

The Irish Jerusalem: etymological politics and the study of Greek in medieval Ireland



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THE IRISH JERUSALEM: ETYMOLOGICAL POLITICS AND THE STUDY OF GREEK IN MEDIEVAL IRELAND

ABSTRACT

This study examines the etymology of the placename Tara, Irish *Temair*, in the Old Irish glossary *Sanas Cormaic* and in the *Dindsenchas* tradition. Its focus is the derivation of *Temair* from a purported Greek verb *teomoro* and it is proposed that this etymology may have drawn on the Harleian Graeco-Latin (Cyrillus) glossary and could ultimately have been inspired by the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville. It further addresses the idea that Cormac mac Cuilennáin, king and bishop of Cashel, was the author of *Sanas Cormaic* and proposes that medieval etymology, as a branch of Irish learning drawing on the Graeco-Roman learned tradition, might reveal contemporary political concerns coded into the origins of words.¹

ONE OF THE EARLIEST SOURCES to give an origin for the placename Tara, Irish *Temair*, is the late Old Irish glossary *Sanas Cormaic*, dated to the late ninth or early tenth century on the basis of its association with the king and bishop of Cashel, Cormac mac Cuilennáin (d. 908).² The textual history of this glossary was discussed in detail in a 1988 study by Paul Russell, but points made in it bear repeating here as they are relevant for the present examination.³ The text has survived in a shorter and a longer version in altogether ten manuscripts which date from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. The short recension is found in Oxford, Bodleian Library Laud MS 610 (Ld.), in RIA MS D ii 1, the Book of Uí Maine (M), in TCD MS 1339, the Book of Leinster (LL), and in RIA MS 23 P 16, the Leabhar Breac (LB), while the long version is found in TCD MS 1318, the Yellow Book of Lecan (Y), in two sections in TCD MS H 2.15b (pp. 13–37 and 77–102), in UCD Franciscan MS A 12, while extracts of the text survive in RIA MS 23 N 10 and BL Harley MS 5280.⁴ Russell, citing a study by William O’Sullivan, notes that the copies in Ld. and LL preserve the oldest version of the text.

¹This article is the result of research carried out on the ‘Mapping the Medieval Mind’ project at the University of Cambridge, and funded by the Leverhulme Trust (2020–6). Many thanks to an anonymous reader and to the editors of *Celtica* for their critical comments on an earlier draft of this article. Further thanks for their insights on various aspects addressed in the present study are due to Michael Clarke, Kevin Murray, Erich Poppe, and Paul Russell. For any remaining errors I alone am responsible.

²The evidence of Cormac’s authorship is discussed below.

³Paul Russell, ‘The sounds of a silence: The growth of Cormac’s Glossary’, *CMCS* 15 (Summer 1988), 1–30.

⁴See list of manuscripts, editions and secondary literature in Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Clavis litterarum Hibernensium: Medieval Irish Books*, 3 vols (Turnhout, 2017), ii, 1171–4 (§887).

No critical edition of *Sanas Cormaic* has been published to date, but various versions of the text have appeared both with and without a translation since the mid-nineteenth century.⁵ The text has received its most recent editorial treatment as part of the *Early Irish Glossaries* database, produced by Paul Russell, Sharon Arbuthnot and Pádraic Moran at the University of Cambridge between 2006 and 2009.⁶ The entry on *Temair* is found in both versions of the text and is given here from the *Early Irish Glossaries* database:⁷

Short version

Ld. Temair .i. greic ro tuailled ann .i. teomoro .i. conspicio. Temair didiu cach loc asnad airgna decsin, unde dicitur temair na tuathe 7 temair in tige.

‘*Temair*, that is, Greek was corrupted there, namely, *teomoro*, that is, *conspicio*. *Temair* then is every place from which the view is excellent, as is said *temair na túaithe* (*temair* of the land) and *temair in tige* (*temair* of the house).’

M Teamair .i. grec ro truaillnead and .i. teomora .i. conspicio temair didiu cach loc asnadh airgna deacsín unde sin teamair na tuaithe 7 temair in tige.

LB⁸ Temair .i. te múr. múr Téa ingine Lúgdach maic hltha .i. grec ro truaillned and. téomora i.e. conspicio. teamúr didiu cach loch ba hurgna décsiú iter mhaig 7 tech. ut dicitur temair na duath .i. grianan nó tulach. temair in tige .i. grianan.

‘*Temair*, that is, *te-múr*, namely, the *múr* of Tea daughter of Lugaid son of Íth. *Temair*, that is, Greek was corrupted there. *Teomora*, that is, *conspicio*. *Teamúr* then is every place from which the view

⁵It was first edited from LB in Whitley Stokes, ‘Cormac’s Glossary’, in Whitley Stokes (ed.), *Three Irish Glossaries* (London, 1862), v–lxxx, 1–46; shortly thereafter, it was re-edited from the LB, but with material from Y and with an English translation by John O’Donovan in Whitley Stokes (ed.) and John O’Donovan (trans.), *Sanas Chormaic: Cormac’s Glossary* (Calcutta, 1868). Stokes further edited the text found in Laud MS 610 in Whitley Stokes (ed.), ‘On the Bodleian fragment of Cormac’s Glossary’, *Transactions of the Philological Society* 22 (1891–4, 1894), 149–206. The text of Y was edited, with readings from LB and from H 2.15b in Kuno Meyer (ed.), ‘*Sanas Cormaic*: an Old-Irish glossary compiled by Cormac úa Cuileinnáin, king-bishop of Cashel in the ninth century’, in Osborn J. Bergin, R. I. Best, Kuno Meyer and John G. O’Keeffe (eds), *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, vol. 4 (1912), 1–128. The version in M was later edited in Kuno Meyer (ed.), ‘Cormac’s Glossar nach der Handschrift des Buches der Uí Maine’, *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 23 (1919), 290–319.

⁶See: Paul Russell, Pádraic Moran, Sharon Arbuthnot, *Early Irish Glossaries Database*, version 3.3 (2023) <www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/irishglossaries/> (accessed 14 July 2024).

⁷Translations are my own. Text given with slight adjustments for word separation from: <https://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/irishglossaries/concordances.php?readingID=&main=1&cp1=1&cp15=1&cp16=1&cp18=1&cp7=1&cp11=1&cp8=1&cp9=1&page=7&perPage=100> (accessed 14 July 2024).

⁸As Paul Russell points out to me, while the LB text is a representative of the short version, it has been conflated with a text of the long version in the course of its transmission and therefore also contains the first paragraph about Tea wife of Érimón.

is excellent whether on the plain or the house, as is said *temair na túaithe*, that is, a *gríanán* or a hill, and *temair in tige*, i.e. *gríanán*.⁹

Long version

Y Temair .i. te-mur .i. mur Tea ingine Luigdech maic Ithæ. Temair .i. grec ro truaillid and .i. teomoro id est conspicio. Temair didiu cech locc as mbi aurgnam deicsi iter mag 7 tech, ut dicitur temair na tuaithe 7 temair in tighe.

'Temair, that is, te-múr, namely, the múr of Tea daughter of Lugaid son of Íth. Temair, that is, Greek was corrupted there, namely, teomoro, that is, conspicio. Temair then is every place from which the view is most excellent whether on the plain or the house, as is said temair na túaithe and temair in tige.'

The longer version gives two explanations. The first explains that *Temair* is analysed as *te-mur* and is named after the *múr* 'rampart' of Tea⁹ daughter of Lugaid son of Íth and wife of Érimón son of Míl.¹⁰ The second explanation asserts that *temair* is a common noun designating any place which affords a great view, and that it is derived from the Greek verb *teomoro* which means *conspicio* in Latin. The shorter and older version only contains the second explanation. The significance of this is discussed below.

