IRISH LETTER-NAMES AND THEIR KENNINGS*

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In a previous article in this journal[1] I attempted to highlight the import-
ance of the Irish letter-names in a discussion of the history, and in particular
the primary form, of the Ogam alphabet. I argued that the letter-names,
being the means by which the values of the symbols were memorised and
transmitted, represent the mainstay of the tradition and should be given
precedence over the manuscript key, which in effect contains no more than
the values which the *literati* of the Old and Middle Irish periods themselves
abstracted from the shapes of the letter-names in their own time. This latter
exercise was not without an ulterior motive, that of accounting for an embar-
rassment of riches inherited from an earlier period, and it succeeded in
producing some purely cosmetic values, which have wrongly been regarded
as authentic and, as I hope to show in a forthcoming book on Ogam, have
led to a somewhat distorted view of the intentions and *modus operandi* of
the framers of the system. The problem inherited by the later Ogamists
was largely a result of sound-changes which disturbed the phonemic in-
ventory of sounds for which the alphabet was originally framed, and as I
have tried to show in my paper 'Runic and Ogam letter-names: a parallelism'
in the forthcoming James Carney *Festschrift*, very similar developments
took place in the later history of the Common Germanic Fuþark, which
consequently provides an interesting corroborative parallel to the history of
the Ogam alphabet and its letter-names.

Having assigned such a pivotal role to the letter-names I feel it incumbent
on me to treat them in somewhat greater detail than I have hitherto had
occasion to do. In the present paper therefore I should like to present an
edition of our earliest source of information on the form and meaning of
the Irish letter nomenclature, the Old Irish *Briatharogaim*.[2] The edition is
accompanied by a translation, both of the texts themselves and of the ex-
tensive gloss and commentary material, along with a full discussion of each
individual letter-name. Before proceeding, however, there are some com-
ments of a more general nature which I would like to make.

Though the Irish letter-names are always closely associated with and were originally coined for the characters of the Ogam alphabet, they are by no means exclusively Ogam, or for that matter Early Irish, letter-names. They long outlived the usefulness of the Ogam script itself and served as the standard nomenclature for Irish letters from the earliest period for which we have information right up to the demise of the native schools in the seventeenth century. As the inner structure of the Ogam alphabet formed the framework for the discussion of Irish phonology in the native grammatical tradition, so the shapes of the letter-names and the fact that they did not conform to the corresponding Latin letter nomenclature in highlighting the opposition between *mutae* (*be, ce, de, ge,* etc.) and *semivocales* (*ef, el, em, en,* etc.) were what led Irish grammarians to claim that their alphabet (which at the time meant the phonological structure of their language) knew no *semivocales*, since all names of consonants were of the *be, ce, de* type, i.e. began with the consonant itself and not with a vowel.[3] The use of letter-names of the Latin type, e.g. *ef* and *es* for native *Fern* and *Sail*, is attested[4] but, to my knowledge, is more the exception than the rule. In early glossaries such as the *Sanas Cormaic*, native grammatical works such as the *Auraicept na nÉces*, the later *Irish Grammatical Tracts, Bardic Syntactical Tracts* and Ó hEodhasa's *Rudimenta Grammaticae Hibernicae*, as well as in metrical compositions of an instructional type such as *Nena filed féghthar linn*,[5] Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh's *Madh fiafraidheach budh feasach*[6] and the poem on the rules of rhyme in Bardic verse beginning *Feadha an Oghaim aithnidh damh*,[7] the native nomenclature is predominant and shows little variation. Its stability over such a long period is ample testimony to the position of honour and respect which it held among the Irish learned classes, and is in itself good reason for giving it careful attention.

As is the case with their counterparts in the runic tradition, the Irish letter-names are not attested on the epigraphical record and our earliest source of information on them dates from the Old Irish period. Exactly when they first came to be employed as letter-names cannot, therefore, be established with certainty, though most scholars have tended to regard them as coeval with the creation of the Ogam alphabet itself. Thurneysen had gone over to this view by 1937[8] and Carney regarded them as early standard examples which gradually became so closely associated with the Ogam characters that they were raised to the status of letter-names.[9] Marstrander, as is well known, was of the opinion that Ogam was a continuation of a cipher

[3]See G. Calder, *Auraicept na nÉces (Aur.)* (Edinburgh 1917), 1059f. = 4096ff, R. Thurneysen, *ZCP* 17 (1933), 282, and A. G. Van Hamel, 'Primitieve Ierse Taalstudie', *Meded. Kon. Ak. Wetensch. afd. Lett.* 9,9 (1946), 295–339, 319.

[4]See D. Binchy *Corpus Iuris Hibernici (CIH)* 6 vols (Dublin 1978), 345.12.

[5]*ZCP* 12 (1918), 295.

[6]*Féilsgribhinn Torna*, ed. S. Pender (Cork 1947), 66–76.

[7]*Éigse* 3 (1941), 36–51.

[8]Thurneysen, 'Zum Ogom', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache u. Literatur* 61 (1937), 188–208, 207.

[9]J. Carney, 'The invention of the Ogom cipher', *Ériu* 26 (1975), 53–65, 63.

invented in Gaul and he argued for the existence of the letter-names as such already in Continental Celtic.[10] As far as I am aware Meroney is the only scholar to have argued that some, at least, of the Irish letters had not received names as late as the Old Irish period, but I shall advance reasons for discounting this view below.[11]

Most of these views on the age of the letter-names are to a large extent conjectural, and an inordinate, and to my mind totally unjustified, amount of attention has been given in the discussions mentioned above, to name but a few, to the supposed Celtic origins of the runic names for P and Q, Old English *Peorð* and *Cweorð*, Gothic *Pertra* and *Quertra*. As I hope to show in my forthcoming book, there is no reason to believe that these pairs in the Germanic nomenclature reflect a Celtic, whether continental or insular, opposition between P and Q and, consequently, Germanic names prove nothing on the date of the coining of the Irish letter-names. There is no reason, in fact, to suppose that they belong to anything other than a strictly Irish tradition. Some remarks on the date of their coining will be reserved for the concluding section of this article.

It has become a commonplace of Irish scholarship to regard *all* the Irish letter-names as names of trees and no other aspect of Irish letters has contributed more to the derailment of a serious study of the history of Ogam than this. Despite a warning by Bishop Graves in an enlightened article published in 1876[12] this figment of the medieval Irish glossators' imagination continued to exercise its influence over scholars in the present century, and the works of Vendryes[13] and Marstrander[14] in particular could have benefited considerably from a consideration of Graves' rejection of the 'alphabet végétal' (as Vendryes termed it) fiction. A second warning was issued by Meroney in his 1949 paper[15] (from which I derived considerable benefit in the preparation of the present edition of the *Briatharogaim*, though I will have occasion to disagree with many of the arguments advanced in it). This too, however, seems to have fallen on deaf ears (witness, for example, the Ó Dónaill dictionary of Modern Irish where the letter-names are not only restrictively described as names of the Ogam characters but are also given their fictional arboreal meanings) and in a more recent paper Motta has described Meroney's view as an *opinione diversa* (i.e. differing from Vendryes's).[16] Meroney's is not merely the opinion of a modern scholar, however;

[10]K. Marstrander, 'Om runene og runenavnenes oprindelse', *Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap* 1 (1928), 85–188, 139ff.

[11]H. Meroney, 'Early Irish letter-names', *Speculum* 24 (1949), 19–43, passim. All references to Meroney, unless otherwise specified, are to this paper. If not accompanied by a page number they refer to the discussion of the relevant letter.

[12]C. Graves, 'The Ogham alphabet', *Hermathena* 2 (= no. iv, 1876), 443–72, 458–9.

[13]J. Vendryes, 'L'écriture ogamique et ses origines', *Études Celtiques (EC)* 4 (1941), 83–116, and 'Sur un nom ancien de l'arbre' (with an appendix on the letter-names), *Revue Celtique (RC)* 44 (1927), 313–19.

[14]Op. cit. in fn. 10.

[15]See fn. 11.

[16]F. Motta, 'Contributi allo studio della lingua delle iscrizioni ogamiche (A-B)' *Studi e saggi linguistici* 18 (1978), 257–333, 261, fn. 15.

it is confirmed by the composers of the *Briatharogaim* who were blissfully unaware of the fiction and whose works are the oldest, least contaminated and therefore most trustworthy source of information on the matter.

The *Briatharogaim* have come down to us in three different series which are ascribed respectively to Morann mac Moín, Mac ind Óc and Cú Chulainn. Their closest typological parallels are the *kenningar* of the Icelandic runic poem, those of the Anglo-Saxon runic poem being similar but at some remove in terms of style.[17] Within Irish tradition itself they find a parallel in the kennings of the *Immacallam in dá Thúarad* (*RC* 26, 4ff) where, in fact, the equivalent of the Morann mac Moín kenning for N, *costud síde* is attested (n.72, p.24).

The *Briatharogaim* are circumlocutions or charades which may have been put by a teacher to a pupil rather as Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh addresses a series of questions to aspiring (or established?) bardic poets in the poem already referred to. I' doubt that they ever functioned, or were intended to function, as a cipher alphabet in word form, as is often suggested. To use the terminology of the modern crossword puzzle the circumlocutions, or kennings, may be 'simple' or 'cryptic'. It is difficult, however, for us today to evaluate them along these lines as we are at some remove from the cultural and intellectual environment which produced them, and we do have the advantage of knowing the answers in advance, since they are preserved in alphabetical order with glosses which can be of considerable assistance, though they are often misleading. The idea of the kennings was to hint at the names of the letters by reference to what was regarded by their authors as the primary meanings of the letter-names. They can also be based on an actual or near homonym, or on the sound represented by the letter, and the immediate resolution of the kenning can be the name of the letter itself, a homonym, the sound represented by the letter, a word of which the first or only sound is represented by the letter, a word closely associated with the letter-name in its primary meaning, or a proverb (in one instance) containing the letter-name or a homonym in its primary meaning.

Though there is a small degree of overlap between the three series, henceforth referred to as A (= Morann) B (= Mac ind Óc) and C (= Cú Chulainn), they are clearly independent of one another and the kennings for any given letter-name may vary considerably from one to the other. All, however, are invariably made up of two words, with the following possibilities; noun/noun, adjective/noun and (very infrequent) noun/adjective. In the second of these types the adjective is more often than not in its superlative form with a following genitive, comparative with accompanying dative of the noun being attested also and tending to replace the superlative and genitive construction, with the result that hybrid forms inevitably turn up in the MSS.

The B tradition is also characterized by connecting alliteration, which

[17]See B. Dickins, *Runic and heroic poems of the old Teutonic peoples*, Cambridge (1915), 28ff and 12ff.

follows the *fidrad freccomail* pattern whereby *g* and *c* (between the letters T and C) and *d* and *t* (between R and A) may alliterate.[18] The alliteration breaks down in some manuscripts but is recoverable from others in all cases except the bridge between the twenty primary letters of the Ogam alphabet and the five supplementary ones, and its absence here may have been deliberate. The overlap between the series occurs in the B[24] (for a key to the sigla see below) tradition in the letter L where the kenning has been borrowed from C; B[135] preserves the original, which is confirmed by alliteration. Similarly B[24] uses the A kennings for the last four supplementary letters, while B[135] again preserves the alliterating originals. Apart from this the kennings within any given tradition are relatively uniform in the manuscripts, allowance being made for variety in spelling, the presence or absence of irregular nasalization and the tendency to replace superlatives with comparatives already referred to. The supplementary letters, however, are badly represented in the C tradition, while A can boast two kennings for some letters, the second being a modification of the first dictated apparently by the arboreal fiction in the case of N *costud/coscrad side* and O *congnaid/congnamaid ech*, but clearly distinct in the case of M, G, Z, R and U. In these I have chosen the A[137] kennings in my restored text though in most cases it is difficult to establish a priority between the alternatives.

The nature of the kennings is such that diagnostic criteria for dating purposes are relatively limited. That they belong to the Old Irish period, however, is suggested by a number of features. Among these are that superlatives far outnumber comparatives in the adjective/noun constructions; in the *Félire Óenguso*, composed between 797 and 808, comparative forms are already more numerous than superlatives.[19] The connecting alliteration of the B tradition enables us to restore Old Irish *mlais* for MS *blais* (alliterating with *mol*) at the IO/AE bridge. Nasalization is found after *árusc*, *trian* and *tosach*, though the value of this for dating purposes is questionable, particularly in view of the presence of irregular nasalization elsewhere in the text (see next paragraph). Other points worth noting are the fact that *dos* would appear to be treated as a *u*-stem (see D) and that *congnaid* (later *comguinid*) and *condál* (later *comdál*) are supported by several manuscripts (see O and H). Among extra-linguistic criteria worth mentioning are the fact that the kennings are written in a larger hand than the surrounding glosses in several manuscripts, the extent of gloss and commentary, usually an indication that the text is regarded as old, the fact that the commentators themselves suggest that the kennings belong to what they call *seangáedhelg* ('old Irish', see the A[3457] glosses to L), and the fact that *Briatharogam Morainn mic Moín* is referred to and quoted in Cormac's glossary (Y 606, see the discussion under E and note that the article in question is found in

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[18]On *fidrad freccomail* see G. Murphy *Early Irish metrics (EIM)* (Dublin 1961), 38–9, and Carney, *Eriu* 22 (1971), 23.

[19]See Thurneysen, *A grammar of Old Irish (GOI)* (Dublin 1946), §366.

the *Book of Uí Maine* and *Leabhar Breac* and thus belongs to the original). It is worthy of note too that the second kenning for Z in the same tradition appears in O'Davoren's glossary (see the relevant section below). More important than this, however, is the fact that the authors of the kennings, unlike their glossators, were familiar with the meanings of letter-names which would appear to have been very low-frequencey words already in the Old Irish period (see in particular GG and O); they knew nothing of the arboreal fiction, and their kennings on E, I and the supplementary letters point to what may have been the earlier names and/or values of these (see the relevant sections of the discussion).

Irregular nasalization[20] is found in A[17] *li n-ambi* and *clithar mbaiscill* (see S and Q) and is particularly common in the B tradition if the second noun of the kenning begins with a vowel, the exception being *brig anduine* (Q). In the restored text I have removed it except when there is evidence to suggest the neuter gender of any nasalizing word. The absence of nasalization in MS *tosach garma* (A) is not, of course, inconsistent with Old Irish practices (see *GOI* §237).

The *Briatharogaim* appear mainly in the so-called *Ogam Tract* or *Book of Ogams*[21] published by Calder at *Aur.* 5465ff. The A and B series alone are found in the body of the tract as it is preseved in the Book of Ballymote (BB, fourteenth century), National Library of Ireland MS G53 (seventeenth century)[22] and T.C.D. H.3.18/1337 (sixteenth century),[23] while all three are appended to it in columnar form (with the appropriate letters or values to the left of the kennings)[24] in G53 and H.3.18; the *Auraicept na nÉces* itself begins in BB where we might have expected these series to appear. The A tradition, which would seem to have been the most popular, also made its way into the commentary of the *Auraicept*[25] and this version of it is the

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[20]I should point out that this kind of nasalization frequently occurs in chevilles, which bear some resemblance to the kennings. While non-historical, therefore, it may not in fact be irregular.

[21]The complete tract is found at H.3.18, 26^{a}1–35.28, BB, 308^{b}44–314 and G53, 1–22. Fragments not containing the *Briatharogaim* (corresponding to *Aur.* 5685–6161) also appear in Brit. Museum Add. 4783. The tract does not bear a title in the MSS (though it finishes in some with *Finit dona hogmaib*), but a quotation from it is introduced at *Aur.* 2813–4 with *amal isber in leapar ogaim*, whence the title *Book of Ogams*. Meroney (20, fn. 7) thinks that the *Aur.* 200 *Duil Feadha Mair* might be the Ogam tract but the subject matter referred to is not from the latter. Though associated in subject matter with parts of the *Auraicept* the Ogam tract is clearly independent of it. The *Briatharogaim* appear after a discussion of the origin of the names of the Ogam characters in which two opposing views are presented, viz. that they were called after the twenty-five most noble scholars of the school of Fénius Farsaid (*Aur.* 5501 ff), and that they were named after the trees of the forest (*Aur.* 5511 ff).

[22]See Nessa Ní Shéaghdha, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland*, Fasciculus 2 (1961), 72

[23]A colophon on the page preceding that on which the *Ogam tract* begins was written by the scribe Cairbre ua Maolchonaire in the year m.ccccc.xi (25^{a}11-12).

