should be drunk and it brings on the menses.

**§27** 75.22–3

Flidh do thēgad ar licc tē *nó* a
n-aghain *nó* a bruit *nó* a fhāsced
⁊ a cur tē 'mon mbroind ⁊ dobeir
in fuil místa a cétōir.

Chickweed should be heated on a hot stone or in a pan, or it should be boiled or squeezed and when it is hot, it should be put around the womb and it brings on the menses at once.

**§28** 75.24

Būafallán do bruith ⁊ a brised ⁊ a
cur tē ar in imlind ⁊ dīcuirid in
fuil místa.

Mugwort should be boiled and pounded and put on the navel when it is hot and it brings on the menses.

**§29** 75.25–6

Saige d'ibe ⁊ tocuirid in fuil *nó* a
brised ⁊ a cur 'na fēle ⁊ dobeir in
fuil mīsta amach.

Sage should be drunk and it brings on the blood, or it should be pounded and put in her vagina and it brings the menses out.

**§30** 75.26–7

Frēma madra do bruith ⁊ a cur
'na fēle ⁊ cuiridh amach an fuil.

The roots of madder should be boiled and put in her vagina and it causes the blood to flow out.

**§31** 75.27–8

Men cogail do cumusc ⁊ mil ⁊
boill imfodo fo indamail
congaibe fir ⁊ a cur 'na fēle gu
domain ⁊ tocuirid in fuil.

Powder of cockle-plant and honey should be mixed and very long objects in the likeness of the male member [should be made] and put deep into her vagina and it brings on the blood.

**§32** 75.29–33

Calement, mint*us*, saige, būafall*án*, frēma madra, origanum, saderei, litronta, rú, isoib, musda*r*d, cu*m*i*n*, sīl losa na croic*h*i, l*us* creide, nenaid, nefpt, mercuirial: na losa sin *nó* ní dīb do bruit*h* ar li*n*d *nó* a*r* fīn *nó* a*r* braichl*es* ⁊ a ōl nō a mbruit a*r* u*isce* ⁊ fot*r*ucc*ad nó* a mbruit*h* a*r* fīn u*e*l a*r* lind u*e*l a*r* u*isce* ⁊ urbruit dīb.

Calamint, mint, sage, mugwort, madder roots, oregano, savory, dittany, bedstraw, hyssop, mustard, cumin, fennel seed, speedwell, nettles, catmint, mercury: those herbs or some of them should be boiled in beer or wine or in wort and drunk, or they should be boiled in water and a bath [be made of it], or they should be boiled in wine or in beer or in water and a decoction [should be made] from them.

**§33** 75.34–5

Ar teilgen fola .i. ces ferna bīs sai*r*des re grēi*n* ⁊ līat*h* an d*r*oigin do berbad ar lemn*acht* ⁊ ibed gu cend naomaide.

For releasing blood, i.e. a sprig of alder that is [growing] south-eastwards to the sun and the grey part of a blackthorn should be boiled in new milk, and let it be drunk for nine days.

**§34** 75.36

Leiges am*r*a do tab*air*t na fola .i. glaisīn fūalraig do bruit*h* a*r* li*n*d ⁊ a ōl fo t*r*ī ⁊ dobeir i*n* f*uil.*

A wonderful cure for bringing on the menses, i.e. spearwort from the marshy edge of a lake should be boiled in beer and drunk three times, and it brings on the blood.

**§35** 75.37–76.1

Do toirmescc rof*h*a*r*singe na bandoc*h*ta .i. alum*en* ⁊ arrament ⁊ fuil d*r*aige ⁊ dēna men mī*n* dīb ⁊ c*umus*c si*n* ⁊ fīnh*ég*ra trēn ⁊ cuir 'na fē*le* ⁊ bīd inte re hed fada ⁊ cuimgeōc*h*aid hī.

To prevent a too copious flow from the vagina, i.e. [take] alum and atrament and dragon's blood, and let a fine powder be made of them and mix that with strong vinegar and put [it] in the vagina, and let it be in her for a long while and it will constrict it.

**§36** 76.1–3

Mei*n* coc*ail* ⁊ tūis do losg*ad* ar cloi*ch* nd*er*g ⁊ a detach do lēgi*n* tre fui*n*ēl fūit*h*e ⁊ arlamaig[id] sin hī [cum] comp*er*ta.

Powder of cockle and incense should be burned on a red [hot] stone and its smoke released through a funnel underneath her and that prepares her for conception.

**§37** 76.3–6

Neift do berbad ar fī*n nó* a*r* u*isci* ⁊ suided a*r* stōl toll ⁊ lēig*ed* a detach fūiti, nō a losc*ad* a*r* cloi*ch* nd*ei*rg ⁊ a dē do lēigin fūiti *nó* an lus fēi*n* do c*ur* 'na fēil ⁊ tir*m*aigid sin a fēile [⁊ do]beir in comp*e*rt.

Catmint should be boiled in wine or water and let her sit on a perforated stool and let its smoke be released under her, or it should be burned on a red [hot] stone and its smoke released under her, or the herb itself should be put in her vagina and that dries her vagina and it brings on the conception.

**§38** 76.7

Fuil [...] [ai]psint[60] a*r*na t*ir*mug*ad* ⁊ a*r* ndenam mene dīb ⁊ a n-ōl ar fīn *nó* ar li*nn* nō a*r* bai*n*de d'ēis na fola[61] ⁊ comp*ēruid*.

[Take] blood [...] [and] absinth that have been dried and made into flour, and they should be drunk mixed with wine or beer or milk after the blood and she will conceive.

**§39** 76.8–9

Sūg maga*r*lāi*n* .i. sati*r*egia do comailt do co*n*gaib an fi*r* ⁊ na m*n*ā [d'éis na?][62] fola m*ísta* rē com*us*c dōib ⁊ comp*ēr*uid.

Juice of orchid, i.e. satyrion, should be rubbed on the genitals of the man and the woman [after the?] menses [and] before they have intercourse, and she will conceive.

**§40** 76.9–12

Bei*net* mīl ⁊ cac m[...]ic[63] fo cud*r*uma re mil ⁊ taislī*n* do dēnam dē ma*r* mēur ⁊ a c*ur* 'na fēil re t*r*ī lā ⁊ re t*r*ī haidcib d'ēis na fola ⁊ ibed i*n* ben casnaide deda a*r* fī*n* nō ar li*n*d ⁊ gēmad ai*mr*i*t* rīam comp*ēr*uid.

Equal parts of the rennet of a hare and dung [of a ?] should be mixed with an equal amount of honey and a damp linen cloth should be made in the shape of a finger, it should be put in her vagina for three days and nights after the blood, and let the woman drink the shavings of centaury in wine or beer and although she had been barren before, she will conceive.

**§41** 76.13–14

Fēili mīl do t*ir*mug*ad* ⁊ mi*n* do dēna*m* deí ⁊ in mi*n* sin do c*h*ait*h*em do*n* fi*r* ⁊ do*n* mnaī ⁊ comp*é*ruid i*n* ben m*a*c ⁊ m*a*d hī in ben amāi*n* caitfes co*mpēr*uid i*ngin*.

The vagina of a hare should be dried and a powder made of it and have the man and the woman eat that powder and the woman will give birth to a boy, and if the woman alone eats it she will give birth to a girl.

[60] Several letters are illegible in the MS here.
[61] The words *d'ēis na fola* have been added above the line in the MS.
[62] A few letters are illegible in the MS here.
[63] Several letters are illegible in the MS here.

**§42** 76.15–17

Mei*n* mag*r*all cull*aigh* d'ōl nō do caitem don mnaī p*ost* sangene*m* (u*e*l c*r*uore*m*) ⁊ an mi*n* c*ét*na do c*ur* a fēile na mnā ⁊ ti*r*m*igid* hī ⁊ dobeir arin m*a*clog in sīl ferrda do congb*áil.*

The woman should drink or eat the powder of a boar's testicle after blood (or blood) and the same powder should be put in the woman's vagina and it dries her and it causes the womb to retain the male sperm.

**§43** 76.18–19

Uirge fïada d'ōl a*r* fīn ⁊ in mag*r*all is mō don maga*r*lī*n* ⁊ is tende, ⁊ comp*ē*r*i*d m*a*c dā cuidige a f*er* lé ⁊ m*a*d hī an ben amāi*n* cait*h*es comp*r*id i*ngin.*

The testicles of a deer should be drunk in wine with the largest and hardest root of the orchid, and she will conceive a boy if her husband shares it with her, and if it is the woman alone who consumes [it], she conceives a girl.