The Book of Leinster (LL) is another witness to the short version but does not contain the entry on *Temair* since only a fragment covering the latter half of the letter T and the letter U has survived after the manuscript was rebound in the fourteenth century. But as Anne and William O'Sullivan argued, the LL text of *Sanas Cormaic* appears to have been substantially the same as Laud's.¹¹ We may argue therefore that LL's entry on *Temair* would have looked much the same as that found in Laud 610 given above. Indirect evidence of this is given elsewhere in LL, in a prose passage on page 159a which heads a section of prose *dindsenchas* texts and which is likely the earliest version of the prose *dindsenchas* of Tara:

Temuir, unde nominatur. Ni handsa. Temair .i. Teamur .i. múr Tea ingine Lugdach meic Itha. ben Herimoin meic Miled .i. is and ro hadnacht hí. Unde poeta cecinit.

⁹*eDIL* s.v. gives the name as 'Téa' with long *e*, but in the only metrical examples of the name, the word is written in hiatus as 'Teä' making the first syllable short. See MD i, 6 l. 11 (*fors' mbiad lecht Tea iar tuinnem*; with elision of second syllable) and l. 17 (*Brega Teä treb tuilltech*). Both examples are found in Gwynn's 'Temair II', a poem beginning *Ní cheil maissi dona mnáib*, likely composed by the tenth-century poet Cináed úa hArtacáin (d. 975), to whom the poem is ascribed in several manuscripts.

¹⁰Edited from Y in Meyer, '*Sanas Cormaic*', 105. See the earlier edition and translation in Stokes and O'Donovan, *Sanas Chormaic*, 157.

¹¹Anne O'Sullivan and William O'Sullivan, 'Three notes on Laud Misc. 610 (or the Book of Pottlerath)', *Celtica* (1971), 135–51, at 150.

In cetben luid i n-uaig úair
don chúain a Tur Bregain báin;
Tea Brega ben in rí
dianid ainm Temair fir Fáil.

Uel Temuir a uerbo Greco temoro .i. conspicio. úair is Temair
ainm do *cech* inad asnid soirb fegad radairc. Unde dicitur temair
na tuathe 7 temair in tige.¹²

‘Temair. Whence is it named? Not difficult. Temair, that is, Teamur,
that is, the rampart of Tea daughter of Lugaid son of Íth, wife of
Érimón son of Míl. It is there that she was buried. From that the
poet sang:

“The first woman who went into the cold earth
of the company from the Tower of fair Bregon
Tea of Brega, wife of the king,
from whom is named ‘true Tara of Fál’.”

Or Temair [comes] from the Greek verb *temoro*, which means *conspicio*. Because Temair is the name of every place from which the
view is pleasant.¹³ From which is said *temair na tuathe* and *temair
in tige* “*temair* of the land” and “*temair* of the house”.¹⁴

Russell has noted that the LL prose *dindsenchas* passage above ‘is in part identical with Cormac Y 1212’, i.e. the entry on *Temair* in Y.¹⁵ But as can be seen from the image below, while the passage corresponds to the longer version of the Temair entry in *Sanas Cormaic*, the reference to Cormac mac Cuilennáin is written at the height of the line in which the second explanation begins. The angled bracket, though faded towards the bottom, also indicates that only the last three to four lines are derived from *Sanas Cormaic*. While the main text on this page was written in the hand of A, the scribe responsible for

¹²LL II. 1032–41.

¹³Literally ‘out of which seeing a view is pleasant’.

¹⁴Translation of the prose adapted from Dónall Mac Giolla Easpaig, ‘The significance of the placename *Temair*’, in Edel Bhreathnach (ed.), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin, 2005), 423–48, at 424, 426. The translation of the quatrain is that from John Koch and John Carey (eds), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe and Early Ireland and Wales*, Celtic Studies Publications 1 (Malden, MA, 1994), 250 (cf. R. A. S. Macalister (ed. and trans.), *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, 5 vols (London, 1938–56), iv, 58.1605; hereafter *LGÉ*). The stanza comes from the *LGÉ* poem on the Fir Bolg beginning *Dene mo resnís a meic* and is ascribed to Colum Cille in LL (LL II. 942–1016). The same stanza is also found in Recension B of *Dindsenchas Éirenn* (Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), ‘The Bodleian *Dinshenchas*’, *Folklore* 3 (1892), 467–516, at 470), where the text (perhaps following Cináed úa hArtacáin’s poem *Ní cheil maissi dona mndáib*, MD i, 6) suggests, anachronistically, that Temair was the wife of Géde Ollgothach, son of Ollam Fótla, and incorporates phrases related to Géde from the third recension of *LGÉ* (see *LGÉ* v, 236; cf. LL II. 2341–2, and Sharon Arbuthnot, *Cóir Anmann: A Late Middle Irish Treatise on Personal Names*, ITS 59–60, 2 vols (London, 2005–6), i, 108 §135). The connection with Géde is also found in Recension C of the *Dindsenchas* (§1 of the prose *dindsenchas* of Tara in Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), ‘The prose tales in the Rennes *Dindsenchas*’, *RC* 15 (1894), 272–336, 418–84, at 277, 279).

¹⁵Russell, ‘Sounds of a silence’, 11.

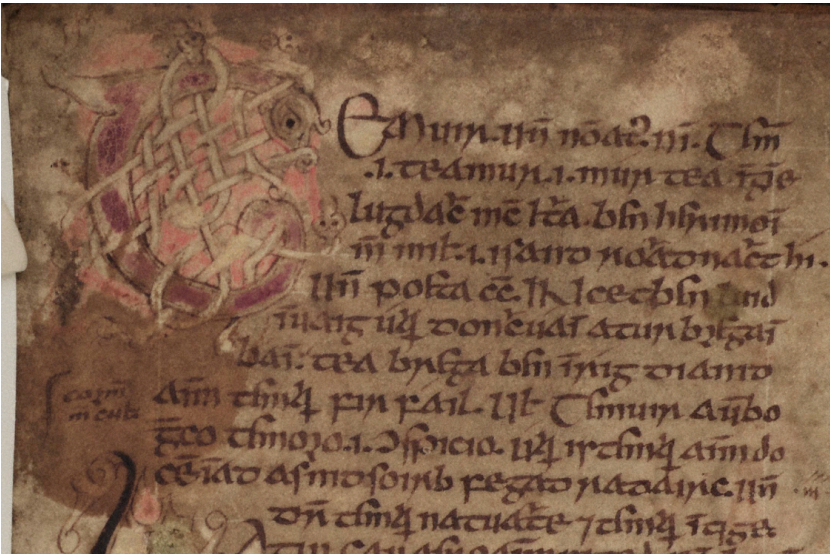


Figure 1: Prose *dindsenchas* of Tara on p. 159a in LL

the majority of the LL *Dindsenchas*, the marginal note appears to have been written in the hand of T, the scribe who also wrote the LL *Sanas Cormaic*.¹⁶

This marginal note is the earliest piece of evidence, and the only pre-Norman one, to suggest that Cormac mac Cuilennáin was the author of *Sanas Cormaic*. Russell further notes that the compilation bears the title *Sanas Cormaic* in LB and *sanasán saltrach Cormaic* in Ld.¹⁷

A further piece of evidence, though later, comes from the prosimetrical *Dindsenchas Érenn*.¹⁸ In the prose *dindsenchas* of Tara in this recension, in the only Latin passage in the entire corpus, the Greek etymology given by Cormac, who is cited as a source, is considerably expanded:¹⁹

Temair a uerbo graeco *temorio* quod latine interpretatur conspicio. Huius oppidi quod Temoriam uocamus nomen esse deriuatum autores affirmant; omnisque locus conspicuus et eminens, siue in campo, siue in domo, siue in quocumque loco sit, uocabulo quo dicitur Temair nominari potest. Sic in prouerbio scotico reperitur, ut dicitur *temair na tuáithi* et *temair in tigi*, quam sententiam **in suo Silentio** [i.e. *Sanas*] **Cormaccus** de hoc nomine disputando possuit. Hoc igitur oppidum multorum sibi commune uindicat, nunc cunctis enim Hibernensibus oppidis excellens congruenter

¹⁶O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan, 'Three notes', 15–16.