[24]Excluding the fourth supplementary letter, which has the columnar value IP (or the name *Pin*) in the MSS (= IO in this edition), and the fifth, which has X (glossed *em̃* for *Emancholl*, here = AE), these letters are employed in the present edition.

[25]The only trace of the other traditions in the *Auraicept* commentary is the appearance of the C kenning for the letter Z as an alternative to that of the A series in A^5 and related MSS, for which see fn. 29 below.

latest in terms of the glosses and the fixing of the arboreal fiction. Cormac's and O'Davoren's glossaries have one kenning each, from the A tradition, as already pointed out. A further six (three from A and three from B) are recorded in somewhat corrupt form in a glossary from H.3.18, 416^c (*CIH* 951.21-2) and five more (four from A and one from C) along with glosses to four are recorded in NLI MS G10 50^a in an account of the hazels of Segais.[26]

In the present edition the versions from the body of the *Ogam Tract* are numbered as follows:[27]

A^1 < BB 309^{a}50–310^{a}21 = *Aur.* 5528–5614
A^3 < G53 3,4–5,21
A^7 < H.3.18, 26^b 22–27^{b}29
B^1 < BB 310^{a}22–310^{b}5 = *Aur.* 5615–5667
B^3 < G53, 5,22–7,7
B^5 < H.3.18 27^{b}30–28^{a}30.

The texts appearing in columnar form at the end of the *Ogam Tract* are:

A^2 < H.3.18, 34 = *Anecd.*[28] 3, 43–4
A^6 < G53, 20
B^2 < H.3.18, 34 = *Anecd.* 3, 44–5
B^4 < G.53, 20
C^1 < H.3.18, 34 = *Anecd.* 3, 45
C^2 <G53, 21.

The *Auraicept* (commentary) texts are:

A^4 < BB 325^{a}20–325^{b}2 = *Aur.* 1157–1198
A^5 < YBL 536 = *Aur.* 4253–4308.[29]

A^8 and C^3 are the kennings in G10, A^9 and B^6 those from the H.3.18 glossary (at 416^c).

A^{137} stand in a similar relationship to one another as B^{135}. A^{37} would not appear to be copies of A^1, which omits the *roith* of the T kenning and has a corruptly transmitted gloss on the same. Neither does A^3 seem to be a copy of A^7, to judge by A^3 *caoiniu*/A^7 *caine* (the letter C), A^3 *millsem*/A^7 *millsi* (G), A^3 *millsium*/A^7 *millsi* (IO). Similarly, whereas B^{135} all have the

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[26]See L. Breatnach, 'The caldron of poesy', *Ériu* 32 (1981), 45–93, 92–3.

[27]A^{137} means A^1, A^3 and A^7, etc.

[28]*Anecdota from Irish manuscripts* 3 (1909); Meyer's title *Traigshruth Firchertne* is a misnomer and does not apply to the *Briatharogaim*.

[29]Other copies of this tradition which I have consulted are: (TCD) E.3.3/1432 13^{a}8–13^{a}59, H.2.15b/1317 123^{b}7–124^{a}14, H.4.22/1363 191.9–192.7; (NLI) G53 114.14–117.3; (RIA) 23P2/535 158^{rb}26–158va14, Aii4/738 57^{b}28–59^{a}18. These add little by way of important variant readings. For a discussion of the relationship between the MSS of the *Auraicept* see A. Ahlqvist, *The early Irish linguist*, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum, Societas Scientiarum Fennica (1983), 22ff.

mistakes *annum/andu*m for B^{24} *anduine* (Q) and *med* for B^2 *ined* and B^4 *inned* (G), B^1 omits the kenning for GG, B^5 misplaces it at the end of the series with the remark *a ndegaid guirt tic so itir e [7] straib* accompanied by reference marks, while B^3 has it in the right place. B^1 also omits the kenning for AE for which B^5 has *mol galraid* and B^3 the more correct *mol galraig* and B^{15} share the mistake *morid/moridh* for B^3 *moradh* (Z). For the letter I B^3 has three variants (one of which is found in the B^{24} tradition) as against 2 in B^1 and a single kenning in B^5.

A^6, B^4 and C^2 stand in similar relationship to A^2, B^2 and C^1 respectively, but do not seem to be copies of them. Thus, whereas A^{26} both have X opposite the kenning for the last supplementary letter with *em̃* (= *Emancholl*) added, A^6 has the more correct (?) *guirem* for A^2 *gruidem* (U). Similarly, while B^{24} share *luth cethra* with C^{12} against B^{135} (L) and both have the correct *brig anduine* (Q), B^2 has the correct *ined* as against the *inned* of B^4 (G), but B^4 has *eittiudh* for B^2 *eitiu* (GG) as well as *cainem* for B^2 *cained* (I), and *aca fidh* as the kenning for EA which is missing in B^2. C^2 has *nec* as against C^1 *necto* (GG), *forbbaidh* (U, the better reading) as compared with C^1 *forbhaid*, and it has I as the value opposite the kenning *luth lobair* compared with C^1 IO.

A^{45} are more closely related to A^{26} than A^{137} and share their kennings when they differ from those of A^{137} (M, G, Z, U) but in the case of R they are isolated. A^4 has no kennings for the vowels and the supplementary letters, preserving only the glosses.

I have normalized the texts of the kennings to a standard compatible with Old Irish. When superlative and comparative constructions are found for any one kenning I choose the former if there is evidence for an accompanying genitive, as the replacement of the superlative + genitive construction by comparative + dative is to be expected but not the reverse. I have removed nasalization when it is not justified. Complete *variae lectiones* accompany the text. With the gloss and commentary my objective has been to show the gradual development of the arboreal fiction. I do not provide variant readings for these unless they are significant. The text is normally that found in Calder's *Aur.* with any significant readings from other MSS indicated.

TEXTS AND TRANSLATION

TEXTS

	A	B	C
B	Féochos foltchaín	Glaisem cnis	Maise malach
L	Lí súla	Carae cethrae	Lúth cethrae
F	Airenach fían	Comét lachta	Dín cridi
S	Lí ambí	Lúth bech	Tosach mela
N	Costud síde	Bág ban	Bág maise
H	Condál cúan	Bánad gnúise	Ansam aidche
D	Ardam dosae	Grés soír	Slechtam soíre
T	Trian roith	Smiur gúaile	Trian n-airm
C	Caíniu fedaib	Carae blóesc	Milsem fedo
Q	Clithar baiscill ˙	Bríg anduini	Dígu fethail
M	Tressam fedmae	Árusc n-airlig	Conar gotha
G	Milsiu féraib	Ined erc	Sásad ile
GG	Lúth lego	Étiud midach	Tosach n-échto
Z	Tressam rúamnai	Mórad rún	Saigid nél
R	Tindem rucci	Rúamnae drech	Bruth fergae
A	Ardam íachta	Tosach frecrai	Tosach garmae
O	Congnaid ech	Féthem soíre	Lúth fían.
U	Úaraib adbaib	Sílad cland	Forbbaid ambí
E	Érgnaid fid	Commaín carat	Bráthair bethi (?)
I	Sinem fedo	Caínem sen	Lúth lobair (?)
EA	Snámchaín feda	Cosc lobair	Caínem éco
OI	Sruithem aicde	Lí crotha	
UI	Túthmar fid	Cubat oll	
IO	Milsem fedo	Amram mlais	
AE	Lúad sáethaig	Mol galraig	

VARIAE LECTIONES

Minimal or insignificant orthographic variants such as, in the case of the first kenning, A[1] *feocus,* A[26] *feochas,* A[3] *feochos,* A[4] *feocos,* A[5] *feochuos, etc. are not noted.* A[‘] *is the only manuscript with peculiar spellings, such as feochuous (-chos), foultcain (folt-), aireunach (airenach), airdeumh (ardamh), etc. For each kenning I cite the closest reading to my restored form first, followed by any significant variation on it.*

B: A[3] feochos foltchaín, A[7] eochos (*space left for ornamented capital*); B[2] glaisem cnis, B[4] glaissen, B[5] laisim (*space left as in* A[‘] *above*); C[2] maise malach.

L: A[6] lí sula, A[3] lí śulæ; B[5] cara cethra, B[24] luth cethra; C[1] luth cethra.

F: A[7] airenach fia*n*; B[3] comét lachta; C[1] din cride.

S: A[38] lí ambí, A[1] (*also* A[37] *in glosses*) li nai*m*bi; B[5] luth bech, B[3] luath; C[1] tosach mela.

N: A[2] costud side, A[5] coscra*d*/costad, A[147] sida; B[1] bag ban; C[2] bag maise.

H: A[2] condal, A[147] cuan, A[137] conal, A[458] comdal, A[26] con/chon; B[5] bánad, B[3] gnuisse; C[2] ansam aidche.

	A	B	C
		TRANSLATION	
B	Withered foot with fine hair	Greyest of skin	Beauty of the eyebrow
L	Lustre of the eye	Friend of cattle	Sustenance of cattle
F	Vanguard of hunting/ warrior bands	Milk container	Protection of the heart
S	Pallor of a lifeless one	Sustenance of bees	Beginning of honey
N	Establishing of peace	Boast of women	Boast of beauty
H	Assembly of packs of hounds	Blanching of faces	Most difficult at night
D	Most exalted tree	Handicraft of an artificer	Most carved of craftsmanship
T	One of three parts of a wheel	Marrow of (char)coal	One of three parts of a weapon
C	Fairest tree	Friend of nutshells	Sweetest tree
Q	Shelter of a (?)lunatic	Substance of an insignificant person	Dregs of clothing
M	Strongest in exertion	Proverb of slaughter	Path of the voice
G	Sweetest grass	Suitable place for cows	Sating of multitudes
GG	Sustenance of a leech	Raiment of physicians	Beginning of slaying
Z	Strongest reddening (dye)	Increase of secrets	Seeking of clouds
R	Most intense blushing	Reddening of faces	Glow of anger
A	Loudest groan	Beginning of an answer	Beginning of calling
O	Wounder of horses	Smoothest of craftsmanship	Sustaining (equipment) of hunting/warrior bands
U	In cold dwellings	Propagation of plants	Shroud of a lifeless one
E	Discerning tree	Exchange of friends	Brother of birch (?)
I	Oldest tree	Fairest of the ancients	Energy of an infirm person (?)
EA	Fair-swimming letter	(?)Admonishing of an infirm person	Fairest fish
OI	Most venerable substance	Splendour of form	
UI	Fragrant tree	Great elbow/cubit	
IO	Sweetest tree	Most wonderful taste	
AE	Groan of a sick person	Groan of a sick person	

D: A[26] arddam dossa, A[137] ardam dossaib, A[8] airdem dosa, A[4] airde dossaib, A[9] airdiu tosaid; B[1] gres saír; C[12] slechtain saire.

T: A[2] trian roith, A[1] roith *missing*; B[2] smiur guaile; C[1] trian nairm.

C: A[1] cainiu fedaib, A[7] caine, A[4] cain fidh, A[26] ithcar, cnocar, caincar fear/fid; B[12345] cara bloisc; C[1] millsem fedho/ C[2] fedæ.

Q: A[7] clithar mbaiscill, A[26] clithchar boscill, A[3] mbaosgaill, A[4] boaiscille; B[24] brig anduine, -une, B[135] annum/andum; C[2] digu fethail.

M: A[1] tresim fedma, A[6] ardam maisse, A[4] airdi (A[137] V A[2456]); B[2] arusc nairlig; C[1] conair gotha.

G: A[1] millsiu feraib, A[3] millsem, A[7] millsi (*both with dative*), A[26] glaisem gelta, A[5] glasibh, A[4] glaisiu geltaibh (A[137] V A[2456]); B[2] ined nercc, B[4] inned, B[135] med; C[2] sássadh ile.

GG: A[5] luth lego, A[26] leighe *otherwise* lega; B[5] (*misplaced*) eitiud, B[24] midach, B[2] eitiu, B[35] miadach, *also* (*misplaced*) A[1] (*Aur.* 5584) etiud midach, B[1] *missing*; C[1] tosach necto, C[2] tosa nec.

Z: A[1] tresim ruamna, A[24] aire, A[56] sraba, H. 4. 22 aire sreabhudh, H. 2. 15b aire srab, A[9] airer adhon draigin (A[137] V A[24569]); B[24] morad run, B[15] morid; C[1] saigid, C[2] nél, *also* A[5] *and related MSS* saididh nell.

R: A[1] tinnem ruccæ, A[7] tindem, A[5] (*and* G53, 116.11) ruamna ruici/ ruamna ruisg (A[12367] V A[45]); B[5] ruamna drech, B[24] romnad; C[1] bruth fergga.

A: A[26] ardam iachtadha, A[37] iachtad, A[9] aird iachdad, A[4] *missing from here to end*; B[3] tosach freccra; C[1] tosach garma.

O: A[26] congnaid ech, A[137] congnamaid aliter comguinid, A[5] cudnoudh; B[5] fethem no fedham, B[1] no fedem, B[3] no fedmed, B[24] foillem, *all* saire; C[1] luth fiann.

U: A[1] uaraib adbaib, A[3] úruibh, A[56] guiremh dal, A[2] gruidem, (A[137] V A[256]); B[2] silad cland; C[2] forbbaidh ambi, C[1] forbhaid.

E: A[1] ergnaid fid, A[6] ærchaid fid, A[2] ærcaid fer no fid, A[5] ercra fer, *Sanas Cormaic* ærchaid; B[2] commain carat, B[4] comaoin; C[1] brathair bethi.

I: A[2] sinem, A[6] fedho, A[137] siniu fedhaib; B[3] crinem feadha no sinem no ailleam aois, B[1] no clainem, B[2] cáined sen nó aileam ais, B[4] caíneam sen .i. aillem aís, B[6] aillaem aes; C[12] luth (no lith) lobair, C[3] lúat labar.

EA: A[1] Snamchain fheda, A[2] snamchar fer (A[137] V A[256]); B[1] cosc lobair, B[4] aca fidh (B[135] V B[4], B[2] *missing*); C[1] cainem écco.

OI: A[3] sruithem, A[26] aicde, A[5] (*misplaced*) tuathmar fidh; B[1] lí crotha, B[24] sruithem aicde (*following* A *from here to end*); C *missing from here to end.*

UI: A[3] tuthmar fidh, A[1] tutmur, A[7] tuathmar (*with punctum delens over first* a), A[26] fer; B[1] cubat noll, B[24] = A.

IO: A[2] millsem fedho, A[7] millsi; B[13] amram blais, B[24] = A.

AE: A[1] luad (A[26] od) sæthaig, (A[2] .7. c̄, = *et cetera?*); B[3] mol galraigh, B[5] galraid, B[1] *missing*, B[24] = A, *with* od.

NOTES TO TEXTS AND TRANSLATION

H: With the coexistence of the early and late forms of the compound *com* + *dál* (*condál* and *comdál*) in the MSS compare *congnaid/comguinid* under O.

D: Old Irish -*e* after a neutral consonant is generally written -*a* in the MSS, MSS -*o* as a rule representing Old Irish -*o*, the gen. sg. of *i*- and *u*-stems, which can also be written -*a*. Excluding abstract and verbal nouns, and nouns such as *cnes* and *adaig*, one might have expected the gen. after a superlative to be in the plural. There is MSS support, however, for *milsem fedo* (C and IO, the former also written *fedæ* in one MS) and *sinem fedo* (I), and I have allowed these to stand. It could be argued that *fedo* here means 'of the wood' but this will not help with *cainem éco* (EA), which is supported by both MSS. Thus, whether the *dosa* of *ardam dosa* represents an original gen. sg. or pl. is unclear but I have chosen the latter. Either way there is no MSS support for an *o*- stem gen. *dois/dos* and I take *dos* to be a *u*-stem (cf. ns. *dus* :Oengus,

Met. Dinds. 3, 390.17 and note that, if the name *Eudus* (*CIIC* 2, 686, *AU* 798/*FM* 793, *AU* 822), *Eodhos* (*FM* 820) *Eudos* (*FM* 722) contains *dos*/*dus* 'tree, copse', the genitive forms *Eodusa* (*Mart. Tall.* May 22), *Eodosa* (*AU* 1059), *Eoghusa* (*AU* 1350) suggest a *u*-stem). I am grateful to Jürgen Uhlich for discussing this name with me and providing me with the examples cited.

