

A tract on Nemed's ancestry and descendants



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A TRACT ON NEMED'S ANCESTRY AND DESCENDANTS

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a brief tract preserved in two copies, both of them in the Great Book of Lecan, concerned with some of the legendary settlers of Ireland. The text may be earlier than *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, dating possibly from the tenth century, and its doctrines differ from those of that work in several respects. Particularly interesting is its account of the Túatha Dé, whom it associates with contemporary magical practices, and for whom it claims some kind of 'worship' by the practitioners of various arts.

THE BRIEF TEXT edited below exists in two copies, both of them in the Great Book of Lecan (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS 2 P 2 (535); hereafter Lec), and both in the hand of the scribe Giolla Íosa Mór Mac Fírbhisigh writing early in the fifteenth century.¹ The first of these, designated A below, appears in a collection of anecdotes and bits of lore: it is immediately preceded by a story concerning Colum Cille, and is followed by an account of Find mac Cumail and his *fian*.² The second, designated B, appears in the manuscript's second copy of *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (hereafter *LGE*), belonging to the version designated recension *c* by Mark Scowcroft;³ within that work, it is placed at the end of the section devoted to the settlement of Ireland by Nemed.⁴

¹I have already presented the text of one of these copies, with some variants from the other along with translation and discussion, in 'Lebor Gabála Éirenn "The book of invasions of Ireland"', in Michael Clarke, Erich Poppe and Isabelle Torrance (eds), *Classical Antiquity and Medieval Ireland: An Anthology of Medieval Irish Texts and Interpretations* (London, 2024), 335–44. The aims of that collection, and the space available, precluded a full edition; in undertaking to supply that desideratum here, I am mindful of Michael Clarke's anticipation that several of the 'interim editions' in the volume were 'likely to be superseded once a fuller study of the text has been made' (ibid., xxii). Various of the interpretations advanced below do in fact supersede positions taken in the 2024 collection. All translations are my own.

²Fol. 193va7–37; this was published as part of a 'Lecan Miscellany' by Toirdhealbhach Ó Raithbheartaigh (ed. and trans.), *Genealogical Tracts I* (Dublin, 1932), 197–8. In fact our tract does not form part of the genealogical miscellany proper, which occupies fols 177r–183r of the manuscript. Another autonomous text included in his 'Miscellany' by Ó Raithbheartaigh is an account of the Gaelic settlement taken from fol. 191va, a fragment of which is also preserved in the Book of Leinster; this was subsequently edited by Vernam Hull, 'The Milesian invasion of Ireland', *ZCP* 19 (1933), 155–60.

³For Scowcroft's most recent assessment of *LGE*'s textual history, see his chapter 'Mediaeval recensions of the *Lebor Gabála*', in John Carey (ed.), *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: Textual History and Pseudohistory*, ITS Subsidiary Series 20 (London, 2009), 1–20.

⁴Fol. 277ra19–rb14; published in R. A. S. Macalister (ed. and trans.), *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, ITS 34, 35, 39, 41, 44 (London, 1938–56), iii, 152–5. Cf. A. G. van Hamel, 'On *Lebor Gabála*', *ZCP* 10 (1915), 97–197, at 163, 166; and Ó Raithbheartaigh, *Genealogical Tracts I*, 198–201.

It appears that our text was first written as an independent composition, rather than originating as an addition to some version of *LGÉ* recension c, with copy A excerpted from the same source.⁵ This is evident from the age of its language (discussed below), from the extensive divergences between the two copies, and from indications (also discussed below) that some form of it may have influenced recension *b* of *LGÉ*. For Giolla Íosa to have added such a tract to his text of *LGÉ* would have been in character: as Tomás Ó Concheanainn has noted, he also included there extracts from a synchronistic treatise and from the *Bórama* saga, as well as material from the *Annals of Tigernach*;⁶ and he can indeed be seen to have made several further additions as well.⁷

As the tract is quite short, I provide diplomatic texts of both copies below; these are followed by a discussion of language and apparent date, as preliminaries to offering a critical text, together with translation, textual notes and further discussion.

DIPLOMATIC TEXTS⁸

A.

§1. Parrthalon & Neimead da mac Agnomain meic Stairde meic Thæt meic Beim meic Mair meic Aireacht meic Fortheacht meic Iathacht mic Iathfeth meic Noí.

§2. Sil mBeothaig meic Iardainis ⁊ sil Semians meic Stairns ⁊ sil Feargusa Lethdeirg is ead fil a Manaind.

§3. Is airi as-bearddas Fir Bolc imme-curdís fir Earann i mbolcaib do reic fri Grecu ar or ⁊ airged do suigiud ima chathrachaib ar nathracha ⁊ ar biastaib nemneachaib. Is de-sin a mbunad ⁊ no theigdis cusin ceandach-sin sair ⁊ inair ⁊ is do sil Nemid doib.

§4. At-bearad aroili Tuatha Dea do sil Beothacht meic Iardanainis doib .i. do muintir Nemid don lucht do-chuadar sair do chuindgid na hingine. Ar gabtha thair ⁊ do-ronsad feis i n-airthir co tancadar iarum cind rée moiri a n-ui ⁊ a n-iarmai. La meid a n-eolais dano do-lodar genóo⁹ gen eathró co n-eistedar for Sleib Conmaicni ⁊rl-.

§5. At-beraid aroile hi deamna grada examla Túatha Dé Danann ⁊ it iad-side do-deachadar do nim ar æn risin loinges do-deachadar la deamon do nim.

⁵Cf. my discussion of this question in Carey, 'Lebor Gabála Éirenn "The book of invasions of Ireland"', 341.

⁶Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'Lebor Gabála in the Book of Lecan', in Toby Barnard, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín and Katharine Simms (eds), 'A Miracle of Learning' – *Studies in Manuscripts and Irish Learning: Essays in Honour of William O'Sullivan* (Aldershot, 1998), 68–90, at 72–87; cf. Macalister, *LGÉ* ii, 241–2; iii, 97; v, 308–9; Pádraig Ó Riain (ed.), *Cath Almaine*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 25 (Dublin, 1978), 66–70; R. Mark Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála – Part I: The growth of the text', *Ériu* 38 (1987), 81–142, at 123, 128.

⁷I hope to make these additions the subject of a study in the near future.

⁸All unambiguous abbreviations have been silently expanded, including the horizontal suspension stroke when this signifies *n*.

⁹There appears to be a superscript *n* above this word, yielding an emended reading *gen nóo*.

Ar-fæmad curpa aerda umpu do millead 7 do aslach sil Adaim. Is e leas fris' tudchadar æs in athiarmorachta-sin a ndiaig demain 7 a muintiri.

§6. Tiagaid tra in lucht-sin highi. Thiagaid fo muri. Tiagaid hi conrechtaib. Tiagaid co tuaithcingtha. Tiagaid co haimidi. Is inand bunadus doib uile .i. muintir demain iad uili.

§7a. Ata fis 7 eacna leo co n-adradis 7 ro chachnadar brichta goband 7 druid 7 leigi 7 luamnachta 7 deogbairi 7 airidechta. Is uaidib atait adraithi i nEri. Finit.

B.

§1. Is examail fo-gabar in genelach-sa Parrthalon 7 Nemid .i. Da mac Agnoimean meic Sdairn meic Thæid meic Beoein meic Mair meic Airtthecht meic Iathacht meic Iathfeth meic Næi meic Laimiach.

§2. Sil mBeothaich meic Iardanainis. Sil Semianis meic Sdairnainis. Sil Fergusa Leithdreg meic Nemid is ead fil i Mainn Conain.

§3. Is airi ad-bearar Fir Bolc friu uair do-berdis uir leo a hErinn da reic re Grecaib ar or 7 ar airgead do thuigiudug na cathrach. Uair do badar naithreacha nemnecha nemi 7 piasta urchoidecha isna cathrachaib-sin la Grécu 7 is e-sin bunad firindi in adbair fa n-abar Fir Bolc riu 7 no theiddis cusin cendaigecht-sin soir 7 anoir cacha bliadna 7 Fir Domnann o domaintoirnem na huiiri isna bolcaib 7 Gaileoin ona tachailt. Ocus is do sil Nemid doib dib linaib.

§4. Ad-bearaid aroile Tuatha De Danann comad do sil Beothaich meic Iardanainis doib .i. do muintir Nemid don lucht do-chuadar soir do chuindgid na hingine. Ar gabus tair 7 do-ronsad feis mair thair co tangadar iarum cind re maire a n-ui 7 a n-iarmui. La med a n-eolais dano do-lodar can noithi cen eathra co ndeisidar for Sleib Conmaicne Rein i Condachtaib.

§5. At-beraid aroile comad deamna grada ecsamla Túatha Dé Danann 7 comad iad-siden do-deachadar do nim ar æn risin loinges do-deachaid Luitcifear cona deamnaib do nibh. Ar-fæmad chuirp ærda umpu do millead 7 d'aslach for sil nAdaim. Is he les fris' tucadar æs in iarmorachta-sin i ndiaid demain 7 a muintiri.