¹⁷Russell, 'Sounds of a silence', 10–11. See further (pp. 13–14) his arguments on the Munster and Cashel association with the term *sanas* which is only attached to this glossary.

¹⁸On the different recensions of the *Dindsenchas*, see Marie-Luise Theuerkauf, *Dindsenchas Érenn*, Cork Studies in Celtic Literatures 7 (Cork, 2023), 1–15.

¹⁹This passage corresponds to what is §4 of the prose on Tara in Stokes' edition of the Rennes prose *Dindsenchas* (Stokes, 'The Rennes *Dindsenchas*', 278).

eorum commune uocabulum possidet, quippe cum huius rector usque hodie totius insolae Scotorum monarchiam sortitur.²⁰

‘Authors affirm that *Temair*, the name of this stronghold which we call *Temoria*, is derived from the Greek verb *temorio* which is translated into Latin as *conspicio*. And every conspicuous and eminent place, whether on a plain or in a house, or wherever it may be, can be called by this word ‘*temair*’. Thus it is found in the Irish saying,²¹ as is said *temair na tuaithe* ‘*temair* of the land’ and *temair in tigi* ‘*temair* of the house’, an opinion concerning this name under discussion, which **Cormac** cited in his *Silence*. This *oppidum*, then, claims for itself what is common to many, since it surpasses all *oppida* in Ireland it now appropriately possesses their common name, because, naturally, even today its [i.e. Tara’s] ruler obtains the sovereignty of the entire island of Ireland.’²²

The phrases *siue in campo siue in domo* are likely translations for *iter mag 7 tech*, the phrase found in the long version of *Sanas Cormaic* given above, which suggests that a text of the long version was likely used as the source for the Latin passage.

Immediately preceding this Latin passage is a list of Tara’s previous names, each one given by Ireland’s previous occupants.²³ The list concludes with the

²⁰Stokes, ‘The Rennes *Dindsenchas*’, 278.

²¹The word *scotico* < *scoticus* refers to the Irish language here.

²²Marie-Luise Theuerkauf, ‘*Dindsenchas Érenn* ‘Knowledge of Ireland’s Notable Places’: the Theban origins of Tara’, in Michael Clarke, Erich Poppe, and Isabelle Torrance (eds), *Classical Antiquity in Medieval Ireland: The Antiquity Sagas and Related Literature* (London, 2024), 355–70, at 365.

²³In the *Dindsenchas*, it is not uncommon to find references to a place’s previous names before it received the name whose origin is related in the story. In the case of Tara, its previous names are connected to the pre-Milesian groups of settlers of Ireland. In what is the first poem of the prosimetrical tract in many manuscripts, *Temair Breg cid ní dia tá* (‘*Temair Breg*, what is it from?’), Fintan states that Tara had four names before it was named *Tara* (*MD* i, 4–5 ll. 39–40: *cóic anmann uirri iarsin / ó tá Fordruim co Temair*, ‘five names accordingly were given it / from the time when it was Fordruim till it was Temair’). These were *Druim Léith*, named after Líath mac Laigni Leth-anglais; *Druim Cáin*, named after Cáin son of Fiachu Cendfindáin; and *Cathair Crofind*, named after Crofind daughter of Alloid (brother of the Dagda). The fourth name, not attached, it seems, to any person or event, is given as *Fordruim* (‘Over-ridge’?). The preposition *for* may not be merely situational here, but, like its Celtic cognates such as Gaulish *wer-* (see *Uer-cingetorix*) may express superiority, in the vein of ‘super-hill’, or the German nominal and verbal prefix ‘ober-’. *Temair Breg cid ní dia tá* is shared between the prosimetrical *Dindsenchas Érenn* and the third redaction of *LGÉ*. A prose passage, which is only found in the Book of Lecan copy of this redaction of *LGÉ*, where it directly precedes the poem, explains that each of Temair’s previous names (apart from *Fordruim*), comes from a representative of some of Ireland’s previous settlers: it was called *Druim Léith* or *Liathdruim* under the occupation of Nemed’s people; *Druim Cáin* during the reign of the Fir Bolg, *Cathair Crofind* while the Túatha Dé Danann ruled Ireland, and *Temair* from Tea, the wife of Érimón son of Míl. This information is only supplied in the Book of Lecan copy of the third redaction of *LGÉ* (Macalister, *LGÉ* v, 82–3). *LGÉ* omits *Fordruim*, but in addition to *Liathdruim* (Clanna Nemid), *Druim Cáin* (Fir Bolg), *Cathair Crofind* (Túatha Dé Danann) and *Temair* (sons of Míl), gives two further names for Temair under the reign of the last king of the Fir Bolg, Eochu mac Eirc: *Tulach in Trír* ‘Mound of the Three Men’, and *Carn in Aenfhír* ‘Stone-heap of the Solitary Man’. Although the poem asks whether it was under Parthalón’s or Cessair’s occupation of

name *Druim nDécsin* ‘Ridge of Looking’ or ‘Lookout Ridge’. This is a curious name for Tara, which is not connected to any of the groups of settlers:

§3. Temhair ⁊ Druim Cáin ⁊ Liathdruim ⁊ Cathair Cro[*f*]ind, Druim nDécsin .u. anmanda Temrach ind sin.

‘§3. *Temair* and *Druim Cáin* ‘Cáin’s Ridge’ and *Liathdruim* ‘Grey Ridge’ (or ‘Líath’s Ridge’) and *Cathair Crofind* ‘City of Crofind’ and *Druim nDécsin* ‘Ridge of Looking’ (or ‘Lookout Ridge’), those are the five names of Temair.’²⁴

Since *Druim nDécsin* is directly followed by the Latin passage in which the Greek etymology of *Temair* is given, it is possible that *Druim nDécsin* was coined as an etymological translation of *teomoro/conspicio* to capture the idea that Tara was closely connected with ‘looking’, ‘gazing’ or ‘having a view’.

While *Druim nDécsin* might be an invention of the *Dindsenchas* compiler to form a closer connection between the various thematic strands of tradition given in the prose, the idea of *conspicio* in the Latin passage serves another purpose. It is rephrased to express notions of *conspiciuus* and *eminens* in the *Dindsenchas*. While *Sanas Cormaic* allows for the passage to be interpreted in a more neutral way – a *temair* is simply any place, whether inside or outside, which affords a good view – the *Dindsenchas* clearly stamps out any notion of equality between the various namesakes. In the *Dindsenchas*, Tara is a place which *is seen* rather than a place *from which one can see*. And this idea forms the basis of the second part of the Latin *Dindsenchas* passage above: although every *locus conspicuus et eminens* can be called a *temair*, it is *this Temair*, the one in Brega, which surpasses all others. Although it possesses a name common to all, it is *primus inter pares*. And because of this onomastic eminence, its king is the rightful ruler over the island of Ireland. Arguably, the claim sounds a little contrived and not particularly elegant, but the intention of the statement is clear: the Greek etymology *teomoro/conspicio* ultimately forms the basis of a political claim – the supremacy of the king of Tara over all others and his right to rule Ireland. As Cormac’s Greek etymology was being absorbed into the *Dindsenchas*, its explanation was rephrased so as to express the more overtly political outlook of a flourishing topographical tradition.