Note that when the basis of comparison is the species to which the item represented by the comparative or superlative belongs there is no difference in meaning between the two. Thus *ardam dosae*/*dosa* (lit.) 'highest of trees/a tree' and *ardu dosaib* (lit.) 'higher than trees' both mean 'highest (or 'most exalted') tree'. The same goes for (G) *glaisem geltae*/*glaisiu geltaib* ('greenest pasture', the alternative A kenning) and (I) *sinem fedo*/*siniu fedaib*. My translation of (C) *cainiu fedaib* and (G) *milsiu féraib* (lit. 'fairer than trees' and 'sweeter than grasses') is based on this. In examples such as *Cid as briscim cuirir? Accned mna ididhi* 'What is more fragile/brittle than a nut? The character of a jealous(?) woman' (*ZCP* 13, 272), on the other hand, the superlative has come to function as a comparative. On the dative with the superlative in Middle Irish, see Murphy, *EIM* 102, on *dech*.

My restoration and translation of the C kenning is tentative but derives some support from the B kennings for D and O. MS *slechtain* 'genuflection' (?) can hardly be correct and the confusion of -*m* and -*n* as well as *in* and *m* is found elsewhere (see the variant readings under B, Q and G). I take *slechtam* to be the superlative of **slechtae*, past participle of *sligid* 'cuts, fells' in the sense 'carves' (see *SR* 4189 *dias doib fri soirsi slecht* where *slecht* is also associated with craftsmanship). For *soire* 'craftsmanship' (see *DIL* s.v. 2 *saire*), as opposed to the more common *soirse*, see the B kenning on O.

C: The readings for the B kenning's *bloisc* show no significant variation. Calder, Meroney and *DIL* s.v. *blosc* 'sound, noise, crash' take the kenning to mean 'friend of cracking'. My emendation to gen.pl. *blóesc* is not supported by the MSS, in which the *óe*/*áe* diphthongs are otherwise represented by *ai*, *æ* and *aoi*; it seems to me, however, to make better sense.

Q: The final *m* in *andum*/*annum* is doubtless due to a misreading of Old Irish *anduni*.

M: Meyer's *marusc* (*Anecd.* iii 44) is a misreading of B² where there is only one *m*, representing the letter corresponding to the kenning.

G: Meyer's *med* (loc.cit.) is a mistranscription of INed, though *med* is found in other MSS. *Ined* is an earlier, but not not an archaic, form of *inad* (cf. *imbed*/*imbad*).

GG: C² *tosa nec* could be a corruption of *tosach n-échto* or *tosach n-éca* 'beginning of death' with a gen.pl. of *éc* (for the use of the pl. cf. *DIL* s.v. E 9, 15ff). As *éc* is frequently used of a natural death, however, it would be less suitable if my interpretation of *gétal* is correct (see below).

A:The MSS have *iachtad* and *iachtadha*, the latter the younger gen., the former an inexplicable nom. or the Old Irish gen. *iachta* with non-historical -*d*. Though this -*d* is not common in the MSS I have chosen to restore the old form. Cf. *costud*, the attested gen. of which, *costada*, must have replaced an earlier *costa*, and see Thurneysen's remarks on *techte*/*techtaite*, *sluinde*/*sluindite* in *GOI* §566.

O: On *congnaid*/*comguinid* see under H above. I take B *féthem* to be superlative of *DIL* 4 *féth* as an adj. (see F 103, 21). There seems to have been some hesitation with this, however, in view of the alternatives *fedham*, *fedem* and *fedmed*, which are unclear to me. B²⁴ *fóillem* is superlative of *fóill* 'fine, exiguous, subtle.'

E: The precise significance of *fer* as an alternative to *fid* in the kennings to C, E, EA and UI is not clear to me. Meroney renders it 'plant' (=*fér*?) but this hardly fits the EA example *snámchar fer* where 'chap' would be more suitable (cf. Carney, *Ériu* 22 (1971), 51 on *fer* and *ben* 'bird' and Breatnach, *Peritia* 3 (1984), 452 on *ingen* 'bird', as well as *DIL* s.v. *fer* 82. 44ff). Calder's *comainm* for the B kenning is a misreading of the MS which has *comain* (*Aur.* 5656). On *bráthair bethi* and *lúth lobair* as doubtful kennings for E and I see the discussion below.

I: Calder's *no claidem* (*Aur.* 5658) is a mistake for MS *no cláinem* 'or most crooked'.

EA: There is no need for Calder's suggested emendation of *snamchain* to *snámcham* (see his Index and Meroney, who accepts the suggestion). I take *éco*/*écco* of C to be the gen.sg. of an unattested nom. *éic* 'fish, salmon', of which *éicne* 'salmon' may be a derivative (<**ank- IEW* 45–6 or **penk-*, ib. 807–8 ?). Cf. *ecad .i. saith ecca .i. biad n-ecca .i. pisci* 'fish-hook/bait i.e. sufficiency of a fish i.e. food of a fish i.e. pisci[s]' (*O'Mulc* 355 and *DIL* s.v. *écath*).

IO: MS *amram blais* probably derives from *amram mlais* through an intermediate *amram mblais*. The alliteration in this series demands restoration to the Old Irish form.

GLOSS AND COMMENTARY

B: A[137] Feocus foltchain, ar beithi sen isin briatharog*am*, uair an*mand* tuc Moran*d* uaidh fen for fedaib *in* ogai*m* is iat gabus greim feda isin briatharog*am*. Feocus foltchain ar son bethi, ar at e sin da egosc in bethi 7 tucad uad-san for fidh *in* ogai*m* ro gab ainm uad.

A[236] .i. cos feoidhe ban lais 7 is alaind a barr.

A[45] Beithe dno on beithe ro hainmnigheadh ar cosmaillius fri cois in bheithe *ut dicitur* feocos foltchain in beithi 7 is airi sin is i mbeithi ro scribadh in cetainm ogaim tucadh a nErind . . .

B[135] .i. beithi sin *in* ogai*m* o bethi na cailli, ar is uad tucad bethi fair; *sic in reliquis sequentibus.*

B[24] .i. caine͞r (B[4] cain*n*en) no crectha (B[4] crecath) nó fuarc.

C[12] .i. creccad, crecad.

L: A[1] .i. luis sin .i. *in* luisiu.

A[26] .i. leam nó gius.

A[3457] .i. luis dna sin ar is ón crann s*in* ro hain*m*nigheadh .i. o chærthend, oir luis ain*m* cærthainn issin tsheangædhilg. *Secundum alios* .i. cærthenn .i. ar aill*eacht* (A[5] dath) a chær.

A[8] .i. lem.

B[135] (.i. lem) cara .i. dil lasna ceathra in lem ara blath 7 ara canach. Tucad uad-side for luis *in* ogai*m*, ar is uad tucad luis fair.

B[24] = A[26].

C[12] .i. leam.

F: A[137] .i. sciath; ar f*ern* aigiseom sin ar a ndergi ar ænrian, no air is i in fern adb*ur* in sceith. Tucad o fernæ forsin fid ogai*m* ro gab ainm uaidhi. Airenach fian .i. sciath, fern sin aig*i*-sium.

A[26] .i. ar inchaib .i. sgiath.

A[45] .i. fernd dono, o chrand ro hainmniged, *ut dicitur* Airenach fian*n* .i. fernd, air is di na sgeith.

B[135] .i. fern*n* in ogaim sin o fern na caille, ar is i coimetas in lacht, ar is di do-niter lestair imon lacht.

B[24] toeí, caei (*leg.* taeí?).

C[12] .i. sciath.

S: A[137] .i. li mairb .i. am fo diultad conach beo acht is marb. Li n-ambi dono .i. sail aigi-seom sin 7 tugad uaidi-sium forsin fid n-ogai*m*.

A[26] .i. li mairbh.

A[45] sail dano is o chrand ro hainmniged *ut dicitur* Li ambi soil .i. nemli (A[5] nembi) lais .i. ar cosmaillius a datha fri marb.

B[135] .i. sail sin ara blath 7 ara canach. Tucad uad-side ara fid coibhnesa *in* ogai*m*.

B[24] .i. blath soilech.

C[12] .i. sail.

N: A[137] .i. ni*n* se*n* .i. gi*n*ol garmna fri fid e .i. airde sida sin. Cosdad sida aigi sin o nin na garmna.

A[26] .i. nin gar*m*na .i. ni aurgab*ar* acht a síth.

A[45] nin dno is o chrand ro hainmniged .i. o uindsind *ut dicitur* cosdad (A[5] *and related MSS* coscrad) sida nin .i. uin*n*ius, ar is di do-niter craind gæ triasa coscairther

B: A^{137} 'Withered foot with fine hair', that is for birch in the *Briatharogam*, for the names (= kennings) which Morann himself gave to the letter(-names) of Ogam have the force of the letter(-names) in the *Briatharogam*. 'Withered foot with fine hair' for *Beithe*, for they are the two outward appearances of the birch and [the kenning] was transferred thence to the Ogam letter which took its name from it.

A^{236} i.e. it has a white withered foot and its crown is splendid.

A^{45} *Beithe*, then, was called after the birch on account of its (the symbol's?) similarity to the foot (trunk) of the birch, *ut dicitur* 'withered foot with fine hair' is the birch, and it is for the following reason that the first Ogam inscription brought into Ireland was written on the birch . . .

B^{135} i.e. that is Ogam *Beithe*, (called) after the birch of the wood, for it is thence that it was named *Beithe*; *sic in reliquis sequentibus*.

B^{24} i.e. garlic (or leeks) or tattooing(?) or bark(?).

C^{12} i.e. tattooing (?).

L: A^1 i.e. that is *Luis* i.e. the radiance(?).

A^{26} i.e. elm-tree or fir-tree/pine.

A^{3457} i.e. that, then, is *Luis*, for it was named after that tree, i.e. after the rowan-tree, for *luis* is a name of the rowan tree in old Irish. *Secundum alios* i.e. rowan-tree i.e. on account of the beauty (A^5 of the colour) of its berries.

A^8 i.e. elm-tree.

B^{135} (i.e. elm-tree) friend i.e. cattle love the elm on account of its flower and its down. [The kenning] was transferred thence to Ogam *Luis*, for it was called *Luis* after it (viz. the *luis* supposedly meaning 'elm-tree').

C^{12} i.e. elm-tree.

F: A^{137} i.e. a shield; that is his [kenning for] *Fern* (alder-tree) on account of their redness alike, or because the [wood of the] alder-tree is the material of the shield. [The kenning] was transferred from the alder-tree to the Ogam letter which took its name from it. 'Vanguard of hunting/warrior bands' i.e. a shield, his [kenning] for *Fern*.

A^{26} i.e. in front of i.e. a shield.

A^{45} i.e. *Fern*, then, was called after a tree, *ut dicitur* 'vanguard of hunting/warrior bands' i.e. alder-tree, for shields are [made] of it.

B^{135} i.e. that is Ogam *Fern* [called] after the alder-tree of the wood, for it is it which holds the milk, for milk-pails are made of it.

B^{24} a vessel.

C^{12} i.e. a shield.

S: A^{137} i.e. pallor of a dead person i.e. *am* as negative (prefix) so that he is not alive but dead. 'Pallor of a lifeless one', then, that is his [kenning for] willow-tree, and it was transferred thence to the Ogam letter.

A^{26} i.e. pallor of a dead person.

A^{45} *Sail*, then, was called after a tree, *ut dicitur* 'pallor of a lifeless one' is willow-tree, i.e. noncolour (A^5 lifeless) in his opinion i.e. on account of the similarity of its colour to a dead person.

B^{135} i.e. that is the willow-tree on account of its flower and its down. [The kenning] was transferred thence to its cognate Ogam letter.

B^{24} i.e. the flower of the willow-tree.

C^{12} i.e. a willow-tree.

N: A^{137} i.e. that is [a kenning for] *Nin* i.e. it is the fork of a weaver's beam as applied to a letter i.e. that is a sign of peace. 'Establishing of peace', that is his [kenning] based on the *nin* (fork) of the weaver's beam.

A^{26} i.e. the fork of a weaver's beam i.e. it is raised only in [times of] peace.

A^{45} *Nin*, then, was named after a tree i.e. after the ash-tree *ut dicitur* 'establishing (A^5 destruction) of peace' is *nin* i.e. the ash-tree, for the spearshafts by means of

in sidh. No cosdudh sidha uindis. Nin .i. ginol garmna do-gnither do uindsind .i. isin aimsir sidha togaibter garmna.

B[135] .i. nin garmna .i. ginol garmna. Uad-side fora fid coibnesa.

B[24] .i. garman.

C[12] .i. garman.

H: A[137] .i. uath sin, ar is uath la nech conal chon alladh. Conal cuan do rad re huath in ogaim [A[37] .i. scé, ar is uatmar i ara deilgibh) ar coibnius (A[37] choibdeligh-iudh) in anma, ar uath iad ar ænrian.

A[26] .i. is ann fo-ceird coin alti uaill .i. scei.

A[45] Huath dono, is o chrand ro hainmniged .i. sce ut dicitur comdal cuan huath ar is uathmar hi ara deilghibh, no is minic la cach comdail ic sgiaigh.

B[135] .i. uath, ar is ban gnuis in duine in tan do-berar uath no uamun uimi. Uad-side for fid in ogaim ar æntaid anma aturu fen .i. uath cechtar de.

B[24] .i. scei.

C[12] .i. huath.

D: A[137] .i. dur (A[3] duir) sin a dualus a feda isin caill.

A[69] .i. dair.

A[45] Duir dono is o chrand ro hainmniged ut dicitur airde dossaib duir.

B[135] .i. dair. Tucad uad-side fora fidh coibnesa in ogaim.

B[24] .i. dauir.

C[1] .i. niama sairte, C[2] .i. niama sairde nó niansu.

T: A[1] .i. aillinde sin aniu.

A[26] .i. cuilenn .i. carpait.

A[37] .i. cuillend, .i. tinne aige-seom sin .i. trian roith theinde in chuilinn, oir is cuilenn in tres fidh roith in charpaid.

A[45] Tinne dono is o chrand ro hainmniged .i. cuileann .i. ar is cuileand in tres fidh roith in carbait.

B[135] .i. cuillenn sen. Uad-side fora fidh coibnesa in ogaim .i. tinne. Secundum alios ar is ainm tindi do cuillenn, ut alii dicunt.

B[24] .i. iarn.

C[12] tinne .i. iarn.

C: A[137] .i. coll sin ara chaini a fedaib.

A[26] .i. cach ag ithe a cnó.

A[45] coll dono is o chrand ro hainmniged ut dicitur cainfidh .i. coll .i. cach ac ithi a chno.

B[135] .i. coll. Uad-side fora fidh coibnesa in ogaim.

B[24] .i. coll.

C[12] .i. cno/cnoi.

Q: A[137] .i. buaili .i. boscell .i. gelt .i. basceall .i. is ann tic a ciall do in tan degas a bas. Clithar boiscell dono .i. quert sin, no boscell .i. elti .i. edruma iat. Clithar boiscell dono .i. gelti no elti, quert a dualus a feda.

A[26] .i. eilit nó geilt.

A[45] queirt dano is o chrand ro hainmnighead .i. abhull ut dicitur clithar boaiscille .i. elit, gelt, quert .i. aball (Quiert .i. cli A[5]).

which the peace is destroyed are made of it. Or 'establishing of peace' is ash-tree. *Nin* i.e. the fork of a weaver's beam which is made of ash i.e. weavers' beams are raised in times of peace.

B[135] i.e. the fork of a weaver's beam i.e. the fork of a weaver's beam. [The kenning was transferred] thence to its cognate letter.

B[24] i.e. a weaver's beam.

C[12] i.e. a weaver's beam.

H: A[137] i.e. that is *Úath* for an assembly of wolves is fearsome to a person. 'Assembly of packs of hounds' is applied [as a kenning] to the *Húath* of Ogam [A[37] i.e. whitethorn, for it is fearsome on account of its thorns] because of the kinship (A[37] apportioning, or read *coibdelachas* 'kinship') of the name, for they are *úath* alike.

A[26] i.e. it is there that wolves howl i.e. whitethorn.

A[45] *Húath* then, was called after a tree i.e. the whitethorn *ut dicitur* 'assembly of packs of hounds' is *húath*, for it is fearsome on account of its thorns, or people frequently meet at a whitethorn.

B[135] i.e. *úath*, for a person's face is white when he is surrounded by terror or fear. [The kenning was transferred] thence to the Ogam letter on account of the identity of name between them, i.e. both are *úath*.

B[24] i.e. whitethorn.