§6. Tiagaid thra in lucht-sin i sidaib. Ocus tiagaid fo muirib. Ocus tiagaid tiagaid¹⁰ i conrechtaib. Ocus tiagaid co hamaide. Ocus tiagait co tuaithcingtha. Is as-sin is bunadus doib uili .i. muintir deamain.

§7b. Ni ruca genelach na ndaine-sea for cula nocho ro-feasidar fir in domain olchena. Ocus do-ræbadar in sluag-sa uili la firindi mac Milead 7 la tairchedal chreidme Críst. Acht ata isin Libar de subternis As-beartadar aroile comad fileada do Grecaib Túatha Dé Danann co n-imad a cumachta co n-imthigdis for murib cen leasdrú i ndiaid inna deasorbiba in bithfáithi. Robdar tuatha rig 7 cenela. It e a n-anmanna na coimthech cona Tuathaib Dea .i. Dealbæth 7 Ealathan 7 Breas las' roferad cath Bresi .i. cath Muigi Turead fri Fomorchaib 7 Dagda 7 Lug Lamfota foden.

¹⁰Dittography due to moving between columns.

LANGUAGE AND DATE

When I have had occasion to refer to this tract in the past, I have considered copy B only, and have not looked closely at its language; on this basis, I have assumed that it was a work of the later Middle Ages.¹¹ Closer scrutiny, however, and comparison with the readings of A, indicate that it is earlier than this: I can see no reason why it cannot date from the tenth century, and feel that it would be difficult to date it later than the eleventh.

Scribal Features

As both A and B are the work of a single individual, there is a high likelihood that some shared readings reflect not the exemplar, but the scribal habits of Giolla Íosa himself. Before considering aspects of the language of the text that hold real potential as dating criteria, accordingly, it will be useful to eliminate those which probably belong to this category. Examples for comparison will be mainly taken from sections of the copy of *LGÉ* recension *c* in Lec that are adjacent to copy B of our text, juxtaposed where appropriate with instances drawn from the copy of the same recension in the Book of Ballymote (RIA MS 23 P 12 (536); hereafter BB). For convenience, I shall cite R. A. S. Macalister's edition; but all readings have been checked against the manuscripts.

- Insertion of the glide vowel *a* between *e* and a broad consonant. This is usual in both manuscripts of recension *c*; but there are cases where its absence in BB indicates that it has been supplied by Giolla Íosa in Lec: *nEbha* BB / *nEaba* Lec (*LGÉ* iii, 170, line 1316); *fechta* BB / *feachta* Lec (*LGÉ* iii, 172, line 1338); *nDela* BB / *nDeala* Lec (*LGÉ* iv, 28, §295 n. 9).
- Use of *d* rather than earlier *t* for final /d/. Again this is standard in both manuscripts, but there are cases in which the change is made in Lec only: *ro linsat* BB / *ro linsad* Lec (*LGÉ* iii, 148, §264 n. 18); *iat* BB / *iad* Lec (*LGÉ* iii, n. 45); *do-radsat* BB / *do-radsad* Lec (*LGÉ* iv, 34, §297 n. 1); *ro randsat* BB / *ro roindsead* Lec (*LGÉ* iv, 38, §300 n. 18–18).
- Lec consistently reads *bolc* where BB, and other manuscripts of *LGÉ*, read *bolg*.
- In §3, *airged* A, *airgead* B contrast with the earlier form *argat* (or dative singular *argut*). Palatalisation of the cluster is however standard in the later language,¹² and was in any case employed by Giolla Íosa: thus he gives Núadu's epithet as *Airceadlam*, *Airgedlam* (*LGÉ* iv, 176, §362 (twice); 180, §364) where the Book of Leinster copy of *LGÉ* has *Argatlám*, *Argatlam* (LL lines 1092, 1074, 1092).

¹¹John Carey, *A Single Ray of the Sun: Religious Speculation in Early Ireland*, 2nd ed. (Aberystwyth, 2015), 18–19; Carey, 'The old gods of Ireland in the later Middle Ages', in Katja Ritari and Alexandra Bergholm (eds), *Understanding Celtic Religion: Revisiting the Pagan Past*, New Approaches to Celtic Religion and Mythology 1 (Cardiff, 2015), 51–68, at 57–8.

¹²Thus *airgead* is given as a permissible variant of *argad* in IGT II.11.

- In §5, accusative singular *loinges* in both copies might seem to point to this word's treatment in the source as a masculine noun: a later usage. But this form seems likely to be due to Giolla Íosa, who has accusative and dative singular *loinges* throughout his text of *LGÉ*: accusative singular *loinges* (fol. 272ra44), *a* (= *i*) *morloinges* (fol. 279ra32), *don loinges* (fol. 280ra11), *for loinges* (fols 270rb3–5; 275vb33, 39–40; 277ra17; also *for loingeas*, fol. 284va23–4), *re loinges* (fol. 276vb38–40). Rendering an earlier text, Giolla Íosa has *for loinges* in his copy of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in the Yellow Book of Lecan, by contrast with *for longais* in *LU* 4861; similarly '*com longes* (vs '*com loingis*, *LU* 5489), *la loinges* (vs *la longais*, *LU* 6601), *co longes* (vs *co loingis*, *LU* 6629), *did longes* (vs *dit loingis*, *LU* 6644).¹³ I have therefore emended to *longais* in the edited text below.
- In §7a, I have emended A's *atait* to *at-taat*: the former is very frequent in manuscripts of the later Middle Ages, and freely substitutes for the older form (for instance, in the Old Irish material in legal texts).¹⁴ In his copy of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Giolla Íosa has *atait* where the Book of Leinster version reads *atát*.¹⁵

In normalising below, I have accordingly eliminated these features. Since, as will be demonstrated in detail, the text is evidently Middle Irish, I have also felt justified in restoring *argut* for *airged* A *airgead* B in §3, and *milliud* for *millead* AB in §5: *u*-colouring from the very end of the Middle Irish period can be found in comparable contexts in the *Annals of Inisfallen*.¹⁶ Further individual instances of normalisation are discussed in the textual notes.

Indications of Date

Several aspects of the tract's language indicate that it can scarcely have been composed after the Middle Irish period.

- There are no instances of univertation in the text. Deuterotonic forms are: *as-beirtis* §3, *imme-cuirtis* §3, *at-berat* §4 and §5, *do-chúatar* §4, *do-rónsat* §4, *do-lotar* §4, *do-dechatar* §5, *do-dechaid* §5, *ar-fóemat* §5, *at-tá* §7a, *at-taat* §7a. Although some very common verbs retain deuterotonic flexion into the Early Modern period, the process of univertation is already well established in *Saltair na Rann*, in the late tenth century.¹⁷

¹³John Strachan and J. G. O'Keeffe (eds), *The Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Yellow Book of Lecan with Variant Readings from the Lebor na hUidre* (Dublin, 1912), ll. 371–2, 1010, 2072, 2090, 2104.

¹⁴E.g. CIH 206.27, 213.27, 219.16, 350.26, 359.34, 495.7, 522.33, 794.25, 795.14, 1167.20, 1236.20, 1821.28, 1823.3, 1824.5, 1825.28, 1997.35, 2006.4.

¹⁵Strachan and O'Keeffe, *Táin*, l. 2605; LL 10351. This section of the text is missing from *LU*.

¹⁶Seán Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), *The Annals of Inisfallen (MS. Rawlinson B. 503)* (Dublin, 1951), s.aa. 1162 (*asin chuimriuch*), 1177 (*do inriud*, o *Lumniuch*), 1196 (*i cubriuch*), 1203 (*i lLumniuch*).

¹⁷Liam Breatnach, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', in Kim McCone et al. (eds), *Stair na Gaeilge: In Ómós do Pádraig Ó Fiannachta* (Maigh Nuad, 1994), 282–3. Readings from *Saltair na Rann* will be cited below using the line-numbers in Whitley Stokes (ed.), *Saltair na Rann* (Oxford, 1883).

- The old independent plural passive ending appears to be preserved in *gabtha* §4 (*gabus* B). The ending is found throughout the Middle Irish period,¹⁸ but independent instances grow increasingly rare over time.
- Almost all original strong preterites and perfects are inflected as in Old Irish. This is unremarkable in the case of forms of *téit* (*do-chúatar* §4), *do-tét* (*do-lotar* §4, *do-dechatar* §5, *do-dechaid* §5, *tudchatar* §5) and *tic* (*táncatar* §4). But it may be more significant in that of *ro chachnatar* §7a; and especially in that of *co ndeistetar* §4, retaining the relatively rare old 3 pl. form by contrast with the considerably more common *deisetar*, evidently formed by analogy with other Middle Irish 3 pl. preterites ending in *-setar*, *-satar*.¹⁹
- The old 3 pl. present indicative of the copula *it* continues to be used with plural subjects (§5). There was a tendency for *it* to be replaced by *is* in the course of the Middle Irish period; both forms (with *at* for *it*) are for instance present in the eleventh-century *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*.²⁰
- The relative form of the preverb *imm-* appears to be present in *imme-cuirtis* §3; its retention is according to Liam Breatnach very rare in Middle Irish.²¹ Here relative nasalisation appears to be due to the preceding *úair* ‘because’;²² Breatnach notes that relative nasalisation has almost entirely disappeared in the Middle Irish period.²³
- A short dative is present in *i nÉre* §7a – admittedly, this is one of the words with which the short dative was formulaically retained throughout Middle Irish.
- §7a gives the correct Old Irish *i*-stem genitive plural *leige* (MS *leigi*) for *liaig*; the only examples of the genitive plural offered by *eDIL* are Middle Irish *lega*, Early Modern Irish *leagha*, *legad*.²⁴ Another instance of the early form is genitive plural *lege* in *Cath Maige Tuired*.²⁵

¹⁸Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson (ed.), *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* (Dublin, 1990), p. 111.