If we accept his authorship of *Sanas Cormaic*, it might be worth querying whether Cormac’s Greek etymology may not itself have been politically inclined, that it may never have been all that ‘neutral’? On the face of it, *Sanas*

Ireland (*In ac Partolan na cath / nó ‘n ac cétgabáil Cesrach*) that Tara was so named, no previous name for Tara is attached to either of these groups. Nor indeed to the groups of Cicul Cricenchlos of the Fomoiré or to anyone *do line Lupracán* ‘from the line of the Lupracans’, which the poem mentions. See MD i, 2.5–10.

²⁴Translation slightly adapted from Stokes, ‘The Rennes *Dindsenchas*’, 279–80, §1.3). Stokes translated *Druim Cáin* as ‘Beautiful Ridge’, but this can hardly be correct: *Temair Breg cid ní dia tá*, on which this part of the prose is likely based, rhymes *Cáin*: *máir* (pl. < *már*); it can hardly be the same as the adjective *caín* (see *eDIL* s.v.) here. As Kevin Murray points out to me, this was also the understanding of later scholars, see Pádraig Ó Riain, Diarmuid Ó Murchadha, Emma Nic Cárthaigh, and Kevin Murray (eds), *Historical Dictionary of Gaelic Placenames / Foclóir Stairiúil Áitainmneacha na Gaeilge* (London, 2003), viii, s.n. *Druim Caoin* (1).

Cormaic may simply have been pointing to the fact that *Temair* applied to a number of placenames besides the one in Meath, notably the Munster place-name *Temair Lúachra*. Alternatively, Cormac mac Cuilennáin, king and bishop of Cashel, may have phrased the etymology of Tara in a deliberately more equalizing or ‘inclusive’ way in order to reject the supremacy of Bregian Tara, the seat of his political rivals, the Uí Néill. It is no secret that Cormac’s intellectual prowess was more than matched by his political ambitions and that he sought to challenge the Uí Néill kingship of Tara and make a bid for it himself.²⁵

The (no doubt politically-motivated) idea of Bregian Tara’s pre-eminence among Ireland’s places is explored in other glossaries besides *Sanas Cormac*.²⁶ Outside of the glossary tradition, there appears to be only once instance of *tem-air* being used in the way Cormac explains, as a common noun meaning ‘height’ or ‘hill’.²⁷ The word is employed to describe a particular aspect of the city of Troy in the first recension of *Togail Troí*, the eleventh-century prose adaptation of Dares Phrygius’ *De excidio Troiae historia*:²⁸

*Con-rótacht leis rigimscing amra i mmedhón na catrach.
Do-rónadh dano treb chain chumtachta 7 foradh leis for **temair** 7
dingna na cathrach do dálloc 7 **d’fordécsin** 7 do dibricud námhat
tairis sechtair: **arc** (.i. **dind**) Priaimh ba hedh a hainm.*

‘A wonderful royal pavilion was erected by him amidst the city. Moreover, a fair well-built dwelling, and a viewing platform were built by him [i.e. Priam] on the **temair** and the stronghold of the city as a meeting place and for **observation**, and for hurling at foes over it outside. ‘Priam’s **arc** (that is **dind**)’ was its name.’²⁹

This passage finds no counterpart in its Latin source; all Dares offers is: *Priamus ut Ilium venit, ampliora moenia extruxit, civitatem munitissimam reddidit* ‘When Priam came to Ilium, he had greater fortifications built, and saw to it that the city was most secure’.³⁰ It was the invention of the *Togail Troí* compiler

²⁵Francis J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (Dublin, 1973, repr. 2001), 203.

²⁶These are discussed in Marie-Luise Theuerkauf, ‘*Dindsenchas*, law texts and glossaries: The lexical eminence of Tara’, forthcoming.

²⁷The use of *temair* as an appellative noun has been examined by Dónall Mac Giolla Easpaig. Although Mac Giolla Easpaig initially points out that ‘[a]ctual occurrences of *temair* as a common appellative are few and are attested only in glossaries or in works of translation’, he suggests that it was in such special and learned contexts ‘that the source of the common noun meaning “height” is to be found’. See Mac Giolla Easpaig, ‘Significance and etymology of the placename *Temair*’, 427, 428.

²⁸See Ralph O’Connor, ‘Irish narrative literature and the classical tradition, 900–1300’, in Ralph O’Connor (ed.), *Classical Literature and Learning in Medieval Irish Narrative* (Cambridge, 2014), 1–22, at 14.

²⁹Text and translation slightly adapted from Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), ‘The destruction of Troy’, in Ernst Windisch, and Whitley Stokes (eds), *Irische Texte mit Wörterbuch*, 4 vols (Leipzig, 1884), ii, 1–142, at 9, 70. Stokes translates *temair* as ‘acropolis’, but this term usually refers to a structure built on a hill, not to the hill itself.

³⁰See Ferdinand Otto (ed.), *Daretis Phrygii De excidio Troiae historia*, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Leipzig, 1873), 6. Translation is my own.

therefore, deliberately drawing on his knowledge of the word's Greek etymology.³¹ His description of the topography of the most famous city in classical antiquity by means of a word which itself was supposedly derived from Greek is evidence that he was not only keenly aware of the word's learned origin but also wished to establish a connection between the prestige of Troy as the seat of the kings of Asia Minor and Tara as the seat of Irish kings.³² The textual context in which *temair* is used suggests conspicuousness and eminence. That the structure built by Priam, called his *arc* (borrowed from Latin *arx* and meaning 'height', 'citadel', or 'city'), is glossed by the word *dind* and is intended for *fordécsin* 'overlooking', further suggests that *Togail Troí* actively participated in the same learned milieu which used *Sanas Cormaic* as a source for developing the *dindsenchas* of Tara. The citation from *Togail Troí* evidently draws on the same connection between *Temair* and 'looking', giving a telling example of how one branch of Irish classical learning, that of the glossary tradition, may have informed another, the development of the antiquity sagas.³³

GREEK ETYMOLOGIES AND THE STUDY OF GREEK IN MEDIEVAL IRELAND

Irish learned interest in classical antiquity goes back to the earliest period of literary production. A number of early linguistic and aetiological works promote the idea that Greece was the cradle of Irish civilisation.³⁴ For instance, the prologue to the early Old Irish *De origine Scotticae linguae* (commonly referred to as 'O'Mulconry's Glossary') states that *Scoti de Graecis originem duxerunt, sic et lingam* 'the Irish derived their origin from the Greeks, and likewise their

³¹The description of the new Troy under Priam in the second recension of *Togail Troí* does not use the word *temair*, but gives a similar description. See Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Togail Troí: The Destruction of Troy* (Calcutta, 1881), 19; 79–80: *Ra cumtaiged inscing rigda lais i mmédón na cathrach. Ra cossegrad ar cúl na rígdaí sin fidneimed do Íoib 7 a delb in dea isin fidnemiud tall. Da-rónad dano leis gríanán caemdathach cumdachtha for dreich in dindgnai do rigaib 7 do rurechaib, do degfearaib 7 do degdainib*, 'A royal room withal was built by him amidst the city. Behind that royal room a sacred grove was consecrated to Jupiter, and the god's image was there in the grove. Then he made a balcony [*gríanán*], fair-coloured, adorned, in front of the fortress, for kings and lords, for gentlefolk.' But the word *gríanán* may also be connected with the etymology of *Temair* in the LB version of *Sanas Cormaic*. See Stokes, 'Cormac's Glossary', 42: [...] *ut dicitur temair na duath .i. gríanan no tulac. temair in tige .i. gríanan*.

