FÉNIUS FARSAID AND THE ALPHABETS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines evidence for the existence of an alternative tradition to that found in *Auraicept na nÉces* concerning the role played by Fénius Farsaid in the invention of the alphabet of Irish and those of the three sacred languages—Hebrew, Greek and Latin. The sources to be considered are *Auraicept na nÉces*, *In Lebor Ollaman*, a Middle Irish text in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud 610, glosses on the copy of *Auraicept na nÉces* in TCD MS E 3.3 (1432) and the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville.

AURAICEPT NA NÉCES

Auraicept na nÉces (*Auraicept*), 'The Poets' Primer', contains a wide range of material relevant to the training of poets, including an account of the origin of the Irish language and sets of nominal paradigms. The Old Irish text, accompanied by extensive Middle Irish glosses and commentary, has been edited by Calder (1917), based on the recensions in BB, E, YBL and Eg.[1] The canonical text has been edited by Ahlqvist,[2] who has drawn attention (1982, 11–14) to similarities between the *Auraicept* and legal texts, noting that in both types of material a canonical text is subject to glossing and commentary. Poppe has also observed that the techniques employed in Hiberno-Latin biblical exegesis were applied to vernacular legal studies in Ireland, and that 'exegetical, grammatical, and legal studies in both Latin and Irish were conducted in the same intellectual milieu' (1999, 191). The sections of the *Auraicept* which are of relevance to the present discussion concern the invention by Fénius Farsaid of the Irish language and the Irish, Hebrew, Greek and Latin alphabets.

The legend of Fénius's invention of the Irish language by selecting the best elements from the other languages spoken at the tower of Babel is well known:

> *Cía ar-ránic a mbérla-sa ⁊ cía airm an-ar-n-ícht ⁊ cissi aimser ar-ícht?*
> *Ni ansae: ar-a-ránic Fénius Farrsaid ocin tur Nemruaid…Is and-sin*

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> *do-reped a mbélra asna ilbérlaib ⁊ do-aiselbad do óen díb, conid a*
> *ainm-side for-tá a mbélra-sa, conid Goídelc de-sin ó Goídiuil mac*
> *Angin mic Glúnfind mic Láimfind mic Agnumain do Grécaib.*

> 'Who has invented this language and in what place was it invented and
> at what time was it invented? Not difficult: Fénius Farrsaid invented
> it at Nimrod's tower…It is there that the language was cut out of the
> many languages and it was assigned to one of them, so that it is his
> name by which the language is called, so that Goídelc ['Irish'] is hence
> from Góedel mac A. mic G. mic L. mic A. of the Greeks.' (Ahlqvist
> 1982, 47 §1.2–10)

Ahlqvist treats this, the only pseudo-historical section, as part of the canon-
ical text, but with the caveat (1982, 33) that the passage seems to be placed
out of context in the surviving manuscripts and is written in large script
only in L. In the introduction to his edition, Calder (1917, xxiii) also draws
attention to the difficulties involved in distinguishing between canonical
text and commentary, noting that the earliest strata of commentary became
what he describes as 'primary material', which was itself subject to com-
mentary.

It is not only the invention of the Irish language that is accredited to
Fénius, however, since it is also claimed that he invented the Ogam alpha-
bet and those of the three sacred languages:

> *Is e in fer cetna tra Fenius Farsaidh arainig inna ceithri aipgitri-sea .i.*
> *aipgitir Ebraidi ⁊ Grecda ⁊ Laitinda ⁊ in beithi-luis-nin in ogaim ⁊ is airi*
> *is certiu in dedenach .i. in beithe air is fo deoidh arricht.*

> 'Now Fenius Farsaidh is the same man that discovered these four
> alphabets, to wit, the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin alphabets, and the
> Beithe Luis Nin of the Ogham, and it is for this reason the last, to wit,
> the Beithe is more exact because it was discovered last.' (Calder 1917,
> ll 1132–5; *sim.* ll 4224–8)

There is no palaeographical evidence to indicate that this section formed
part of the canonical text, but such evidence is, in any case, an unreliable
dating criterion, since canonical text is not invariably written in large script
either in the *Auraicept* or in legal sources (Calder 1917, xxiii; Breatnach
2005, 93). On the other hand, a substantial corpus of secondary material
in Old Irish is found in legal texts (Breatnach 2005, 350–1) and, given the
similarities between the two types of material, it is not unlikely that some
strata of commentary on the *Auraicept* can also be dated on linguistic
grounds to the Old Irish and early Middle Irish periods. The passage under
discussion preserves two features which point to an early Middle Irish date
of composition: the disyllabic form of the article is preserved in two of the
three manuscripts classified by Ahlqvist (1982, 22–3) as group B, while the

feminine form of the numeral *cethéora* is preserved in all six manuscripts classified as group C:

Group B[3]

inna .iiii. (BB 324b42)
*ina ceit*ri (E 23va25)
na .c. (L 158rb1–2)

Group C

na ceitheora (YBL col. 535.26)
na ceitheora (H 123a19)
na ceitheora (G 113.3)
na cethora (Eg. 71va14)
*na cethe*ora (A 57vb1)
*na cethe*ora (T 190.32)

Both forms gradually fell out of use during the Middle Irish period, although examples are still to be found in the late-tenth-century *Saltair na Rann* (*SNG* III §7.6, §8.5). These linguistic features suggest that the portrayal of Fénius as the inventor of all four alphabets was a relatively early development within the tradition of commentary on the *Auraicept*.

IN LEBOR OLLAMAN

The second text to be considered is a passage from a Middle Irish tract known as *In Lebor Ollaman* (*LO*). This is of relevance to the present discussion because it preserves alternative versions of traditions found in the *Auraicept*, including the doctrine on the invention of the alphabets of Irish, Hebrew, Greek and Latin. The text has never been published and has received little attention to date. Meroney (1945, 19 n. 5; 1949, 41 n. 45) describes it as 'commentary' on the *Auraicept* and later as 'a set of random notes on the *Auraicept na nÉces*' (Meroney 1950, 199), stating somewhat dismissively that 'This commentary…is given the high-sounding title *Lebhar Ollaman*, but it is merely an appendage to the *Auraicept na nÉces*, which Calder omitted from his edition' (1950, 199 n. 5). Stokes is even more dismissive, describing the copies of both *LO* and the *Auraicept* in Eg. as 'fragments of a so-called treatise in five parts on Irish grammar, which appears to contain nothing of the least value but some notes on ogham characters…' (Stokes 1862, lxi).

LO conforms in style to what Charles-Edwards has described as 'standard Old Irish textbook prose', the main features of which he identifies as 'etymology, enumeration and a particular form of question and answer in

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[3] When citing from unpublished manuscript sources, words have been divided and punctuation has been added. Editorial additions are enclosed in square brackets.

which a question is asked by a pupil and the master replies *ní anse...* and then expounds his answer'(Charles-Edwards 1980, 147). Although *LO* does not make use of the formula of a dialogue between teacher and pupil, a similar format is followed in that questions are introduced by *cest* 'a question', the answer being preceded by *ní hansa* 'it is not difficult', or else by *is fissid* 'it should be known' or *cid fodera* 'why'.[4] As well as functioning as an exegetical text to be read in conjunction with the *Auraicept*, it also corrects what it claims are errors in the teachings of the former. In doing so, *LO* cites extracts from the canonical text, glosses and commentary on the *Auraicept*, indicating that the author was working with an annotated copy of that text.