¹⁹Breatnach, ‘An Mheán-Ghaeilge’, 301.

²⁰Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, lines 190, 796, 896, 1120–21. As Ruairí Ó hUiginn points out to me, however, *it/at* continued in use as a ‘stylistic archaism’ in the Early Modern period; he notes instances in the *Annals of the Four Masters* extending down into the seventeenth century, also in the ‘Gaelic Marco Polo’. Cf. Damian McManus, ‘An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach’, in McCone et al., *Stair na Gaeilge*, 335–445, at 416–17.

²¹Breatnach, ‘An Mheán-Ghaeilge’, 287.

²²Relative nasalisation is much better attested with the related conjunction *óre*, *úaire* (*GOI* 316); but Ruairí Ó hUiginn has also noted instances with (*ind*) *úair*: ‘The Old Irish nasalizing relative clause’, *Ériu* 37 (1986), 33–87, at 36. *Uair* is present only in B, but is necessary to explain relative *imme* in A.

²³‘An Mheán-Ghaeilge’, 287.

²⁴*eDIL* s.v. 1 *liaig* (<https://dil.ie/30125>; accessed 11 October 2024). *IGT* II.1138 appears to give an example of genitive plural *leagh*.

²⁵Elizabeth A. Gray (ed. and trans.), *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, ITS 52 (Naas, 1982), 54, l. 542.

- The adjective meaning 'great' has the form *már* rather than *mór* in both of its instances in the text (both in §4). Commonest in Old Irish, *már* becomes rare in the Middle Irish period: there are no instances in *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*;²⁶ and out of the approximately 250 examples in the passions and homilies in the *Leabhar Breac*, only two have the *á*-vocalism.²⁷
- In *ar bíastaib nemnechaib* §3, an attributive adjective following a dative plural noun preserves the dative plural ending. This is still the standard usage in *Saltair na Rann*, but tends to give place to the old accusative ending thereafter. Examples can still be found however in later Middle Irish, and indeed thereafter as well.²⁸
- The preposition *fri* has not yet been replaced by *re*, *ri* in §3; also *frisín* §5, *fris'* §5. On this basis I have felt justified in normalising *risín* AB to *frisín* in §5.
- *Airi* in the sense 'on account of it, therefore' (as in §3) is noted by *eDIL* s.v. 1 *ar* as a usage characteristic of the Old Irish glosses, being replaced by *air sin* in the later language.
- Nasalisation after an old neuter is present in *síl mBethaig* §2. For the most part, this usage characterises Old and Middle Irish; when the second element is a proper noun, however, such nasalisation lingered on as a fossil (notably in the names of places and population groups), and can even be found when the first element is in the genitive or dative singular.²⁹ It may however be significant that the neuter pronoun *ed* is used to refer to another of the instances of *síl* in the same paragraph.
- Ruairí Ó hUiginn has called my attention to two further features in §4 which, while not entirely unattested in the later language, are most characteristically early: use of the word *nó* 'ship',³⁰ and prepositionless dative *cinn* in an adverbial phrase referring to time.³¹

The conservative elements in the language of the tract are balanced by others, from several of which it is clear that it cannot be Old Irish.

²⁶In his glossary Jackson notes *deg-máru* on line 737; but the old vocalism was regularly preserved in the second elements in compounds.

²⁷Robert Atkinson (ed. and trans.), *The Passions and the Homilies from the Leabhar Breac*, Todd Lecture Series 2 (Dublin, 1887), ll. 306, 7531. I exclude from consideration instances of the formulaic phrase *céin máir* 'a long time' (ll. 919, 2565, 2998, 3422, 7046).

²⁸Breatnach, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', 252; Tomás Ó Máille, *The Language of the Annals of Ulster* (Manchester, 1910), 126.

²⁹Breatnach, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', 239; Ó Máille, *Language of the Annals of Ulster*, 129–31.

³⁰While *eDIL* s.v. 2 *nó*, *noe* notes examples even in later Middle Irish, most of its citations are from earlier sources.

³¹Thus *GOI* 537; and cf. the exact parallel to our phrase in *cinn rehe*, *Wb.* 4c11. This usage is however still found in the poetry of Flann Mainistrech (died 1056): *cind cethri ndíni* 'at the end of four generations' (*LL* line 23415).

- In *do-rónsat* §4, the augmented preterite passive stem of *do-gní* is used in the 3 pl. preterite active. This use of the preterite passive form of this verb for the active appears to have arisen in the tenth century: examples are found in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, *Bethu Phátraic* and *Saltair na Rann*.³²
- In *do-chúatar* §4, lenition follows the first preverb of a non-relative compound verb; similarly, lenition follows a non-relative verbal particle in *no théigtis* §3, *ro chachnatar* §7a. Kenneth Jackson held that ‘simple and prototonic active verbs after the preverbs *no*, *ro*, *ní* etc., and the tonic part of deuterotonics when non-relative (as well as when relative) must have been generally lenited in MI or at any rate in later MI’,³³ and there is already plenty of evidence of these developments in *Saltair na Rann*. Thus there are instances of *do-chúaid* at 2101, 3685, 3711, 3877, 3981, 4001, 4745, 4776, 5333, 5625, etc.; with *no*, note e.g. *no chinned* 4019, and instances with *ní* at 519, 842, 3123, 5485, 6139, 8181.³⁴
- The verb *as-beir* appears with a meaningless infixed pronoun in *at-berat* §§4 and 5 (but note *as-bearddas* A in §3, on the strength of which I have restored *as-beirtis* despite *ad-bearar* in B). The form with petrified infix is already well established in *Saltair na Rann*.³⁵
- In *na hingine* §4, the feminine genitive singular article *na* corresponds to earlier *inna*. Although the later form, *na* is already extensively attested in Old Irish: examples in the glosses include *Wb.* 12c11, 16a12, 18d14; *ML* 18d24, 19c9, 20a20.³⁶ For the possibility that there is in fact an instance of *inna* in §5, see the textual notes.
- Several augmented preterites appear to be used with the sense of the narrative preterite rather than the perfect: *do-chúatar* §4, *do-rónsat* §4, *ndeistetar* §4, *do-dechatar* §5, *do-dechaid* §5, *tudchatar* §5, *ro cachnatar* §7a. Again, this is a development that began within the Old Irish period, but became prevalent in Middle Irish.³⁷
- The old 3 pl. independent personal pronoun *é* is replaced by *íat* (§5). Examples of the latter are present not only in *Saltair na Rann* (5517, 8355) but also in *Bethu Phátraic*.³⁸

This is a diminutive text; and the indications of date that it affords are few, and fairly unspecific. Most of them would accommodate a time of composition anywhere in the Middle Irish period. There is however nothing in the tract’s

³²Examples in *DIL* s.v. *do-gní*, col. 285, ll. 60–3.

³³Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, 77.

³⁴Cf. Breatnach, ‘An Mheán-Ghaeilge’, 278–9.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 284–5. With *as-beir* in particular, note in *Saltair na Rann* the example *at-beir* 4169.

³⁶Cf. James Carney, ‘The dating of early Irish verse texts, 500–1100’, *Éigse* 19/2 (1983), 177–216, at 199–200.

³⁷Discussion in Kim McCone, *The Early Irish Verb* (Maynooth, 1987), 98–104.

³⁸Kathleen Mulchrone (ed. and trans.), *Bethu Phátraic: The Tripartite Life of Patrick* (Dublin, 1939), ll. 1053, 2649.

language incompatible with composition in the tenth century; and the use of *már* rather than *mór*, together with *imme-cuirtis* with relative preverb and relative nasalisation, *airi* in the sense 'therefore', and (if correctly restored) feminine genitive singular *inna*, appear to me to tip the balance in favour of an earlier rather than a later dating. Placing the text so early would also make sense in terms of its divergence from the doctrines of *LGÉ*, a work which clearly became widely influential soon after its first composition;³⁹ and of its agreements with the earlier *Scél Tuáin*, detailed below.

Copies A and B have different conclusions, which I designate **§7a** and **§7b** respectively. I take the view that **§7a** represents what was found in the exemplar, while **§7b** has been introduced as a substitute for this; see discussion in the textual notes below. I may however be mistaken on this point; and the language of **§7b** is in any case deserving of comment.