**§44** 76.20–2

Comtrom pengi*n*de do mirr ⁊ da *fich*it grāi*n*de pibuir ⁊ comtrom t*r*ī pi*ngin*de do stafesaig*r*ia; a mi*n* sin d'ōl a*r* fīn [⁊] a fot*r*ugad p*ost* c*r*uore*m* ⁊ c*om*pēraid fo c*ét*ōir.

[Take] the equivalent of a pennyweight of myrrh and forty grains of pepper and the equivalent of three pennyweights of staveacre; its powder should be drunk in wine [and] she should be bathed after bleeding and she will conceive immediately.

**§45** 76.23–4

In lec*htur*i risi *n*-abur*tur* t*r*ifera magna ⁊ mandrogora do berb*ad* a*r* fīn ⁊ a ōl d'ēis na fola in lictub*áire* remrāti ⁊ dobeir sin a*r* amridib co*mper*t.

The electuary that is called *trifera magna* and mandrake should be boiled in wine and said electuary should be drunk after bleeding, and that makes those who are barren conceive.

**§46** 76.25

In lictub*áire* ⁊ sūg būafallá*in* l*íath* do sūat*ad* t*r*īt a cēle ⁊ tlām olla do t*um*ad in[d][64] ⁊ a c*ur* 'na fēle ⁊ c*om*p*r*id.

The electuary and juice of mugwort should be mixed together and a flock of wool dipped in it, and it should be put in her vagina and she conceives.

[64]There is a hole in the MS that obscures the final letter of this word.

**§47** 76.26–8

In lictub*áire* dīanad ai*n*m teoto*r*i*con* anaca*r*diu*m* .i. co*m*t*r*om ui*n*ge dē ⁊ co*m*trom 6 pi*ng*i*nd* do ta*r*taru*m* .i. desc*ad* fī*n*a a*r* c*r*ūad*h*ug*ad* a*r* f*r*aigt*h*ib na dunad; a c*um*usc sin ⁊ a cur sa f*é*l*e* ⁊ co*mp*r*i*d.

[Take] the electuary called *teodoricon anacardium*, i.e. the equivalent of an ounce of it and the equivalent of six pennyweights of tartar, i.e. the dregs of wine that have been dried on the interior walls of the casks; that should be mixed and put in the vagina and she will conceive.

**§48** 76.29–31

P*r*eteria teoto*r*i*con* anacai*r*di ⁊ c*u*dru*m*a dē ⁊ do scamonia, .i. co*m*t*r*om t*r*ī pi*ng*i*n*d da g*a*c ní dīb ⁊ a c*um*usc ⁊ a c*ur* 'na fēle ⁊ co*mp*r*i*d gan cu*n*dtabe*r*t dā co*m*ruige ra fer sa lō sin *nó* a*r*a bā*r*ach.

In addition, [take] an equal amount of *teotoricon anacairdi* and of scammony, i.e. the equivalent of three pennyweights of each of them, and they should be mixed and put in her vagina and she will conceive without doubt if she has sexual relations with a man on that day or the following day.

**§49** 76.31–2

Neipt ⁊ bei*n*id mīl do c*um*usc g*um*bid 'na pillolib. A t*r*ī nō a 4 do c*ur* 'na f*é*l*e* *dí*b a n*dí*aig fola ⁊ c*um*usced ra f*er* ⁊ co*mp*r*i*d a c*ét*óir.

Catmint and rennet of a hare should be mixed until they are in the form of pills. Three or four of them should be put in her vagina after bleeding, and let her have intercourse with a man and she will conceive at once.

**§50** 77.1–3

Gāirl*eóg* do [b*ri*]sed[65] ⁊ im nō blonacc do c*ur* t[rethe][66] ⁊ a c*ur* a*r* l*eic* ndeirg ⁊ i*n* ben do congb*áil* a*r* stōl 'na suide ⁊ biaid bal*ad* na gāirl*eóig*i ara h*án*ail dā roib in brei*t*h gu cōir ⁊ dobeir in fuil m*ísta.*

Garlic should be pounded and butter or grease put through it and it should be put on a red [hot] stone and the woman should be kept sitting on a stool and the smell of garlic will be on her breath if the birth is correct, and it brings on the menses.

**§51** 77.4–6

Eōlus do lot brei*t*h*i* mnā .i. ath*air* losa ⁊ dubsc*r*ibion*n* ⁊ fuil d*r*aig*e* ⁊ g*r*ifi*n* na cl*oiche*, b*er*b*aigt*u*r* ar u*isc*i t[rá]iges ⁊ a c*ur* ara cuidig ⁊ nī b*é*ra m*ac* nā i*ngin.*

A cure for destroying a woman's birth, i.e. bistort and black ink and dragon's blood and biting stonecrop, let them be boiled in water from an ebbing tide, and they should be put in her meal and she will bear neither a boy nor a girl.

[65]The first letter of this word is faded in the MS, but may be a 'b' with a very faint vertical tilde above it.

[66]The final letters of this word are obscured by fading in the MS.

**§52** 77.6–7

Bocc beg ⁊ ath*air* tal*man*, b*erbtur* do mna[í] aga caillt*er* a breit*h* ⁊ icyd.

Let a small he-goat and yarrow be boiled for a woman who is losing her birth and it heals.

**§53** 77.8

Eōlus do mnāib aimrid .i. ros nenta ⁊ ros ca[indinde] ⁊ r*os* c*rūach* P*ādraig* do b*r*uit ar fī*n* ⁊ a ōl ⁊ b*ēr*ui[d m]*ac*.[67]

A cure for barren women, i.e. nettle seed and onion seed and seed of great plantain should be crushed in wine and drunk and she will conceive a son.

**§54** 77.9

Eōl*us* do dāi*r* bō .i. sop nenta do cumelt fob [*sic*] alta.[68]

A cure for bulling of a cow, i.e. a wisp of nettle should be rubbed (under ?) of a joint.

**§55** 77.10

Eōlus a*r* tac*h*ur mec .i. b*úafallán* l*íath* do b*r*uit a*r* lemn*acht* nō a*r* fī*n* ⁊ a ōl.

A cure for bringing forth a son, i.e. mugwort should be boiled in new milk or in wine and drunk.

**§56** 77.11–12

Eōl*us* a*r* toch*ar* mec .i. c*eir*īn do būafall*án* do ceng*al* a*r* comai*r* in m*acl*a*ig* a*r* in mb*r*oi*n*d ⁊ ros cai*n*di*n*de ⁊ ros losa na c*r*oic*h*i do b*r*uit*h* ⁊ a ōl p*ost.*

A cure for bringing forth a son, i.e. a poultice of mugwort should be tied over the womb on the abdomen and onion seed and fennel seed should be boiled and drunk afterwards.

**§57** 77.13–14

Eōl*us* a*r* breit*h* t*h*ógl*úasacht*a g*u* cōir .i. b*úafallán* l*íath* do b*r*uit*h* a*r* u*isce* ⁊ a cur fōn mbnaī [*sic*] ⁊ bēr*aid* gu cōir.

A cure for aborting a birth properly, i.e. mugwort should be boiled in water and applied it to the woman and she will deliver properly.

**§58** 77.15–16

Ar tuismed do mnaī .i. loi*m* con ⁊ melle ⁊ fīn fo cud*r*uma d'ōl 'na dig ⁊ tuismēbuid fo c*ét*ōir.

For a woman in childbirth, i.e. have her drink in one draught equal parts of dog's milk and bitter vetch and wine and she will give birth immediately.

**§59** 77.16–17

Ar i*n* c*ét*na .i. b*enet* m*íl* m*uige* do b*r*uit ar fī*n* ⁊ a ōl re co*m*rug risin mnaī ⁊ co*mpēr*uid.

For the same, i.e. rennet of a hare should be boiled in wine and drunk before intercourse with the woman and she will conceive.

[67] These letters are illegible in the MS due to fading.

[68] The end of this line is obscured by fading in the MS, and my reading is therefore tentative.

**§60** 77.18–20

Ar tuismed do mnaī .i. barr briscēn do brised ⁊ a mbruith ar geir mhairt ⁊ a fasced tre brét līn ⁊ mīn cruithnechta ⁊ psalann trīt ⁊ a mbruit arīs, ⁊ ix mīrenda d'ithi dē ar cétlongad ⁊ a trī rē loighe gu cend nómaide ⁊ ind in am na cōrach donīter.

For a woman in childbirth, i.e. the top of silverweed should be pounded and boiled in ox fat and it should be strained through a linen cloth and wheat flour [put] on it and salt through it and they should be boiled again, and nine pieces of it should be eaten on an empty stomach and three before going to bed for nine days, and an end is made in the proper time.

