

Review: *De Origine Scoticae Linguae*
(O'Mulconry's Glossary): *An Early Irish*
Linguistic Tract, with a Related Glossary,
Irsan (Moran)



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up many possibilities and raise new questions. The algorithm, of course, is still at its initial stage and the accuracy cannot be compared to that achieved by commercial programmes run by Google or Facebook, but the methodology is sound and given more time and data, it could develop into a powerful tool that can significantly advance our understanding of the evolution of the Irish language and its textual tradition. The authors have done a beautiful job by combining humanities with computer science, in an accessible and informative way.

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De Origine Scoticae Linguae (O'Mulconry's Glossary): An Early Irish Linguistic Tract, with a Related Glossary, Irsan [= Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis: Lexica Latina Medii Aevi VII]. Edited by Pádraic Moran. Brepols, Turnhout 2019. 592 pp. €230. ISBN 978-2-503-58179-8.

Ever since 1932 when Eoin Mac Neill argued in *Ériu* that this glossary, originally edited by Whitley Stokes in 1898 and generally known 'O' Mulconry's Glossary,' should have a pre-Norman date – he argued for two strata with the earliest coming from the seventh or eighth centuries – a new edition has been something to be desired. Now Moran, on the basis of more than a decade's work (his paper on Hebrew in this and other glossaries appeared in *CMCS* in 2010) has given us a splendid new edition, excellent introductory material, and a copious commentary. We are in his debt!

So what has Moran given us? First, a new edition of the text that should be known as *De Origine Scoticae Linguae*, which is text no. 890 in the *Clavis Litterarum Hibernensium*. Moran explains (p. 13) how, via Stokes, it came

to have the name of John O'Mulconry, who lived in the sixteenth century, because that was the name given it by Eugene O'Curry. He is aware that by now that name is so embedded in the literature it will not probably not be displaced by the early medieval name, and so he refers to it throughout using the siglum 'OM' and, more importantly, he has retained the numbering found in Stokes' edition so that older references to the glossary work conveniently with this edition. Second, it was known that there was a related glossary (from which much material was lost: it now begins with the word *irsan* – hence the name) which now contains 232 entries, and this too has been edited. This text, *Irsan*, is no. 891 in the *Clavis Litterarum Hibernensium*. He has provided a fulsome introduction these texts (pp. 11–124), which is *de facto* an introduction to this medieval genre, and a commentary on virtually every entry in the two glossaries (pp. 275–551) which not only examines the entries linguistically but points out how they fill in our wider historical picture of the world in which the glossary was created. In addition, he has provided an English translation of both glossaries. This is no mean feat given the complex moves between languages and sounds, but it makes these texts available to a much wider range of scholars than those with a working competence in Irish of a variety of dates.

The introduction – really an introductory handbook to glossaries – is well worth careful study for several reasons. First, it deliberately moves away from the view that the academic (or perhaps sole) value of glossaries is as a quarry for those studying the evolution of language. They appeared because the study of the origin of languages was, within their creators' historical vision, linked to the origins of nations. As they viewed their past, the scattering of the nations was coincident with the confusion of languages and words. These medieval collectors of words believed they knew of a time of 'a single tongue and set of words' (Genesis 11:1: *erat autem terra labii unius et sermonum eorundem*), and so in relating the words of the post-Babel situation to one another they were uncovering links between nations and so uncovering their own identity among the multiple descendants of Japhet (Genesis 10:2–5). In this they were following in the footsteps of Isidore of Seville – whose work they systematically plundered – but as Moran shows (p. 45), they were not just readers and adaptors of Isidore but imitators: they took up his agenda and then applied it to their own language. Second, Moran, following on from other scholars, sets out a clear pattern of stages which we need to assume if we are to explain how glossaries came to be formed. His own analysis of O'Mulconry then becomes a test study of this hypothesis and, on this evidence, we can speculate on the nature of the work of Irish scholars which must have been taking place in the sixth and early seventh centuries. Along the same lines, Moran looks in detail at how the actual compilers of these glossaries did their work, and the various reasons they gave for how they linked words, and so brings before us, I suspect for the first time, a detailed insight into one more group of scholars working between the seventh to the ninth centuries. Moran, rightly in my view, leans towards seeing the lack of a named author combined with the

layered nature of the work as pointing to these glossaries as being the work of groups, and so he uses ‘author’ as a reference to the point of composition rather than implying an single individual (p. 15). Moreover, while no one can work her/his way through a glossary without an occasional good laugh at some of the links made, Moran respects their endeavour and shows just how close they were in method to modern etymologists (pp. 35–43). Third, Moran has done his work as an editor, and a palaeographer, meticulously. This has allowed him to see that our four extant manuscripts represent two textual families – and he has nailed his colours to the mast by producing a stemma (p. 24). One family is represented by a single manuscript (TCD 1317, pp. 41–2 = Moran’s OM²), to which the second glossary, *Irsan*, is ‘closely’ related (pp. 12, 23, 51–3) – and this conclusion about the relationships marks a departure from the received position. The other family is represented by three manuscripts (one of which has no independent value as a witness); and when all are taken together we have an indication of just how popular were such glossaries. Lastly, it is fascinating to see how Moran’s far more extensive investigation has vindicated the arguments put forward by MacNeill in a 16-page article. The more detailed work allows Moran to date the first stratum of O’Mulconry to the seventh century and the second stratum to the ninth (p. 97).

Pádraic Moran is to be congratulated on an excellent piece of work. This new edition with its copious notes will, I hope, lead medievalists other than those working on history of the Irish language to discover the value of O’Mulconry. It is pleasing also to see that it is published in an international series which will bring it to the notice of a wider circle of scholars than Celticists: O’Mulconry’s compilers were engaged in their particular part of a Europe-wide endeavour. The one drawback is the price! At €230 it will rely on libraries to make it available to all but a handful of scholars; but it deserves a place in every library which makes a claim to support Celtic studies or medieval studies.

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The Case of the Abbot of Drimnagh: A Medieval Irish Story of Sex-Change. Tadhg Ó Siócháin. Cork Studies in Celtic Literatures, Cork, 2017. iii + 73 pp. ISBN 978-0-9955469-1-2. €12.00.

This volume, the second in the Cork Studies in Celtic Literatures series, is a semi-diplomatic edition, translation, and discussion of the text edited by Kuno Meyer in 1907 under the title ‘Story of the Abbot of Druimenaig who was changed into a Woman’. The story is about an abbot of Drimnagh who falls asleep on a hill, wakes up to discover he has become a woman, marries a man and has seven children over seven years, falls asleep on the same hill and wakes up to find he is in his original body, and finally returns to Drimnagh on