Although **§7b** exhibits several late features, these need not be earlier than the current scribe: thus the paragraph also contains the conjunction-phrase *comad*, which can be seen to have been added by B in **§4**, and again twice in **§5**. There are several conservative forms: *s*-subjunctive *rofeasidar*, strong preterite *do-ræbadar* and *as-beartadar*, the original independent 3 pl. pronoun *e*, the short form *Tuathaib Dea* without *Donann/Danann*, and the old vocalism in *-fota*. None of these features necessarily indicates a date earlier than, or even particularly early in, the Middle Irish period; *inna* as a form of the definite article, by contrast, does look quite early. There appears accordingly to be room for the conjecture that the mysterious *Liber de subternis* ('Book of the Subterranean Ones') may have been an Old Irish text.

EDITED TEXT

§1. Partholón 7 Nemed, dá mac Agnomain maic Stairn maic Thaít maic Beoéin maic Máir maic Airecht maic Íathacht maic Íathféth maic Noí.

§2. Síl mBethaig maic Íardanainis. Síl Sémiainis maic Stairnainis. Síl Fergusa Lethdeirg: is ed fil i Mainn Chonáin.

§3. Is airi as-beirtis Fir Bolg, úair imme-cuirtis úir leo a hÉrinn i mbolgaib, do reic fri Grécu ar ór 7 ar argut, do súidiugud ima cathracha ar nathrachaib 7 ar bíastaib nemnechaib. Is de-sin a mbunad 7 no théigtis cusin cennach-sin sair 7 anair 7 is do síl Nemid dóib.

§4. At-berat araili: Túatha Déa, do síl Bethaig maic Íardanainis dóib .i. do muintir Nemid, don lucht do-chúatar sair do chuindgid na hingine. Ar gabtha thair 7 do-rónsat feis máir co táncatar iarum cind rée máire a n-uí 7 a n-iarmuí. La méit a n-eólais dano do-lotar cen nó cen ethru co ndeistetar for Sléib Conmaicne Réin i Connachtaib.

§5. At-berat araili it demna gráda écsamla Túatha Dé Donann 7 it íat-side do-dechatar do nim ar óen frisin longais do-dechaid la demon do nim. Ar-fóemat

³⁹On this point see e.g. John Carey, 'Lebor Gabála and the legendary history of Ireland', in Helen Fulton (ed.), *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society* (Dublin, 2005), 32–48, at 45.

curpu áerda umpu do milliud 7 do aslach síl Ádaim. Is é les fris' tudchatar áes inna tíarmórachta-sin i ndiaid demain 7 a muintire.

§6. Tiagait trá in lucht-sin i síde. Tiagait fo muiri. Tiagait i conrechtaib. Tiagait co túaithchingtha. Tiagait co h-aimiti. Is inann bunadus dóib uile .i. muintir demain.

§7a. At-tá fis 7 ecna leo co n-adraitis 7 ro chachnatar brichtu gobann 7 druad 7 leige 7 lúamnachta 7 deogbaire 7 araidechta. Is úaidib at-taata adrada i nÉre. Finit.

TRANSLATION

§1. Partholón and Nemed, the two sons of Agnoman son of Starn son of Tat son of Beoén son of Már son of Airecht son of Íathacht son of Japhet son of Noah.

§2. The lineage of Bethach son of Íardanainis. The lineage of Sémiainis son of Stairnainis. The lineage of Fergus Lethderg: it is that which is in Mainn Conáin.

§3. This is why they used to be called 'Fir Bolg' ['Men of Bags']: because they used to carry soil with them from Ireland in bags, to sell to the Greeks for gold and silver, to be put around their cities against serpents and poisonous beasts. Hence is their origin; and they used to go to and from the east on that business, and they are of the lineage of Nemed.

§4. Some say: the Túatha Dé are of the lineage of Bethach son of Íardanainis; that is, of the people of Nemed, of the company who went eastward to ask for the maiden. For they were seized in the east, and they made a great wedding in the east, so that afterward, at the end of a long time, their grandsons and their great-grandsons came. So great was their knowledge that they came without ships, without vessels, so that they rested upon Slíab Conmaicne Réin in Connacht.

§5. Others say that the Túatha Dé Donann are demons of a special kind, and that it is they who came from heaven together with the exile which came from heaven with the Devil. They put on bodies of air to ruin and to tempt the lineage of Adam. That is the errand on which the folk of that following came, in the train of the Devil and his household.

§6. That company, then, go into the hollow hills. They go beneath the seas. They go in wolf-shapes. They go to those who turn against the sun. They go to witches. They all have the same origin: the household of the Devil.

§7a. They have knowledge and wisdom, so that they used to be worshipped. And they recited spells of blacksmiths and of druids and of physicians and of navigation and of cupbearers and of chariot-driving. It is from them that there is worship [of idols] in Ireland. *Finit.*

[§7b.⁴⁰ The genealogy of these folk cannot be carried back, nor can the men of the world know it. And this whole host perished on account of the righteousness of the sons of Míl, and on account of the foretelling of the faith of Christ. But [this] is in the *Liber de subternis* ['Book of the Subterranean Ones']: 'Others said that the Túatha Dé Danann⁴¹ were poets of the Greeks with the abundance of their power, so that they used to go upon the seas without vessels, after the They were tribes of kings, and races. These are the names of the companions among the Túatha Dé: Delbáeth and Elatha and Bres – by whom was fought the battle of Bres, i.e., the battle of Mag Tuired against the Fomóraig – and the Dagda, and Lug Lámfota himself']

TEXTUAL NOTES

§1. *Partholón 7 Nemed*: B here reads *Is examail fogabar in genelach-sa Parrthalon 7 Nemid .i.* 'This genealogy of Partholón and Nemed is found differently, i.e. ...'. This wording is evidently secondary, serving as a bridge between this passage and the conclusion of the Nemed section in *LGÉ* which immediately precedes it.

Partholón: Both A and B read *Parrthalon* here. The spelling with *-rr-* is characteristic of recension *c* of *LGÉ*, while that with *a* in the second syllable is specifically characteristic of Lec: thus, although Macalister's apparatus does not always make this clear, the name is almost exclusively so spelled in the *Partholón* section of that manuscript's copy of recension *c* (e.g. fol. 273ra 8, 13, 24, 27, 31, 34, 40, 41, 42 (twice), 48; with abbreviated *Parr-* at 43, 46 and instances with single *-r-* at 10, 12). Since the spelling *Partholón* appears to be that consistently found in twelfth-century manuscripts, I have adopted it here.⁴²

§2. *Síl mBethaig*: I have here normalised against both copies (*Síl mBeothaig* A, *Síl mBeothaich* B); similarly in §4 below. The spelling with *-eo-* is characteristic of Lec (also of BB), but more conservative versions of *LGÉ* have *-e-* in the first syllable: this is confirmed by internal rhyme between *Bethaig* and *srethaib*, *LGÉ* iv, 214, ll. 1807–8.

i Mainn Chonáin: I have tentatively followed B here, regarding A's *a Manaind* 'in Man' as a *lectio faciliior*. The name *Mainn* or *Moin(n) Conáin* is applied in *LGÉ* to a region in Britain settled by the descendants of Fergus Lethderg.⁴³ Otherwise, it seems to appear only in much later sources: *AFM* s.a. 960, and

⁴⁰§7b appears in B instead of §7a, the latter being in my view likelier to represent the original; see discussion below. For the text of the former, see the diplomatic edition of B above.

⁴¹The manuscript here has *.i.d.d.* I expand the final word using the later spelling *Danann*, as this is the form which the scribe uses when he writes the name in full in B §4 above.

⁴²Thus *LU* 1224, 1231; *LL* 392, 413; J. H. Bernard and Robert Atkinson (ed. and trans.), *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*, 2 vols (London, 1898), i, 159.

⁴³*LGÉ* iii, 126, 148, 156, 176. In the last of these instances, internal rhyme with *raind* indicates the original vocalism.

(citing *LGĒ*) Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh's *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach*.⁴⁴ I have supplied the lenition after dative singular *Mainn*; if its absence in B is not merely scribal, it could be an indication of lateness.

§3. *as-beirtis*: I am grateful to Ruairí Ó hUiginn for the persuasive suggestion that *as-bearddas* in A represents the 3 pl. imperfect passive, which I have accordingly restored; *ad-bearar ... friu* in B represents a reinterpretation of this form. I am not aware of other examples of *as-beir* being used to mean 'calls, names' without an associated preposition.

imme-cuirtis: I take B's *doberdis* to be a *lectio facilior*, substituting a more common verb and dropping the (nasalising) relative clause following *úair*.