**§61** 77.21–23

Do cudnud breithi .i. ces fern a ⁊ crotoll ūr droigin ⁊ berbtur ar lemnacht nō ar uisce fīrtiprat ⁊ ibed in ben ⁊ suided ria in ūair sin.

For hastening a birth, i.e. let a sprig of alder and fresh husk of a blackthorn be boiled in new milk or in fresh spring water, and let the woman drink it and let him sit with her at that time.

**§62** 77.24–25

Do claechlaid breithi ann so don mnaī beres ingena .i. uirge tuirc allaid do bruith ar lemnacht ⁊ a n-ithe ⁊ an lemnacht d'ōl a n-inbaid na fola.

For changing a birth here for the woman who bears daughters, i.e. testicles of a wild boar should be boiled in new milk and eaten, and the new milk should be drunk at the proper time of the blood.

**§63** 77.26–27

In ben beris ingena as ē so a leigheas .i. fiacal eich do cengal a n-eill do croicend rōin ⁊ a cur fo 7 n-aiffrennaib ⁊ a cur fo brāgaid.

A woman who bears girls, this is its cure, i.e. the tooth of a horse should be tied in a sealskin thong and it should be taken to seven masses (?) and put around her neck.

**§64** 77.28–31

Ar breith leinim do mnaī gan gūasacht na brīathra so sīs do scríbend a membrum ⁊ a cengal ina broind .i. M[a]ria peperit Christum, Anna peperit Mariam, Elizabet <⁊>[69] Iohannem, Celina Remegium + satur + arepo + tenet + opera + rotas nō ditanntri do tabairt ar dig dī ⁊ bēraid gan gūasacht.

For childbirth without danger for a woman, these words should be written on a parchment and fixed to her womb, i.e. Mary gave birth to Christ, Anna gave birth to Mary, Elizabeth [gave birth to] John, Celina [gave birth to] Remigius + sator + arepo + tenet + opera + rotas or put dittany in a drink for her and she will give birth without danger.

[69]The scribe has written the Tironian note for Irish *ocus* 'and' here, but this must be an error, as Elizabeth is the mother of John the Baptist; presumably a repetition of Latin *peperit* is to be understood.

**§65** 78.1

Cosc a*r* tend*us* do mnāib a*r* *m*br*eth* lenim .i. ath*air* tal*man* d'ibi a*r* dig.

A remedy for contractions in women at childbirth, i.e. yarrow should be consumed in a drink.

**§66** 78.1–2

Sūg in gallbil*air* d'ibi do mnaī a mbī lenam ma*r*b ⁊ b*é*ruid a c*é*t*ó*ir.

For a woman in whom a dead child remains, juice of garden cresses should be drunk and she will give birth immediately.

**§67** 78.3

Ar telg*ud* fo*l*a do mnāib .i. esp*ó*c b*án* do b*er*b*ad* a*r* lemn*acht* ⁊ gloriu*m* ⁊ ibed.

For shedding of blood by women, i.e. oxeye daisy should be boiled in new milk and iris (?) and let her drink [it].

**§68** 78.4

Do tab*air*t fo*la* m*ísta* .i. a*r*get l*úacr*a ⁊ edend talm*an* ⁊ fīnscot*h*.

To bring on the menses, i.e. meadowsweet and ground ivy and wine blossom.

**§69** 78.4–5

⁊ g*r*ībrācā*n* 'mu*n* doim scīt*h* bīs fo arata*r* ⁊ nī bēra*r* dōib ī*ar* tai*n*.

And a cattle prod (?) around the weary ox that is under a plough, and they will not give birth afterwards.

**§70** 78.6–7

In ben 'ga mbī lenum ma*r*b 'na broi*n*d, tabai*r* cac eic*h* a*r* leic deir*g*[70] ⁊ a dē fōn srōi*n* ⁊ bēr*aid* gan fuirech.

The woman who has a dead foetus in her womb, give [her] horse's dung on a red [hot] stone and [put] its smoke under her nose and she will give birth without delay.

**§71** 78.7–8

Ros bilair do bruit do m*n*aī a*r* medg ⁊ ibed ⁊ ber*ar* in tógl*úasacht*.

Seed of watercress should be crushed in whey for a woman and let her drink it and let the abortion be brought on.

**§72** 78.9–11

Tāscēla cīa don lānmui*n* is amr*it* .i. fūal cec*h*ta*r* dīb do tab*air*t a soitec*h* a*r* let*h* i *m*bīd[71] duill*eo*ga lem[aigh] muige ⁊ cidbē dīb is amr*it*, bīd feōdaig a luib arna bārach.

A prognostication for which one of a couple is barren, i.e. the urine of each of them should be put in a separate vessel in which are leaves of marsh mallow, and whichever of them is barren, their plant will be withered the next day.

[70] MS *deig* with a suspension mark over the 'i', but *deirg* is probably meant.
[71] MS i*n* bid.

**§73** 78.11–12

Uirge mīl muige do māollug*ad* maill*e re* balg*um* fīna do mnaī ar ndul a fola m*ísta* dī ⁊ c*om*pr*i*d mac.

Have the woman swallow whole the testicles of a hare along with a mouthful of wine after her menses go and she [will] conceive a boy.

**§74** 78.13

Eōl*us* d'fi*r* amr*it* .i. benit mīl muige do c*umus*c a*r* fī*n* ⁊ ibed ⁊ gei*n*fid ūad.

A cure for a barren man, i.e. the rennet of a hare should be mixed in wine and let him drink and she will conceive from him.

**§75** 78.14–15

Ar rit fola ban .i. lemn*acht* a*r* a mberbt*ur* ell*enn* ⁊ im*us* ⁊ arg*at* l*úachr*a d'ōl.

For a flow of women's blood, i.e. new milk in which elecampane and celery and meadowsweet are boiled should be drunk.

**§76** 78.15–17

Ar slānasaigid mnā .i. nem*naid* goirt nac*h* ricc u*isce* do c*ur* a n-om*ur* nda*n*gen ⁊ clo*ch*a d*er*ga i*nd* ⁊ scaīl*id* in ben a cosa ōsa c*hin*d gu tēit in tes ina broind ⁊ īc*thair*.

For the afterbirth of a woman, i.e. tormentil from a field that does not reach water should be put in a solid tub with red [hot] stones in it and the woman spreads her legs above it so that the heat goes into her womb, and she will be healed.

**§77** 78.18–19

Urcosc ele fai*r* .i. cet*r*i cāora i*m*be ⁊ sci*n*dīn do c*h*ac gabair a meodōn g*a*ca caīre ⁊ a māels*h*lug*ad dí*.

Another antidote for it, i.e. [take] four balls of butter and [put] a small lump of goat dung in the middle of each ball and have her swallow them whole.

**§78** 78.19–21

A*r* toglúa*sacht* .i. sema*r* scait*h*e fin*n*e ⁊ ec*h*sema*r* ⁊ ath*air* l*osa* ⁊ ath*air* t*alman*, b*rist*e*r* ⁊ b*er*b*aigt*u*r* a*r* lemn*acht* ⁊ eba*r* fo l*uig*i ⁊ fo ērge.

For an abortion, i.e. let clover of the white flower and red clover and bistort and yarrow be crushed and boiled in new milk and let it be drunk on going to bed and when rising.

**§79** 78.22–23

Do scaīl*ed* leni*m* mai*r*b bīs a ṁbroiṅd .i. loc*h*oll, sl*ánlus* m*uc*, flid, biatus a c*ur* a*r* cuir*m nó* a*r* medg ⁊ deoc*h* d'ōl dē a*r* c*étlong*ad gac*h* laī.

For releasing a dead child that remains in the womb, i.e. brooklime, swinecress, chickweed [and] beet should be put in beer or in whey and a draught of it drunk every day on an empty stomach.

**§80** 78.24–26

Eōl*us* do mnaī a mbī lenu*m* ma*r*b .i. loi*ṁ* con ⁊ mil ⁊ fīn ⁊ a c*ur* a n-āe*n*l*estur* .i. lān copāi*n* da g*ac* ní dīb si*n* a c*umus*c, ⁊ a n-ōl don m*n*aí ⁊ bēr*aid* lenam a c*ét*ōir.

A cure for a woman in whom a dead child remains, i.e. dog's milk and honey and wine should be put in a single vessel, i.e. a full cup of each of those should be mixed, and the woman should drink them and she will give birth to a child at once.