³²See Stokes, *The Destruction of Troy*, 2, 58: *In Troí-sin immoro prímhathir na Asia bice í-side* 'Now that Troy was the chief city of Asia Minor'. *Togail Troí* (same pages) further stresses that Troy and the Trojans themselves are not Greeks, but instead go back to a common ancestor in Jupiter from whose two sons, Dardanus and Mercury, both peoples are respectively descended: *Is é seo turthuind bunaid na Troiana 7 a craeb choibniusa fri Grécaib .i. Mercur mac Íoib brathair Dardain meic Íoib. Is uad ra genatar Gréic. O Dardán immoro ra genatar Troianai*, 'This is an account of the origin of the Trojans and their branch of kinship to the Greeks: to wit, Mercury son of Jove, brother of Dardanus son of Jove, it is from him the Greeks were born: from Dardanus, however, were born the Trojans.' My thanks to Michael Clarke for highlighting this important distinction.

³³This scenario, and the arguably highly conscious choice of intertextually evocative vocabulary can also be viewed in the context of Brent Miles' examination of the Latin rhetorical technique of *amplificatio* in classical adaptations such as *Togail Troí*. See Brent Miles, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, 2011), 95–144 ('Classicism and *Togail Troí*'), especially 102–4.

³⁴For a survey of this topic, see Bart Jaski, "'We are of the Greeks in our origin": new perspectives on the Irish origin legend', *CMCS* 46 (Winter 2003), 1–53.

language'.³⁵ Similarly, the ninth-century poet Máel Muru Othna (†887) says in his *Can a mbunadus na nGaedel* 'Whence the Origin of the Gaels?': *do Gré-caib dún conar mbunud, conar ndligud* 'we are of the Greeks in our origin, in our laws'.³⁶

Given the emphasis on the common origin of Trojans and Greeks, the link established between Troy and Tara in *Togail Troí* seems to be an extension of the Hellenic origin paradigm, a paradigm which was eventually absorbed into and superseded by the more ibero-centric model found in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* and affiliated texts.³⁷

A fair amount of ink has been spilled to ascertain whether these intellectual endeavours – carving Ireland's people, laws and especially the Irish language from the classical ether as the new Hellenic west – were matched by a proper understanding of the Greek language. Knowledge of Greek in medieval Ireland was, by all accounts, limited to specific contexts, and, as far as glossaries were concerned, the evidence suggests that glossators drew on 'vocabularies and Latin texts citing Greek words in isolation' rather than on continuous texts.³⁸

To what extent the derivation of *Temair* from Greek *teomoro* (al. *teomora*, *temoro*, *temorio*, *temoria*), shared between *Sanas Cormaic* and the *Dindsenchas*, reflects real Greek has been a matter of debate. It was taken by Stokes, in both his translation of *Sanas Cormaic* and of the prose texts from the Rennes *Dindsenchas*, to represent the transliteration of the first person singular Greek verbal form *θεωρέω* (*theoréo*) 'I look at, view, behold'. In this, he was likely guided by the word's Latin translation as *conspicio*.³⁹ Without further explanation, Joseph Vendryes took *teomoro* to represent *θεώρημα* (*theōrēma*) 'that which is looked at, viewed, a sight' in his *Lexique étymologique*, but ultimately said that Cormac's etymology 'n'est pas à retenir' ('should not be retained').⁴⁰ Paul Russell has also suggested *θεωρέω*, or possibly *θεώμαι* (*theomai*), remarking that 'it is not easy to explain the formal connection', but he has later argued

³⁵Pádraic Moran (ed. and trans.), *De origine Scoticae linguae* ('O'Mulconry's Glossary): *An Early Irish Linguistic Tract, with a Related Glossary*, *Irsan* (Turnhout, 2019), 127.

³⁶Jaski, "'We are of the Greeks in our origin'", 12.

³⁷While the Irish, unlike other medieval European nations, never claimed descent from the Trojans, the association – obviously considered prestigious – remained attractive and found other expressions. The most notable example of this is likely the twelfth-century poem *Clann ollaman uaisle Emna* 'The Children of Ollam are the nobles of Emain', a poem comparing the nobles of Ulster to the Trojans while the kings and heroes of Connacht are compared to the Greeks. For the standard edition and translation, see Francis John Byrne, 'Clann Ollaman uaisle Emna', *Studia Hibernica* 4 (1964), 54–94. Now see Michael Clarke, 'Clann Ollaman uaisle Emna "The nobles of Emain Macha are Ollam's descendants"', in Michael Clarke, Erich Poppe, and Isabelle Torrance (eds), *Classical Antiquity in Medieval Ireland: The Antiquity Sagas and Related Literature* (London, 2024), 79–84.

³⁸Pádraic Moran, 'Greek in medieval Ireland', in Alex Mullen, and Patrick James (eds), *Multilingualism in the Graeco-Roman Worlds* (Cambridge, 2012), 172–92, at 190. See also Michael Herren, 'The study of Greek in Ireland in the Early Middle Ages', *L'Irlanda e gli Irlandesi nell'alto medioevo*, *Spoletto*, 16–21 April 2009 (Spoletto, 2010), 511–28.

³⁹Stokes and O'Donovan, *Sanas Chormaic*, 157; Stokes, 'The Rennes *Dindsenchas*', 280. See H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Seventh Edition (Oxford, 1940), s.v. *θεωρέω*. This interpretation squares well with Moran's observation ('Greek in medieval Ireland', 191) that most Greek verbal forms cited are in the first person singular present indicative active.

⁴⁰*LEIA*, T-48 s.v. *temair*.

that establishing the correct Greek form actually defeats the purpose of the gloss since ‘etymological analysis of the headword very often depends precisely on the mangled Greek form found in our manuscripts’.⁴¹ Indeed, in his entry on *Temair* Cormac himself says that *Grēc ro trúailled* and ‘Greek was corrupted there’.

The idea of ‘corruption’ crops up in a number of etymological entries in *Sanas Cormaic*.⁴² In the case of *teomoro*, the ‘corruption’ present might refer to the presence of medial *m*, although it finds a corresponding sound in all but one of Greek words suggested (thus present in Vendryes’ *θεώρημα*, and Russell’s *θεῶμαι*), namely *θεωρέω*. Without this intruding *m*, which is necessary to spell *Temair*, we would be left with *teo(o)ro* (i.e. *teomoro* -*m* = *teooro*; LL’s *temoro* -*m* = *teoro*). The closest Greek lexeme of which *teo(o)ro* would be the Latin transliteration, is *θεωρῶ* (*theorō*), the contracted form of the verb proposed by Stokes.⁴³ This lexeme becomes an especially attractive suggestion because one of its Latin translations is given as *conspicio*, the very translation Cormac gives for *teomoro*, in a Graeco-Latin glossary which was arguably available to Cormac.⁴⁴ This is the glossary referred to as the Harleian (or Cyrilus) Glossary which survives in an eighth-century codex of Italian provenance in BL Harleian MS 5792. A copy of the Harleian Glossary is preserved in Laon Bibliothèque municipale MS 444, a ninth-century manuscript which bears the signature of Martinus Hibernensis (d. 875). Paul Russell has shown that a version of the Harleian glossary was the likely source for a number of Greek etymologies in *Sanas Cormaic*.⁴⁵ It is possible therefore that Cormac used the entry on *θεωρῶ* in the Harleian glossary as a source for his *teomoro*. In light of this possibility, Cormac’s ‘corruption’ could actually represent a hermeneutic

⁴¹Russell, ‘The sounds of a silence’, 15 n. 68. Cf. idem, ‘*Graece ... Latine*: Graeco-Latin glossaries in early medieval Ireland’, *Peritia* 14 (2000), 406–20, at 410, and Pádraic Moran, ‘“A living speech”? The pronunciation of Greek in early medieval Ireland’, *Ériu* 61 (2011), 29–57, at 45.