C[12] i.e. fear.

D: A[137] i.e. that is *dur* (= *Dair*) on account of its [corresponding] tree in the wood.

A[69] i.e. oak-tree.

A[45] *Dair*, then, was called after a tree *ut dicitur* 'most exalted tree' is oak-tree.

B[135] i.e. oak-tree. [The kenning] was transferred thence to its cognate Ogam letter.

B[24] i.e. oak-tree.

C[12] (see notes).

T: A[1] i.e. that is holly today (see notes).

A[26] i.e. holly-tree i.e. of a chariot.

A[37] i.e. holly-tree i.e. that is his [kenning for] *Tinne* i.e. 'a third part of a wheel' is the *tinne* of (= meaning?) the holly-tree, for [the wood of] the holly-tree is one of the three [types of] wood in the wheel of a chariot.

A[45] *Tinne*, then, was called after a tree i.e. the holly-tree i.e. for the [wood of the] holly-tree .. (as in A[37]).

B[135] i.e. that is the holly-tree. [The kenning was transferred] thence to its cognate Ogam letter i.e. *Tinne. Secundum alios* for *tinne* is a name for the holly-tree, *ut alii dicunt*.

B[24] i.e. iron.

C[12] *tinne* i.e. iron.

C: A[137] i.e. that is the hazel-tree on account of its beauty among trees.

A[26] i.e. everyone eating its nuts.

A[45] *Coll*, then, was called after a tree *ut dicitur* 'fair-tree' i.e. the hazel-tree i.e. everyone eating its nuts.

B[135] i.e. hazel-tree. [The kenning was transferred] thence to its cognate Ogam letter.

B[24] i.e. hazel-tree.

C[12] i.e. nut(s).

Q: A[137] i.e. a byre (? or fence) i.e. *boscell* i.e. a lunatic i.e. *basceall* ('death-sense') i.e. it is then that his sense comes to him when he dies. 'Shelter of a lunatic', then, i.e. *Quert* or *boscell* i.e. hinds i.e. they are light(-headed?). 'Shelter of *boiscell*', then, i.e. lunatics or hinds, *Quert* on account of its [corresponding] tree.

A[26] i.e. a hind or a lunatic.

A[45] *Queirt*, then, was called after a tree i.e. the apple-tree *ut dicitur* 'shelter of a lunatic/hind' i.e. a hind, a lunatic, *quert* i.e. an apple-tree (*quiert* i.e. a house-post A[5]).

B[135] .i. quert. Uad-side fora fidh coibnesa.
B[24] .i. ceirtech.
C[12] .i. cumdaigh.

   M: A[137] .i. muin leis-si*um* sin .i. ar æntaidh anma fri muin duine no daim, ar is iat is tresi feid*m* ann.
A[2456] .i. finemain arin*ni* fasas a n-airde.
B[135] .i. muin duine. Uad-side fora fidh comainmnigech.
B[24] .i. muin, muine.
C[12] .i. tre muin.

   G: A[137] .i. gort leis-si*um* sin ar æntaidh anma frisin gort arba. In tan bis ina fua*chonn* is millsi na ga*ch* fer in fer sin .i. in gort arba. Uad-side forsin fid ut *in* oga*im* ar comæntaidh in anma atura.
A[26] .i. edlenn no edhend.
A[45] .i. edeand.
B[135] .i. gort. Uad-side fora fidh comainmnigthech.
B[24] .i. gort.
C[12] .i. arbhar.

   GG: A[137] getal (A[3] gétal) sen .i. ar is lúth lasna leigib (A[3] .i. gilcach no rait, A[7] raith) 7 coibn*ius* etir cath 7 getal (A[3] gétal).
A[26] .i. gilcach ar imat a icce.
A[45] Ngedal .i. gilcach nuo rait, *ut dicitur* luth lego ngedal .i. gilcach no rait, ar is luth laisna legaib 7 coibnes iter K 7 NG, no mio*dach* ice .i. ar imad a ice no/.i. gilcach no rait.
B[35] .i. cath. Tucad uada-side *for* ngetal. (Also A[1] *Aur* 1.5584).
B[1] *missing*.
B[24] .i. gilccach.
C[12] .i. icce.

   Z: A[137] .i. straif leis-si*um* sin *in* oga*im*. Straif iar ræt, ar is i in straif is tresiu ruamna ic dathadh na ræt, ar is i do-gni in airget ngeal conad gorm ic denum airgit decht (A[7] dechta) de. Is i berbthar tresin fual isin or mban co ndene or *derg* de. Tresi*m* ruamna in straif iar ræt. Tugad uaid-side isin fid dianad ainm straif (A[3] .i. draighean) ar aentaid anma aturu .i. straif ainm cechtar de.
A[2456] .i. draighen.
B[135] .i. straif. Tucad uad-side fora fidh comainmnighthech.
B[24] .i. sraiph nó draighen.
C[12] and A[5] .i. a ddé súas (C[2] co néll-).

   R: A[137] ruis sin .i. on ruidiudh no on r*uis* iar ret, ar is *tre ruis* scribthair 7 is ruidhiud fasas a n-aigid in duine tri sug in lossa do cuimilt fæthi. Tindi rucæ dono do rad frisin ruis o rus (A[7] rús, A[3] rúis) no on ruided, ar is tri ruis scribtair-side fen.
A[26] .i. cairthenn nó tene truim.
A[45] .i. trom, teine truim.
B[135] .i. sug in rois do-ní ruamna na ndrech co mbi ruidead intib.
B[24] .i. cairthenn nó trom.
C[12] .i. imdergadh.

   A: A[137] (A[3] ochtach, A[9] .i. uchtach) .i. mactad .i. ailm aigisium sin, ar is ailm (no *a*) adber in duine ac iachtad i ngal*ar*, no ic machtad .i. ag ingantugud secip ræta.

B[135] i.e. a rag (?). [The kenning was transferred] thence to its cognate letter.

B[24] i.e. a rag.

C[12] i.e. of clothing.

   M: A[137] i.e. that is his [kenning for] *Muin* i.e. on account of the identity of the name to the *muin* ('upper part of the back') of a person or an ox, for they are the strongest in exertion.

A[2456] i.e. the vine, because it grows upwards.

B[135] i.e. *muin* ('deceit, treachery'?) of a person. [The kenning was transferred] thence to its cognominal letter.

B[24] i.e. *muin* ('deceit etc.'?), *muine* ('a brake' or 'thicket'?)

C[12] i.e. through the *muin* ('neck, throat').

   G: A[137] i.e. that is his [kenning for] *Gort* because of the identity of the name to the field of corn. When it is young corn in the blade that grass is sweeter than all grasses i.e. the cornfield. [The kenning was transferred] thence to that Ogam letter on account of their identity in name.

A[26] i.e. honeysuckle or ivy.

A[45] i.e. ivy.

B[135] i.e. a field. [The kenning was transferred] thence to its cognominal letter.

B[24] i.e. a field.

C[12] i.e. corn.

   GG: A[137] i.e. that is [a kenning for] *Gétal* i.e. for it is sustenance with the leeches (A[3] i.e. broom/reed or bog-myrtle, A[7] fern) and there is kinship between battle and *gétal* ('act of wounding'?).

A[26] i.e. broom/reed on account of the abundance of its healing (powers?).

A[45] *Ngedal* i.e. reed or bog-myrtle, *ut dicitur* 'sustenance of a leech' is *ngedal* i.e. reed or bog-myrtle, for it is sustenance with the leeches and there is kinship between K (= *cath* 'battle') and *ng* (= *gétal* 'wounding'?) or a healing physician i.e. on account of the abundance of its healing (powers?) or/ i.e. reed or bog-myrtle.

B[35] A[1] i.e. battle. [The kenning] was transferred thence to *Ngetal*.

B[24] i.e. reed.

C[12] i.e. cure.

   Z: A[137] i.e. that is his [kenning for] Ogam *Straif*. *Straif* ('sulphur') in substance, for sulphur is the strongest colouring (reddening?) agent for dyeing things, for it is it which causes white silver to become blue while making pure (?)/compressed (?) silver of it. It is it which is boiled in urine into white gold and makes red gold of it. 'Strongest reddening dye', [applies to] *straif* in its concrete meaning. [The kenning] was transferred thence to the letter called *Straif* (A[3] i.e. blackthorn) on account of their identity in name, *straif* is the name of each of them.

A[2456] i.e. blackthorn.

B[135] i.e. sulphur. [The kenning] was transferred thence to its cognominal letter.

C[12] and A[5] i.e. its smoke above (C[2] to the clouds).

   R: A[137] that is [a kenning for] *Ruis*, i.e. from reddening or blushing in substance, for it is written with [the symbol] *Ruis* and it is a reddening which grows in a person's face by rubbing the juice of the plant under it. 'Most intense blushing', then, is applied [as a kenning] to *Ruis* from *rus* ('blushing') or from the reddening, for that itself is written with [the symbol] *Ruis*.

A[26] i.e. rowan-tree or a fire (?) of elder-wood.

A[45] i.e. elder-tree, a fire of elder-wood.

B[135] i.e. the juice of the rose (?) which causes reddening of the faces so that there is blushing in them.

B[24] i.e. rowan-tree or elder-tree.

C[12] i.e. reddening/blushing.

   A: A[137] (A[3] pine-(or fir-) tree, A[9] i.e. a cry) i.e astonishment i.e. that is his [kenning for] *Ailm*, for *ailm* (or *a*) is what a person says when groaning in sickness or when astonished i.e. marvelling at whatever thing.

A^{26} .i. feth .i.fe fe nó ferdris.

A^4 .i. crand giuis .i. ochtach.

A^5 .i. o*ch*tach no ailm, airdeumh iachtadha .i. feth .i. fe ue at uath feirrdris no ailm, *id est quaisi* pailm a palma.

B^{135} .i. ailm sin, ar is i cetlabra gach duine iarna genemain a.

B^{24} .i. a.

C^{12} .i. á.

O: A^{137} congna*m*aigh ech*raide* .i. onnaid in carpait .i. (A^7 nó) na roith .i. onn leis-*sium* sin ar is tri onn scribthar onnaid in carbait. *Aliter* comguinid ech .i. aiten. Tucad uad-side forsin fid ut dianad a*inm* on*n* ar æntaid ataru ar is ainm onn do cechtar de 7 is on aiten*n* tucad int ainm is onn frisin fid n-og*aim secundum alios.*

A^{2456} .i. aiten nó echlasc.

B^{135} .i. onn .i. o.

B^4 .i. aitend.

C^{12} .i. fræch.

U: A^{137} .i. ur aigi-sium sin ar is do uir in talman is ainm uaraib adbaib. Tucad uada-side forsin fidh dianad ainm ur *in* og*aim* ar æntaid anma aturu .i. ur cechtar de 7 tre ur scribthair.

A^{2456} .i. fræch.

B^{135} .i. ur/uir les-sium sin, ar is i uir in talman do-gni silad na clann cuirtir inti. Silad clann dono rad o uir in talman do radh frisin fid n-ogaim ro gab comainm fria .i. ur cechtar de.

B^{24} .i. uir .i. talamh.

C^{12} .i. uir.

E: A^{137} .i. edad aigi-sium sin ar is don crun*n* critaig is ainm ergnaid fid. Tucad uada-side forsin fidh og*aim* dianad ainm edhadh, ar is uad tucad edad fair.

A^{26} .i. idhadh .i. fe fe a tuth nó fe a flesc.

A^{45} .i. ed uath .i. crand fir no crithach (A^5 *ut dicitur* erc*ra* fer fe fe flesg).

B^{135} .i. edadh isin caill. Uad-side fora fidh comai*nmnigthech in* og*aim.*

B^{24} .i. clesach uisce .i. éiccne.

C^{12} .i. é.

I: A^{137} idad aigi-seom sin, ar is do ibar as ainm siniu fedaib. Tucad uad-side forsin fid ut in og*aim* dianad ainm idad, ar is uad tucad int ainm is idad fair, ar is do ibar is ainm idad.

A^{2456} .i. ibhar.

B^{135} .i. ibar. Uad-side forin fidh n-ogaim ro gab ainm aile uadh .i. idadh.

B^{24} .i. ibar.

C^{12} .i. æs/ aeis.

EA: A^{137} .i. ebad (A^3 eubhadh) les-*sium*, sin, ar snamchai*n* fid .i. don bratan (A^1 bran) mor is ainm sen. Tucad uad-side forsin fid dianid ainm ebad in og*aim*, ar is ainm do bratan eo (A^1 é) 7 is tri ebad scribtar side ama*l* aipgitir in betha .i. tre sed .i. os, eo, tre eo, nasc .i. lon (*in* A^{13} .i. os *and* .i. lon *are written above the line*).

A^{2456} .i. crithach.

B^{135} .i. elen*n* for in fid *in* og*aim* ro gab ainm uad .i. ebad (eubadh B^3, eba B^5).

B^4 .i. ebadh.

C^{13} .i. éiccne.

A^{26} i.e. a stick (?) i.e. woe, woe, or bramble.

A^4 i.e. a pine tree i.e. pine-(or fir-) tree.

A^5 i.e. pine-tree or *ailm*, 'loudest groan' i.e. stick (?) i.e. woe woe great fear (? = *ad-uath*?), bramble or *ailm id est quasi pailm* from (Lat.) *palma*.

B^{135} i.e. that is *ailm*, for *a* is the first utterance of every person after his birth.

B^{24} i.e. *a*.

C^{12} i.e. *á*.

O: A^{137} 'helper of horses' i.e the wheel rims of a chariot i.e. (A^7 or) the wheels i.e. that is his [kenning for] *Onn* for *onnaid* ('wheel rims') of the chariot is written with [the symbol] *Onn. Aliter* 'wounder of horses' i.e. furze. [The kenning] was transferred thence to that letter which is named *Onn* on account of their identity, for both are called *onn*, and the name *Onn* was given to the letter from *aiten* ('furze') *secundum alios*.

A^{2456} i.e. furze or horsewhip.

B^{135} i.e. *onn* i.e. *o*.

B^{24} i.e. furze.

C^{12} i.e. heather.

U: A^{137} i.e. that is his [kenning for] *Úr* for 'in cold dwellings' is a kenning for the earth of the ground. It was transferred thence to the Ogam letter which is called *Úr* because of their identity of name i.e. both are *úr* and it is written with [the symbol] *Úr*.

A^{2456} i.e. heather.

B^{135} i.e. that is his [kenning for] *Úr*, for it is the earth of the ground which propagates the plants planted in it. 'Propagation of plants', then, is said of the earth of the ground and of the Ogam letter which took the same name as it i.e. both are *úr*.

B^{24} i.e. earth i.e. ground.

C^{12} i.e. earth.

E: A^{137} i.e. that is his [kenning for] *Edad*, for 'discerning tree' is a kenning for the aspen- (poplar-) tree. It was transferred thence to the Ogam letter called *Edhadh*, for it was called *Edad* after it.

A^{26} i.e. *Idhadh* i.e. woe, woe its stench or woe its stick.

A^{45} i.e. *ed uath* i.e. the juniper or aspen. (A^5 *ut dicitur* 'wasting of men'? woe woe wand).

B^{135} i.e. *edadh* in the wood. [The kenning was transferred] thence to its cognominal Ogam letter.

B^{24} i.e. the crafty one of the water i.e. salmon.

C^{12} i.e. *é* ('salmon').

I: A^{137} i.e. that is his [kenning for] *Idad* for the yew's kenning is 'oldest tree'. It was transferred thence to that Ogam letter called *Idad*, for it was called *Idad* after it, for *idad* is a name for yew-tree.

A^{2456} i.e. yew-tree.

B^{135} i.e. yew-tree. [The kenning was transferred] thence to the Ogam letter which took another name from it i.e. *Idadh*.

B^{24} i.e. yew-tree.

C^{12} i.e. age(?).

EA: A^{137} that is his [kenning for] *Ébad*, for 'fair-swimming letter' i.e. that is a kenning for the great salmon. It was transferred thence to the Ogam letter called *Ébad*, for *é/éo* is a name/word for the salmon and it is written with [the character] *Ébad* as [in] the 'Alphabet of the world' i.e. three stags i.e. deer, a salmon, three salmon, a snipe i.e. a blackbird.

A^{2456} i.e. aspen-(poplar-) tree.

B^{135} i.e. honeysuckle (or aspen?) transferred to the Ogam letter which took its name from it. i.e. *Ébad*.

B^4 i.e. *Ébadh*.