## Textual commentary

**§1: *galur.*** This word is written in the manuscript as *gal–*, with a suspension stroke following the first three letters. Although one might expect a plural form here given that multiple conditions are dealt with in the chapter, I have expanded the form as the singular *galur*, partly on the basis that the expected dative plural form *galraib* would usually be abbreviated as *galr–*. It is also tempting to compare here the title '*The Sekenesse of Wymmen*' that is given for two fifteenth-century Middle English treatises on gynaecology and obstetrics.[72]

**§2: *imad cuislend* […].** The concept of veins that have been widened or ruptured seems to be what is conveyed by the phrase *imad cuislend* 'a venous excess' in the first Irish quatrain in our text.[73]

**§4: *būafallán líath.*** *eDIL* s.v. *búathfallán* translates this term as 'ragwort' (*Senecio jacobaea*), which, however, is a highly toxic plant; the etymology and variants of the word are discussed by Williams, who suggests that it means 'cow-shriveller'.[74] The name *búafallan líath* translates Lat. *artemecia* (*Artemisia vulgaris*, or 'mugwort'), however, in a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century treatise on *materia medica* in BL MS 15403.[75] In the Latin *Trotula*, mugwort (*arthimesia*) is prescribed in remedies for 'retention of the menses' (*De retentione menstruorum*), where its medicinal value is attributed to the authority of Galen,[76] as well as in cures for 'paucity of the menses' (*De paucitate menstruorum*).[77]

**§6: *dīgērta.*** My translation of this term as 'unsoured' is tentative. As noted in *eDIL* s.v. *? digerta*, this word is also attested in a separate entry in Conla Mac an Leagha's Remedy Book, where *medg ndigerta* is prescribed as the liquefying

[72] Version 1 of this Middle English text has been edited by M-R Hallaert, *The 'Sekenesse of wymmen': A Middle English Treatise on Diseases in Women (Yale Medical Library, Ms. 47 fols 60r–71v)*, Scripta: Mediaeval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 8 (Brussels, 1982), while Version 2 has been edited by Rowland, *Medieval Woman's Guide to Health*.

[73] See the discussion above, p. 314.

[74] N. J. A. Williams, 'Some Irish plant names', in Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach and Kim McCone (eds), *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney*, Maynooth Monographs 2 (Maynooth, 1989), 449–62, at 449–50; see also the remarks in Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, Early Irish Law Series 4 (Dublin, 2000), 184.

[75] Stokes, 'On the materia medica of the mediaeval Irish', 225.

[76] Green, *The Trotula*, 74–7 (§§13, 14 and 16)

[77] Green, *The Trotula*, 78–9 (§§19, 20 and 24).

agent in a cure for cough (RIA MS 24 B 3 [445], p. 61.34). It is also noted in the dictionary that the form *digér* is given as a compound of *deoch* 'drink' and *gér* 'sharp' in the bardic grammatical tracts.[78] David Stifter (pers. comm.) has accordingly suggested to me that it could be the word *dígértha* from *gér* 'sharp, sour' (cf. *géraid*, 'to turn sour'). If so, the term could mean 'un-soured' or 'not yet soured (cheese)', referring to curds in the literal sense as an early stage in the transformation of milk into cheese. Cf. also *eDIL* s.v. *gert*, where *gert* is defined as 'an indefinite word meaning any of the by-products of cattle except their young, gen[erally] used of milk'; see also the following note.

***tāth.*** *eDIL* s.v. 1 *táth* gives 'welding, soldering, joining together' and 'a kind of cheese (made of curds?) under senses Ia and II of this term, respectively. Fergus Kelly notes that the word is mentioned as a foodstuff in several texts and relates its semantic development to the process of making pressed cheeses using curds.[79] See also the note on the word *dīgērta* above.

***a tīrib grég tucud.*** This is one of a handful of remedies in Conla Mac an Leagha's treatise which reference the oriental origins of certain plants or recipes.[80] I have not identified a classical source for this remedy; it is possible, however, that the specification that it 'was brought from Greek lands' was merely an efficacy phrase intended to add authority to the cure.

**§8:** Cf. Pliny's *Natural History*, which states that 'It is thought that to fumigate the uterus with goat's horn is very beneficial' (*caprino cornu suffiri vulvam utilissimum putant*).[81]

**§9:** Cf. NLS MS Adv. 72.1.3, fol. 80r19–21.

**§10:** Cf. NLS MS Adv. 72.1.3, fol. 80r21–2.

**§11:** Cf. NLS MS Adv. 72.1.3, fol. 80r22–4.

**§12:** Cf. NLS MS Adv. 72.1.3, fol. 80r24–6.

**§13:** Cf. NLS MS Adv. 72.1.3, fol. 80rz–80v2; this clarifies the reading *ibhedh*, which is obscured in our MS due to damage to the page.

**§15:** ***Cetri losa…*** My translations of the four plants named in this tetrad are very tentative. *eDIL* s.v. *simsán* gives 'wood-sorrel' as a translation of this term but also cross-references it with the entry s.v. *simsóga*, defined as both 'sampsuchine' (marjoram) and 'wood-sorrel'. *Selgán* glosses *accetosa* in a glossary from Manchester, John Rylands University Library, MS 35 ('Lord Crawford's Medical Manuscript'), and might therefore be identified as common sorrel or garden sorrel (*rumex acetosa*).[82] The word itself, however, is clearly a

[78] See Eoin Mac Cárthaigh, *The Art of Bardic Poetry: A New Edition of Irish Grammatical Tracts I* (Dublin, 2014), 138–9 (§146).

[79] Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 329.

[80] This and other examples are noted by Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchada, 'Michael Casey's medical transcripts in Gilbert MS 147', *Éigse* 40 (2019), 43–114, at 78 n. 68.

[81] Jones, *Pliny. Natural History*, 170–1 (XXVIII.lxxvii).

[82] See Stokes, 'Three Irish medical glossaries', 334 (§54).

diminutive form of *selg* 'spleen', and therefore may be a loan-translation for some variety of the plant 'spleenwort' (*asplenium*). *eDIL* s.v. *samad* defines this term as 'the plant sorrel', and the qualification *léna* suggests that here reference is being made to 'meadow sorrel'. The term *fed coille* is equated with *cardo capalínus*, *paleonius* and *gluinech* in the aforementioned glossary from the John Rylands manuscript. *eDIL* s.v. *glúinech* defines this plant as 'milkwort (?), knotgrass (?)', but the reference could be to *seamsóg ghlúineach*, 'pink-sorrel' (*oxalis articulata*).[83] A separate entry in Lord Crawford's Medical Manuscript equates '*fead c*aille' with Lat. *Panis cuculi*, typically translated as 'wood sorrel'. Hogan *et al.* translate *fead coille* as 'wild ambrosia', drawing on O'Reilly's dictionary, and *feada coille* as 'wood sorrel', drawing on Lightfoot's *Flora Scotica*. Another entry in the John Rylands manuscript gives *ruta siluestris .i. fead coille*, suggesting that it could refer to 'rue'.[84] I have tentatively opted for this translation here, on the basis that rue is frequently prescribed in the *Trotula* for gynaecological and obstetrical ailments of various kinds.

**§20: *raidde.*** This word, which must be in the genitive following *barr*, appears to refer to some kind of shrub, likely 'bog-myrtle'. *eDIL* s.v. *rait* renders this word as 'bog-myrtle' on the basis of D. A. Binchy's translation of an archaic legal poem that refers to restitution for damage to various plants classified as 'undergrowth of the wood' (*fedo forball*). There, however, Binchy expresses uncertainty as to whether the word should be taken as a dental stem with genitive singular *raited*.[85] *eDIL* also gives the definition 'bog-myrtle' under the forms *raideóg* and *raidleog*.

**§22:** Cf. the discussion of *aillium* 'garlic' in Tadhg Ó Cuinn's *Materia medica*, which attributes this teaching to the eleventh-century medical translator Constantinus Africanus:

> Ingne gairl*eoige* arna glanad da cur isin maclog & togairmidh an f*uil* m*ista* am*ail* adeir Constantin *no* an gairl*eog* da b*earbadh* ar uisce & in bean da chur ann co nuigi a himleinn & togairmig*idh* an f*uil* m*ista*.
>
> 'Cloves of garlic, cleaned and placed in the womb, provoke menstruation, as Constantine says; or, if the garlic be boiled in water, and the woman immersed in it up to her navel, it will provoke menstruation.'[86]

**§23: *eōlus.*** *eDIL* s.v. *eólas, eulas* gives the primary definition of this term as 'knowledge, information, esp. knowledge gained by experience or practice, acquaintance'. It also gives the more specialised definition of 'secret knowledge, a prescription, spell, charm', based on a citation from the legal compilation

[83] Zoë Devlin, *Wildflowers of Ireland*: https://www.wildflowersofireland.net/plant_detail.php?id_flower=194&wildflower=Pink-sorrel (accessed 11 February 2026).