⁴²What the corruption entails varies from entry to entry: initial or medial consonants and vowels may be different, or an ending may have been omitted. See Meyer, ‘*Sanas Cormaic*’, 86, §1011: *Om in bíd, grēicc ro trúailled and; om [ὀμὸν] isin grēic, cruor isin laitín* ‘*om* (raw) is the food, Greek was corrupted there: *omon* in Greek, *cruor* in Latin.’ As *LEIA* O-21 s.v. *om* states, Irish *om* and Greek *ὀμός* do indeed go back to the same IE root. Further evidence of such cross-linguistic reasoning has been observed by Pádraic Moran (‘Greek in medieval Ireland’, 190) who noted that ‘[t]he Irish glossaries might thus be considered as an early stage in the history of comparative linguistics’.

⁴³Michael Clarke has suggested to me that the medial *m* in *teomoro*, apart from making the word look more like *Temair*, might serve to facilitate the pronunciation of Greek *-eo-* as two separate syllables, meaning that it would act as a glide /w/. He cites another, much later example of this phenomenon in the spelling of Menelaus (with *-aus* pronounced as two short syllables) as *Menelabus* in Irish, where lenited *b* acts as a glide. While this is an attractive suggestion, the development by which lenited *m*, pronounced /v/ in the Old and Middle Irish period becomes /w/ had not yet taken place by the time of the compilation of *Sanas Cormaic*.

⁴⁴See Georg Goetz (ed.), *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum* (Leipzig, 1888), ii, 328.15–17 (hereafter *CGL*): *θεωρῶ* *aspecto cerno respicio aspicio* ***conspicio*** *conspicio* *conspicor* *dispicio* (‘I look at, I perceive, I look back, I look upon, I catch sight of, I catch sight of, I see, I describe’) [emphasis my own].

⁴⁵See Russell, ‘*Graece ... Latine*’.

device for deriving words from other languages.⁴⁶ In this way, his etymology of Tara looks less like an exercise in Procrustean morphology, where lemmata are arbitrarily made to ‘fit’ a desired meaning, and more like a consciously crafted etymology. Although it is unlikely that he was fully proficient in it, Cormac here demonstrates *some* knowledge of actual Greek.⁴⁷

While we may have found the source from which Cormac took the Greek etymology of *Temair*, it does not tell us what inspired him to etymologize the word in this particular manner. In his gloss, Cormac was arguing that *Temair*, since it is derived from a Greek word which means ‘to see’, is also a common noun meaning ‘hill’ or ‘height’, and phrases like *temair na tuaithe* and *temair in tige* attest to this.⁴⁸ But phrases of the structure ‘*Temair* of X’ are found in other glossaries, as well as in law texts, where they, as metaphorical expressions of the placename, serve to make the case for Tara’s eminence among all Irish places.⁴⁹ Cormac’s contribution to this bit of political lexicography, then, lay in refining the notion of Tara’s pre-eminence by supplying it with a prestigious etymological foundation.

I would like to suggest that the Greek etymology of *Temair* was not the result of scientific serendipity, but a conscious choice to make a connection between the name *Temair* and the idea of ‘seeing’, ‘observing’, and ‘catching sight of’. Of all the Latin texts which Cormac had at his disposal and which have been shown to have served as his source material, only one work provides such a connection: the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville.⁵⁰

We know that medieval Irish scholars held Isidore’s *Etymologies* in the highest esteem, and aptly referred to it as the *culmen*, the ‘pinnacle’ of all learning. As the late Old Irish text *Do Fáilsigud Tána Bó Cúailnge* amusingly relates, the Irish held the *culmen* in such high regard that they gave away their own epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in exchange for it – and could only reassemble the *Táin* in its entirety after holding a *séance* with the pre-Christian warrior Fergus mac Roích, since he had participated in the *Táin* and could therefore relate it from personal experience.⁵¹

Book XV of the *Etymologies*, *De aedificiis et agris*, deals with the origins of buildings and fields in sixteen chapters, the first of which, *De civitatibus*, discusses the origin and foundation of famous cities. Parts of *De civitatibus*, especially the section on *Oppida nobilia, qui vel quae constituerunt*, almost

⁴⁶ ‘Corruption’ is therefore a type of glossatorial *topos*, not dissimilar from adverbial *quasi* ‘approximately’ found in about 200 entries in *Sanas Cormaic*. Paul Russell has demonstrated that the purpose of *quasi* in glossaries was ‘intended to bridge the gap between the lemma and its etymon’ (Paul Russell, ‘*Quasi*: bridging the etymological gap in early Irish glossaries’, in Bernadette Smelik, Rijcklof Hofman, Camiel Hamans, and David Cram (eds), *A Companion in Linguistics: A Festschrift for Anders Ahlqvist on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday* (Nijmegen, 2004), 49–62, at 50).

⁴⁷ Moran, ‘Greek in early medieval Ireland’, 191 n. 88 (citing Vendryes).

⁴⁸ The word *didiu* in the entry on *Temair* in *Sanas Cormaic* given above from the various manuscripts is probably to be taken as having the force of Latin *ergo* (‘therefore, consequently’) here. See *eDIL* s.v. *didiu*.

⁴⁹ As argued in Theuerkauf, ‘*Dindsenchas*, law texts and glossaries’, forthcoming.

⁵⁰ Russell, ‘*Graece ... Latine*’, 410–11, 414 n. 32, 415, 418–19.

⁵¹ Kevin Murray, ‘The finding of the *Táin*’, *CMCS* 41 (2001), 17–23.

read like an instruction manual for writing *dindsenchas*, featuring the techniques of eponymy and etymological dissection of words we encounter in many topographical histories.⁵² One of the most famous cities of the ancient east, described in greater detail by Isidore, is Jerusalem:

Iudaei asserunt Sem, fillium Noe [...] primum post diluvium in Syria condidisse urbem Salem [...] Hanc postea tenuerunt Iebusaei, ex quibus et sortita vocabulum est Iebus; sicque duobus nominibus copulata Iebus et Salem vocata est Hierusalem, quae postea a Salomone Hierosolyma quasi Hierosolomoniam dicta est. Haec et **corrupte** a poetis Solyma nuncupata est, et postmodum ab Aelio Hadriano Aelia vocitata est. [In] ipsa est et Sion, quae Hebraice interpretatur **speculatio**, eo quod **in sublimi** constructa sit, et de longe venientia **contempletur**. Hierusalem [autem] pacifica in nostro sermone transfertur.⁵³

‘The Jews say that Noah’s son Shem (*Sem*) [...] was the first to found a city after the Flood, Salem in Syria [...] Afterwards the Jebusites held it, from whom it got the name Jebus. Thus Jerusalem (*Hierusalem*) was named, from the coupling of the two names *Jebus* and *Salem*. Later it was called *Hierosolyma* by Solomon, as if it were *Hiero-solomoniam* (< *ἱερός* ‘holy’). **By corruption**, it is also named Solyma by the poets, and later it was called *Aelia* by Aelius Hadrian. [Within] it is also Zion, which means “**lookout**” (*speculatio*) in Hebrew, because it was built **on a height** and **looks out on** things approaching from afar. Jerusalem means “peaceable” (*pacificus*) in our language.”⁵⁴

The similarities between what an Irish scholar would likely call ‘the *dindsenchas* of Jerusalem’ (*Hierusalem can as’ ro hainmniged*, as the familiar formula goes) and the *dindsenchas* of Tara are striking. The eponymic derivation of Jerusalem from Iebus and Salem parallels that of *Temair* from *Tea-múr*, while Jerusalem’s alternative names, reflecting the city’s different occupations (like Aelia under Hadrian), find an echo in the previous names of Tara under the Túatha Dé Danann, the Fir Bolg, and the Clanna Nemid respectively. But the crucial analogy to be drawn is that between Jerusalem’s Hebrew name *Zion*, translated by a Latin word from the semantic field of ‘looking, seeing’ (*speculatio*), and the Greek etymology of *Temair* which

⁵²On these, see Theuerkauf, *Dindsenchas Érenn*, 70–9.