C^{13} i.e. a salmon.

OI: A[137] .i. or iar ret. Tucad uad-side forsin fid ar aentaid in anma fil aturu .i. or ainm cechtar de.

A[26] .i. feirius.

A[45] .i. feorus no edind (A[5] *continues with kennings for* UI *and* OI).

B[135] .i. or. Uad-side fora fid comainm*nigthech* .i. or in ogai*m*.

B[24] .i. ór.

UI: A[137] .i. uill*eann* leis-sium sin ar is do edlen*n* is ainm. Tucadh uad-sidhe forsin [fid] og*aim* dianad ainm uill*eann* ar is uadh tucad uill*eann* fair, ar is do edlin*n* is ainm.

A[26] .i. crann fir nó elen*n*.

A[45] .i. edleand.

B[135] .i. uill*eann* .i. edlen*n*. Uad-side forsin fid in ogaim ro gab [ainm] uaide .i. uil-leann.

B[24] crann fir nó eilend.

IO: A[137] .i. pin (A[37] pín) sin aigi-sium, ar is do*n* chrun*n* dianid ainm pin is ainm millsium feda. De atbertar cæra pinne (A[37] píne). Tucad uad-side forsin fid dianad ainm pin (A[37] pín), ar is uadh tucad pin no ifin/iphín air.

A[26] .i. spin.

A[45] .i. spinan no ispin/spin *ut dicitur* millsim fedha pin .i. caor.

B[135] .i. pin (B[3] pín) no ifin (B[3] ifin, B[5] ihpín). Uad-side forsin fidh ro gab ainm uaid, .i. pin no iphin/ifin/ihpín.

B[24] .i. spin.

AE: A[137] .i. ach no uch. Emancoll leis-sium sin ar gabair emuncoll ar ach gia gabar ar araill. *Finit* Briatharogam Morain*d*.

A[26] .i. uch .i. midua .i. seim munchæl.

A[5] .i. umda (*related MSS* imda) a fedha, no emancoll .i. gabar . . (*as in* A[13]) .i. midiuiti . . . (*as in* A[26]).

B[35] .i. ach no uch ar eamhancoll oir gabor eamho*n*coll ar ach no uch. *Finit*. B[1] *missing*.

B[24] .i. uchra no usca no uch.

B: B[2] *caineṙ* is probably a mistake for *cainenn* as in B[4], 'garlic' or 'leeks' being a reasonable resolution of the kenning. B[4] *crecath*, B[2] *crectha* (gen.sg. of *crecath*?) and C[12] *creccad/crecad* are unclear. If the -c-, -cc- represents [k] and the B examples refer to the bark of the birch (cf. *fúarc* 'integument, bark'?) one might compare Welsh *crych* 'wrinkled, crumpled, rough' which, however, is derived from **krikso* (see *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* s.v.). Though the readings suggest intervocalic [k] or [g] one is tempted to identify *crecad/crecath* with *crechad* 'cauterizing, branding, tattooing' (see Meyer, *ZCP* 10 (1915), 400–1; O'Rahilly, *Ériu* 13 (1942), 168; and *DIL* s.v.). The association of *crechad* with the colour *glas* 'blue, grey' in *colpa iarna crechad no ica ta in colpa glas iarna crech*ad 'a tattooed shank, or who has the blue tattooed shank' (Breatnach, *Ériu* 32 (1981), 62–3 gl.8), together with Meyer's observation that *glasen* 'woad' (cf. the B[4] reading *glaissen*) was probably used for tattooing, might suggest that the glossator interpreted the kenning to mean 'bluest of [human] skin', whence i.e. tattooing. This could also explain the C gloss if 'beauty of the eyebrow' was interpreted to mean 'adornment [by tattooing] of the eyebrow', cf. *CIH* 1617.15 and 2334.2–3 *CRECCOIRE/CRECCAIRI* (note the spellings) *.i. doniad crecad glas arna roscaib*. Fergus Kelly, however, has recently (*Ériu* 37 (1986), 185–6) discussed this passage and connected OI *creccaire* with Scottish Gaelic *kreahkir*, assuming an onomatopoeic origin and a meaning 'raucous chatter' (though this leaves the *glas arna roscaib* unexplained).

L: A[1] *in luisiu* could be a mistake for *ón luisiu* (treating *luise* as a masc. *io*-stem) or *in luisin* (for the *-n* see *DIL* s.v. *luise*).

F: A[26] *ar inchaib* is an etymological gloss on *airenach*.

OI: A^{13^-} i.e. gold in substance. [The kenning] was transferred thence to the letter on account of their identity of name i.e. they are both called *ór*.

A^{26} i.e. spindle-tree.

A^{45} i.e. spindle-tree or ivy.

B^{135} i.e. gold. [The kenning was transferred] thence to its cognominal letter i.e. Ogam *Ór*.

B^{24} i.e. gold.

UI: A^{137} i.e. that is his [kenning for] *Uilleann* for it is a name for honeysuckle. It was transferred thence to the Ogam [letter] called *Uilleann*, for it was called *Uilleann* after it, for it is a name for honeysuckle.

A^{26} i.e. a juniper or spindle-tree (? honeysuckle).

A^{45} i.e. honeysuckle.

B^{135} i.e. elbow (?) i.e. honeysuckle. [The kenning was transferred] thence to the Ogam letter which took [its name] from it i.e. *Uilleann*.

B^{24} a juniper or spindle-tree (? honeysuckle).

IO: A^{137} i.e. that is his [kenning for] *Pin*, for 'sweetest tree' is a kenning for the tree called *pin* ('gooseberry, pine'?). Thence are named the gooseberries (?). [The kenning] was transferred thence to the letter called *Pin* because it was named *Pín* or *Ifín/Iphín* after it.

A^{26} i.e. a thorn bush.

A^{45} i.e. whitethorn or gooseberry bush (?) *ut dicitur* 'sweetest tree' is *pín* i.e. berry.

B^{135} i.e. *pín* ('gooseberry'?) or *ifín/iphín*. [The kenning was transferred] thence to the letter which took its name from it i.e. *Pín* or *Iphín/Ihpín*.

B^{24} i.e. a thorn bush.

AE: A^{137} i.e. *ach* or *uch*. That is his [kenning for] *Emancholl*, for *Emancholl* has the [phonetic] value *ach* though it has another [phonetic] value. *Finit* the *Briatharogam* of Morann.

A^{26} i.e. *uch* ('cry of woe') *i.e. midua*? i.e. smooth, slender-neck.

A^{5} i.e. many its letters or *Emancholl* i.e. it has the [phonetic] value (as in A^{13}) i.e. *midiuiti* (= A^{26}).

B^{35} i.e. *ach* or *uch* for *Emancholl* (continues as in A^{137}).

B^{24} i.e. wasting away (or 'lamenting'?) or grease (?) or woe.

N: The word *ginól* 'jaws' is glossed *glac na gabla* at *Fél*[2] lix.y, apparently a figurative extension of its primary meaning.

D: The C kennings have *saire* 'craftsmanship' but both glosses have forms with dentals which are unclear to me unless they represent *niam as airde* 'most exalted beauty'.

T: The A^1 gloss is corrupt and the transmission is clearly faulty (*roith* is missing from the kenning). Calder, and *DIL* following him, translate 'another thing the meaning of that today' reading *aill inde* . . . There is no gap in the MS, however, and my colleague Liam Breatnach suggests it is probably a corruption of *cuillend é sin aniu*, which is preferable.

GG: The C gloss would fit the A/B kennings better and was probably influenced by them.

A: A^{26} *feth* is unclear and the gloss here and at A^5 seems to be influenced by E. I translate with *DIL* 2 *feth*. A^5 *at uath* is probably an etymological gloss on *Edad*, see under E.

E: A^{26} *flesc* (cf. *feth* under A) is probably a reference to the *flesc idaith* of Cormac's glossary (Y 606).

AE: The meaning of *midua* and *midiuiti* is unclear to me. Meroney, translating 'not-simple', takes these to be a reference to the symbol itself. *Diuit* is used in the *Auraicept* (2895, 2898) of simple uncompounded *c* and *g* (as opposed to *q* and *ng*) but the precise significance of *mi-* in *midiuiti* is unclear. *Seim munchæl* on the other hand is quite clearly an etymological gloss on *Emancholl*.

DISCUSSION

B *Beithe*[30]

The kennings of A and B clearly refer to the distinctive features of the birch, its impressive and elegant crown and both the bright colour and peeling nature of its bark. C is a little more difficult. Meroney assumes displacement from the letter L, probably on the basis of A's kenning for that letter; but L already has its full complement of kennings. 'Beauty of the eyebrow' (or 'eyelash', see *Ériu* 20 (1966), 42, §33) could refer to the light-branched and thin-twigged nature of the birch, to its pendulous crown or indeed to its catkins. For the association of the birch with hair cf. *cunid samalta ra cír mbethi ra dered fagamair no ra bretnasaib bánóir glantaitnem a fhuilt, MU*[2] 586, 'and the bright sheen of his hair is similar to the foliage of a birch-tree at the end of autumn, or to brooches of pale gold.'[31]

The glosses on A are straightforward. For B, C see the relevant notes. For the reference to Ogam being first written on the birch see *Aur.* 5483ff.

Beithe derives from Primitive Irish (PI) *betwias and is cognate with Welsh *bedwen/bedw* 'birch(es)' < IE **g*ʷ*et-* 'resin, gum' (*IEW* 480).

L *Luis*

A's 'lustre of the eye' would appear to point to an association of the name of the letter with *luise/loise* 'flame, blaze, radiance', and was apparently so taken by the A[1] glossator. Meroney regards the B and C kennings as innovations, but this is dictated by the assumption that all kennings must be based on the same word, which, as will be clear from the discussion below (see in particular under M), is not the case. I take 'friend/sustenance of cattle' to be kennings on *lus* 'plant, herb, vegetable', which is sufficiently close to *luis* to suggest it. For *lúth* with the meaning 'sustenance' see under S and GG.

The glosses, excluding A[1], struggle to identify *luis* as a tree, the A[3457] tradition opting for the rowan-tree to accommodate the kenning 'lustre of the eye', while B and C (as well as A[268]) choose the elm (B[1] using a similar explanation to that provided for the analogous *lúth bech* under S) to accommodate the acrostic principle, and the fir-tree, which has little to recommend it.

Unlike *Beithe*, the name of the letter L is not reliably attested in a context which would indicate its primary meaning. Whether, following the A kenning, it is related to *luise*, deriving ultimately from the root **leuk-* 'to shine' (Latin *lux* etc. *IEW* 687ff), or, following B and C, it is to be connected with *lus* < **leudh-* 'to grow' (*IEW* 684–5), Welsh *llysau* 'vegetables', is therefore difficult to say. The analogous *ruis/ruise* (see R) would suggest the former,

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[30]I would like to record my thanks to Fergus Kelly for a very informative discussion on some of the *Beithe* and *Sail* kennings.

[31]I do not see why the Germanic names for B, which also mean 'birch', should have been based on 'Celtic', as suggested by Meroney. 'Celtic', moreover, is a very loose term in this connection.

while adherents of the 'alphabet végétal' idea would probably opt for the latter. Either way, of course, the acrostic principle yields *l-*.

F *Fern*

All kennings point indirectly to the name of the letter, viz. *Fern* 'Alder-tree', through the uses, as the glossators recognise, to which its timber was put. 'Vanguard of hunting/warrior bands'[32] and 'protection of the heart' are kennings for 'shield', which is in fact attested as a secondary meaning of *fern* (see *DIL* s.v. and cf. *fern . . . in crand as teo i ngliaid*, 'alder, the hottest tree in battle', *Silva Gadelica* 1, 245). Alder, being water resistant, was suitable for liquid-containing vessels, whence the kenning of B.

Fern, < PI **werná*, is cognate with Welsh *gwernen/gwern* 'alder-tree(s), Gaulish *Vernodubrum*, < IE **werná* 'alder, pole' (*IEW* 1169).

S *Sail*

The A kenning is a clear reference to the sallow colour of the willow, the characteristic feature which gave it its name in Celtic and Latin. The B kenning, on the other hand, points to the nectar of its catkins, the male and female varieties of which, being on separate trees, require the assistance of bees for pollination (cf. *Ná loisc sailig sáir . . . beich 'na bláth ac deol* 'donot burn the noble willow . . . bees sucking in its blossoms (= catkins?)', *Silva Gadelica* 1, 245). The C kenning is an extension of this.

The glosses are straightforward and require no comment. I see no reason for a connection of any kind with Old Icelandic *sól*, as suggested by Meroney.

Old Irish *sail* < PI **salis* < **saliks* derives from the IE root **sal-*'dirty grey' and is cognate with Welsh *helygen/helyg* 'willow(s)', Lat. *salix*, etc. (*IEW* 879).

N *Nin*

The kennings on this letter-name and the name itself present a number of difficulties which I cannot solve. *Nin* has the singular distinction among Irish letter-names of having both a specific and a general application (viz. 'the letter *n*' and 'letter(s)' in general). For the general meaning cf., for example, the opening line of a short poem on the letters (= sounds) of Irish: *Nena filed féghthar linn* 'Let us examine the letters of the poets' (*ZCP* 12 (1918), 295). Meroney ascribes this usage to the influence of N as an all-purpose initial in Latin documents (= *N(omen)*?) but, like other supposed examples of Latin influence on the Irish letter-names identified by him (see in particular his explanation of *húath*), this seems to me to be highly unlikely and quite unnecessary.

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[32]Cf. *Gwern blaen llin, a want gysseuin* in *Cad Goddeu, The book of Taliesin*, J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Llanbedrog 1910), 23–7, 24, 15–16. Evans suggests that *gwern* may be a mistake for *deru* 'oaks', as oak was regarded as 'at the head of trees' used for bows (89). But a translation 'Alders at the head of the battle-line struck first' removes this difficulty and provides an interesting parallel to the Irish kenning.

Early Irish *nin* and the adjective *ninach* present a number of problems, some of which are discussed by Hull in *ZCP* 28 (1960/61), 254–5. There would appear to be evidence for at least two words of the form *nin*, viz. *DIL* 2 *nin* 'part of a weaver's loom' and 3 *nin* 'a wave', the latter mainly a glossary word but possibly also contained in the phrase *réim nena* (*DIL* s.v. ? 1 *nena*). 'Part of a weaver's loom' appears to be too specific, however, for 2 *nin*, and the editors may have been influenced by the phrase *nin garmna* in the *Briatharogaim* glosses in their choice of this definition. The word seems to be more or less synonymous with *gabul* 'fork, forked branch' (cf. *ninach* .i. *glacach no crechtach no nin gabul* (leg *nin* .i. *gabul*?) .i. *ginol* .i. *glac na gabla*, *DIL* s.v. *glacach* and see further examples s.v. *ninach*. 'Fork' or 'forked branch' would be a suitable starting point for the development of the meaning 'Ogam letter(s)' in view of *fid* 'tree, wood' *fid/fedae* 'letter(s), vowels' and *taebomnai* (*omnae* 'bole of a tree') 'consonants', and this is suggested by *O'Dav.*, *nin* .i. *leter nó oghum nó fren oghuim*, '*nin* i.e. a letter or Ogam or a rod of Ogam' (*CIH* 1518.2). The general meaning 'letter(s)' is, I think, to be explained in this way.

The adjective *ninach* when glossed *gablach* or used as an epithet of *croch* 'cross' is consistent with the above interpretation, but the phrase *nem ninach* scarcely means 'forked heaven'. Hull (loc. cit.) is probably right in identifying this with Welsh *nen* 'roof, ceiling, heaven', but it is at best difficult to go along with his identification of the *ninach* of *croch ninach* and *nem ninach* with the meanings 'having a roof or top' (of a gallows) and 'having a vault or canopy' (of the sky, physical heaven). The Irish glossators clearly had a problem with the *ninach* in *nem ninach* which they gloss variously as *aoibhinn*, *beannach*, *breac*, *brecht*, *nélach*, *reannach* and *taitnemach*. A basic meaning 'loft' with adjectival 'lofty' would cover *nem ninach* and Welsh *nen*, but this, it seems to me, would have to be separated from *nin* = *gabul*, *ninach* = *gablach*, and would be a less likely starting point for the meaning 'letter'.