úir leo a hÉrinn: I here adopt the reading of B; A reads *imme-curdís fir Earann*. A's *fir* looks like a misinterpretation of *úir*; and that these 'men' should then be taken to be 'the men of Ireland', even though this does not make much sense in context, is perhaps not surprising.

i mbolgaib: Only A has the phrase *i mbolcaib* here. I have included it for the sake of sense; by the same token, however, it may be preferable to regard it as a *lectio facilior*.

ima cathracha: As the wording of A and B is quite divergent here, I feel that this emendation of A's *chathrachaib* is justified. That *cathracha* stood in the exemplar may explain incorrect *nathracha* A, *naithreacha* B immediately thereafter; see the next note.

ar nathrachaib: I here emend against the testimony of both copies (*ar nathracha* A, *uair do badar naithreacha* B), as the dative plural ending of the adjective in the following clause (*ar biastaib nemneachaib* A) looks like an early reading.

a mbunad: B here reads *bunad firindi in adbair fa n-abar Fir Bolc riu* 'the true basis of the reason why they are called Fir Bolg'. That this additional wording is secondary is suggested by the form *riu*, contrasting with *friu* in B above; and this phrase seems to belong with the clearly secondary explanations of the names of the Fir Domnann and Gaileóin which follow in the same copy (see next note).

sair 7 anair: B here adds *cacha bliadna 7 Fir Domnann o domaintoirnem na huirí isna bolcaib 7 Gaileoin ona tachailt* 'every year; and the Fir Domnann [were so called] from lowering the earth deep into the bags, and the Gaileóin from digging it'. These etymologies appear to have been taken from *LGĒ* recension c, to which this copy of our tract has been added.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Nollaig Ó Muraile (ed. and trans.), *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach: The Great Book of Irish Genealogies*, 5 vols (Dublin, 2003–4), §§40.1, 1006.2.

⁴⁵*LGĒ* iv, 30; the passage is found in BB as well as in Lec. Giolla Íosa also includes these etymologies in a passage inserted earlier in his Nemed section: *LGĒ* iii, 146.

§4. *At-berat araili: Túatha Déa, do síl Bethaig maic Íardanainis dóib:* As Ruairí Ó hUiginn has pointed out to me, the syntax of this clause is unusual: even though there are other instances in which ‘after verbs of relating, thinking, seeing etc. the person or thing about which the information is given is put as direct object after the verb’, the object is in these cases followed by a relative verb in turn. I am grateful to the anonymous reader for pointing out that the apparent difficulty can be resolved by taking this as a case of direct statement, with *Túatha Déa a nominativus pendens*.

Ar gabtha: As Ruairí Ó hUiginn notes, this can also be understood as *argabtha*, 3 pl. preterite passive of *argaib* ‘seizes, captures’. The variant *gabus* in B is peculiar: perhaps the result of misinterpreting a suspension mark?

feis máir thair: I here follow B; *feis i n-airthir* in A evidently arose, as Ó Raithbheartaigh recognised, from misinterpretation of minims. In rendering *feis* as ‘wedding’ I am influenced by the reference earlier in this paragraph to an expedition in quest of a woman; but ‘feast, festival’ would also be possible translations.

§5. *Túatha Dé Donann:* To the best of my knowledge this expression is only found in sources from the eleventh century and later; earlier than that, the shorter form *Túatha Dé(a)* is employed.⁴⁶ *.t.d.d.* in both copies may accordingly be a later modification of original *Túatha Dé*, even as B’s *Tuatha De Danann* in §4 is evidently a modification of the reading preserved there by A as *Tuatha Dea*. It may also be significant that *Scél Tuáin*, which shares other wording with this section of our tract, uses the form *Túatha Dé*.⁴⁷ For *Donann* as a form older than *Danann*, see discussion in the article cited in n. 47.

inna tíarmórchta-sin: In the treatment of B in my article of 2015, I rendered *Is he les fris’ tucadar æs in iarmórchta-sin* as ‘This is where those who inquire about them go (?)’;⁴⁸ as the question mark indicates, however, I was not entirely happy with this conjecture, and in 2024 I proposed instead ‘that is the reason for which that rearguard went’.⁴⁹ The present treatment builds upon the latter interpretation. I have tentatively emended A’s *in ath-* to *inna t-*: not only is no noun *aithíarmóracht* attested (nor, indeed, a verb *ad-íarmórat* from which it would be derived), but *tíarmóracht* and the related *íarmóracht* are taken to be feminine *ā*-stems, rendering a genitive singular article *in* difficult to account for.⁵⁰

§6. *co túaithchingtha:* This is accusative plural of a compound *túaith-chingid*, which is not noted in *DIL*. The literal sense is ‘left-stepper’, i.e. one who walks

⁴⁶ See my remarks in ‘The name “Tuatha Dé Danann”’, *Éigse* 18/1 (1981), 291–4, at 292–3.

⁴⁷ John Carey (ed. and trans.), ‘Scél Tuáin meic Chairill’, *Ériu* 35 (1984), 93–111, at 102, ll. 57–8.

⁴⁸ Carey, ‘Old gods’, 57.

⁴⁹ Carey, ‘Lebor Gabála Érenn “The book of invasions of Ireland”’, 337.

⁵⁰ Thus genitive singular *iarmorechta*, *CIH* 692.35; discussion in *LELA* s.v. *tíarmóracht*. *Iarmhóracht/iarmhóireacht* is still regarded as feminine in the modern language.

túathbel or counterclockwise; thus Ó Raithbheartaigh translates the word as ‘folk who walk *sinistrorsus*’.⁵¹

§7a. *adrada*: The manuscript has *adraithi*. Ó Raithbheartaigh translated ‘From them are the druids [?]’; but this seems unsatisfactory, if only in light of the spelling *druad* just above. In my preliminary edition I rendered this as ‘adorations [of idols?]’; I am grateful to the anonymous reader for persuasive advocacy of this interpretation, in preference to an alternative reading which I had proposed in the initial version of the present article. The plural phrase *adrada ídal* is very common as a designation for idolatry in the Milan glosses;⁵² I have not encountered it elsewhere.

§7b. As noted above, I take **§7b** to be secondary, having been substituted for **§7a** in the course of the text’s transmission. I am inclined to this opinion by the following considerations:

- **§7b** contradicts what immediately precedes it, reverting to the position of **§4** as if this position had not been advanced previously.
- It duplicates the statement that the Túatha Dé could cross the sea without vessels, already made in **§4**.
- The form of the verb in the phrase *As-beartadar aroile* contrasts with that in *At-berat araili*, shared by both copies in **§§4** and **5**.
- Likewise, *It e* in **§7b** contrasts with *it íat-side* in **§5**.

Accordingly, it is a normalised version of **§7a** that is included in the edition above. The evidence is however not conclusive, as the text sample is so small; so the truth may be the reverse of what I have conjectured here.

Ni ruca genelach ... for cula: I understand this as an error for earlier *Ní rucar genelach* ‘The genealogy cannot be carried back’, meaning that inasmuch as the Túatha Dé are not human, their genealogy cannot be traced to Adam. Another possibility would be to take the verb as 2 sg. *Ní rucae* ‘You could not carry’. It seems to be this passage, or a similar one, that is alluded to in *LGÉ* recension *b*, in a section mentioned below in discussion of the name *Íardanainis* in **§2**: treating of the Túatha Dé, this speaks of ‘the difficulty of carrying their genealogy back’ (*doidhnge a ngeneailg do brith for culu*).⁵³

Another passage clearly related to the opening of this paragraph is found in the copy of *LGÉ* recension *a* in RIA MS D iii 1 (671) (continuing the text in the Book of Fermoy), and in recension *c*. In BB, this reads as follows:

*Is follus nach do deamhnaib na dho sidhaibh doibh. Ar rofeadar cach gur gabhsad cuirp dænna umpu ol [s]odin as firu 7 airimhthear in geinelach for culu 7 doræbadar la tiachtain creidme.*⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ó Raithbheartaigh, *Genealogical Tracts I*, 198. Macalister’s rendering ‘they go to the powerful’ (*LGÉ* iii, 155) is clearly mistaken.

⁵² *ML*. 46b26, 46b30, 47d10, 49a23, 50a11, 62d1, 63a10, 65d11, 65d12, 73d2–3, 84b9. The phrase glosses *superstitio* in 47d10, and *superstitiones* in 65d11 and 65d12.

⁵³ My translation. *LGÉ* iv, 164; the version of the same passage in recension *c* is given at 246.

⁵⁴ Fol. 19ra31–4; cf. *LGÉ* iv, 134 §318, 202 §371.

'It is evident that they do not belong to demons or to the *síde*. For everyone knows that they assumed human bodies, which is more true; and the genealogy is reckoned back, and they perished with the coming of the Faith.'

indiaid inna deasorbiba in bithfaithi: Macalister rendered this phrase as 'Besides being prophets in the world according to their true inheritance', mistranscribing *in bith* as *i mbith*;⁵⁵ Ó Raithbheartaigh did not venture a translation.⁵⁶ In my own earlier treatment of this text I offered 'according to the fair ease (?) of the eternal prophet', understanding *deasorbiba* as a garbling of earlier *deas-sorbi*;⁵⁷ but as this interpretation does not yield any recognisable sense, I think that it is best relinquished.

coimtech: I take this word to be a variant of *cáemthach* 'friend, companion', and/or of its synonym *comthach*; this seems less incongruous than 'strangers', the translation which I proposed in 2024.⁵⁸ As evidence of a form *caimthech*, *eDIL* compares *cneascáimtigh*, rendered 'naked bedfellows', in *Caithréim Thoir-dhealbhaigh*,⁵⁹ while the homonym *cáemthach* 'friendship, companionship' appears twice as *cæimtech* in *Betha Féchin Fabair*.⁶⁰

cona: Ó Raithbheartaigh translates 'with the (?)', but this should be *cosna(ib)*. Equally tentatively, I take *cona* to be for earlier *ocna(ib)*.