⁵³W. M. Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX* (London, 1911), XVI.i.5.

⁵⁴Translation adapted from Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, Oliver Berghof, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge, 2006), 301. As Paul Russell points out to me, Jerome etymologized Jerusalem as *visio pacis* ‘sight/vision of peace’ in his ‘Book of Hebrew Names’. See Paul de Lagarde (ed.), ‘*Liber interpretationis nominum hebraicorum*’, in Paul de Lagarde, Germain Morin, and Marc Adriaen (eds), *S. Hieronymi presbyteri opera. Pars I, opera exegetica I: Hebraicae quaestiones in libro Geneseos, Liber interpretationis nominum hebraicorum, Commentarioli in Psalmos, Commentarius in Ecclesiasten*, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 72 (Turnhout, 1959), 59–161, at 121, 136, 146.

establishes the same semantic connection. Even the idea of lexical corruption found in *Sanas Cormaic* (*Gréc ro truailled and*), is present in Isidore (*haec et corrupte*). The etymology of Tara has not been traced back to Isidore so far, perhaps because it did not quote or translate him directly, but simply drew inspiration from him.

Cormac's knowledge of Greek was likely limited (and there is no evidence to suggest he knew any Hebrew), and he therefore may have made use of a Latin-Greek glossary like the Harleian one in search of a close enough Greek match for *Temair*. While Isidore's *speculatio* gives Greek *κατοπτεισις* (*katop-teusis*) 'a lookout', other words using the stem *spec-* yielded more promising results, the most fitting being *spectacula* 'shows, spectacles', which is translated as *θεωπια*.⁵⁵ Another entry in the glossary and potential match could have been *θεωρία* (*theoría*), a close-enough Greek rendering of *Temoria*, the Latinized form of Tara.⁵⁶ In the Harleian Glossary, *θεωρία* is translated as *spectacula* 'sights', which would have been an approximate semantic match to Isidore's *speculatio* 'watching'.⁵⁷ Supposing that Cormac was looking through the glossary for a Greek word from which to derive *temair*, he may have associated *spectacula* (and singular *spectaculum*) with its specific meaning 'spectacle, public sight, show', rather than its general meaning 'sight', thereby making *θεωρία* a less attractive choice than *θεωρῶ*. Alternatively, it is also possible that Cormac mistook Isidore's *speculatio* for a first singular verbal form, which may have prompted him to look for a verb as well. If this is the case, then the only entry matching Cormac's semantic and morphophonological requirements was *θεωρῶ*. And for *θεωρῶ* to become *teomoro/Temair*, the word needed to be 'corrupted' by adding *m*, and by losing the Greek verbal ending.⁵⁸

It is further possible that it was Isidore's claim that Hebrew צִיּוֹן (*tsiyón*) was not just the name for the Temple Mount, used synecdochically for the entire city of Jerusalem, but was also a word denoting a hill from which one could 'look out', which may have inspired Cormac to proceed likewise with *Temair*.⁵⁹

⁵⁵See Goetz, *CGL* ii, 186. As for the letter *θ*, Pádraic Moran has shown ("A living speech"?), 52) that Greek *theta* was transliterated as both *t* or *th*. Yet Irish scholars did not do so arbitrarily, but adhered to the morphophonemic exigencies of their language: *th* was interpreted as a lenited sound, and *theta* was therefore not written as *th* in grammatical situations where lenition would not naturally occur, such as in the initials of stand-alone words.

⁵⁶See *Thes.* ii, 259 (from the Book of Armagh), where *Temoria*, *-ae* declines like a first declension Latin noun.

⁵⁷Goetz, *CGL* ii, 329.13–14: *θεωπια spectaculaludi* [sic] ('θεωπια "spectacles, plays"'). The index (*CGL* vii, 540) further gives *aspectio*, *contemplatio*, *ludus*, *spectaculum*, *spectamen* ('watching, viewing, play, spectacle, scene'). But, once again, all of these are nouns, while Cormac may have been looking for a verbal form.

⁵⁸We may remark that *teomoro* looks like a closer match to gen. sg. *Temro* than to its nominative *Temair*.

⁵⁹A point of nuance: in Lindsay's edition of the *Etymologiae*, above, he gives [in] *ipsa est et Sion* (*lege abl. ipsā*). As his apparatus (XV.i.5 l. 5 note) shows, some manuscripts did not contain *in* and just give *ipsa est et Sion* 'and it [i.e. Jerusalem] is Zion itself'. The presence or absence of *in* is not insignificant, since the first expresses that Zion was *part of* Jerusalem while the second states that Zion *was* Jerusalem. If Cormac used Isidore's history of Jerusalem, he likely would have understood it in the second sense (and this may point to what sort of manuscript of the *Etymologiae* was available to him). Interestingly, the etymology of *Zion* is uncertain, but pre-Israelite origins

ETYMOLOGY, EPONYMY AND THE SUPREMACY OF *TEMAIR*

We may wonder what had driven the king of Cashel to cast Tara, the seat of power of his political rivals, the Uí Néill, in such a favourable light? It appears particularly favourable in contrast to the etymology of Tara given in another text associated with Cormac. Within the Munster genealogical tracts, we find a short tale entitled *Do bunad imthechta Eóganachta* ‘Concerning the origin of the wandering of the Eóganachta’, which relates the settlement of Ireland by the dynasty’s eponymous ancestor Eógan Taídlech (‘the Shining’), identified with the first Míl Espáine, and contrasts Eógan’s peaceful reign with the violent conquest of the Dál Cuinn (from whom the Uí Néill descend).⁶⁰ In this text, *Temair* is etymologized as *teime-úr*, that is *teime* ‘darkness, death’ and *úr* ‘sod, soil’, because *teime-úr* was what the second Míl Espáine (*in Míl Espáine tánaise/dédenach*), ancestor of the Dál Cuinn, brought to Ireland when he and his people conquered the land by the sword.⁶¹ In *Do bunad*, Tara is no lofty Greek citadel nor the sacred bastion of the Israelites but the ‘soil of death’ brought by the Milesian usurpers from Spain.⁶²

In 907 Cormac defeated the Uí Néill under the king of Tara at the battle of Mag Léna, and marched into Uí Néill and Connacht territory in the same year to obtain hostages.⁶³ Given Cormac mac Cuilennáin’s own designs on the kingship of Tara, further demonstrated by military campaigns into Meath and against Clonmacnoise, the Munster king did not object to Tara’s supremacy among Irish places *per se*.⁶⁴ Rather, it seems that his efforts, both military and scholarly, were intended to prevent the kingship of Tara from becoming the prerogative *ab origine* of a budding Uí Néill hegemony.⁶⁵ The notion of an hereditary Uí Néill high-kingship, to the exclusion of all other provincial dynasties, found its most scholarly expression in the Milesian teleological paradigm. Cormac may have sought to counter this very idea in *Do bunad*

both in Hebrew itself, as well as in Arabic have been proposed, which suggest that the name may indeed derive from a common noun. See Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (eds), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (Downers Grove, IL, 2008), 936 s.v. Zion.