[84] Stokes, 'Three Irish medical glossaries', 336 (§105).

[85] Binchy, 'An archaic legal poem', 158 and 164.

[86] Ó Conchubhair, 'An Irish *Materia Medica*', §31 (pp. 92 [ed.] and 474 [trans.], slightly modified here). My thanks to Siobhán Barrett for pointing out this parallel to me.

*Senchas Már*, where *in gert-bruthcan* 'milk pottage' is explained as *ag bruith in neich is cain do losaib 7 do* [*sic leg.*] *eolusuib do neoch bis a ngalur*; Plummer translates this as 'boiling what is good in the way of herbs together with charms for a sick man' and notes that '*eolus* is the regular word for magic knowledge, in the concrete a spell or charm'.[87] The term *eólus* is used in relation to ten remedies in our text, but none of these include a verbal incantation, as is implied by the translations 'spell' and 'charm'.[88] It is possible, however, that the use of the descriptor in our text carries a value-judgement of some kind regarding the origin or efficacy of the remedies in question, e.g. that they are considered to derive from local tradition rather than written authority or foreign sources. I have translated the term here simply as 'cure', which in Hiberno-English often carries the sense of a remedy derived from unwritten folk tradition or local custom, typically knowledge that is understood to have been passed down through multiple generations of a single family.

**§25: *fín gabuir.*** Presumably this refers to wine in which some part of a goat has been mixed: compare, for example, the advice in §8 that the scrapings of a goat's horn be mixed with honey and eaten in order to staunch excessive menstrual bleeding. Goat dung is recommended in §13. Another possibility is that it refers to wine preserved in a goat skin.

**§27: *flidh do thégad ...*** A corresponding remedy is found in the Irish treatise on gynaecology edited by Wulff.[89] Similarly, the Latin version of the *Trotula* contains the advice that 'chickweed cooked in an earthenware pot and placed over [the belly] provokes the menses' (*morsus galline in testa coctus et superpositus menstrua prouocat*).[90] According to commentary on the seventh-century Irish medico-legal tract on injuries, *Di ércib fola*, the application of a chickweed compress was the standard treatment for a haematoma.[91]

**§28:** A similar remedy is found in the Irish treatise on gynaecology edited by Wulff.[92]

**§29: *saige.*** I take this to be the word for 'sage' (*salvia officinalis*), likely an otherwise unattested loanword from English; the same spelling in §32, but the form is not recorded in *eDIL* with this meaning. The only name I can find attested for this plant elsewhere in Irish sources is *sáiste*/*sáitse*, which Risk includes in his study of loanwords from French.[93]

**§30:** A similar remedy is found in the Irish treatise on gynaecology edited by Wulff.[94]

[87] Plummer, 'Notes on some passages in the Brehon laws', *Ériu* 8 (1916), 127–32, at 130, citing *AL* I, 300.14–16.

[88] See §§23, 25, 50, 52–6, 71 and 77.

[89] Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 74.22–4.

[90] Green, *The Trotula*, 76–7 (§15).

[91] Neil McLeod, 'Di ércib fola', *Ériu* 52 (2002), 123–216, at 173 (§3.3).

[92] Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 74.24–5.

[93] See Hogan et al., *Luibhleabhrán*, s.v. *sáiste, sáitse*, and Risk, 'French loan-words in Irish', *EC* 12/2 (1970), 585–655, at 607 and 623–4 (§§37, 100 and 103). *Saitsi* is the form given in a remedy for retention of the menses in the Irish *Trotula* text; see Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 74.31.

[94] Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 74.25–6.

**§31:** A similar remedy is found in the Irish treatise on gynaecology edited by Wulff, reading *min cogail 7 mil 7 builg-lín do denam fo indamail meir do gairleoig arna brugh 7 arna bruith a hola 7 a him 7 a cur na feil 7 is tren togairmes an fuil mista*.[95] These instructions are evidently for the creation of a pessary to treat retention of the menses.

***congaibe.*** *eDIL* s.v. *congab* gives this word with the meanings 'settlement, gathering, host', but also 'in a more specialized sense equipment, weapons, trappings', several of the citations for which suggest that it could be used as a euphemism for the penis. That this is the meaning intended in our text is indicated by a remedy for retention of the menses in the Latin *Trotula*, which advises the reader to make 'another pessary in the shape of the male member, and let it be hollow, and inside there let the medicine be placed and let it be inserted' (*Vel fiat aliud pessarium in modum uirge uirilis, et sit concauum, ibique inponatur medicina et iniciatur*).[96]

**§32:** A similar remedy is found in the Irish treatise on gynaecology edited by Wulff.[97]

***saderei.*** This form is not attested in *eDIL* which gives only the form *sabraei* for 'the herb savory', noting that this is an 'English or Romance loan-word' (*eDIL* s.v. *sabraei*). The form *saterei* is given for this word in the Anglo-Norman dictionary, however, citing its occurrence in several Anglo-Norman French medical texts.[98]

**§33:** ***ces.*** This term occurs elsewhere in Conla Mac an Leagha's Remedy Book, always before the name of a tree: see, for example, RIA MS 23 N 29 (467), fol. 1v12–13, which contains a remedy for intestinal ailments attributed to Dían Cécht and listing among its ingredients *ceis fern*a *7 ceis lemai*n *7 ceis darac*h 'a sprig of alder and a sprig of elm and a sprig of oak'.[99] I take it to be the word given in *eDIL* s.v. 3 *ces*, defined as 'spear'; presumably in this case the word refers not to a weapon, but to a small, pointed plant shoot or 'sprig'.

***sairdes ré gréin.*** This is one of several cures in Conla Mac an Leagha's Remedy Book that include instructions to either use a plant that faces eastwards as an ingredient or to consume a medicament while facing eastwards.[100] Such instructions are also found in Old English remedies, leading Edward Pettit to observe that this direction was 'believed to be especially propitious'.[101] It is possible that there is a liturgical basis for the instruction, for as Edel Bhreathnach has recently noted in relation to early Irish monastic practices,

[95] Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 74.26–8.

[96] Green, *The Trotula*, 76–7 (§18).

[97] Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 74.28–30.

[98] See https://anglo-norman.net/entry/saterei (accessed 11 February 2026).

[99] My thanks to Siobhán Barrett for input on this term. For discussion of the remedy in question, see Hayden, 'Attribution and authority', 43.

[100] Another example is a cure for urinary disease edited in Hayden, 'Three versified medical recipes', 113.

[101] Edward Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: The Lacnunga*, 2 vols (Lewiston, NY, 2001), ii, 45.

'praying *ad orientem* "to the east" was associated with the belief that Paradise, the Garden of Eden, was located in the east. Through Christ's death on the cross and man's salvation, the supplicant prayed towards Paradise and came face to face with God, looked at the tree of life and sought forgiveness of his/her sins'.[102] This association with spiritual healing may have led to an analogous belief that physical ailments could be treated by ingredients found growing in this orientation. The specification in this case that the plant be growing 'south-east towards the sun' may, however, also reflect an understanding that plants facing in this direction would be likely to produce the freshest growth with the most therapeutic juice.

***líath an droigin.*** This probably refers to the bark of a blackthorn tree, which is dark grey in colour. The scraped-off, green inner bark of trees (Ir. *etarsnam*) was considered pharmaceutically useful and is called for in other recipes from Conla Mac an Leagha's Remedy Book.[103]

**§34: *glaisīn.*** *eDIL* s.v. 1 *glaisín* defines this term as 'woad' and cross-references it with the headword *glasen*, which has the same definition. Woad, however, tends to grow in dry places and requires little water. It may be that the word here is instead that given in *eDIL* s.v. 2 *glaisín*, defined there as 'a streamlet'. Siobhán Barrett has suggested to me that the plant meant here could be *glaisín léna* or 'lesser spearwort' (*Ranunculus flammula*), which 'is usually found in still or slow-moving water such as lake margins, marshes and wet places'.[104] If this identification is correct, the definition given in *eDIL* s.v. *glaisléna* as 'peppergrass, pepperwort (?)' may be incorrect, as pepperwort is 'found on dry waste places and below hedgerows'.[105]

***fūalraig.*** I take this to be the genitive singular of the metathesized form of *fúarlach* 'the marshy edge of a lake or river' (see *eDIL* s.v. *fúarlach*). *eDIL* also records the (tentative) form *fúalrad*, however, defining it as 'possibly a collective from 1 *fúal* (*eDIL* s.v. 1 *fúal*), which may have originally = 'fluid, liquid'. The dictionary only gives one citation of the latter form, drawn from the Middle Irish text *Saltair na Rann*.