LO is found in both complete and fragmentary form in eight manuscripts, which I have classified into three groups as follows:

Group A:	*Complete*:	M 138va57–139rb54
		BB 299b30–301b23
		E 19rb61–20rb13
	Incomplete:	G 37.21–38.14[5]
Group B:	*Complete*:	YBL col. 500.1–504.22
		H 105a1–107a3
	Incomplete:	Eg. 63a1-b25
Group C:	*Incomplete*:	G 53 43.1–49.12
		A 46r1–47v20
	Citations:	D 3ff.
		H[1] 75c22–36 (*CIH* 622.4–12)[6]

The manuscripts in group B contain the longest version of the text, and in the following discussion citations are from H. This, although not a copy, is very close to the version in YBL, large sections of which are illegible. Where it is necessary to give readings from a different line of transmission, citations are from M. This manuscript preserves some Latin phrases not found in the other manuscripts and it also has some superior readings.

Group C manuscripts share some important readings with group A but for the most part are in close agreement with group B. This can be seen

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[4] For a discussion of question and answer teaching in general, see Derolez (1985, 132–3) and Baumgarten (1992).

[5] This seventeenth-century paper manuscript consists of two parts, which were originally separate, and is the work of two scribes (Ní Shéaghdha 1961, 71–2). Although the sections, when taken together, preserve almost the complete text of *LO*, they represent different lines of transmission: 37.21–38.14 is similar to M 138vb4–32, while 43.1–49.12 is similar to A 46r11–47v20.

[6] The citations from *LO* are preceded by citations from *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (*CIH* 621.36–622.3).

from a comparison of a stanza describing the materials used in building Nimrod's tower (significant differences are highlighted in bold):

Group A:
> *Ael* ocus **ola**nn *is fuil,*
> *cre is usce is* **lín** *lan*chuir,
> **sechi**m, *bitamai*n *co* m*buaidh*
> **ocht** *n-adhbair i*n *tuir Nea*mruaidh. (M 138vb34–6)

'Lime and wool and blood, / clay and water and flax of full twist, / shittim-wood, excellent bitumen, / the eight materials of Nimrod's tower.'[7]

Groups BC:
> *Aol,* **ola an**n ocus *fuil,*
> *cre, uisci, ros lin lanchuir,*
> *tuis, mirr, bidam*ain *co mbuaid*
> *naoi n-adhboir in tuir Nemhruaidh.* (H 105a44–5)[8]

'Lime, oil there and blood, / clay, water, flax-seed of full twist, / incense, myrrh, excellent bitumen, / the nine materials of Nimrod's tower.'

Furthermore, groups BC differ in their representation of the names of Ogam characters, normally giving the Ogam symbols rather than the letter names as found in group A.[9] They also contain additional material and sometimes preserve longer citations from the *Auraicept* than the manuscripts in group A do. At the end of the tract, they add a list of interrogative particles which is not found in group A. This list may not have formed part of the original text of *LO*, however, since, if it is omitted, all versions will then end with a gloss on the opening words of the canonical text of the *Auraicept*, forming a type of closure:

> *Auraicept: Prescens tempus pro omnibus temporibus ponitur .i. sam(l)aigther in aimsir frecnairc forna huilib aimseraib.* (Calder 1917, ll 85–7)[10]

> *LO:* "*Presens temp*us *pro o*mn*i tempore ponit*ur *.i. sa*maig*t*er *in ai*mser *frecnairc forna huilib ai*mser*oip*" *.i. at-b*ertis *na c*etug*dair at-b*ero*t na hugdair deighenacha.* (H 106b43–107a1)

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[7] Unless otherwise indicated, translations throughout are my own.

[8] This is the same as the version in the manuscripts of Calder's 'second family' of the *Auraicept* (Calder 1917, ll 2448–51).

[9] Contrast, for example, *ceirt ⁊ ngetar* [*sic*] *⁊ sdraiph ⁊ amancholl* M 139rb40 with the corresponding text in H 106b33, which has Ogam symbols.

[10] Calder (1917, 8) identifies Priscian as the source of the Latin quotation but, as noted by Poppe (2002, 305), the wording of Priscian is quite different.

"*praesens tempus pro omne tempore ponitur*, i.e. the present tense is put for all tenses", i.e. what the first authors used to say is what the recent authors say.'

The independent status of *LO* can be seen by comparing its manuscript transmission with that of the *Auraicept* as established by Ahlqvist (1982, 22–4):[11]

Group A: D, M
Group B: BB, E, L
Group C: A, Eg., H, G, T, YBL

Whereas, for example, the versions of *LO* in BB and E agree closely with M, the versions of the *Auraicept* in BB and E agree with each other but differ from M.

Eight citations from *LO* are written as marginal glosses on the version of the *Auraicept* in D. This vellum manuscript has not been dated with certainty, but, according to the catalogue, it belongs to the fifteenth or sixteenth century (Abbott and Gwynn 1921, 307). The glosses are in the hand of the main scribe, who is identified in a colophon as Diarmuid Ó Dubhugáin, and it is significant in this regard that capital letters are rubricated, as is the case in the main text. The citations agree closely with the version of *LO* in group B manuscripts but also contain some additional material. Commenting on the extent of glossing on the copy of the *Auraicept* in D, Ahlqvist has observed that 'it shows that somewhere along the line, different versions of the text happened to be found in one place and conflated versions produced' (1982, 26).

The prologue of *LO* begins with a citation from the first line of the canonical text of the *Auraicept*: [A]*s-bearot tra ugdair* [*na*] *nGaid*el *et re*liqua '"Now the authors of the Irish say" etc.' (H 105a1–2). These opening words, written in large script in YBL and H, have led to confusion between the texts in some catalogues. The copy in H, for example, is not recognised as an independent text, being described as 'an imperfect copy of the "Uraicept" of Cennfaelad' (Abbott and Gwynn 1921, 93), while the version in YBL is described as '…the Leabhar Ollamhan, which comprises the Uraicept' (Abbott and Gwynn 1921, 102). The copy of the *Auraicept* in D is described in the catalogue as 'The Leabhar Ollamhan or Auraicept na nEices' (Abbott and Gwynn 1921, 307), again showing confusion between the texts; and the citations from *LO* written as marginal glosses in D are further evidence of the close association of the two texts in the manuscript tradition. The manuscript context is also likely to have led to confusion since, with the exception of the copy in BB, *LO* always precedes the

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[11] The sigla used here differ slightly from those used by Ahlqvist. The 'unnoticed' copy of the *Auraicept* claimed to have been identified by Hofman and Smelik (2005) is, as correctly stated in the supplement to the catalogue (Abbott and Gwynn 1921, 350) 'Not *Uraicept na n-Éigeas…*'. This section of TCD MS H 2.17 (1319) contains copies of *IGT* II–IV as well as some unrelated material, for which see Abbott and Gwynn (1921, 113).