.i. *cath Muigi Turead fri Fomorchaib*: Two relatively late features are present here: use of the dative with *fri*, and velar flexion of *Fomóir* (< *Fomoir*).⁶¹ As the phrase is evidently a gloss, however, it need not constitute evidence for the age of the rest of the passage.

CONTENT AND BACKGROUND

The text begins by identifying Partholón and Nemed as sons of Agnoman, and tracing their ancestry back to Noah (§1). The doctrine that Partholón and Nemed were brothers differs from the position of *LGÉ*, and other legendary-historical sources, according to which Partholón was the son of Sera son of Srú, only Nemed being son of Agnoman.⁶² In the oldest version of the earlier (possibly ninth-century) *Scél Tuáin maic Cairill*, however, they are portrayed as brothers, and sons of Agnoman son of Starn.⁶³ Alternatively, the statement

⁵⁵ *LGÉ* iii, 154–5.

⁵⁶ *Genealogical Tracts I*, 200.

⁵⁷ Carey, 'Lebor Gabála Éirenn "The book of invasions of Ireland"', 339, 344.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁵⁹ Standish Hayes O'Grady (ed. and trans.), *Caithréim Thoir-dhealbhaigh: The Triumphs of Turlough*, vol. I: *Text*, ITS 26 (London, 1929), 99.

⁶⁰ Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'Life of S. Féchin of Fore', *RC* 12 (1891), 318–53, at 322.

⁶¹ On the latter development, see my 'The nature of the Fomoiri: The dark other in the medieval Irish imagination', in Emily Lyle (ed.), *Myth and History in Celtic and Scandinavian Traditions* (Amsterdam, 2021), 25–48, at 26 n. 2.

⁶² Nemed is however said to have been Partholón's great-grand-nephew in *LGÉ* recension *b* (iii, 126–8).

⁶³ Carey, 'Scél Tuáin', 101, ll. 21, 31. This is the reading of the copy in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 610, which preserves the most conservative text; the other manuscripts call

in our text could be interpreted as reflecting a misinterpretation of *Lebor Bretnach*, the Middle Irish adaptation of the Cambro-Latin *Historia Brittonum* (early ninth century). There, the Latin *Nimeth filius quidam Agnominis* ‘Nimeth, a certain son of Agnomen’ is rendered *Nemead ... mac saidein araile Atnamain*, where the Irish could also be taken to mean ‘Nemed ... who was another son of Agnoman’ – implying that Partholón, named just previously, was a son of Agnoman as well.⁶⁴ I am however inclined to regard this explanation as less plausible, both because the linguistic indications reviewed above suggest a date rather earlier than that assigned to *Lebor Bretnach* (eleventh century) and, perhaps more tellingly, because there is a further indication of *Scél Tuáin*’s influence at §5 (discussed below).

The pedigree also differs sharply from that which is given for either Partholón or Nemed elsewhere. It can however be compared with pedigrees for the Gaels found in several Irish sources (early genealogical poems, *Auraicept na nÉces*, *Scéla Mošauluim*, *LGÉ*), all of which are indebted to a pedigree for the European ancestor Alanus in *Historia Brittonum*. I have tabulated this evidence in detail elsewhere;⁶⁵ here the comparanda can be concisely noted: *Thait* (cf. *Thoi*, *Toe*, *Toi*, *Thaite*, *Tait*), *Beoéin* (cf. *Boib*, *Boidb*, *Bamb*, *Boinb*, *Buith*, *Boomain*), *Máir* (cf. *Mair*, *Móir*, *Maír*), *Airecht* (cf. *Aurthach*, *Aurthecht*, *Aurtacht*, *Athiecht*, *Aurtecht*, *Arthecht*), *Íathacht* (cf. *Ethach*, *Ethecht*, *Ethiecht*, *Aithecht*).

§2 specifies the three descendants of Nemed who were ancestors of peoples. In *LGÉ*, these are Bethach son of Íarbonél Fáith, ancestor of the Túatha Dé Donann; Sémiún, ancestor of the Fir Bolg; and Fergus Lethderg, ancestor of the Britons.⁶⁶ Even within *LGÉ* there is some variation in these names, with *Íardan(él)* sometimes appearing for *Íarbonél*,⁶⁷ and *Semul* for *Sémiún*.⁶⁸ But *Íardanainis*, *Sémiainis* and *Stairnainis* (evidently for *Starn*) look like elaborated derivatives of the more familiar forms; Macalister designated them ‘childish mystifications’.⁶⁹ In view of our tract’s closeness to the doctrines of *Scél Tuáin* in other respects, it is noteworthy that Sémiún son of *Stairnainis* in the former clearly corresponds to Sémiún son of *Stairai* (v.ll. *Stairn*, *Stariath*) in the latter; whereas *LGÉ* makes Sémiún/Semul the son of Íarbonél/Íardan(él),⁷⁰ or of Érglan

Partholón the son of Sera (ll. 14, 21). (Where my edition has *Agnomain meic Starbuí, do Grécaib*, this should be emended to *Agnomain maic Sta[i]r[n], buí do Grécaib*.)

⁶⁴A. G. van Hamel (ed.), *Lebor Bretnach: The Irish Version of the Historia Brittonum Ascribed to Nennius* (Dublin, [1932]), 21.

⁶⁵John Carey, ‘The ancestry of Féníus Farsaid’, *Celtica* 21 (1990), 104–12, in particular the table between 106 and 107.

⁶⁶Thus recension *a*, *LGÉ* iii, 124–6 §§244–5; iv, 106 §304. Cf. recensions *b* and *c*, *ibid.*, iii, 144 §§258–9, 150 §265; iv, 138 §320, 166 §356. Earlier poems reflect the same doctrine, and were to at least some extent *LGÉ*’s source here: *ibid.*, iii, 176–8; iv, 214.

⁶⁷*LGÉ* iii, 174, l. 1345; 180, l. 1414; iv, 248, l. 2137; v, 488, l. 3875.

⁶⁸*LGÉ* iii, 124 §242; 174, l. 1345; 181 n. 4.

⁶⁹*LGÉ* iii, 198.

⁷⁰*LGÉ* iii, 124 §242, 144 §259. There is also a reference to ‘the descendants of Símon mac Stairn’ (*cloind Simoin m-c Sdairn*) in a list of battles fought by Túathal Techtmar, in a section of recension *c* surviving only in Lec: *LGÉ* v, 318 §593d.

mac Beoáin maic Stairn.⁷¹ In most manuscripts of *Scél Tuáin* the ancestry of the Túatha Dé also involves variant names: they descend from *Beothecht* (v.ll. *Beothach*, *Beoth-*) *mac Iordanen* (v.ll. *Iarboneoil*, *Iordanel*, *Iardonel Fatha*).

Íardanainis recurs at §4 below. Bethach's father is identified as *Íardainis* in a passage in *LGÉ* recension *b*, and also in an associated quatrain: as will be further discussed below, aspects of this passage's wording, as well as its subject (the question whether the Túatha Dé were humans or demons), suggest that it may have been influenced by the forerunner of copy B of our tract.⁷²

The Fir Bolg are the subject of §3, which describes how they travelled to and from Greece, selling Irish soil to the inhabitants as a way of protecting their cities from poisonous creatures. The name *Fir Bolg* (interpreted as 'Men of Bags') is explained as referring to the bags in which the soil was transported. This differs entirely from the account in *LGÉ*, in which they are said to have fled from Ireland to Greece where they were enslaved, and made to haul the earth there in bags; when at last they escaped back to Ireland, they made these bags into the ships in which they travelled.⁷³ A passage attributed to the putatively eighth-century Book of Druimm Snechtai also speaks of the Fir Bolg as fleeing, but in ships stolen from the king of the Greeks.⁷⁴

The idea, implicit in our text, that Irish soil is effective against poison derives from the well-known absence of snakes from Ireland; thus Isidore of Seville already stated that Ireland has no snakes (also no bees, and few birds: *Etymologiae* XIV.vi.6). This statement is repeated in the Latin preface to recension *m* of *LGÉ*, where however it is preceded by the more sweeping assertion that 'the learned attest that Ireland has no snake or lion or frog or harmful mouse or dragon or scorpion or any harmful animal, except the wolf'.⁷⁵ The earliest surviving attestation of the doctrine that this circumstance is due to a property inherent in Ireland itself seems to be a statement of Bede, writing in the eighth century, according to whom the smell of Irish air is fatal to snakes; while anything brought from Ireland, including scrapings from the leaves of Irish books, is effective against their poison (*Historia ecclesiastica* I.1). Ireland's freedom from snakes is first attributed to a blessing by a holy individual in later sources: this is Moses, in some manuscripts of *LGÉ* recension *b* and in recension *c*;⁷⁶ and more famously Saint Patrick, the earliest witnesses to the latter position being various non-Irish writings of the twelfth century.⁷⁷

⁷¹ *LGÉ* iv, 8 §280, 30–32 §296, 42 §303.