**§35:** A similar remedy is found in the Irish treatise on gynaecology edited by Wulff.[106]

***fuil draice.*** This is a literal translation of Lat. *sanguis draconis*, and refers to a kind of red plant resin, mainly of southeast Asian origin but obtainable in the Mediterranean basin during the medieval period. Sharon Arbuthnot has noted the occurrence of the term in Irish medical cures for an ulcerated

[102]Edel Bhreathnach, *Monasticism in Ireland AD 900–1250* (Dublin, 2024), 289.

[103]See David Stifter, 'Zur Bedeutung und Etymologie von altirisch *sirem*', *Die Sprache* 45/1–2 (2005), 160–89 and Hayden, 'Three versified medical recipes', 112.

[104]Devlin, *Wildflowers of Ireland*: https://www.wildflowersofireland.net/plant_detail.php?id_flower=246#glos (accessed 11 February 2026).

[105]Devlin, *Wildflowers of Ireland*: https://www.wildflowersofireland.net/plant_detail.php?id_flower=199#glos (accessed 11 February 2026).

[106]Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 72.26–8.

womb.[107] Dragon's blood is similarly recommended in a recipe for constricting the vagina in the Latin *Trotula*.[108]

**§36:** The manuscript is difficult to read at the end of the second line of p. 76 in RIA MS 24 B 3 (445), but cf. the Irish treatise on gynaecology edited by Wulff, which contains a remedy reading *min cogail 7 tuis do losgad ar clam derg 7 a dé do ligen fuithi tre soithech ina mbi poll 7 ullmuighid hi cum na coimperta*.[109] It appears that some words have been added interlinearly in our version, perhaps the missing phrase *ina mbi poll* or similar.

***fuinēl.*** This term is not attested in *eDIL* but evidently replaces *soithech* 'vessel' in the version of the remedy from Wulff's edition of the Irish *Trotula* text (see the previous note). In the Latin *Trotula*, the word *embotum* is used to refer to a funnel through which smoke passes in a fumigation for pain in the womb.[110] The form *fuinēl* used in our text may be a loanword from English or Anglo-Norman French.

**§37:** A similar remedy is found in the Irish treatise on gynaecology edited by Wulff.[111]

**§39:** ***satiregia.*** I have not found any attestations of this term elsewhere in Irish sources, but it likely refers to 'satyrion', a name for a variety of orchid.[112] The orchid (< Gk *ὄρχις* 'testicle') was associated in medieval medicine with human testicles due to the shape of the plant's tubers. Tadhg Ó Cuinn's *Materia medica* gives the following explanation:

> **Satuirion**, **priamiscus**, **leporina**: .i. **an tulcan** & aderur **magarlin** ris […] bidh prema na l*uibhe* a cosm*ail*eas uirgidh ainmighi & gairtear trit sin **magarlin** de & as cumachtach mhedaigheas in sperma agna mnaibh & agna fearaibh […]
>
> ***Satuirion, priamiscus, leporina:*** i.e. the **orchid**; it is called 'balls' […] the roots of the herb are like the testicles of an animal, and, for that reason, it is called 'balls'; it powerfully increases the generative fluid in women and men […].[113]

**§40:** A similar remedy is found in the Irish treatise on gynaecology edited by Wulff.[114]

[107] Sharon Arbuthnot, 'Finding the words: translating medical texts in the late-medieval Gaelic world', LEIGHEAS Project Blog, 4 April 2024: https://leigheas.maynoothuniversity.ie/finding-the-words-translating-medical-texts-in-the-late-medieval-gaelic-world/ (accessed 11 February 2026).

[108] Green, *The Trotula*, 188–9 (§308).

[109] Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 72.28–30.

[110] See, e.g. Green, *The Trotula*, 156–7 (§225).

[111] Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 72.30–2.

[112] See https://anglo-norman.net/entry/saturion (accessed 11 February 2026), where the word 'saturion' is defined as '(bot.) variety of orchid'.

[113] Ó Conchubhair, 'An Irish *Materia medica*', §252 (p. 249 [ed.] and 623 [trans.]).

[114] Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 74.8–9.

**§41:** A similar remedy is found in the Irish treatise on gynaecology edited by Wulff; this corresponds to a passage in the Latin text concerning 'Impediment to conception' (*De impedimento conceptionis*).[115]

**§42:** Similar remedies are found in the Irish treatise on gynaecology edited by Wulff and in the Latin *Trotula* text.[116]

**§43:** ***magrall.*** *eDIL* s.v. *macrall* gives only the definition 'testicle' for this word, but see the note above on §39 for the idea that the roots of an orchid (*magarlín*, Mod. Ir. *lus na magairlí*) resemble testicles.

**§45:** ***in lechtúri risin aburtur trifera magna.*** See *eDIL* s.v. *lictuáire* for other attestations of this term in medical texts; it derives from Med. Lat. *electuāria*, and refers to a drug administered in the form of a paste that was licked from a spoon.[117] *Trifera magna* is recorded in a fourteenth-century Anglo-Norman medical pharmacopeia as a substance made of herbs and spices mixed with honey.[118] According to the *Antodotarium Nicolai* ('The book of compound medicines of Nicholaus'), which was composed in Salerno in the mid-twelfth century and came to be one of the principal pharmaceutical texts in medieval Europe, *Trifera magna* is prescribed for various purposes; it is said that, when mixed with wine in which mandrake or dwarf elder has been cooked, it helps children who are not able to sleep.[119]

**§47:** The treatise on gynaecology edited by Wulff contains a comparable remedy, albeit with slightly different measurements.[120]

***teodoricon anacardium.*** This is another electuary (*theodoriton anacardinum*) for which the ingredients are given in the *Antidotarium Nicolai*, where it is explained that the first word means 'Gift of God'.[121] It is mentioned in Tadhg Ó Cuinn's *Materia medica*; Ó Conchubhair notes that '*Anacardi* is the kidney-shaped nut of the Indian cashew tree, *Semecarpus anacardium*, which is included in Nicolaus' recipe. The number of other ingredients is not large, the main item being aloes. Principally a purgative, it also helps with the memory.'[122]

***dunad.*** This must be the word given in *eDIL* s.v. *tunna*, meaning 'tun, cask, barrel'; the reading is clarified by the parallel remedy in the gynaecological treatise edited by Wulff (see note on this section above). The form given here is likely a phonetic spelling of the genitive plural.

[115] Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 74.10–12; Green, *The Trotula*, 94–5 (§76).

[116] Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 74.12–13; Green, *The Trotula*, 96–7 (§82).

[117] Brian Ó Cuív, 'The verbal noun ending *-áil* and related forms', *Celtica* 13 (1980), 125–45, at 135; Faith Wallis, *Medieval Medicine: A Reader*, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 15 (Toronto, 2010), 545.

[118] See https://anglo-norman.net/entry/trifera (accessed 11 February 2026).

[119] Green, *The Trotula*, 193 and 201–2; the relevant entry from the *Antidotarium Nicolai* is reproduced in Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, i, 326.

[120] Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 74.14–18.

[121] The text is reproduced in Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, i, 325.

[122] Ó Conchubhair, *An Irish materia medica*, 56.

**§48:** The treatise on gynaecology edited by Wulff contains a comparable remedy.[123]

**§51:** ***athair losa.*** This is translated as 'alehoof' or 'ground ivy' in Logan's *Luibhleabhrán* (s.v. *athair lus, athair lusa*), but the glossary in 'Lord Crawford's Medical Manuscript' contains the entry *serpentina .i. athir .l. .i. bilur Muiri .i. mudomun.*[124] Siobhán Barrett has suggested to me that it is more likely bistort, commonly known as 'snakeroot'.

***uisce t[rá]iges.*** My reading is uncertain here due to fading of some of the letters in the second word, but other remedies in Irish sources call for *uisce tráiges*, lit. 'water which ebbs/recedes', possibly referring to water drawn from an ebbing sea-tide or a turlough.[125] It may be that a principle of sympathetic correspondence underlies this advice, i.e. the idea that just as ebbing water recedes from the beach, so the birth will recede from the woman seeking to abort a foetus.[126]

**§53:** ***ros ca[indinde].*** The final letters of this word are obscured by fading in the manuscript but may be identical to the form in §56. *eDIL* s.v. *cainnenn* offers the translation 'garlic, leek(s), onion (?)'. Fergus Kelly has argued on the basis of references in early Irish legal and literary texts, however, that the word refers specifically to onion (*allium cepa*), most likely a bunching or shallot type of the plant.[127] He also observes that 'The word *cainnenn* dropped out of general use in the Early Modern Irish period, and was replaced by *uinneman (uinniún)*, most probably a borrowing from Norman French *oignun* "onion" '.[128]

**§58:** ***loim con.*** *eDIL* s.v. *loimm* gives the meaning 'milk' for this term, but I know of no recipes in the *Trotula* tradition that recommend the milk of a dog as an ingredient. Pliny notes in his *Natural History*, however, that 'The foetus is retained by taking in drink the ash of porcupines, brought to maturity by drinking bitch's milk, and withdrawn by the afterbirth of a bitch' (*partus conceptos hystricum cinis potus continent, maturat caninum lacte potum, evocat membrana e secundis canum*).[129] This ingredient occurs again in §80.