Auraicept.[12] Other evidence points to a close relationship between the texts. The prologue of *LO* refers to the books of the *Auraicept*, which indicates that it was meant to be read in conjunction with the latter: *It he na hugdair diu i cuirent leth .i. na hugdair-si sis taithmigher i tosaigib na lebar n-examail* 'These are the authors, moreover, to whom he attributes [it], i.e. these authors below who are mentioned at the beginnings of the various books' (H 105a5–6).[13] The phrase *amal ata a curp libair* 'as it is in the body of [the] book' (H 106a16) also refers to the text of the *Auraicept*.

   LO begins by naming not only the authors of the *Auraicept* but also a long list of righteous judges and authors of Ireland, including Senchae mac Ailella, Bríg, Connla, Fachtna Tollbrethach and Morann, all of whom were associated with the giving of true judgements.[14] It is significant that a strong emphasis is placed here on the importance of truth, since the text is largely concerned with presenting what it claims are the true versions of traditions which are inaccurately preserved in the *Auraicept*. The list of judges is introduced as follows:

> *INcipit do senchaide*cht[15] *fil*ed *a pup*all[16] *Pat*raic 7 *bendachais a ng*ina *arna heip*ridis gai a ndlighiodh se*nch*usa con*ad an*n *is-b*ert[atar][17] *ind so sios. Incipit do Lephar Ollom*an.

> 'Here begins the historical lore of poets [assembled] in Patrick's tent and he blessed their mouths so that they would not pronounce a falsehood in the law of *senchas*, so that they said this below. Here begins the *Lebor Ollaman*.' (H 105a13–15)

Such an introduction claims a divine authority for *LO* and echoes elements in the pseudo-historical prologue to the *Senchas Már*, where the poets are

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   [12] In BB they are separated by other texts relevant to the training of poets: *MV* II (301b24–305b3), an abridged version of *MV* I (306b11–308a40; Ó hAodha 1991) and *In Lebor Ogaim* (308b44–314a; Calder 1917, 272–313).

   [13] The four books of the *Auraicept* are attributed to the following authors: Book 1 Cenn Fáelad mac Ailella (Calder 1917, ll 1–734; *sim*. ll 2260–3492); Book 2 Ferchertne Fili (Calder 1917, ll 735–1027; *sim*. ll 3493–984); Book 3 Amairgein Glúngeal (Calder 1917, ll 1028–101; *sim*. ll 3984–4101); Book 4 Fénius Farsaid, Goídel mac Ethéoir and Íar mac Nema (Calder 1917, ll 1102–636; *sim*. ll 4136–725).

   [14] The section on the authors of Ireland has been edited by Peter Smith (1990). This section is similar to material in the pseudo-historical prologue to the *Senchas Már* (*CIH* 1653.16–1655.26), part of which (*CIH* 1653.16–39 and 1654.5–7) has been translated by Ó Corráin (1987, 288–9). A Middle Irish poem on the authors of Ireland includes many of the authors and judges named in this passage of *LO* (Smith 1994).

   [15] *Senchaidecht*, an abstract from *senchaid*, is the form in all manuscripts containing this section of text. It is not given as a headword in *DIL*. The manuscripts in groups AC also read gen. sing. *senchaidechta*. For the etymology of *senchaid*, see McCone (1995).

   [16] *a pop-* H, *i puop-* YBL col. 500.14, *i popl-* M 138vb5. As Damian McManus has suggested to me, the original reading may have been *pupall* 'tent, pavilion', referring to the place where the poets and judges were assembled by Patrick. Cf. *lathrach pupla Pátraic* 'the place of Patrick's tent' (Stokes 1890, 12, l. 397) and *Lathrach Pupaill Adhamhnain* 'the site of Adamnán's Pavilion' (Stokes 1894, 282 §18).

   [17] I supply *-atar* based on the superior reading of group A manuscripts (*at-b*ert*atar* M 138vb6).

described as having been assembled by Loegaire in a *dáil* to confer with Patrick, who also blesses Dubthach's mouth:[18]

> '*Maith trá,*' ol *Pátraic: 'a ndobera Dia for erlabrai, ráid amin.* Non vos estis qui loquimini, sed spiritus patris uestri qui loquitur in uobis,' *₇rl. Bennachais iarum Pátraic a gin-sum ₇ doluid rath in Sprita Naím fora erlabra co n-epert...*'

> '"Well then," said Patrick: "whatever God may give (you) to say, speak thus. *It is not you who speaks, but the Spirit of your father who speaks in you,*" etc. Then Patrick blessed his mouth, and the grace of the Holy Spirit came upon his speech so that he said…' (Carey 1994, 12 §6, 18 §6)

LO goes further than merely presenting alternative traditions to those found in the *Auraicept*, however, stating on no fewer than eight occasions that the teachings of the latter are wrong:

> *IS he a inchrech*ad *sin, ar ni do chl*ochaib *na do cra*nd *do-ron*ad *an tor a*cht *is d'aol* et *rel*iqu*a* 'That is his mistake, for it is not of stones or of timber that the tower was made, but of lime etc.' (H 105a42–3);

> *Ni coir d*ano *sin* 'That, moreover, is not right' (H 105b30);

> *Do-mui*net *tra foir*enn *com*ad *aml*aid *sin no b*etis *a*cht *is comrurca si*n *quia dicit*…'some, moreover, think they should be thus, but that is a mistake, for he says…' (H 106a5–6);

> '*Cai Cain*breatha*ch, d*alta *Feni*usa *Farrs*aid' et *rel*iqu*a. Michorp dna uile ant sreth-so sis ar*…'"Caí Caínbrethach a pupil of Fénius Farsaid" etc. This section below, moreover, is a completely incorrect text, for…' (H 106a25–7);

> *Com*rurca *i n-abair-sim ab*us *d*ano *.i. co mb*etis *Eb*raide *a nEicipt re fod*ail *na mb*erla*d uair*…'What he says here is a mistake, moreover, i.e. that Hebrews could have been in Egypt before the division of the languages, for…' (H 106a30–2);

> *ni c*ert *sin ar*…'that is not right, for…' (H 106a36);

> *Michorp sin ar* 'That is an incorrect text, for…' (H 106b9).

An additional correction is found in the manuscripts of groups AC, which read:

> *IS e i*n *corp coir de sen*… The correct text of that is…' (M 139ra5).

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[18] I am grateful to Damian McManus for this reference.

Both examples of the word *míchorp* in *DIL* are from the version of our text in BB and the meaning 'a misinformation, hence a mis-statement, error?' is suggested. Since *corp* 'body, main part, text' is normally used in the *Auraicept* and in legal material to refer to the main or canonical text, in contrast to glosses and commentary, it is more likely to be used here in the sense of 'an incorrect text'.[19] In the version of *LO* in H, both instances of the word *míchorp* are explained in suprascript glosses, which seem to be in the hand of the main scribe, as *.i. drochairem* 'i.e. a bad account' (H 106a26 and 106b9).