⁷² *LGÉ* iv, 164 §353; 246, line 2112.

⁷³ *LGÉ* iii, 124 §244; 144–6 §§259, 262; iv, 14 §286.

⁷⁴ *LGÉ* iii, 124 §244, 144 §259.

⁷⁵ My translation. *LGÉ* i, 164 §101.

⁷⁶ *LGÉ* ii, 34 §119, 58–60 §144.

⁷⁷ These are the *Vita Cottoniana Patricii*, Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hiberniae* (although Gerald doubts the story, attributing the absence of snakes to the nature of the land), and Jocelin of Furness's *Vita Patricii*: editions by Ludwig Bieler (ed.), 'Anecdota Patriciana: Fragments of a Life of St. Patrick from MSS. Cotton Vitellius E. vii and Rawlinson B 479', in Sylvester O'Brien (ed.), *Measgra i gCuimhne Mhichil Uí Chléirigh* (Dublin, 1944), 220–37, at 228–9; John J. O'Meara (ed.), 'Giraldus Cambrensis in *Topographia Hibernie*: Text of the first recension', *PRIA* 52C (1948–50), 113–78, at 130–1; and John Colgan (ed.), *Triadis thaumaturgae ... acta* (Louvain, 1647), 64–116, at 103. The evidence is usefully summarised by Pádraig A. Breatnach, 'Medieval traditions from

In its opening statement that the Túatha Dé descend from Bethach son of 'Íardanainis' (elsewhere called Íarbonél/Íardan(él) Fáith; see discussion of §2 above), §4 conforms to the doctrine of *LGÉ*. The concluding assertion that they came to Ireland without ships, and alighted upon the mountain of Slíab Conmaicne Réin, is similarly found in *LGÉ* recension *a*, according to which they travelled 'in dark clouds';⁷⁸ this is denied by recension *b*, which has them coming by ship, while recension *c* attempts to harmonise the two positions.⁷⁹ Recension *a*'s doctrine can be paralleled in one of the poems in the tenth-century *De Suidiugud Tellaig Themra*, which speaks of the Túath Dé coming to Ireland 'in masses of dark mists' (*i coepaib ciach ciar*);⁸⁰ while the poem *Ériu co n-úaille co n-idnaib*, which has them descend from Bethach son of Íarbonél and come to Slíab Conmaicne in Connacht in a cloud, may be of roughly the same date.⁸¹

There is however nothing in any other source corresponding to §4's account of the Túatha Dé having gone into the east on a wooing expedition, and then being 'seized' so that they remained there for several generations. Both this doctrine and the account of the Fir Bolg in §3 differ from the rest of the tradition in portraying the departure of these peoples from Ireland in an auspicious light, by contrast with the harrowing narrative in *LGÉ* of the servitude, revolt, decimation and exodus of the various descendants of Nemed.

Having presented in §4 the position that the Túatha Dé were descendants of Nemed, and hence human, the text proceeds in §5 to give the alternative view that they were demons 'of a special kind' (*gráda écsamla*), who 'came from heaven together with the exile which came from heaven with the Devil' (*do-dechatar do nim ar óen frisin loinges do-dechaid la demon do nim*). This latter clause is particularly close to the statement of *Scél Tuáin* that the learned are not sure of the origin of the *Túatha Dé ocus Andé*, but think it likely that they belong 'to the exile which came from heaven' (*din longis do-deochaid de nim*).⁸²

That demons can assume bodies of air was a common belief in the Middle Ages, inherited from such authorities as Augustine and Isidore.⁸³ In Ireland, this doctrine appears already in the seventh-century *Liber de ordine creaturarum*.⁸⁴ The colophon to the tale *Serglige Con Culainn*, identifying the people of the *síde* as demons, states that their power was so great that 'they used to battle against

west Munster', *Studia Hibernica* 17/18 (1977–8), 58–70, at 60–1.

⁷⁸*LGÉ* iv, 108 §306.

⁷⁹*LGÉ* iv, 140–42 §322, 146 §327, 168–70 §358.

⁸⁰R. I. Best (ed. and trans.), 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara', *Ériu* 4/2 (1910), 121–72, at 132. The poem is also preserved in all three recensions of *LGÉ*; for the relevant quatrain, see ii, 212, ll. 727–30.

⁸¹*LGÉ* iv, 212–14, ll. 1796–813. Attribution in some of the manuscripts to 'the *fili Eochaid*' points to the authorship of Eochaid ua Flainn, for whose identity with Eochaid ua Flannucáin (died 1004) see most recently Mícheál Ó Mainnín, 'Eochaid Ua Flainn agus Eochaid Ua Flannucáin: súil úr ar an bhfianaise', *Léann* 2 (2009), 75–104.

⁸²Carey, 'Scél Tuáin', 102, l. 58.

⁸³Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* VIII.16, XV.23; Isidore of Seville, *De differentiis* II.xiv.42.

⁸⁴Marina Smyth (ed. and trans.), *The Liber de ordine creaturarum*, Brepols Library of Christian Sources 5 (Turnhout, 2023), 78.

humans corporeally (*co corptha*);⁸⁵ and in *Acallam na Senórach* a woman of the Túatha Dé Donann states: 'I am not a beguiling woman of the *síde* ... I am wearing my own body (*mo chorp féin umum*)'.⁸⁶ That supernatural bodies might be of air is suggested by the late medieval tale *Eachtra Thaidhg mheic Céin*: here it is said of the Otherworld woman who lured the mortal prince Connlae to join her in Mag Mell – together, indeed, with Connlae himself – that 'the tips of the lovely green grass scarcely bent beneath the delicate soft white feet of that pair'.⁸⁷

§6 continues to speak of the Túatha Dé as demons. The statement that they go into the *síde* or hollow hills invokes of course one of their primary associations; and they are linked with the sea as early as the tale *Echtrae Chonnlaí*, in which the Otherworld of Mag Mell is reached by crossing the sea, and its inhabitants are called 'people of Tethra', a name associated with the sea.⁸⁸ The identification of them as werewolves is somewhat more unusual, although *síd*-women who can turn themselves into wolves appear in *Acallam na Senórach*,⁸⁹ a wolf is one of the creatures whose shape the Morrígain assumes in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*,⁹⁰ and many further tales associate the Túatha Dé with transformations of various kinds.⁹¹

Most intriguing are the statements that the Túatha Dé go to 'those who turn against the sun' (*túaitchgingtha*) and to 'witches' (*h-amaiti*): here they are clearly associated with condemned forms of magic. As observed in the textual notes above, the noun *túaitchgingid*, apparently a *hapax legomenon*, must designate one who walks counter-clockwise or *túaitibel*, a direction with strong negative connotations in Irish tradition. For an association between the people of the *síde*, and black magic involving the counterclockwise turn, see the entry for *túaitheinte* 'left-pagans' (i.e. fairies) in *O'Davoren's Glossary*, which speaks of 'protection against the left-pagans, that is, against the pagans who turn counterclockwise, the people of the *síde*' (*imcomett ar thuathaginntib .i. arna gindtib impadhus tuaithbil, na sidhaighe*).⁹² The reference is to a passage in the legal tract *Conslechteae*, which speaks of a lapdog being used to protect a pregnant woman from *túaitheinti*.⁹³

⁸⁵Myles Dillon (ed.), *Serglige Con Culainn*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 14 (Dublin, 1953), ll. 844–9.

⁸⁶Whitley Stokes (ed.), *Acallamh na Senórach*, *Irische Texte* 4/1 (Leipzig, 1900), ll. 6380–1.

⁸⁷S. H. O'Grady (ed. and trans.), *Silva Gadelica*, 2 vols (London, 1892), i, 350.

⁸⁸For the text, see Kim McCone (ed. and trans.), *Echtrae Chonnlaí and the Beginnings of Vernacular Narrative Writing in Ireland*, Maynooth Medieval Irish Texts 1 (Maynooth, 2000), 121–3; for the marine associations of the name *Tethra* see *ibid.*, 84.

⁸⁹Stokes, *Acallamh*, ll. 7674–725.

⁹⁰Cecile O'Rahilly (ed. and trans.), *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I* (Dublin, 1976), ll. 1856–70, 1982–2005; cf. Johan Corthals (ed. and trans.), *Táin Bó Regamna: Eine Vorerzählung zur Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Veröffentlichungen der keltischen Kommission 5 (Vienna, 1987), 55–7.

⁹¹I discuss this topic in some detail in a forthcoming essay 'Transformation, concealment, and the people of the hills'; I have undertaken to survey the evidence for Irish lycanthropy in my article 'Werewolves in medieval Ireland', *CMCS* 44 (Winter 2002), 37–72.