Assuming, then, the existence of two words with separate adjectival derivatives, viz. *nin/ninach* 'fork/forked' and *nin/ninach* 'loft/lofty', it is now possible to approach the kennings and their glosses. The glosses on A's 'establishing of peace' are dictated largely by the use of *nin* in the phrase *nin garmna* 'fork of a weaver's beam', pointing out that (A[1]) it (the weaver's beam ?) is a sign of peace, or that (A[2456]) weavers' beams are erected only in times of peace. The A[45] tradition, in which the arboreal fiction is well established, alternatively identifies *nin* as a word for the ash-tree and concludes that weavers' beams were made of ash, but prefers a modification of the kenning to *coscrad side*,[33] viz. 'destruction of peace', which was determined, I feel sure, by the arboreal deception, ash being the commonly employed timber in spear-making (see below on O), whence the idea of the 'destruction' of peace. In the B and C traditions, although the kennings are clearly distinct from that of A, the phrase *nin garmna* is once again the starting point for the glosses.

[33]A[4] and RIA 23P2/535 have *costad* twice, but all other MSS consulted have *coscrad/costad*.

The only interpretation that I can put on this is that *nin* 'fork' was a low-frequency word in the glossators' time, known to them mainly in the phrase *nin garmna*, which also turns up as a gloss on the obscure kenning *lom luidh lom tuilith* in a text called *Tulchabha Briathar* 'A bowlful of words'.[34] For them, therefore, *nin garmna* is the starting point for interpretation, just as *onnaid* is the starting point in O (see below). Whether this is the correct point of departure for the kennings themselves, however, is questionable, as the authors of these were more familiar with the meanings of the letter-names than were their later glossators, as will be clear from the discussion of GG and O, and they knew nothing of the arboreal fiction. If *nin* meant 'a forked branch', 'establishing of peace' could be based on the olive branch of Irish tradition, the so-called *cráeb síde*, the shaking of which caused men to cease from fighting (see *DIL* s.v. 2 *síd*, 217, 22ff). 'Boast of women' and 'boast of beauty', however, could scarcely be explained in this way, but could be based on *ninach* 'lofty' in the extended sense 'beautiful, delightful', though this is doubtful. Meroney's 'contest of women', 'contest of beauty' as metaphors for weaving put the glosses before the kennings, which I am reluctant to do, and are partly based on a confusion of the glosses' *síd* 'peace' with *síta* 'silk'. His comments on Icelandic Y and the Germanic N rune do not help much, and are based on the erroneous idea that the Irish kennings have, in some cases, the shapes of the corresponding letters in the Latin alphabet as their basis (see in particular under O).

The etymology of *nin* is unclear, but its initial *n-* is scarcely disputable.

H *(h)Úath*

B's 'blanching of faces' is clearly a kenning on *úath* 'fear, horror' as interpreted by the B[135] gloss, and this is also a suitable interpretation for the A and C kennings. The latter's 'most difficult at night' could also point to *DIL úathad* 'singleness, being alone' but this is less likely, especially in view of Greene's objections to the meaning 'single(ness)' as opposed to 'few' in all but a grammatical context.[35] The absurdity of the identification with 'whitethorn', which I take to have been dictated as elsewhere by the kenning and not, as Meroney suggests, by the sign itself, can be seen in the glossators' attempts to reconcile the kenning 'assembly of packs of hounds' with 'fear' and 'whitethorn' in the A tradition. The equation of *úath* and *scé* turns up in Cormac's glossary (Y 1278) but this is an additional article in *YBL*.[36]

Meroney's explanation of the origin of *úath*, the work of a 'dunce' or 'wag' who turned Latin *autem* into *úathem*, scarcely requires comment. The kennings for the letter-name *(h)úath* suggest that it is an extension of *úath*

[34]See S. H. O'Grady, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the British Museum*, 1 (London 1926), 90–1.

[35]See *Ériu* 22 (1971), 178–80. This would also exclude the unlikely theory that the Ogam symbol was named 'single' owing to the fact that it had only one score.

[36]I cannot see why Anglo-Saxon *þorn* should necessarily have the Irish equation *úath = scé* as its basis, as suggested by Meroney.

'fear, horror' but this is not necessarily the case in view of the fact that the kennings can also be based on homonyms. *Úath* and *úathad/óthad*, Welsh *odid* 'hardly' (also *uthr* 'fear') probably derive from the root **au-* 'down, away from' (*IEW* 73).[37] As I have pointed out before, the *h* value of this symbol in the manuscript tradition of Ogam is a cosmetic one (*Ériu* 37 (1986), 16–17). For the Primitive Irish alphabet an initial consonant is required, and this clearly cannot be generated by an **autos* etymology. Pedersen's view[38] that a radical [h] sound did exist in Primitive and Old Irish in words formerly beginning with /p/ and /i̯/ (and proclitics in /s/) is no help either with an original **autos*. The problem remains, therefore, but I still suspect an initial /i̯/ in the original name, the primary meaning of which one must assume to be lost.

D *Dair*

The A kenning points to the oak-tree, and I take *ardam* to refer to its status among trees (it is the first in the list of *airig fedo* 'nobles of the wood' in the law-tract *Bretha Comaithchesa* 'Laws of Neighbourhood', so placed on account of its *mes* 'mast' and *soíre* 'nobility', see *CIH* 202.19, 21–2)[39] rather than to physical height, though this might be suggested by *A dhair dhosach dhuilledhach, at ard ós cionn croinn* 'O bushy leafy oak, you are high above trees', *Buile Shuibhne* 972. The B and C kennings, assuming my translation of the latter is correct, point to the value attached to oak-wood by craftsmen.

OI *dair/daur* 'oak-tree' < PI **daris/darus* is cognate with Welsh *derwen/derw* 'oak-tree(s)' < IE **deru-* 'tree, oak', etc. (*IEW* 214 f.).

T *Tinne*

The B kenning would appear to be a clear reference to the smelting process and therefore to *tinne* 'bar, rod of metal, ingot, mass of molten metal'. A and C can also be so interpreted since it is known that chariot wheels were iron-shod,[40] and a spear, for example, is described as consisting of the *gáe* 'iron point', the *crand* 'shaft' and several *seimenn* 'rivets' (see *Corm.* Y 975). If *arm* means 'weaponry' rather than 'a weapon', on the other hand, C might refer to 'sword', as one of the triad sword, shield and spear.

The glossators of B[24] and C identify *tinne* as 'iron'. The A tradition, including A[1] with the restoration suggested in the notes, together with B[135], shows the influence of the arboreal fiction. The choice of the holly-tree will have been dictated by the kenning in A if *cuilenn* was one of the woods

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[37]See also A. Walde, *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Neubearbeitete Auflage von J. B. Hofmann), 1 (Heidelberg 1938), 79, and 2 (1954), 266, as well as Greene, loc. cit.

[38]*Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen*, 1 (Göttingen 1909), 410–11.

[39]See also F. Kelly, 'The Old Irish tree-list', *Celtica* 11 (1976), 107–24, 109 and passim on trees in general.

[40]See D. Greene, 'The chariot as described in Irish literature', in *The Iron Age in the Irish Sea province*, Council of British Archaeology research report 9 (1972), 59–73, 64ff.

employed by the wheelwright (it certainly would appear to have been used
for the *fertsi* 'shafts', see *CIH* 202.26, where *feirse carpaid* 'chariot shafts'
are one of the reasons for placing *cuilenn* among the *airig fedo*), though
seasoned elm (in the hub or nave), oak (for the spokes) and ash (for the
felloes) with an outer metal tyre would be the anatomy of the wheel in
more recent times. See further Thurneysen, *ZCP* 19 (1933), 201.

The etymology of *tinne* is not clear but it may be related to *tend* 'strong,
firm' or *tind* 'brilliant'. Vendryes's attempt to establish a connection with
Gaulish *tanno-* is in line with his acceptance of the 'alphabet végétal' theory
(see *RC* 44 (1927), 318–19).[41]

C *Coll*

The kennings for *coll* 'hazel-tree' are all inspired by the hazelnut, which
was much prized in early Ireland and was the main reason for placing the
hazel second only to the oak among the *airig fedo* (*CIH* 203.2). With *cainiu
fedaib* and *milsem fedo* compare Cormac's glossary Y 348: *cnu .i. cainiu .i.
millsi oldati na toraid aile* 'nut i.e. fairer i.e. sweeter than the other fruits'.
The A variants *itchar*, *cnochar* and *cainchar* (*sic. leg.*) likewise point to the
hazelnut as do the glosses.

Old Irish *coll* 'hazel' is cognate with Welsh *collen/cyll* 'hazel(s)', Gaulish
coslo-, Latin *corulus* < **kos(e)lo-* 'hazel' (*IEW* 616).

Q *Cert*

The B and C kennings together with the B[24] and C[12] glosses point to
ceirt 'a rag' and this would suit the A kenning if *baiscell* means *geilt* 'lunatic'.
If it means *elit* 'hind, doe', however, a word *cert* meaning 'bush' would be
preferable and indeed not unsuitable for the *geilt* of Irish tradition, who
normally resides in the woods (see *Buile Shuibhne* 1000, where *cuilenn* is the
geilt's *clithar*, and 437–8, 596 where *ceirt*, *ceirteach* 'rag' is associated with
him). The arboreal 'apple-tree' is probably dictated by the A kenning.[42]

Vendryes, who accepts the *cert = aball* equation, suggests (*RC* 44, 313ff)
the meaning 'apple-tree' is a specification of a more general designation
'tree, bush', comparing Welsh *perth* 'bush' and deriving both ultimately
from IE $*perk^W$- 'oak' through an assimilated $*k^W erk^W$- (Lat. *quercus*) with
a derivative *t*-suffix bringing about the loss of $-k^W$- as in OI *-ort* < **orgtos*.
A PI $*k^W ertā$, $*k^W ertī$ 'bush' cognate with Welsh *perth* would be compatible
with the well-attested value of this symbol on the Ogam inscriptions, viz.
$/k^w/$. *Ce(i)rt* 'rag' < **kert-*, **krāt-* 'turn, plait, interweave' (*IEW* 584, Lat.

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[41]On *ten*, *-tan* 'tree' see K. Meyer, 'Zur keltischen Wortkunde' 1, in *Sitzungsberichte d. kön.
preuss. Akad. d. Wiss.* 38 (1912), 790–803, 798–9.

[42]Meroney dismisses the *cert/aball* equation as 'false' suggesting that *aball* belongs with A
(*ailm*). It is true that *aball* takes the place of *Ailm* in the only 'alphabet' which can correctly be
described as 'végétal', viz. *Aur.* 5925–7 (= 'alphabet' 26), but in that the choice is dictated
entirely by the acrostic principle, which is not true of the *Briatharogaim* glosses. If *cert = aball*
is a 'false' equation it is so in the sense that most such equations in these glosses are false. It is
found in all the MSS of the A[45] tradition.

crātis) on the other hand would be excluded by the acrostic principle but, of course, would have been available as a homonym by the Old Irish period for the kennings. Whether *cert* 'tree, bush' existed at that time depends on one's interpretation of the A kenning; it is not attested in the literature, to my knowledge, and the *aball* equation is suspect as evidence. Its fate may have been similar to that of *gétal*.

The MS spelling *quert*, as I have pointed out (*Ériu* 37 (1986), 15–16), is dictated by the cosmetic value assigned to *ce(i)rt* from the Latin alphabet, as there can be no question of PI /k^w/ having survived in fossilised form in this single instance into the Old Irish period.

M *Muin*

The letter-name *Muin*, like those of G, Z, R and U, has two distinct kennings in the A tradition. A's 'strongest in exertion' and C's 'path of the voice' are both based on OI *muin* 'upper part of the back, neck' and are so understood by the A[137] and C glosses. B's *árusc n-airlig*, rendered 'place of decapitation' by Graves (*Hermathena* 2 (1876), 451), thinking of *muin* 'upper part of back', and 'condition of slaughter' by Calder, has a very different point of departure. I understand *árusc* here to have its normal meaning in early Irish, viz. 'proverb, saying', and I believe the kenning is based, not on *muin* 'upper part of the back' but rather on *DIL* 3 *muin* to which the meanings 'a wile, ruse, trick' (better 'fate, treachery' ?) are given. The proverb in question is probably *messa/messam cach muin*, which is attested independently in two tales (*MU*² 892 = *LL* 35211 and *C.Cath.* 4606, spelt *main* and *main* respectively). In the former it is put in the mouth of Bricriu immediately on discovery of the treachery of the iron house; in the latter it paraphrases Lucan's *Pharsalia* vii 122–3: *Omne malum victi, quod sors feret ultima rerum, omne nefas victoris erit* 'Every woe that utter ruin brings will the vanquished suffer and every horror will the conqueror commit'. *DIL* wrongly places these examples under *main* 'a gift, benefit' (M 35. 68ff) translating 'the worst of boons', 'a deadly gift', 'the worst gift of all'. 'The worst of all treachery' or, more loosely, 'a fate worse than death' is more suitable, and a meaning 'fate' (cf. Latin *sors* above) together with proof that *muin* is not to be equated with *main* are furnished by: *a log mo chuil is mo chealg, mad rom-gab muin mo cach mairg* 'If a fate worse than death (lit. 'woe') has overtaken me as a reward for my sin and deceit' (*ZCP* 6 (1908), 263) where there is internal rhyme between *cuil* and *muin*, an example of *muin* which is also wrongly placed under *main* in *DIL* (M 35.77–8). The Dictionary's suspected proverbial status of *messa/messam cach muin*, however, can now be confirmed by *árusc n-airlig*.

I take the second kenning of the A tradition, viz. *ardam maise* 'most noble goodliness', to be based on yet another Old Irish word *muin*, albeit unrecorded as such in *DIL* though otherwise well-known, viz. *muin* 'love, esteem', most examples of which will again be found under *DIL main*. That this word is not *main* is confirmed by *LU* 9944: *Arcu fuin dom ríg, ferr múin ná cach main* 'I beseech forgiveness of my King, love is greater than wealth'

with the rhyme *fuin:muin*. The *DIL* translation (M 35.66) 'a boon beyond all boons' is not convincing and the rhyme is not 'approximate', but perfect, as in the two preceding and three following quatrains of the poem. The word *muin* 'love' must also be the second element in *inmain* 'dear, beloved', *main* being excluded in view of the preservation of the diphthong in *somain* 'profit', *somaine* 'wealth', *domain* 'loss', *inlaich* 'befitting a warrior', etc. That *maisse* 'beauty', but also 'goodliness', 'that which confers dignity' is not inappropriate in a kenning for *muin* will be clear from the association of *muin*, *miad* and *mórmaisse* in *TTr* 55 = *LL* 30873 where Stokes's translation 'affection' is quite appropriate.

The *muin* kennings thus prove conclusively that any homonym can be exploited for these circumlocutions. Meroney's attempts to make the kennings meet a primary meaning 'esteem' do not work nor do I see any reason why the B and C traditions should be considered innovations. The glossators in the A²⁴⁵⁶ tradition show their desperation with *Muin*, choosing an identification with *finemain* (because it 'grows upwards'!), probably on the basis of the latter's *-main*.

Irish *muin* 'love, affection' is to be connected with Welsh *mynawc* 'loving' as pointed out by Vendryes (*Lexique Étymologique* s.v.). *Muin* 'upper part of back, neck' also 'throat' is cognate with Welsh *mwn* < **mono-*, **moni-* 'neck, throat' (*IEW* 747–8, Lat. *monīle*, etc.) and *muin* 'treachery' is related by Vendryes (loc.cit.) to *mon* 'a feat (especially of sleight or cunning)'.[43]

G *Gort*

All kennings, including the alternative *glaisem geltae* 'greenest pasture' in the A tradition, point to *gort* 'field' either directly, as in the B tradition, or through *arbar* 'corn' and *fér* 'grass' in the phrases *gort arbae* 'cornfield', *gort féoir* 'grass field'. Meroney's 'counterpart of heaven' for B is based on the faulty reading *med* which can be excluded on grounds of the alliteration requirement. There may be biblical overtones in the C kenning. The ivy/honeysuckle equation of the A²⁴⁵⁶ glosses may be based on the 'greenest pasture' kenning of those traditions, honeysuckle and ivy being evergreens.

Old Irish *gort* 'field' < PI **gortas* is cognate with Latin *hortus*, Welsh *garth* 'enclosure, garden' < **gher-/ghor-to-s* 'to enclose, enclosure' (*IEW* 442).