The section on the inventors and discoverers of alphabets begins with a citation from the passage of commentary on the *Auraicept* (Calder 1917, ll 1132–5; *sim*. ll 4224–8) which states that Fénius Farsaid discovered all four alphabets. The fact that this citation is treated as primary material cannot be taken as evidence that it may have been part of the canonical text, however, since secondary material in the *Auraicept* is treated elsewhere in *LO* as primary material:

> *LO* 1: "*Is he in fer cetna Fenius ar-ranaic na cetheora haipgitre at-rubramar romaind*". *Michorp*[a] *sin ar in aipciti*r *Ebraide cetamus ni hé Feniu*s *ar-ranaic hí ar ni hé ro tinnscai*n *an Ebra acht mad Ada*mh. *Aip*gitir *Grecda dano ni he Fe*nius *ar-ranaic si*n *acht madh Fainices, tuath do Grecaib fuil re muir atuaid*.[20] *Is iat [ar-]ranaic ind aip*gitir *Grecda* 7 *Cathm*us *mac Agenoris, ogl*ach *am*ra *do Grecaibh, is e do-rat uaidib í co Grecaib. Aip*gitir *Ebrai*de *dna, ni he Feniu*s *ar-riachta a*cht *is he Maisi m*ac *Am*ra *ar-ri*cht*a dia ro scriph Dia re*cht *do Maisi. Aip*gitir *Gaide*lce im*morro is he Feniu*s *ar-ri*cht*ai la taob na suad n-aill*. Sudet *q*ui *l*egat. (H 106b7–17)
>
> [a] suprascript gloss *.i. drochairemh* 'i.e. a bad account'.
>
> "'It is the same man, Fénius Farsaid, who discovered the four alphabets we have spoken of above". That is an incorrect text, for as regards the Hebrew alphabet first of all, it is not Fénius who discovered it, for it is not he who devised Hebrew but Adam. As for the Greek alphabet, it is not Fénius who discovered it, moreover, but the Phoenicians, a Greek race to the north of the sea. It is they who invented the Greek alphabet and Cadmus, son of Agenor, a wonderful Greek youth, brought it from them to the Greeks. As for the Hebrew alphabet, it is not Fénius who discovered it but Moses, son of Amrae, who discovered it when God wrote the law for Moses. As for the Irish alphabet, however, it is Fénius who invented it along with the other sages. Let him who reads sweat.
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> *LO* 2: *Enoch t*ra *i*n *sech*t*mad fe*r *ó Ada*mh *ar-ran*aic *lit*ri *na nEbr*aide *p*rius. *Cam m*ac *Nai iar ndilin*n. *Apraham da*no *ar-ran*aic *cair*echtairi

*saine do littribh Asarda ⁊ Callacdha et it inunda iar n-uimir ⁊ ese ⁊ litri
na nEbraide. Maisi dono beos fuair litre na nEbraide arna scribend do
laim De i Sleib Sina ic tidnacol rechta do Maisi. Estras immorro iar
Maisi. Faeinices cined do Grecaib fil for bru Mara Ruaid ar-ainic litri na
nGrec archena. Cathmus mac Aigenoris tuc iat a Faeinice.*[b] *Carmentis*[c]
*nimpa ar-ranic litri Laitne. Fenius Farrsaid ar-ranaic bethe luis nion an
Ogaim do reir senchaidechta na nGaidel...*(H 106b17–27)

[b] *.i. geinti .i. cined* 'i.e. pagans, i.e. a race'. These glosses may have become misplaced since
they seem more properly to gloss *Faeinices* at the beginning of the previous sentence,
where the word *cined* occurs. A suprascript gloss (in a different hand) reads *.i. on
chathair sin .i.* (one illegible letter after *.i.*) 'that is, the city [as opposed to the people,
represented by Faeinices], i.e....'.
[c] suprascript gloss (in a different hand) *.i. bandia* 'i.e. a goddess'.

Enoch, moreover, the seventh descendant from Adam, invented the
letters of the Hebrews in the first instance. Ham son of Noah after
the flood. It is Abraham, then, who discovered special characters for
Assyrian and Chaldaean letters and they are identical to Hebrew let-
ters with regard to number and nature. Moses, then, got the letters
of the Hebrews after they had been written by the hand of God on
Mount Sinai while bestowing the law on Moses. Estras, then, came
after Moses. The Phoenicians, a Greek race on the shore of the Red
Sea, invented the letters of the Greeks, moreover. Cadmus, son of
Agenor, brought them from Phoenicia. Carmentis the nymph invented
Latin letters. Fénius Farsaid invented the *beithe-luis-nin* of Ogam
according to the tradition of the Gaels...'

LO presents two versions of the tradition, separated by the phrase *sudet qui
legat* 'let him who reads sweat'. This phrase, which is often abbreviated in the
manuscripts as *s.q.l.*, is found elsewhere as a marker for texts where alterna-
tive versions were known to exist.[21] There are several notable differences
between the two accounts. *LO* 1 consistently refers to alphabets and con-
cludes by stating that Fénius invented the Irish alphabet (*aipgitir Gaidelce*).
LO 2, on the other hand, refers to letters (*litri*) and states that he invented
the alphabet of Ogam, which is referred to by the names of the first, second
and fifth characters (*beithe-luis-nin*) by analogy with the term *alphabeta*. Ó
Cuív (1980, 101) has observed a similar distinction in the *Auraicept*, where
aibgitir is used of Latin letters (Calder 1917, ll 312–13) while *beithe-luis-
nin* is used of Ogam script (Calder 1917, ll 392–3). *LO* 1 does not mention
the inventor of the Latin alphabet and attributes the invention of the Irish
alphabet to Fénius and the other sages (*la taob na suad n-aill*). *LO* 2, by
contrast, states that Latin letters were invented by the nymph Carmentis

[21] See Arbuthnot (2007, §§17, 146 and 179). For examples of the phrase used in other con-
texts, see Plummer (1926, 20) and Hofman (1996, 93). Group A manuscripts of *LO* contain
a second example: *Cinnas do a rad sin, comadh dalta Coe Cae*nbrethaig *Aimirgin Glu*ngel?
*S*udet *q*ui *l*egat 'How can he say that, that Amairgen Glúngel was a pupil of Caí Caínbrethach?
Let him who reads sweat' (M 138vb9–10).

and attributes the invention of the *beithe-luis-nin* to Fénius alone. The 'other sages' alluded to in *LO* 1 are Goídel mac Ethéoir and Íar mac Nema who, along with Fénius, are credited with the authorship of the fourth book of the *Auraicept* (Calder 1917, ll 1102–3; *sim.* ll 4136–8) and with the invention of varieties of Irish (Calder 1917, ll 212–14; *sim.* ll 2528–30). Goídel and Íar are also described in *LO* as *na da shaoi* 'the two sages':

> *C*eist *dna: can*as *a fuair Fenius na t*ri *primb*erla *re tia*chtoi*n atuaid? Ni* hansa. *Ro boi an b*erla Eph*raide aici fei*n *ar t*us. *Rucsad na* da *saidh ro bat*ur *agi*n *tor, .i. Iar m*ac N*de*mo 7 Gai*d*el *m*ac *Eithiuir na da shaoi, na* da *primb*erla *eili cuice fo th*uaid *.i.* G*rec* 7 *Lait*en.