⁹²*CIH* 1531.3–4.

⁹³*CIH* 806.34–807.6; translation and discussion by Liam Breatnach, 'On the glossing of early Irish law-texts, fragmentary texts, and some aspects of the laws relating to dogs', in Anders Ahlqvist et al. (eds), *Celtica Helsingiensia*, *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum* 107 (Helsinki,

Ammaitech or ‘witchcraft’, the art of the *ammait* or ‘witch’, is included in the list of occult skills learned by the descendants of Bethach at the opening of *Cath Maige Tuired*: the tale has taken this list from a copy of recension *a* of *LGÉ*, where however *ammaitech* does not appear.⁹⁴ Later in the same tale, the Dagda speaks of *amaidichtai* (i.e. *ammaitechta* ‘witchcrafts’?) as one of the forms of assault which he will direct against the enemy.⁹⁵ More reminiscent of our own text is the brief Old Irish tale *De Šil Chonairi Móir*, which says of the daughter of a woman brought out of the *síd* that ‘she used to visit *síde*, and seas, and (it was) through witchcraft’ (*foríntegeth síde 7 mure 7 la aimtige*).⁹⁶ Also relevant may be the Middle Irish glosses referring to the type of woman called *bé foimrimme* ‘wandering (?) woman’ in the law tract *Bretha Crólige*: she is described as ‘the feeble-minded woman; i.e., she goes with the *síd*-folk ... they do not come to her except every second time; and when they do come it is not so as to be spoken of (?) that they come’.⁹⁷

§7a states that the Túatha Dé sang or chanted ‘spells’ (*brichta*) pertaining to a series of professions: ‘spells of blacksmiths and of druids and of physicians and of navigation and of cupbearers and of chariot-driving’. Comparable lists are found elsewhere in the literature: the prayer *Fáeth Fiada* or ‘St Patrick’s Breastplate’ asks for protection ‘against spells of women and blacksmiths and druids’ (*fri brichtu ban 7 gobann 7 druad*);⁹⁸ and the Book of Leinster’s copy of *LGÉ* contains the statement ‘Their were the spells of druids and charioteers and trappers and cupbearers’ (*Is accu batar brechta druad 7 arad 7 cuthchaire 7 deogbaire*).⁹⁹ Magic (here referred to as *feiss*, evidently for *fis* ‘knowledge’) is again associated with various groups and professions in a prayer attributed to Colum Cille:

*Feis nEirenn fós fess nAlban feiss suadh feiss druad feiss cerda feiss
cuthchoire feiss corrguine feiss sēdhguine feiss ceich duine bí do-ní
olc 7 amhnus fírm chorp 7 mh’anmuin ...*¹⁰⁰

1996), 11–20, at 16, where *túaitheintí* is rendered ‘fairies’.

⁹⁴Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 24; *LGÉ* iv, 106 §304. On this interpolation, see Gerard Murphy, ‘Notes on *Cath Maige Tuired*’, *Éigse* 7/3 (1954), 191–8, at 195; John Carey, ‘Myth and mythography in *Cath Maige Tuired*’, *Studia Celtica* 24/25 (1989–90), 53–69, at 53–4.

⁹⁵Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 54.

⁹⁶Lucius Gwynn (ed. and trans.), ‘De Šil Chonairi Móir’, *Ériu* 6 (1912), 130–43, at 133.

⁹⁷D. A. Binchy (ed. and trans.), ‘Bretha Crólige’, *Ériu* 12 (1934–8), 1–77, at 26; my interpretation differs from Binchy’s here. The basis for an association of the *bé foimrimme* with the *ammait* would be considerably enhanced if T. F. O’Rahilly was correct in deriving the latter word from **n-mentí*/**n-mntí* ‘one who is witless’: ‘Notes, mainly etymological’, *Ériu* 13 (1942), 144–219, at 151. But see Joseph Vendryes, *LEIA* s.v. *ammait*, who (citing earlier scholarship) derives the word from **amma*-, originally a children’s term for an older female relative.

⁹⁸*Thes* ii, 357.

⁹⁹*LL* II. 1059–60. A version of the same sentence, omitting the cupbearers, is found in other manuscripts of recension *a*; discussion in John Carey (ed. and trans.), ‘A *Tuath Dé* Miscellany’, *BBCS* 39 (1992), 24–45, at 39.

¹⁰⁰Kuno Meyer (ed.), ‘Mitteilungen aus irischen Handschriften’, *ZCP* 6 (1908), 257–72, at 258; cf. John Carey, *Magic, Metallurgy and Imagination in Medieval Ireland: Three Studies* (Aberystwyth, 2019), 47–8. Aspects of the wording here recall the prayer *Fáeth Fiada*, in which the appeal for protection against the spells of women and smiths and druids, cited above, is followed by a request to be guarded ‘against every knowledge (*fiss*) which ruins the body and soul of a person’.

'The knowledge of Ireland, moreover, the knowledge of Scotland, the knowledge of sages, the knowledge of druids, the knowledge of craftsmen, the knowledge of trappers, the knowledge of sorcerers, the knowledge of deer-hunters, the knowledge of every living person who wreaks evil and harm against my body and my soul ...'

The association of the Túatha Dé with various skills is reflected throughout the medieval literature;¹⁰¹ thus recensions *b* and *c* of *LGÉ* state that 'they learned knowledge and poetry; for every mystery of skill and every exactitude of medicine and every cleverness of art has its origin from the Túatha Dé Donann'.¹⁰²

This close association of the Túatha Dé with a variety of professions suggests that they may have remained important to practitioners of those professions, perhaps indeed as the objects of some kind of belief – even as our text states that they were 'worshipped' by the classes of professionals who are enumerated. We may have contemporary evidence of such a role in the references to Goibniu, the blacksmith of the Túatha Dé, and to Dían Cécht, their chief physician, in two ninth-century charms.¹⁰³ It is striking that our text states that there 'is worship' on account of the Túatha Dé, using the present tense, as well as that they 'used to be worshipped'; also cast in the present tense are the statement that they assume bodies of air in §5, and the description of their activities in §6. This curious mixture of tenses is also found in the entry on Brigit in *Sanas Cormaic*, where her status as a goddess is spoken of in both the imperfect and the present tenses; it may be relevant that Brigit's divinity is also here linked with her association with various arts.¹⁰⁴

CONCLUSION

Although the evidence is far from conclusive, linguistic indications point to a date for our tract in the early Middle Irish period, quite possibly in the tenth century. It may in other words constitute a treatment of Irish legendary history which antedates *LGÉ*; and as we have seen its testimony differs from that of *LGÉ* in several ways. In a variety of respects it can be best compared with works that appear to date from the ninth century: *Scél Tuáin* (Partholón and Nemed as brothers §1, ancestry of Sémiainis/Sémión §2, parallelism of wording in *do nim ar óen frisin loinges do-dechaid* §5 vs. *din longis do-deochaid de nim*) and *Sanas Cormaic* (mixture of the present and imperfect tenses in references to devotion to the Túatha Dé §7a); while some of the wording in

¹⁰¹For some discussion of this point, see my article 'The waters of vision and the gods of skill', *Alexandria* 1 (1991), 163–85, especially at 174–8.

¹⁰²*LGÉ* iv, 164 §353, 200–2 §371. As an example of the text in recension *b*, RIA MS D iv 3 (1224), fol. 17r, ll. 6–9 reads: *ro fogluimsett eolussa 7 filidichta ar cach diamair dana 7 cech leri legis 7 cach amuinsi elathon docussin is do Thua[th] De Donond ata a bunad.*

¹⁰³I discuss these in *Magic, Metallurgy and Imagination*, 4–9.

¹⁰⁴Kuno Meyer, *Sanas Cormaic: An Old-Irish Glossary, Anecdota* 4, 15 §150. Imperfect: *bandēa no adratis filid ... dea Brigit uocabatur*. Present: *eum [sic] deam uocant poetarum*.

§6 recalls the potentially even earlier *De Síil Chonairi Móir*. Other doctrines are wholly without parallel: that the Fir Bolg sold Irish soil to the Greeks (§3), and that the Túatha Dé went on a wooing expedition into the east, where they were detained for generations (§4). Our tract appears to give us a fascinating glimpse of Irish legendary history at a relatively early stage in its development.

At least as interesting is what §§5–7a have to tell us about the Túatha Dé regarded as supernatural beings: the patristic doctrine that they are spirits who assume bodies of air (§5), their association with sinister magic (§6), and their further association with the spells or *brichta* linked with various professions (§7a). Especially noteworthy is what looks like a reference to their worship (*adrada*) by those who followed these professions: this, and the repeated use of the present tense in this section of the tract, raise intriguing questions about their role at the time of the its composition.

The final section of the text is replaced by a longer paragraph in B. While the substitution appears to be secondary, it is of interest inasmuch as it cites a lost work *Liber de subternis* ('Book of the Subterranean Ones'), which may have been at least as old as our tract itself.¹⁰⁵

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