⁶⁰Edited by Kuno Meyer, ‘The Laud genealogies and tribal histories’, *ZCP* 8 (1912), 291–338, at 312–14. For a summary and partial translation see Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 199–201. Byrne stated (p. 200) that it was ‘very likely that this story was compiled, if not composed, by Cormac mac Cuilennáin when the Eóganachta were making a final effort to challenge the Uí Néill high-kingship.’

⁶¹Meyer, ‘The Laud genealogies’, 313. On the glossary word *teime* meaning ‘death’, see *eDIL* s.v. *teime* and cf. *temaid* ‘dies’.

⁶²As stated by Byrne (*Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 201), Eógan Taídlech is understood as the first Míl Espáine who was left *i tir Amazonum* ‘in the land of the Amazons’ and came to Ireland from there, before the second Míl Espáine came from *cathir Breogaint* ‘Breogan’s city’ in Spain. On the etymology of *Temair*, the text further says *dind húir a Them is ala chéill in sin* ‘sods from the city of Them that is its second meaning’.

⁶³*AI* 907.1 and Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), 113.

⁶⁴See *AI* 907.

⁶⁵In the course of the ninth century, these had not only come to claim the title *rex Temoriae* for themselves, but their expansionist politics were aimed at making the kingship of Tara synonymous with the (still theoretical) high-kingship of Ireland. See Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 266.

imthechta Eóganachta,⁶⁶ all the while encoding his own political ambitions into his glossary by casting Tara in the etymological mould of Isidore's Jerusalem. As a bishop and scholar, Cormac emulated Isidore, but as a king and politician he may have aspired to be the Irish Solomon.⁶⁷ And under this new Solomon, Tara would not be the 'sod of death' of the second Míl Espáine, but the new Jerusalem, throwing off the clutches of the Uí Néill like Jerusalem had thrown off those of Babylon.

It is tantalizing to imagine how all these ideas first took shape as the *sanas*, the 'secret council' of Cormac mac Cuilennáin, king and bishop of Cashel.⁶⁸ If Cormac sought to counter the idea of Uí Néill dominance in his own glossary, and in the entry on *Temair* specifically, then only the shorter version of the entry would allow for this interpretation, indirectly supporting the argument that the shorter version was also the older one. As given above, the longer version states that Tea, the eponymous figure behind Tara, was the wife of Érimón son of Míl. Other texts explain that Tara was the place which Tea first spotted from Spain and which she demanded as a bridal portion from her husband Érimón, meaning that Tara rightfully belonged to the Erimonian branch of the Milesian family.⁶⁹ This branch included the Uí Néill, the Connachta, but also the Laigin and Osraige.⁷⁰ This pairing of Tea and Érimón is already found in Máel Múru's poem and indeed the pairing of Érimón and a female representation of Tara more generally has been a dominant theme from the late Old Irish period onwards.⁷¹ Another eponymous figure, connected with Tara in the *dindsenchas* tradition since the ninth century, is Tephe or Tebe, whose name supplies another etymology for *Temair* as *Tephe-múr* 'Rampart of Tephe'. An

⁶⁶If *Do bunad* was indeed another brainchild of Cormac's, the sinister etymology of Tara in that text seems eerily prescient given the circumstances of Cormac's own demise: in 908, the Munster king's political aspirations came to a tragic end in the battle of Belach Mugna, when, in a cruel twist of historical irony, he met his death at the hands of the Uí Néill, the very dynasty whose power he had sought to rein in.

⁶⁷Comparison to Solomon was a popular eulogistic motif; in Ireland it was commonly applied to the legendary king of Tara, and ancestor figure to the Uí Néill, Cormac mac Airt (see e.g. Cináed úa hArtacáin's *Dindsenchas* poem, *Domun duthain a lainde*, where Cormac is compared to Solomon in the last stanza; *MD* i, 36–7). As John Carey and Barbara Hillers have recently shown, accounts of Solomon, perhaps transmitted to Ireland via early apocryphal texts, likely informed the portrayal of Cormac mac Airt in texts as early as the eighth century (John Carey and Barbara Hillers, 'Cormac, Solomon, and One Shearing for Another', *Peritia* 33 (2022), 29–39).

⁶⁸On the meaning of *sanas* as 'secret counsel', 'secret council' or 'apocryphon', see Russell, 'The sounds of a silence', 13–14, and later Russell, 'Graece ... Latine', 416–17.

⁶⁹She is named as the wife of Érimón in *Can a mbunadas na nGáedel* and in several prose and verse passages in *Lebor Gabála*, as well as in passages dealing with Tara across the various versions of the *Dindsenchas*. James Henthorn Todd (ed. and trans.), *Leabhar Breathnach annso sis: The Irish Version of the Historia Britonum of Nennius* (Dublin, 1848), 244–5 (st. 45); Macalister, *LGÉ* iv, 58; v, 40, 56, 62, 98, 130; *LL* ll. 1032–41; Stokes, 'The Bodleian *Dinnsenchas*', 470; idem, 'The Rennes *Dindsenchas*', 277; E. J. Gwynn (ed. and trans.), *The Metrical Dindsenchas*, 5 vols (Dublin, 1903–35), i, 4, 6.

⁷⁰Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 203.

⁷¹Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 242–3. Her husband Érimón was also her great-uncle: Míl Espáine was the son of Bile son of Bregon. Íth, who was the first Milesian to see Ireland from Spain, was Bile's brother. When his father was killed by the then occupants of Ireland, the Túatha Dé Danann, it was Íth's son Lugaid, Tea's father, who mustered the first armed expedition to Ireland in order to avenge Íth. Érimón followed and brought Tea with him.

outlier to the tradition, she is variously described as being of (Theban) Greek, Egyptian, and later of Spanish origin.⁷²

That subsequent generations of scholars, more than likely working for Uí Néill rulers, expanded and exploited Cormac's etymology of Tara to bolster their patron's claims to the high-kingship, comes close to a demonstration of the Barthesian 'death of the author'.⁷³ As his name became inseparably attached to his glossary, Cormac's etymology of Tara retained *auctoritas* all the while betraying its *auctor*.⁷⁴

Etymology, the aetiology of words, affords us a fascinating insight into the development of linguistic thought in medieval Ireland. As the foregoing excursus into the history of Tara has sought to demonstrate, medieval etymology was likely never cultivated as a purely intellectual pursuit. Just as Isidore's *Etymologies* were the *culmen* of all learning, so Tara was the *culmen* of all Irish places. Etymology, then, was the prism through which classical and biblical antiquity – Thebes, Troy, and even Jerusalem – could be projected onto an Irish political landscape, and it therefore participated in the same discourses as did other more overtly historicist branches of learning. As medieval Irish etymology slowly divests itself of the grime of academic contempt, it imparts to us the lesson that any serious attempt to excavate what the Irish regarded as their 'antiquity' requires respect for, and faith in, the methods of their contemporary medieval reconstruction of it.

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⁷²For a discussion of this figure, her likely origin and later development, see Theuerkauf, 'The Theban origins of Tara'.

⁷³Roland Barthes, 'The death of the author', in Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London, 1977), 142–8.

⁷⁴The second stanza from the poem *Temair Breg baile na fían* by Cúán úa Lothcháin, poet to Máel Sechnaill II, king of Ireland, reads like a versification of the entry on *Temair* from the longer version of *Sanas Cormaic*: *Eisséirge mná meicc Míled / fossad n-aurard n-airdírech / cathir Chormaic húi Chuind chain / less n-aurdairec íarthair domain* 'Resurrection-stead of the wife of Míl's son, stable, lofty, level: citadel of Cormac, grandson of fair Conn, conspicuous court of the western world' (Maud Joynt (ed. and trans.), 'Echtra Mac Echdach Mugmedóin', *Ériu* 4 (1910), pp. 91–111, at 92–3).