> 'A question, then: from where did Fénius get the three chief languages before coming from the north? It is not difficult. He himself knew Hebrew in the first instance. The two sages who were at the tower, i.e. Íar mac Nema and Goídel mac Ethéoir are the two sages, brought the other two chief languages northwards to him, i.e. Greek and Latin.' (H 106a19–23)

Adam is said in *LO 1* to have devised Hebrew, whereas *LO* 2 attributes the invention of Hebrew letters to Enoch.[22] Finally, Ham and Estras/Ezra appear only in *LO* 2. While I have not found any traditions which specifically associate Ham with the invention of alphabets or letters, the implication may be that he rediscovered Hebrew letters after the Biblical flood destroyed those invented by Enoch. Similarly, Estras may be included in the list of inventors and discoverers of letters and alphabets because of his role in re-introducing Mosaic law to the Israelites after they had fallen into heathen practices (1 Ezra 7.7–10). He is described as *scriba velox in lege Mosi* 'a ready scribe in the law of Moses' (1 Ezra 7.6) and he is also associated with the writing of the law in *Etym* 1, 42.2.

LAUD 610

The third text to be examined here is a passage of eleven lines in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud 610, a vellum manuscript which has been dated to the fifteenth century (Ó Cuív 2001, 62). The text is incomplete due to the loss of folios:[23]

> *Cia ar-ránic lit*ri *na n*Ebraide? *Moisi m*ac *Amhbra m*eic *Cath diaro sc*rib *in Coimdiu fei*n *dó deichthimna ind rechta cona meór isna taiblibh clochaib i*

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[22] Enoch is associated with learning in *Sex Aetates Mundi*: *Enóch mac Iaréth, di clannaib Séth, is é cétna-litterda ro-buí riam* 'Henoch, son of Jared, of the race of Seth, he was the first ever man of letters' (Ó Cróinín 1983, 69 §13, ll 15–16).

[23] After this article had been submitted for publication I came across a complete version of the text in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlison B 486 fol. 53ra25–rb20 (Ó Cuív 2001, 134; Ó Cróinín 1983, 34 n. 41). In addition to providing the final two words of the text, this version contains some superior readings which have been incorporated into the text of Laud.

Sléib Sína. Abram mac Thara ro scribh litri na Sirechda 7 do sil Ismail meic
Abraim 7 Agari[a] Egeptacdai doib sin. Issis ingin Inachi[si] is i ar-ranic litri
na nEgeptacda dia tanic a Grecaib i nEgept. Cathmhus mac Agenaris is e
ro scribh litri na nGrec [tria dath ndergtha].[24] In bandea Carmentis ro scrib
litri na Latinda. Is iat sin persanna na n-aipgitret. Fenius Farsaidh immorro
is é ro tinoil na tri hapgitri iar sin a n-énleabar. Isin Aracept ro tinoiled ar
daigh [trebhaire namma. Finit amen. Finit amen.] (24vb25–36)[25]

[a] suprascript gloss *.i. cumal* 'i.e. a slave girl'.

'Who discovered the letters of the Hebrews? Moses son of Amra
son of Cat, when the Lord himself wrote the ten commandments of
scripture for him with his finger on the stone tablets on Mount Sinai.
Abraham son of Tara wrote the letters of the Syrians and they are
of the race of Ismael, son of Abraham, and Agar the Egyptian. Isis
daughter of Inachus invented the letters of the Egyptians when she
came from the Greeks into Egypt. Cadmus son of Agenor wrote the
letters of the Greeks [through red colouring]. The goddess Carmentis
wrote the letters of the Latins. Those are the persons of the alphabets,
and Fénius Farsaid, moreover, gathered the three alphabets afterwards
into one book. They were gathered into the *Auraicept* [merely for the
sake of wisdom. *Finit amen. Finit amen*].'

This text identifies the discoverers and inventors of the letters of the
Hebrews, Syrians, Egyptians, Greeks and Latins.

THE *ETYMOLOGIAE* OF ISIDORE OF SEVILLE

Some of the traditions concerning letters and alphabets in *LO* 1, *LO* 2 and
Laud 610 are derived ultimately from the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville.
This work was highly influential in Ireland, where it was known as *in cul-
men* 'the summit of learning' (Ó Máille 1921–3, 75–6; McCone 1990, 12).
The relevant sections are given below:

Hebraeorum litteras a Lege coepisse per Moysen: Syrorum autem et
Chaldaeorum per Abraham. Unde et cum Hebraeis et numero et sono
concordant, solis characteribus discrepant. Aegyptiorum litteras Isis regi-
na, Inachis filia, de Graecia veniens in Aegyptum, repperit et Aegyptiis tra-
didit...Hinc est quod et Phoeniceo colore librorum capita scribuntur, quia
ab ipsis litterae initium habuerunt. Cadmus Agenoris filius Graecas litteras
a Phoenice in Graeciam decem et septem primus attulit. (*Etym* I, 3.5–6)

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[24] *ngrecgha dathderg*, Laud. This is an allusion to the use of Phoenician red ink in capital
letters (*Etym* I, 3.6).
[25] A striking feature of this passage and the corresponding passages from *LO* is the fre-
quency of noun-initial sentences.

'The letters of the Hebrews started with the Law transmitted by Moses. Those of the Syrians and Chaldeans began with Abraham, so that they agree in the number of characters and in their sounds with the Hebrew letters and differ only in their shapes. Queen Isis, daughter of Inachus, devised the Egyptian letters when she came from Greece into Egypt, and passed them on to the Egyptians…Hence it is that the chapter headings of books are written with Phoenician scarlet, since it is from the Phoenicians that the letters had their origin. Cadmus, son of Agenor, first brought seventeen Greek letters from Phoenicia into Greece.' (Barney *et al.* 2006, 39–40)

Latinas litteras Carmentis nympha prima Italis tradidit. (*Etym* I, 4.1)
'The nymph Carmentis first brought the Latin letters to the Italians.' (Barney *et al.* 2006, 40)

ALTERNATIVE TRADITIONS

It has been seen that *LO* 1, *LO* 2 and Laud 610 differ significantly from the *Auraicept* in their teachings on the discoverers and inventors of the Hebrew, Greek and Latin alphabets and letters. Since these texts reflect a doctrine found in Isidore's *Etymologiae*, the role played by Fénius is, not surprisingly, greatly reduced, in that he is credited only with the invention of the Ogam alphabet or letters in *LO* 2. His role is even further diminished in *LO* 1, which states that the *aipgitir Gaidelce* was invented not by Fénius alone, but by Fénius and the other sages. The main differences between the texts discussed here, and their relationship to the *Etymologiae* and the individuals to whom it attributes the invention of the alphabets and letters, can be seen in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1—Persanna na n-aipgitreth.