GG *Gétal*

I take 'sustenance of a leech' (for this meaning of *lúth* see under L, S) and 'raiment of physicians' to be more or less synonymous as kennings, 'food' and 'clothing' being coupled frequently as the necessities of life (see *Wb* 10ᵈ23, 29ª13, *SR* 6840, etc.). They point, therefore, to something from which the leech/physician derives his income. This could refer to some article of his equipment (cf. the *lúth* of the C kenning on O which points to the

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[43] See Vendryes's discussion in *ZCP* 9 (1913), 294–6 where, however, he gives the meaning 'protection' to the example cited above from *ZCP* 6, 263.

hunting bands' spears), but the kenning 'beginning of slaying' excludes this and points rather in the direction of some warlike activity. The glossators of the A[13457] traditions recognize this and suggest a connection between the letter-name, variously written *getal, gétal, ngetal* and *ngedal,* and *cath* (= *K* in A[45]) 'battle', while the B kenning is simply glossed 'battle' in B[35] (as well as in A[1] = *Aur.* 5584). The *K/Ng* equation led Meroney to identify the 'nearly forgotten old name' of this letter as *cétal* 'charm', but 'charm' cannot underlie the C kenning and the letter-name could never have begun with /k/.

The name of this symbol is generally taken to be *ngetal,* but the initial *n* is purely cosmetic, as I have suggested elsewhere (*Ériu* 37, 18ff), and may be safely disregarded in the search for an etymology. In the G53 manuscript, in which the accent is quite regularly used over vowels known to be long, the name of this letter appears as *gétal* (2. 22, 4. 8,9), and in both Ó hEodhasa's Grammar and the poem *Feadha an Oghaim aithnidh damh* the rationalized form *niatal/niatol*[44] is more consistent with a cosmetically modified *ngétal* than *ngetal.* This, combined with the kennings, provides an explanation for the letter-name which not only suits the *Bríatharogaim* circumlocutions perfectly but will also establish the independent phonetic status of this particular symbol in the Primitive Irish Ogam alphabet. I take *gétal* to be an old verbal noun of *gonid* 'wounds', corresponding in formation to *cétal* 'act of singing' the verbal noun of *canid* 'sings' and deriving ultimately from *g^Whṇtlom* through PI *g^Wantlon, *g^Wēddlan.* A meaning 'act of wounding' will suit the kennings 'sustenance of a leech' and 'raiment of physicians' admirably and is, of course, perfectly consistent with 'beginning of slaying', particularly in view of the fact that *écht* 'slaying, slaughter' is often coupled with or glossed *guin,* the more common verbal noun of *gonid.*[45] The only problem with this interpretation of the origin of the letter-name is that of explaining the contrasting vocalisms of *gétal* and the past passive of *gonid,* viz. *-góet* (cf. *cétal* and *-cét*) though this difficulty in fact exists even without *gétal* since *-gét* is actually attested.[46] Until the publication of Cowgill's superb article on the etymology of OI *guidid,*[47] *-góet* had been considered the problem form, which Thurneysen, expecting *-gét* and not familiar with its existence at the time, explained tentatively as due to the influence of the vocalism of the present *gonid* (*GOI* §710). Cowgill thought this an improbable explanation, pointing out that very divergent active-past passive vocalisms were tolerated in the language and suggested instead an *ad hoc* rule

[44]*Graiméir Ghaeilge na mBráthar Mionúr,* ed. P. Mac Aogáin O.F.M. (Dublin 1968), 7, and *Éigse* 3 (1941) 44, qt. 39.

[45]Meroney believes that B and C were kennings for 'battle' and 'healing', with which they are glossed, but this disregards the order of priority which should be given to this material.

[46]See *ZCP* 24 (1954), 235, *Ériu* 16 (1952), 44 n.2, and *Buile Shuibhne* 1077, as well as Cowgill (see next note) 62, n. 14a.

[47]W. Cowgill, 'The etymology of Irish *guidid* and the outcome of *g^Wh* in Celtic', in *Lautgeschichte und Etymologie,* Akten der VI Fachtagung der Indogermanischen Gesellschaft (ed. M. Mayrhofer, M. Peters) (Wiesbaden 1980), 49–78, especially 60–2.

whereby -*ant*- after a labiovelar yielded -*óedd*- (through -*ont*-) rather than -*édd*-. If this were so *g^W óetal* would be the expected outcome of *$*g^W$antlon* and *gétal* would have to be placed alongside -*gét* as a secondary formation modelled on *cétal*/-*cét*. A problem remains, therefore, but *gétal* 'act of wounding' has the support of the kennings.

The glossators, as we have seen, were no longer familiar with the meaning of the letter-name, probably because it had been ousted by *guin* as the vb.n. of *gonid* (cf. the replacement of *cétal* as vb.n. of *canid* in later Irish by *canamain, canadh*, etc.). The suspected link with *cath* is not wide of the mark, however, and may point to a lingering memory of *gétal* 'act of wounding', with which the composers of the kennings must, of course, have been familiar; *cath*, alternatively, could be an educated guess based on the kennings. The *gilcach* 'reed' equation of the 'alphabet végétal' fiction was also determined by the kennings as is clear from the explanation 'on account of the abundance of its healing (powers)'. The same may explain the *raith* 'fern, bracken', *rait* 'bog-myrtle' alternatives in A[137].

Gonid is cognate with Welsh *gwanu* 'to pierce, stab' < Common Celtic *$*g^W$an*- < *$*g^W$hen*- 'to pierce, strike' (*IEW* 491ff). Since, as Cowgill has shown conclusively, Common Celtic *$*g^W$* preserved its labial element in Primitive Irish for as long as did its voiceless counterpart k^W (= Q above), the interpretation of the meaning and origin of *gétal* presented here supports the view I put forward in *Ériu* 37 (1986), 24f. regarding symbol 13 of the Ogam alphabet, namely that it originally represented the voiced labiovelar and was secondarily (cosmetically) modified to *ng* on the falling together of *$*g^W$* and *g*.

Z Straiph

All kennings will admit of an answer *sraib, straif, straiph*, etc. 'sulphur'. A's 'strongest reddening (dye)' refers as is clear from the A[137] gloss to the well-known use of sulphur in alchemy, and the alternative *aire srábae* 'chief of streams' (or 'chief/noble stream', reading *sraba*) may refer to a lava flow, the Biblical stream of brimstone (*Isaiah* xxx 33 = *sruth* [*s*]*ruibhe, DIL* s.v. 1 *ruib*), or may be based on the etymologies of the name *Sraibtine* (.i. *sráib tenedh*, in *Cóir Anmann* §115, *sruaim tine* in *O'Dav.* = *CIH* 1526.25). C's 'seeking of clouds' is consistent with 'sulphur' as interpreted by the glossators but, though all the readings and glosses support *saigid*, the original might have had *saiget nél* 'arrow of the clouds' (= 'lightning' = *sraibtine*). *Mórad rún* 'increasing of secrets' is the most enigmatic of the kennings but is not inconsistent with the supposed mystical properties of sulphur in alchemy and magic. It is doubtful that *rún* is to be emended to *rúamna* 'reddening' as suggested by Meroney.

The 'alphabet végétal' adherents produce an equation with *draigen* 'blackthorn' in this instance. There would appear to be no explanation for this other than the alternative interpretation of *aire srába* in *O'Dav.* (*CIH* 1473.14): *aire* .i. *fal* ut est *aire srapha sraibh*, '*aire* ('dam') i.e. a hedge *ut est aire srapha sraibh*' (?'*sraibh* is a hedge on a river'); blackthorn, of course, is

one of the most common hedges. Compare A⁹ *airer* (leg. *aire* or *aire srabae*?) *adhon* (= *ed ón*) *draigin*.

In a discussion of this letter-name, which he connected with the saint's name *Strafán, Srafán, Sraphán,* Thurneysen (loc. cit. in fn.8, 206–8) went along with the 'alphabet végétal' view pointing to *Anc.Laws* V.84.10 (*CIH* 1610.10) and the then unpublished *Bretha Déin Chécht* (= *CIH* 2307.21, *Ériu* 20 (1966), 26, §9) where, he said, *sraiff* and *sraif* were listed among the *luibi Gall* 'foreign herbs'. In the former, however, (*diri uigi circi, a lan do luibib gall 7 sraiff 7 luingit 7 airgetlaim*) the compendium for *et* appears between the words *luibib gall* and the following three items and would not appear, at least from the facsimile (*BB* 344ᵇ29), to have been inserted later, as suggested by Binchy (*CIH* 1610 fn. d). In *Bretha Déin Chécht* the same triad would appear to be described as *lubai Gall* (*Mad i nadaid ri ba ece*n tri *lubai Gall do cuingid do .i. sraif 7 lungait 7 argad*/uim) but, as Binchy is obliged to point out (*Ériu* 20 (1966), 55) *airgetlam* is used elsewhere for Latin *orpimentum*, which shares dyeing properties with sulphur but can scarcely be described as a 'herb', whether foreign or native. Thurneysen's 'botanisches Rätsel', if one exists, could be solved by assuming that *luib* has a wider connotation than 'herb' (see *DIL* L 237.80ff) or by reading *ruib* 'rue' with prosthetic *s* for *sraif*(*f*) in these, but this would still leave *airgetlam* and the compendium *et* unexplained. Moreover, a herb, whether native or foreign, will not fit the kennings, with the possible exception of 'strongest reddening (dye)', the glossators' interpretation of which would then have to be disregarded.[48] O'Rahilly's rejection of the arboreal theory (*Ériu* 13 (1942), 185 fn.3) certainly seems preferable.

The etymology of *sraif, sraiph, zraif, straif, sraib,* etc. 'sulphur' remains a mystery which, when solved, will give us the old value of this symbol. An initial with *ts* or *sᵂ* will meet the requirement of distinctiveness from the /s/ represented by *sail,* as I suggested in *Ériu* 37 (1986), 25f.

R Ruis

All kennings point unambiguously to a word meaning 'red', 'redness', in particular the 'reddening' in the face brought on by embarrassment, shame or anger. The alternative *rúamnae rucci* 'hue of blushing' in A may have been suggested by the B tradition, while *rúamnae ruisg* 'hue (lustre ?) of the eye' is reminiscent of the *lí súla* kenning on *Luis. Ruis* is to be associated therefore with *ruise* 'red' (cf. *luis/luise* above under L), *ruisid* 'reddens', *rondid* 'colours, dyes, reddens' < **reudh-*'red' (*IEW* 872–3). The arboreal 'rowan-tree' and ('fire of') 'elder-tree' are dictated by the kennings, and have little else to recommend them.

A Ailm

The kennings for the letter A are all, unfortunately, based on the sound rather than the name and give us no clue as to the meaning of the latter.

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[48]See Meroney for some remarks on the use of sulphur in alchemy.

There is no reason, however, to accept Meroney's view (p. 25) that this implies that A, among other letters,[49] had not yet been assigned a name at the time the kennings were composed. The kennings are circumlocutions for the letters or letter-names and there are no strict rules (apart from the apparent requirement that they be limited to two words) as to how they function. Meroney has, also overplayed the significance attaching to the position of A in the classical alphabets as the source of the Irish kennings for this letter. The Irish grammarians were obviously aware of the status of classical A (cf. *a .i. prinncipium .i. tossach, Aur.* 4211) but the *tosach* of kennings B and C ('beginning of an answer/calling') have nothing to do with this. The latter points clearly to the Irish vocative particle *á* and is so glossed, the former, as my colleague Liam Breatnach suggested to me, to *acc, aicc* 'no, nay' (*GOI* §868) or, less likely, to *aithesc* 'answer, reply'. A's 'loudest groan' is also a natural kenning for the sound represented by the letter and is correctly interpreted by the glossators as such.

The meaning and origin of *ailm* remain a mystery; the glossators' 'pine- (or fir-) tree' and the derivation from *palma* are about as trustworthy as the rest of the arboreal fictions, and are dictated by the kenning of A (a misreading of the gloss *uchtach* as *ochtach*?) and the form of the name. The A[256] *fe fe* gloss may have been suggested by the kenning but may also be displaced from E.

Thurneysen always maintained that *Ailm* and *Beithe* had been suggested by *Alpha* and *Beta*,[50] but he never went so far as to regard either as a borrowing, and no other letter-name with the exception of *Pin* and *Ór* in the supplementary category can be shown to be a loanword. As far as I know *ailm* is only attested once outside the *Briatharogaim* and letter-name contexts, in the King and Hermit poem: *caine ailmi ardom-peitet* 'beautiful are the pines which make music for me'.[51] If the translation is correct the arborealists may be right, but the poet himself might have been one.

O *Onn*

The kennings for *Onn* are particularly important as will be clear from the conclusions at the end of this paper. Within the A tradition there is a degree of hesitation between *congnaid ech* 'wounder of horses' and *congnamaid ech* 'helper of horses', the latter in my opinion the younger of the two,[52]

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[49]Others which Meroney believes fall into this category are AE, O, UI, E and EA. That the Old English kenning for *Ós* (the name of the rune O, formerly *A* < **Ansuz*) viz. 'the first beginning of all speech', could be based on the earlier initial of the name (*A*) is, of course, out of the question as no Anglo-Saxon could have been familiar with the etymology; it is based on Latin *ōs* 'mouth'.

[50]See Thurneysen (for ref. see fn.8) 204.

[51]G. Murphy, *Early Irish lyrics* (Oxford 1956), 18. It is interesting to note that this text also provides the only example of *idath* outside of the Old Irish tree-list and *Briatharogaim* contexts; see *Celtica* 11 (1976), 115, and see L. Joseph's very interesting comments on the 'freshness' of this kind of poetry in his forthcoming paper 'Trees and tradition in early Ireland' (a written version of a lecture delivered to the Cornell Medieval Society (Quodlibet) 1986) to be published in *Speculum*. I am grateful to the author for allowing me to read this paper.

[52]Meroney, on the other hand, regards 'helper of horses' as the older kenning which, he suggests, predates the coining of a name for *O* and is based on the shape of Latin *O*.

postdating the demise of the word *onn* 'ash-tree' (replaced by *uinnius/uinnsiu*) and the identification of *Onn* (the letter-name) with [*f*]*onnaid* 'the wheel-rims or tyres of a chariot'. 'Wounder of horses' is the older kenning and points clearly to 'ash' through 'horse-whip' as interpreted by the glossators at A[2456]. The wood of the ash, being strong, tough and pliant was used for horsewhips, as is clear from *echlasg fuinnsionn* (see *DIL* s.v. *echlasc*) and: *Uinnsenn dorcha a dath, fid luaite na ndroch, echlasc lám lucht ech, a cruth ac cládh chath*, 'Ash, whose colour is dark (? a reference to the tree rather than the wood), the wood which moves wheels, a horse-whip in the hands of horsemen, its form turns [the fortunes of] battles' (*Silva Gadelica* 1, 245). The last line of this quatrain, together with one of the reasons advanced for placing the ash (*uinnius*) among the *airig fedo* (*CIH* 202.19, 27), *letharadh airm* 'one of two materials of a weapon' (cf. *trian n-airm* above under T), and *a uinnes, a urbhadach, a arm lámha láoich*, 'O ash, O harmful one, O weapon in the hand of a warrior' (*Buile Shuibhne* 1002–3), points to the use of ash for spear-shafts and thus provides a suitable interpretation for kenning C 'sustaining (equipment) of warrior/hunting bands'. B's 'smoothest of craftsmanship' is similar to the *dair* 'oak' kennings and can be solved by 'ash' with no difficulty.

The glossators, who were no longer familiar with the word *onn* 'ash', changed the A kenning to meet the equation with *onnaid*, and the arboreal theory, the claims of which in this instance would have been perfectly justified, opts for furze (A[2456]) and heather (C), in each case influenced by the kennings.

Onn 'ash' is cognate with Welsh *onnen/onn* 'ash-tree(s)' < **ōs-*, *osen*, etc. 'ash' (*IEW* 782) but was already replaced in Irish before the composition of the *Senchas Már* (in the tree-lists of *Bretha Comaithchesa*, *uinnius* is used) by a secondary derivative of the root, viz. *uinnius/uinnsiu*, later *uinnsionn*, *fuinnsionn*, < **osnist(i̯)ō*. The composers of the kennings, however, were familiar with *onn* 'ash' and the assignment of this letter-name to O must clearly be old.

U   *Úir, Úr*

All kennings point unambiguously to *úir/úr* 'earth, clay, soil' whether as a 'grave' (A and C) or as a propagator of plants (B). The second kenning in A, viz. *gruidem/guirem dál*, could contain the superlative of *grot* 'quick' (see Meroney's 'most prompt of meetings'), *gor* 'pious' or *gúr* 'sharp, keen'. I have chosen the latter on the grounds that it is the more common reading and in view of the arboreal 'heather', since these fictional equations, it seems to me, are usually determined by the kenning, and 'heather' is more in line with 'most painful' than 'most prompt' or 'pious'.