***melle.*** Fergus Kelly suggests that this word is a derivative of *mell* 'sphere, swelling', and notes that it has been identified with the plant called 'bitter vetch' or 'heath-pease' (*Lathyrus montanus*), which has edible tubers.[130]

[123]Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 74.18–20.

[124]Stokes, 'Three Irish medical glossaries', 333 (§28).

[125]See the discussion in Deborah Hayden, 'From the "king of the waters" to curative manuscripts: water and medicine in medieval Irish textual culture', in Marilina Cesario, Hugh Magennis and Elisa Ramazzina (eds), *The Elements in the Medieval World. Interdisciplinary Perspectives: Water* (Leiden, 2024), 75–98, at 89–90 and n. 45.

[126]My thanks to David Stifter for this suggestion.

[127]Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 251–3.

[128]Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 251, citing Risk, 'French loan-words in Irish (Part 2)', *EC* 14/1 (1974), 67–98, at 91.

[129]Jones, *Pliny: Natural History*, 358–9 (XXX.43).

[130]Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 312, citing Gerard Murphy (ed.), *Early Irish Lyrics, Eighth to Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1956; repr. Dublin, 1996), 14 and Rudolf Thurneysen, 'Allerlei keltisches', *ZCP* 18 (1930), 100–10, at 105–6.

**§59: *benet míl muige.*** The Irish gynaecological treatise edited by Wulff notes that the rennet of a hare is one of the animal products that is good for conception and childbirth.[131]

**§60: *ind in am na cōrach.*** I am uncertain of the intended meaning here and my translation is tentative. Another copy of this remedy is found in NLI MS G 11, p. 269b8–10, where the end of the text instead reads *7 a n-aimsir na fola místa donite*r *sin* 'and that is done at the time of the menses'.

**§63:** As noted above, another copy of this remedy is found on fol. 672b of TCD MS H 3. 17 (1336), where it is one of several charms written in the margins and blank spaces of the manuscript that were collected and edited by R. I. Best in 1952.[132] Best understood it to form part of the same remedy as that given in §64 of our text, but the rubrication in our manuscript, as well as a line dividing the two remedies in the H 3. 17 copy, indicate that they were understood to be distinct cures (one for conceiving males, the other for a safe birth), even if their juxtaposition in both copies suggests either that one witness is a copy of the other or that both derive from a common source.[133] Another copy of the remedy occurs in NLI MS G 11, p. 268b29–30, where it is again followed immediately (but is clearly distinct from) the remedy in §64 of our text.

**§64:** Copies of this remedy are found on fol. 672b of TCD MS H 3. 17 (1336; see note on §63 above) and in NLI MS G 11, p. 268b30–5. R. I. Best pointed out the existence of the copy in Conla Mac an Leagha's Remedy Book in a footnote to his edition of the charms from the TCD manuscript.[134]

**§65: *tendus.*** This form is not recorded in *eDIL* with the sense given here, but cf. *eDIL* s.v. *tendad* 'pressing, straining, tightening' and Ó Dónaill's *Foclóir Gaeilge–Bearla*, s.v. *teannas* 'tightness, tautness; strain, tension'.[135] It is possible that the general sense of 'tightness' or 'tension' is intended, which could refer to a range of possible conditions. In the present context, however, it may be that the specific obstetrical phenomenon of contractions, whereby the uterine muscles tighten and then relax during labour, is what is meant.

**§67: *glorium.*** I am uncertain of the plant intended here. The glossary in Lord Crawford's Medical Manuscript contains the entry *scopa reghia 7 hipericon .i. gloriam .i. fenel.*[136] *Scopa regia* is a species of the plant goosefoot (*chenopodium scoparia*), whereas *hipericon* may refer to *hypericum* or St John's wort. *eDIL* s.v. *gloriam*, however, translates this word as 'the iris of gladiolus' on the basis of definitions in other medical manuscripts.

**§69:** This remedy is written continuously with the previous one (§68), with no rubrication to indicate the beginning of a new entry. The previous remedy

[131] Wulff, 'A mediaeval handbook', 56.1–2, 58.22, 70.26 and 70.34.
[132] Best, 'Some Irish charms'; see also the discussion above, p. 317.
[133] Best, 'Some Irish charms', 30 (no. V); Hayden, 'Premodern Irish rituals', 416–18.
[134] Best, 'Some Irish charms', 32 (n.)
[135] Niall Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (Dublin, 1977).
[136] Stokes, 'Three Irish medical glossaries', 333 (§22).

is stated to be for bringing on the menses, however, while this one appears to be for treating cattle when giving birth; I therefore take them to be intended as separate cures.

***grībrācān.*** *eDIL* s.v. *gribracán* gives the uncertain definition 'pricking pain (?)' for this word on the basis of a single citation; cf. also *eDIL* s.v. *gribracach* 'tingling numbness, "pins and needles" '. *Gribracán* may be a compound of *rácán* < *ráca* 'rake (agricult[ural] implement)' (*eDIL* s.v. *ráca*) and *gríb* 'claw, talon (?)' (*eDIL* s.v. *gríb*), suggesting that the word could refer to some kind of cattle prod.[137] My translation is, however, tentative here.

**§70:** Cf. NLS MS Adv. 72.1.3, fol. 80r14–16.

**§71:** Cf. NLS MS Adv. 72.1.3, fol. 80r16.

***ros bilair.*** Uí Chonchubhair and Ó Conchúir identify the plant *biolar* as 'watercress' (*Nasturtium officinale*) and observe that as an important medicinal herb of the Middle Ages, 'it was used for diseases of the chest and urinary tract, for bleeding and scurvy, to overcome melancholia and headache and to banish worms and blackheads. It was also believed to be effective for women's ailments, and in Dún Chaoin it was used as a poultice to ease labour pains.'[138]

**§72:** Cf. NLI MS G 11, p. 269a17–19. A similar fertility test is included in the Latin *Trotula*:

> Si mulier maneat sterilis uicio uiri uel sui, hoc modo percipietur. Accipe duas ollas et in utraque pone cantabrum, et de urina uiri pone in una earum cum cantabro, et in alia de urina Mulieris, et olle dimittantur per .ix. uel dies .x. Et si sterilitas sit uicio Mulieris, inuenies uermes multos in olla sua et cantabrum fetidum. Similiter in alia si sit uicio uiri. Et si in neutra inueneris, in neutron erit causa, et tunc poterunt medicine beneficio adiuuari ut concipiat.
>
> 'If a woman remains barren by fault of the man or herself, it will be perceived in this manner. Take two pots and in each one place wheat bran and put some of the man's urine in one of them with the bran, and in the other [put] some urine of the woman [with the rest of the bran], and let the pots sit for nine or ten days. If the infertility is the fault of the woman, you will find many worms in her pot and the bran will stink. [You will find the same thing] in the other [pot] if it is the man's fault. And if you find this in neither, then in neither is there any defect and they are able to be aided by the benefit of medicine so that they might conceive.'[139]

The same test appears in the Middle English gynaecological handbook edited by Rowland, who observes that it can ultimately be traced back to Egyptian papyri and the Galenic work *De antidotis* 'On antidotes'.[140]

[137] My thanks to Ruairí Ó hUiginn for this suggestion.
[138] Uí Chonchubhair and Ó Conchúir, *Flóra Chorca Dhuibhne*, 87.
[139] Green, *The Trotula*, 94–5 (§75).
[140] Rowland, *Medieval Woman's Guide to Health*, 34–5 and 168–9.

***lem*[*ach*] *muige*.** In the G 11 copy of the remedy, this line reads *ar duill*eog *i*n *lemaig*h *no a*r *copoig*. *eDIL* s.v. 1 *lemach* defines this word as 'the plant marsh mallow' and includes citations with the forms *lemach muighe* and *leamhach buíde*. It may be that our scribe simply omitted a suspension mark over the form *lem*, or perhaps the reference to a *duilleog* 'leaf' led him to confuse it with the form given in *eDIL* s.v. 1 *lem* 'elm-tree'.