	Hebrew	Greek	Latin	Syrian	Chaldean	Egyptian	Irish
Etym	Moses	Phoenicians Cadmus	Carmentis	Abraham	Abraham	Isis	
Laud 610	Moses	Cadmus	Carmentis	Abraham		Isis	
LO 1	Adam, Moses	Phoenicians Cadmus					Fénius Sages
LO 2	Enoch, Ham Moses, Estras	Phoenicians Cadmus	Carmentis	Abraham	Abraham		Fénius
Auraicept	Fénius	Fénius	Fénius				Fénius

The use of the Middle Irish verb *tinóilid* 'gathers' in Laud 610 is significant. This text states that Fénius 'gathered' (*ro tinoil*) the three alphabets (presumably of the three sacred languages, although this is not stated explicitly) into one book. In other words, he plays a much reduced role compared to that attributed to him in the *Auraicept* itself. In the latter, the verb used is *ar-ic* 'discovers, invents', and he is said to have invented all four alphabets.

The same verb is used to describe his role in inventing the Irish alphabet in *LO* 1 and *LO* 2.

This raises the question as to what text the author of the passage in Laud 610 had in mind when he stated that Fénius 'gathered' the three alphabets into one book. Can it be that he was referring to a different tradition, in which Fénius played a less prominent role? Thus far, only material relating to alphabets has been considered. As already noted, however, *LO* presents alternative teachings or additional information on other traditions found in the *Auraicept*. Three such topics, which will be considered here, are the doctrine of the 72 languages, the inscription on the cross in the three sacred languages and the values of certain *forfeda* 'supplementary characters' in Ogam.

SEVENTY-TWO LANGUAGES

A passage of commentary on the canonical text of the *Auraicept*[26] reflects the doctrine of the 72 languages of the world corresponding to the 72 nations descended from Noah:

> *Cest, caidhead a n-anmandh na da chenel sechtmogat o rofoghlaimet na hilberlae? Ni ansa. Beithin, Scithi, Scuit, Germain...*

> 'Query, what are the names of the 72 races from which the many languages were learnt? Not hard. Bithynians, Scythians, Scots, Germans...' (Calder 1917, ll 215ff.; *sim.* ll 2531ff).

This doctrine is based ultimately on Genesis, chapter ten (Ó Cróinín 1983, 148). *LO*, however, relates the number of languages to three other sources, namely the number of Adam's daughters, the number of counsellors who built Nimrod's tower and the number of Christ's disciples. It also states that 24 languages were derived from each of the three sacred languages, giving a total of 72:

> "*Da berla .lxx.*"[27] *ar is* da *ingen .lxx. ro bad*ur *ac Adhamh* no *is da com*air*l̃id .lxx. ro bat*ur *ac dena*m *in tuir no a ufidhair*[28] *na* da *deiscip*ul *.lxx. ro bat*ur *ag Crist. Da mac ar .l.o*[29] *ro bat*ur *ac Ad*am *a fidhair na da Do*mnach *.l.a*[*t*] *a ndentar di aiff*rend *.l.at isi*n *mbl̃*iadain.

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[26] The commentary relates to the following section:*...conid and-sin con-atgetar cuici in scol bérla do thepiu dóib asna ilbérlaib...*'until the school asked him to extract a language out of the many languges...' (Ahlqvist 1982, 47 §1.8).

[27] I take this to be a citation from commentary on the *Auraicept* (*cf.* Calder 1917, l. 228; *sim.* ll 263–4).

[28] Note the use of *u* to represent lenited *b* (YBL col. 501.12 reads *a bfid-*); *cf.*, for example, *i Uerr Maedoc* 'in Ferna Maedóc' (*AI s.a.* 1204 §2).

[29] The form *.l.o* seems to be corrupt and may have arisen from a misreading of the abbreviation for *uero*, which occurs in the corresponding passage in M 138vb43: *Da mac ar .l. uero ro badar ag Adam....*

"*Ceit*ri b*erla .20. as cach berla*" *.i.* "*uais*" *cech* b*erla secundu*m *iudices.*
*Cind*us *a rada* "*ceit*ri b*erla .xx. as cach primb*er*la prim*dha" *do rad riu?*
Ni hansa. *Ara mb*reith *do cin*e*do*ip *aire*do*ib leo uath*aib. *Et is iar*mo
*rait*er "*cethr*i b*erla fith*et *as gach primb*er*la" *ar it aentadacha*[30] *iar*
*foghar ris na primb*er*laib.* (H 105b4–13)

'"Seventy-two languages" for Adam had seventy-two daughters, or it is
seventy-two counsellors who were building the tower, or as a symbol
of the seventy-two disciples whom Christ had. Adam had fifty-two
sons as a symbol of the fifty-two Sundays on which fifty-two masses
are performed in the year.
    "Twenty-four languages out of every language", i.e. "noble" is every
language according to judges. How is the statement "twenty-four lan-
guages out of every chief, principal language" made concerning them?
It is not difficult. On account of their being taken by noble nations
with them from them. And it is then that "twenty-four languages out
of every chief language" is said, for they agree according to sound with
the chief languages.'

LO assigns 72 daughters and 52 sons to Adam. According to *Saltair na
Rann* (Greene and Kelly 1976, ll 1969–72; Murdoch 1976, 134), he had 72
sons and 72 daughters, while in other texts various numbers of children
are attributed to him (Glaeske 2006, 3–4). A Latin gloss in *Sex Aetates
Mundi*, the source of which is given as Jerome, agrees with our text:
*Tot filii Adae quot sunt dominici dies in anno, id est .lii. Tot filiae Adae
quot sunt lingae, id est .lxxii* 'There were as many sons of Adam as there
are Sundays in the year, i.e. fifty-two. There were as many daughters as
there are languages, i.e. seventy-two' (Ó Cróinín 1983, 69 §11). A poem
written in the margin of the Codex Palatino-Vaticanus no. 830 (Ó Cuív
1990, 58–60) also agrees with *LO* regarding the number of Adam's sons
and daughters. According to *Sex Aetates Mundi* Christ had 72 disciples,
although other traditions give the number of disciples as 70 (Ó Cróinín
1983, 96 §66; 172).
    In a subsequent passage in *LO*, the number of languages is related to
the number of nations descended from Noah's three sons, Semh, Ham and
Japheth. This passage also begins with a citation from the *Auraicept*, which
is said to be mistaken:

"*Coig*er *.lxx. li*n *na sg*oili *.i. f*er *cech* b*erla* 7 *na tr*i *suidhe .i. sai cach
primb*er*la do*na tr*i primb*er*lad*aib *.i. Ebra, Greg, Laid*en. *Ceit*ri b*erla
.xx. as gach berla dib sin is* sed *ro fod*la*d an*n". *Is* sed *tr*a *ti*cf*ad as sin
co mb*etis *na tr*i *primb*er*la riasi*n *fog*ail 7 *co mb*etis *na da* b*erla .lxx. i*na

    [30] I have emended the manuscript reading *aentagoit*, which has probably arisen as a result
of the mis-expansion of a suspension stroke; *cf. it aontag-* YBL col. 501.19 and [*i*]*t oentadacha*
M 138vb49.