The etymology of Irish *úir/úr* 'earth, etc.' is uncertain (see Vendryes, *Lexique Etymologique* s.v. 1 *úr*) but a Primitive Irish initial *ú* (whence the value /u(:)/) is beyond doubt.

E *Edad*?

The recorded names of the Ogam characters for E and I (*Edad* and *Idad*) pose considerable problems of interpretation and etymology and have all the appearances of being rhyming (with the obvious concession to the acrostic principle) neologisms. Confusion of *edad* and *idad* is found in Cormac's glossary (Y 1301), where *ibne* and *Suibne* are described as derived from *ibíne* and *Suibine* by removal of the *edhadh*, and at 606, where the A kenning for *edad* is quoted and is explained by reference to the *flesc idaith* and the *flesc* made of *edath*.

In view of this uncertain status of *edad* and *idad* the kennings present a number of difficulties. The B kenning 'exchange of friends' is very enigmatic but the gloss of B[24] suggests OI *éo* 'salmon', and the 'exchange' therefore might be a play on words, viz. *éo* 'yew-tree' and *éo/é* 'salmon'. This interpretation might also explain A *érgnaid fid* (or *érgnaid fer*) 'discerning letter/wood/tree' (or 'discerning chap'), a reference to the use of rods of yew (*flesca ibair*) in divination[53] or to the well-known *éo fis*, 'salmon of knowledge'. The variant *ærchaid fid* found in Cormac's glossary (and in A[26]), and explained in the former as .i. *ind aor ro-lil in flesc cui nomen est fe* 'the curse, it followed (or which adhered to?) the rod *cui nomen est fé*', a reference to the *defixio* (?) described in this interesting passage, seems to be corrupt.[54] Certainly *ærchaid* seems strange[55] unless *áer* 'satire', *áerchaid* 'satirist' was modelled on *sen, senchaid*, in which case *áerchaid fid* (better *fedo*) would mean something like 'satirising wood', a reference to the *defixio*. A[5] *ercra fer*, which Meroney translates 'plant of destruction' (better 'wasting of men'), may be based on this or is a faulty reading of the kenning.[56]

'Brother of birch' in C, which the glossators interpret as *é* ('salmon'?, scarcely 'yew', which is *éo* whereas 'salmon' has two forms *éo* and *é*) is also rather enigmatic. Meroney considers it a late and vague invention referring to 'yew', all trees 'being, so to speak, brothers', but I see no reason to believe that any of the kennings are late (apart from the remodelled forms in N and O, see above) and, as I have said, *é* in the gloss is more likely to mean 'salmon' as in the B[24] gloss. 'Brother of B' could conceivably refer to the Latin letter-name *Be* and thus *B/E*, but I doubt this very much. The only suggestion that I can make at present is that C's *bráthair bethi* and the following *luth* (read *lúad*, and note the C[3] spelling) *lobair* have been misplaced and were formerly the kennings for the last two supplementary letters. Since the name of the second-last of these is *Pín, bráthair bethi* would then mean 'brother of B', i.e. P (cf. *Beithe/Peithe*) and *lúad lobair* 'groan of

[53]See Vendryes (op. cit. in fn.13) 95.

[54]For a discussion of this passage see F. Shaw, 'Fe ille Fe innund' in *Féilsgríbhinn Torna* (see fn.6), 77–82, 79.

[55]See *DIL* s.v. ?*aerchaid*. The form *aorchaid* (*Corm* Y 1081) appears as *aorachais* in *O'Cl* and the entry probably means '*Rindaid* i.e. the title of a man of satire (rather than "the title of a man, a satirist") who wounds (satirises) every face'.

[56]Meroney suggests that E was nameless at the time of the composition of the kennings these being based on the two semantic values of *é*, 'salmon' and 'yew'.

a sick person' would match the A and B kennings for AE perfectly, viz. *lúad sáethaig* and *mol galraig* (both) 'groan of a sick person'. I must admit, however, that the C kennings appear in the position for E and I (though in C¹ IO appears in the columnar list of values beside *luth lobair*), where they are followed by one single supplementary-letter kenning which points to the first of this group. C³, moreover, also uses *lúat labar* for its second *i*. If a full complement of C kennings ever comes to light it may solve this problem.

The glossators' equations with 'juniper' or 'aspen' have little to recommend them and the *fe fe* gloss of A²⁶ is apparently from Cormac's glossary. See further the discussion of I.

I *Idad*?

The kennings for I pose fewer problems than those for E, with the exception of the C tradition (on which see the discussion on E), and will admit of an answer 'yew-tree' (*ibar* in the glosses), the 'yew' being renowned for its age and, accordingly, placed last in the 'Alphabet of the world'. There is considerable variety in the B tradition but the alliteration requirement favours *crínem feda* or *cainem sen* and I have chosen the latter in the restored text as the former could be explained as due to the influence of the A tradition while *áildem ais* 'most beautiful in age' could be a gloss on *cainem sen*; there still remains a problem, however, at the bridge between original and supplementary letters. The glosses all point to *ibar* 'yew' with the exception of C, the kenning of which, 'sustenance' (?), energy (?) (or 'festival', 'rejoicing', see the alternative *no lith*) of a sick person', I cannot reconcile with an answer 'yew', unless 'sustenance which causes sickness' a reference to the yew's poisonous berries.

It will be clear at this stage that there is a measure of overlap between the E and I kennings, the former pointing to *éo* 'yew' or *éo/é* 'salmon', the latter to 'yew', glossed *ibar*. Now *ibar* cannot have been the old name of I since Welsh *efwr* 'cow-parsnip, hogweed' and Gallo-Roman *eburos* 'yew' (< *ĕreb(h)*, etc. 'dark red', *IEW* 334) point to a PI *eburas*. Old Irish *éo* on the other hand could have been, since it derives from PI *iwas*, cf. Welsh *ywen/yw* 'yew-tree(s)', Gaulish *ivo-* (*IEW* 297, *ei-*, *iwo-* 'yew', cf. IVAGE-NI in Ogam).[57] The kennings seem to have been composed at a time when the names of these two letters were known to mean (E) 'yew' or 'salmon' and (I) 'yew' and the glossators naturally gloss the latter with *ibar* as it contained an initial *i-* in their day. I would suggest, therefore, that the original names of these letters may have been *eburas* or *esox* and *iwas* and that the confusion which arose by their respective developments to *ibar/éo* and *éo* led to the adoption of the very artificial pair *Edad/Idad*.[58]

[57]See R. A. S. Macalister, *Corpus inscriptionum insularum Celticarum* 1 (Dublin 1945), no. 259.

[58]If either *Edad* or *Idad* is original the creation of a perfunctory rhyming partner dictated by the acrostic principle would be analogous to Old English *Peorð/Cweorð*, Gothic *Pertra/Quertra*, Irish *Beithe/Peithe*, Greek *Gamma/Agma*, etc.

The arboreal fiction equates *idad* and *ibar* but the lawyers, who had no reason to do so, keep them separate, assigning *ibar* to the *airig fedo* (*CIH* 202.19 and 203.2) and *idad* to the *athaig fedo* (ibid. 202.28 and 203.6). For a discussion of *idad, fidad* see Kelly, *Celtica* 11 (1976), 115.

EA *Ébad*?

A's 'fair-swimming letter' and C's 'fairest fish' point clearly to *éo*, *é* 'salmon' or *éicne* 'salmon' as indicated by the A[137] and C glosses[59] and suggest that the first of the supplementary letters was designed to represent *é*, or the diphthong *éo*. The name *Ébad* would appear to have been modelled on *Edad/Idad*. The B kennings *cosc lobair* and *aca fid* present a problem. The former alliterates with the following *li crotha* but not with any of the preceding kennings for I; the latter could alliterate with *áildem ais* but this would involve breaking the alliteration between E and I and between EA and OI. What's more, since the B[24] kennings of all the other supplementary letters substitute the kennings of the A tradition, and as *aca fid* is only attested in B[4], it may be a corrupt transmission of *snámchain/snámhchar fid*. Otherwise *aca* might be equated with Lat. *aqua*, viz. 'water letter' or *aca fid* = *aqua vitae*? *Cosc lobair*, which Meroney translates 'corrective of a sick man', is a kenning the precise significance of which is not clear to me. Could it mean 'proscribed food of a sick person'?

The arboreal interpretation, in which repetition is beginning to manifest itself, equates *ébad* with 'aspen' and 'honeysuckle'.

OI *Ó(i)r*

Both kennings point unquestionably to *ór* 'gold' and are so interpreted by the glossators, the 'alphabet végétal' theorists producing 'spindle-tree' and 'ivy' in this instance. The name points to a value */o:/* for this letter. *Ór* is a Latin loanword, albeit of long standing at the time of the composition of the kennings.

UI *Uilen/Uillenn*

Meroney is correct, I think, in interpreting the B kenning as 'big elbow', pointing to Latin *cubitus*, but it probably refers to the name of the letter rather than to the shape of Latin Y. A's 'fragrant tree', however, does not suit *uil(l)en(n)*, though it would fit the arboreal 'honeysuckle' equation. Normally, however, as I have tried to show, the kennings do not reflect the 'alphabet végétal' theory. Unless an alternative interpretation for this kenning is found, therefore, it may be more recent.

IO *Pín, Iphín*

This letter would appear to have been assigned the name *Pín* in the first instance, one of only two loanwords in the nomenclature (< Latin *Pínus*),

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[59]See Meroney, 'The alphabet of the world' in *The Journal of Celtic Studies* 2 (1958), 173–88, on the A[137] gloss.

borrowing being dictated in this instance by the value it was assigned, viz.
/p/ (see my remarks on *bráthair bethi* under E and cf. *Aur.* 1365: *Pin immoro
ar P ata*, '*Pin*, moreover, it stands for P'). The kennings suggest that *Pin*
was understood to be the name of a tree with edible berries, whence *DIL*'s
'gooseberry' (note that A's *milsem fedo* also occurs in the C tradition as a
kenning for *Coll*). The name *Pin* seems to have undergone a perfunctory
metamorphosis to *Iphin/Ifin* as part of the decision to establish a uniformity
within the supplementary category similar to that found in the other *aicmi*,
which are exclusively made up of either consonants or vowels. The sup-
plementary letters were given the status of diphthongs, *Ifin* now representing
any diphthong beginning with *i*.[60]

AE *Emancholl*
   The kennings on this letter, the name of which (*Emancholl* 'twinned C')
describes its shape and knows nothing of the 'tree' theory, except in as
much as *coll* is a tree, point, as do those on *Ailm*, to its original value. Prior
to the decision to give the supplementary letters the status of diphthongs
Emancholl had the value [x] for which the kenning 'groan of a sick person'
(see also *lúad* (?) *lobair* in C under E) is admirably suited. The glossators
are familiar with the value [x] which they represent with the interjections *ach*
or *uch*, but they know of another which they do not specify, presumably the
diphthong *áe*.
   Much has been written about the shapes of the supplementary characters,
their possible origins and original values. I cannot go into detail on this
subject in the present article. For the moment it will suffice to say that the
kennings and the names would appear to point to the values *é/éo*, *ó*, *ui* (?) *p*
and *ch* respectively in the Old Irish period.

CONCLUSIONS

   The pivotal role which I assigned the letter-names in my *Ériu* 37 article
rested on the assumptions that they were old, that as a fixed series (which
the position-marking nature of the script required) they were the mainstay
of the tradition, and that sound-changes affecting their Anlaut would in-
evitably bring about a corresponding change in the values of the relevant
symbols. In a contribution to the James Carney *Festschrift* I have attempted
to substantiate the last of these assumptions with parallels from the runic
tradition. The first two can now be discussed in the light of the texts edited
in this paper.
   That the names were assigned to the letters at a very early date can scarcely
be doubted. Certainly the Old Irish period is much too late, as the evidence
of the replacement of *onn* by *uinnius* and the probable demise of *cert* 'tree,
bush' show. The latter and its counterpart *gétal*, however, are even more

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[60]In *DIL pin* and *pín* are kept separate, probably on the basis of the gen. sg. *pinne* and *píne*. It
is questionable, however, whether there are two separate words.

significant. Since we must assume that the names were chosen to reflect the values assigned to the symbols by the acrostic principle, and since we now have two etymologies pointing to labiovelar values (one confirmed by the inscriptions, the other not reliably attested) distinct from the non-labial counterparts represented by *coll* and *gort*, there can scarcely be any doubt, if this evidence is accepted, that the delabialization of g^w and k^w represents the *terminus ante quem* for the coining of the letter-names.[61] If this is so, the Primitive Irish forms of these may be taken as a reliable and trustworthy guide to the values of the symbols during that period. In most cases these do not differ from the values in the Old Irish period but there are significant differences in *Fern*, *Cert* and *Gétal* and also, presumably, in *Straiph* and *(h)Úath*.

That the series of letter-names, once coined, was treated as a fixed sequence, moreover, is the only explanation which will account for the survival of *Cert*, *Gétal*, *Úath* and *Straiph* in their proper place long after they can have had any practical purpose in the framework of letter-names governed by the acrostic principle, and it was their survival which dictated the assignment of cosmetic values to these symbols at a later date. For, whereas the sequence had remained intact long after the script which it served had been forced into a very marginal role alongside the Latin alphabet, the letter-names existed at any given time only in a contemporary form, preserving no phonological archaisms.

The reason why the letter *p*, which was already well established in Old Irish, never had the honour of having a letter-name it could call its own now becomes clear. The coining of the Irish letter nomenclature took place at a time when the need for a letter to represent /p/ was not felt. After a brief period of recognition in the form of the name *Pín*, of which it was robbed by the schematism of later Ogamists, /p/ was obliged to fall back on modified or qualified surrogates of the type *Peithe* (< *Beithe*) and *Beithe bog* ('soft b'), as well as the hybrid (and tautological) *Peithbog*.

Though there is a degree of overlap in meaning between Irish and Germanic letter nomenclature there are no compelling reasons for assuming borrowing in either direction, nor is there any reason to believe that either the coiners of the letter-names or the authors of the kennings were strongly influenced by classical tradition, excepting, of course, the possibility that the 'idea' of letter-names derives from elementary instruction in the Latin alphabet.

At the time of the composition of the *Briatharogaim* the meanings of the letter-names were still known, but several of them had become low-frequency words and were on the way to semantic redundancy. This, combined with the love of schematism and the fact that the largest single semantic category among the names was an arboreal one, paved the way for the 'alphabet végétal' fiction which one sees developing in the glosses and culminating in the tradition of the *Briatharogaim* preserved in the commentary to the

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[61]On the delabialization of *k^w* see K. Jackson, *Language and history in Early Britain* (Edinburgh 1953), 139–41, and D. McManus, 'A chronology of the Latin loan-words in Early Irish', *Ériu* 34 (1983), 21–71, 45–8, where the first half of the sixth century is suggested as a probable date.

Auraicept na nÉces (A⁴⁵ above). At lines 1147–9 of the *Auraicept* a com-
mentator points out that, while some people maintain that the Irish letters
were named after trees, 'some of these trees are not known to-day'. The fact
is, of course, that they were never known and they never existed except in
the works of a few schematists whom we usually find taking considerable
liberties to make the fiction fit the facts. Their pretensions are of a kind
which no botanist could take seriously and no lexicographer should ever
have trusted. It is regrettable, therefore, that one of the most transparent
deceptions in the history of Irish letters was accepted as gospel by Irish
lexicographers and faithfully reproduced in their works, and it is to be
hoped that the Irish dictionary presently being compiled by the Royal Irish
Academy will not follow this example.[62]

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[62]*DIL* 1 *ailm* 'quicken-tree', 1 *nin* 'ash-tree', 3 *úath* 'whitethorn', 3 *tinne* 'holly, elder ?', 1
ceirt 'apple-tree', 2 *muin* 'a vine', 2 *gort* 'ivy', *getal* 'a reed', *straif* 'sloe', *ruis* 'elder-tree', *ailm*
'pine-tree', *onn* 'pine-tree, furze bush or ash ?', 4 *úr* 'heath', *edad* 'aspen', *idad* 'yew-tree ?',
ébad 'aspen', *oir* 'spindle-tree', and 2 *uillenn* 'honeysuckle' are all suspect.