***feōdaig*.** The G 11 copy of this remedy reads 7 *feodoch-*. *eDIL* does not record the form *feódaig* as an adjective derived from the verb *feódaigid* (*eDIL* s.v. *feódaigid*), but only the forms *feódaide*, *feóige* (*eDIL* s.v. *feódaide*, *feóige*) with the sense of 'withered, dry, wasted'. As David Stifter has pointed out to me, it may be that the form in our text stands for *féodaide*, with the final vowel elided before the following 'a'.

**§73:** Cf. NLS MS Adv. 72.1.3, fol. 80r11–13.

***māollugad*.** The context for this word suggests that it must be a verbal noun instructing the reader as to how to consume the prescribed ingredients. However, if it is the verb given in *eDIL* s.v. *maelaigid*, meaning 'blunts, depresses, abates', the precise meaning here is unclear. It is possible, however, that the term intended in this context is the same given in §77 as *maels*h*lug*ad (see note below), with the medial lenited 's' omitted. If so, it may be that the advice in this remedy is likewise to swallow the medicine quickly in order to avoid contemplating its unpleasantness.

**§74:** Cf. NLS MS Adv. 72.1.3, fol. 80r10–11.

**§76: *slānasaigid*.** This form is not attested in *eDIL*. Another copy of this remedy is found in NLI MS G 11, p. 269.5–6, however, where the equivalent word is given as *slānug*ad, which is recorded in *eDIL* (*eDIL* s.v. *slánugad*) with the medical sense of 'secundine'.

**§77: *māelshlugad*.** Another copy of this remedy is found in NLS MS Adv. 72.1.3, fol. 80r17–18, where the penultimate word reads *mu*n*s*h*lug*ud. Neither of these forms are attested in *eDIL*, but *māelshlugad* may be a compound of the word given in *eDIL* s.v. *sluiced, slocaid* 'swallows, engulfs'. The prefix *māel* has a range of senses including 'bald', 'bare' and 'blunt' (see *eDIL* s.v. 1 *mael*); Ó Dónaill notes that it can also be used as an intensifier (cf. the English idiom 'to go it bald-headed' in the sense 'to dash or charge forward, without heeding danger or obstacles; to stake everything, to disregard consequences; to attack without care or thought').[141] The intended meaning here may therefore have been that the patient was to swallow the ingredients quickly so as to avoid contemplating their unpleasantness. Cf. the form *maethslughudh* ('soft swallowing'), which is used in commentary to the Old Irish law-tract *Bretha*

[141] Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla*, s.v. *maol*²; *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'bald-headed (*adj.*)', https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1201232923 (accessed 25 February 2026). My thanks to Ruairí Ó hUiginn for pointing out this comparison.

*Comaithcheso* in relation to the trespass of hens swallowing bees.[142] See also the note on §73 above.

***scindīn.*** This form is not attested in *eDIL*, but another copy of this remedy is found in NLS MS 72.1.3, fol. 80r17–18, where this word in question reads *sgidi*n. I therefore take it to be equivalent to the words recorded in Dinneen's dictionary, s.vv. *scidín* 'a trifle, a morsel, a small potato, anything small'; and *sceidín* 'a small spot or speck; a small star in the forehead of a beast; a small potato'.[143] The sense here is evidently a small lump of goat dung, which is to be covered with butter (presumably to hide it from the patient who must consume it).

**§78: *semar scaithe finne* 7 *echsemar.*** Presumably the distinction being made here is between white clover (*Trifolium repens*, recorded in Ó Dónaill's Modern Irish dictionary as *seamair bhán*) and red clover (*Trifolium pratense*, given in the same source as either *seamair chapaill* or *seamair dhearg*), which are two of the most common varieties of the plant.[144]

**§79: *locholl.*** *eDIL* s.v. *lochall* defines this as the 'name of a plant, found mainly in glossaries' and cites the entry *Pulleghium Planta Christi .i. bogha .m. .i. lochull* in Lord Crawford's Medical Manuscript.[145] *Pulegium* refers to pennyroyal, an ingredient frequently mentioned in the Latin *Trotula* text. Uí Chonchubhair and Ó Conchúir identify *lochall* with 'brooklime' (*Veronica beccabunga*), however, and note that 'In Dún Chaoin it was knotted and used as a poultice to ease labour pains.'[146]

## Glossary of plant-names

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *abla* | apple-tree | §17 |
| *aipsint* | absinth | §38 |
| *argat lúacra* | meadowsweet | §§9, 68, 75 |
| *arrament* | atrament | §35 |
| *athair losa* | bistort | §§51, 78 |
| *athair talman* | yarrow | §§52, 65, 78 |
| *biatus* | beet | §79 |
| *bilar* | watercress | §71 |
| *briscén* | silverweed | §60 |
| *búafallán* (*líath*) | mugwort | §§4, 28, 32, 55–7 |
| *cainnenn* | onion | §§53, 56 |

[142]Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Bretha Comaithcheso: An Old-Irish Law Tract on Neighbouring Farms*, Early Irish Law Series 9 (Dublin, 2022), 374.

[143]Patrick S. Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla/An Irish-English Dictionary* (Dublin, 1904), s.vv.

[144]Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla*, s.v. *seamair.*

[145]Stokes, 'Three Irish medical glossaries', 333 (§26).

[146]Uí Chonchubhair and Ó Conchúir, *Flóra Chorca Dhuibhne*, 196; the same identification is given in Niall Mac Coitir, *Ireland's Wild Plants. Myths, Legends and Folklore* (Cork, 2006), 238–9.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *cairtenn* | rowan | §17 |
| *calement* | calamint | §32 |
| *cartlann* | water-mint | §21 |
| *cogal* | cockle-plant | §31 |
| *copóg* | dock-leaf | §19 |
| *crúach Pádraig* | greater plantain | §§16, 18 |
| *cumin* | cumin | §32 |
| *dair* | oak | §17 |
| *deda* | centaury | §40 |
| *ditanntri* | dittany | §64 |
| *dris* | briar | §9 |
| *droigen* | blackthorn | §61 |
| *echsemar* | red clover | §78 |
| *edend talman* | ground ivy | §68 |
| *ellenn* | elecampane | §75 |
| *espóg bán* | oxeye daisy | §67 |
| *fed coille* | rue (?) | §15 |
| *fern* | alder | §§17, 33, 61 |
| *fínscoth* | wine blossom | §68 |
| *flidh* | chickweed | §§27, 79 |
| *gallbilar* | garden-cress | §66 |
| *glaisín* | spearwort | §34 |
| *glorium* | iris (?) | §67 |
| *grifin na cloiche* | stonecrop | §51 |
| *ibar talmain* | juniper | §11 |
| *imus* | celery | §75 |
| *isoib* | hyssop | §32 |
| *lemach* | marsh mallow | §72 |
| *litronta* | dittany | §32 |
| *locholl* | brooklime | §79 |
| *lus creide* | speedwell | §§26, 32 |
| *lus na croici* | fennel | §§23, 32, 56 |
| *lus na sub* | strawberry | §6 |
| *madra* | madder | §§30, 32 |
| *magarlín* | orchid | §§39, 43 |
| *mandrogora* | mandrake | §45 |
| *mecun rata* | root of a fern | §6 |
| *melle* | bitter vetch | §58 |
| *mercuirial* | mercury | §32 |
| *mintus* | mint | §32 |
| *mirr* | myrrh | §44 |
| *musdard* | mustard | §32 |
| *nefpt* | catmint | §§32, 37, 49 |
| *nemnaid* | tormentil | §76 |
| *nenaid* | nettles | §§32, 54 |
| *origanum* | oregano | §32 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *pínán* | gooseberry | §19 |
| *ragam* | horseradish | §14 |
| *rait* (?) | bog-myrtle | §20 |
| *rú* | bedstraw | §32 |
| *saderei* | savory | §32 |
| *saige* | sage | §§29, 32 |
| *sail* | willow | §20 |
| *samad bó* | garden sorrel | §12 |
| *samad léna* | meadow sorrel | §15 |
| *satiregia* | satyrion | §39 |
| *scamonia* | scammony | §48 |
| *selgán* | spleenwort | §15 |
| *semar scaithe finne* | white clover | §78 |
| *simsán* | wood sorrel | §15 |
| *sinaip* | mustard | §24 |
| *slánlus muc* | swinecress | §79 |
| *stafesaigria* | staveacre | §44 |
| *tenegal* | houseleek | §7 |
| *tene talman* | meadow saffron | §19 |
| *tenga énáin* | stitchwort | §7 |

Deborah Hayden

*Maynooth University*