*tim*ceall 7 *com*ad *eistip-si*m *no teipdis. Do-mui*net *tr*a *foir*enn *com*ad
*aml*aid *sin no* betis *a*cht *is comrurca si*n *quia dicit* "*a*cht *comadh a do
.lxx. a llin uile*", *ut dix*it *poeta*:

   *A secht fith*et *fil o Shemh*
   a .u.x. o Iafeth
   7 *tri*cha *ga*n *tar thoir*
   o Chamh con*a chin*edaibh.

7 *nuimir o*mn*ium linguar*um *do cin*ed*oip an*n *si*n *.i. na n-uile tength*ad.
(H 105b45–106a9)

'"Seventy-five was the number [of scholars] of the school, i.e. a man
for every language and the three sages, i.e. a sage of every one of the
three principal languages, i.e. Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Twenty-four
languages from each of those languages, that is what was dispersed
there". The consequence of that, then, is that the three principal lan-
guages would exist before the division and the seventy-two languages
would be in addition to them[31] and it would be out of those they
would be selected. Some, moreover, think that such was the case, but
that is a mistake, for he says "save only that seventy-two was their full
number", as the poet said: "There are twenty-seven [nations] from
Shem, / fifteen from Japheth / and thirty without reproach in the East
/ from Ham with his descendants". And the number of races, then, is
the same as that of all languages, i.e. of all the languages.'

There are two noteworthy features in these passages. Firstly, *LO* differs
from the text of the *Auraicept* as given by Calder in his edition (differences
are highlighted in bold):

   Auraicept: **Ceit**h**ri berla sechtmogat** *as gach berla dib-sen, is ed rofad-
   lad and* (Calder 1917, ll 158–9); **Ceithri berla sechtmogat** *as gach prim-
   berla dipsin, iss ed rofoghl*ad *and, co n-athgap*ail *na primberla.* (Calder
   1917, ll 2459–61)

   LO: "**Ceit**r**i b**er**la .xx.** *as g*ach *berla dib sin is* sed *ro fodl*ad *an*n".
   (H 106a2–3)

Whereas *LO*'s figure of 24 languages being derived from each of the
three sacred languages gives the expected total of 72 in acccordance with
one tradition, the *Auraicept*'s figure of 74 languages makes no sense, and
Calder's translation (1917, 13) is also misleading: 'Seventy-four languages,
which is every one of these languages, that was what was dispersed there'.
Meroney attempts to explain this discrepancy by suggesting that 'Since

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[31] Literally, 'around them'.

Fénius qualifies as both poet and sage, only seventy-four languages are represented', noting that the 'original [doctrine] is no doubt seen in *BB* 300a34' (Meroney 1945, 19 n. 7).[32] Curiously, however, both texts as given by Calder reflect an error in E which, alone of all the manuscripts of the *Auraicept*, reads *ceitri berla .lxx.at* 'seventy-four languages' (E 20rb41). This may have arisen due to a copying error, possibly as a result of the *l* of an abbreviated form of *berla* having been misinterpreted by a scribe as part of the roman numeral for 70. The other manuscripts of the *Auraicept*, including those used by Calder (BB, YBL, Eg.), give the expected reading of 24 languages.[33]

The second interesting feature is the citation "*acht comadh a do .lxx. a llin uile*" 'save only that seventy-two was their full number'. According to the author of *LO*, some authorities misinterpret the passage cited from the *Auraicept* by mistakenly equating the number of languages with *lin na sgoili* 'the number of the school' (i.e. 24 languages from each of the three sacred languages plus the three sacred languages themselves, giving a total of 75). The correct number, however, is 72, the same as the number of nations descended from Noah's three sons. The manuscripts in groups AC have an important addition at this point, in that they specify Isidore as the source of the doctrine: "*conad a do .lxx. a lin uile*" *ut dixit poeta ⁊ is iar mbreith Esudir ad-rubairt…*""so that seventy-two is their full number" as the poet said, and it is according to Isidore's interpretation that he said…' (M 139ra31–2). The relevant passage in the *Etymologiae* is:

> *Gentes autem a quibus divisa est terra, quindecim sunt de Iaphet, trig-inta et una de Cham, viginti et septem de Sem, quae fiunt septuaginta tres, vel potius, ut ratio declarat, septuaginta duae; totidemque linguae, quae per terras esse coeperunt, quaeque crescendo provincias et insulas inpleverunt.* (*Etym* IX, 2.2)

> 'Now, of the nations into which the earth is divided, fifteen are from Japheth, thirty-one from Ham, and twenty-seven from Shem, which adds up to seventy-three—or rather, as a proper accounting shows, seventy two. And there are an equal number of languages, which arose across the lands and, as they increased, filled the provinces and islands.' (Barney *et al.* 2006, 192)

The citation "*acht comadh a do .lxx. a llin uile*" reflects Isidore's correction *vel potius, ut ratio declarat, septuaginta duae* and alludes specifically to the number of nations descended from Ham (i.e. 30 rather than 31, giving a total of 72 nations and languages). The number of nations descended from each of Noah's three sons is also found in *Sex Aetates Mundi* (Ó Cróinín 1983, 73 §24), which, as observed by Ó Cróinín (1983, 147 n. 24.4), 'adopts the more usual figure for the number of Ham's offspring' (i.e. 30).

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[32] This is the copy of *LO* in BB, although Meroney takes it to be commentary on the *Auraicept*.
[33] *ceitri berla xxat* BB 316a18–19; *cetri berla .20.* YBL col. 507.38–9; *cetri berla .20.* Eg. 64rb12.

TRES LINGUAE SACRAE

The motif of the three sacred languages having been used to write the inscription on the cross is common in medieval literature and is found in Isidore's *Etymologiae* (IX, 1.3) and in Hiberno-Latin sources (McNally 1958, 400–1; Howlett 2002, 95). While both *LO* and a section of commentary on the *Auraicept* refer to the motif, *LO* differs significantly in giving a version of the inscription in Latinised Hebrew, in Greek and in Latin:

> *Auraicept: Is e fath ara cuirt*her *primhdhacht i lleith na tri mberla sin…no dno is arin titul roscribad estib 'na triur i clar na croiche.*

> 'The reason why superiority is claimed on behalf of these three languages is…or again it was owing to the superscription that was written out of the three of them upon the board of the Cross.' (Calder 1917, ll 162–5)

> *LO*: *Is fis*id *cidh ara n-ab*ar *primb*erla *fr*isna *tr*ib *ucad. Ni* hansa*: fo bitha is tr*eotha *ro sgrib*ad *tit*ul *na croiche, i*d est *"islem Ih*esu *camalc*us *Iudeor*um*" "histin sot*er *basili*us *exomalegesion" "hic* est *rex* con*feso-r*um*".* (H 106a10–12)

> 'It should be known why those three are called chief languages. It is not difficult: because it is by means of them that the title of the cross was written, that is "…Jesus…king of the Jews", "here is the saviour, king of those confessing", "here is the king of confessors".'

A version of the inscription in a commentary on Mark's Gospel reads *malchus Iudaeorum, basilius exomologesson, rex confessorum* (Cahill 1997, 75, ll 84–5). Cahill notes (1997, 47 (Introduction)) that the Hebrew *melek ha yihudim* 'has been semi-translated and semi-transcribed' and that both the Greek and Latin versions of the inscription use the etymological meaning of the Hebrew word for Jews as found in Jerome's glossary.[34] The text of *LO* differs slightly from this version in reading *islem* and *camalcus*.[35]

FORFEDA

Although it is evident from internal references in the *Auraicept* that alternative versions of its teachings existed, the only two texts mentioned there by name, *Auraicept Muman* (Calder 1917, l. 1366; *sim.* l. 4507) and *Cín Ollaman*

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[34] Cf. *Iudas confitens uel glorificans* (*CCSL* 136), *Iuda confitens sive glorificans* (*CCSL* 152); *Iudaeis confitentibus uel laudantibus* (*CCSL* 154).

[35] *Islem* seems to be the equivalent of Latin *hic est* but I have not been able to establish its origin. Roy Flechner suggests that it may be for Hebrew *yesh lahem* 'they have' (literally, 'it is to them'), while the prefix *ca* in *camalcus* may represent Hebrew *kmo*, which is the equivalent of Latin *sicut*. Martin McNamara informs me that *is lem* is also found in a version of the inscription in the Reference Bible (Paris MS Bibl. Nat., Lat. 11561, fol. 155vb).

(Calder 1917, l. 1204; *sim.* l. 4385), have been lost. The *Auraicept* quotes the teachings of *Auraicept Muman* on the values of the *forfeda* 'supplementary characters' in Ogam, stating that according to this authority some *forfeda* function as vowels and others as consonants (Calder 1917, ll 1359ff.; *sim.* ll 4501ff.). The value of *emancholl* is given as *x*, while *iphin* is said to stand for a *defoghur* (*pin*, the alternative form, standing for *p*).[36] This section is followed in the *Auraicept* by a passage from another, un-named, source in which the *forfeda* are also said to function as both vowels and consonants, indicating that more than one alternative tradition was known to the commentator. In that passage from the un-named source it is stated that *emancholl* stands for *x* and that the proper value of *iphin* is *p*. In the *Auraicept* itself, by contrast, the *forfeda* are a homogeneous set of values, representing four vowel-digraphs and one diphthong. McManus makes the following observation about the values assigned to the *forfeda* in *Auraicept Muman*: 'Since there is evidence of a desire on the part of later Ogamists to have the supplementary charac-ters fit into the Ogam scheme by having them all represent a similar type of sound, it will be clear that a version which has some of them functioning as vowels and others as consonants must constitute the *traditio difficilior* and have considerable claims to authenticity' (McManus 1991, 143).

In light of this, it is significant that in *LO* the *forfeda* are also assigned a heterogeneous set of values. *Emancholl* has the value of *x* while *iphin* can stand for both a consonant (p) and a vowel digraph (io/ío):

> ꝍc [*Emancholl*][37] *dano, .x. fris-cair do-sidhen…A-tat dna litrecha coib-nesto a n-ogam 7 gabaid cach dibh greim araili, ut sunt b, f, iphin.*[38] *Mil, immorro 7 lir 7 fir is idegh fil intib. Miol dano 7 fior 7 sion is ipin intib.* (H 106b35–42)

> '*Emancholl*, then, *x* corresponds to that…There are, moreover, related letters in Ogam and each of them can acquire the force of the other, for example, *b, f, iphin. Mil*, then, and *lir* and *fir*, it is *idad* that is in them. *Míol*, however, *fior/fíor* and *sion/síon*, it is *iphin* [that is] in them.'

Sims-Williams (1992, 64–5) notes that *emancholl*, rather than the usual spelling *ch*, is used for /x/ in a marginal Ogam gloss in the St Gall Priscian (*a chocart inso* 'this is his/its correction'). In this section of *LO emancholl* is grouped along with the three *foilchesta* (*q*, *ng* and *z*), which suggests that there may have been a degree of uncertainty about its value.

What is meant by *gabaid cach dibh greim araili* 'each of them can acquire the force of the other' in the sequence *b, f, iphin* is that certain mutated forms of these consonants are identical in sound with others in the sequence (e.g. lenited *p = f*, nasalised *p = b*, nasalised *f* = lenited *b*, devoiced

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[36] *Defoghur* can be used of both a diphthong and a vowel digraph (McManus 1991, 142).
[37] *Emancholl* is represented in the manuscripts of groups BC by a symbol resembling the letter *x* (Meroney 1949, 39; Sims-Williams 1992, 67 (v)).
[38] In the manuscript, *b, f* and *iphin* are written above the Ogam symbols for these letters.

lenited *b* = *f* (*derbhtha*)). *Iphin*, therefore, must stand for *p*, since *ph* and *f* are identical in sound. In the sequence *míol, fior/fíor* and *sion/síon*, however, *iphin* clearly represents *io/ío*.

The various teachings on the values of *emancholl* and *iphin* may be summarised as follows:

TABLE 2—Summary of the values of *emancholl* and *iphin* in the sources cited.

	Emancholl	**Iphin**
Auraicept na nÉces	æ	io
Auraicept Muman	x	defoghur (pin = p)
Un-named source	x	p
Lebor Ollaman	x	p *and* io/ío

It is noteworthy that the passage on the *forfeda* in *LO* is added as a marginal gloss in D (p. 13, bottom right-hand margin) to the section of the *Auraicept* dealing with that topic. This indicates, of course, that the scribe of D, or of his exemplar, had access to a copy of *LO*. More importantly, it shows that he wished to draw attention to yet another theory about the values of certain *forfeda*, in addition to those associated with *Auraicept Muman* and the un-named source.

CONCLUSION

The texts examined above provide evidence of several traditions which differ significantly from those of the *Auraicept*. This raises the question as to why the latter became an important pedagogical text (Ahlqvist 1982, 22, 31), while only traces of the other teachings have survived. In the case of the doctrine of the inventors/discoverers of alphabets and letters, a possible explanation may lie in the role played by Fénius Farsaid.

We have seen that commentary on the *Auraicept* has greatly inflated Fénius's importance by attributing to him the invention of the alphabets of the three sacred languages as well as that of Irish. Such a development is entirely in keeping with the general tenor of this text, which asserts the primacy of Irish over other languages:...*a mba ferr íarum do cach bérlu ⁊ a mba leithiu ⁊ a mba caímiu, is ed do-reped isin nGoídilc* '...what was best then of every language and what was widest and finest was cut out into Irish' (Ahlqvist 1982, 48 §1.13). Ahlqvist has noted (1982, 40) that '...(to my knowledge) no other mediaeval tradition has dared to challenge the supremacy of the three sacred languages...', while McCone (1990, 37) comments on the 'wonderful audacity' of the claim, stating that '...a doctrine inspired by Isidore and the Bible asserted a privileged position for Irish ahead even of Isidore's three sacred tongues...'. McManus states that the legend is 'important not as a record of "authentic" history but rather as a document expressing the attitudes and aspirations of its framers' (1991, 149).

The further enhancement of Fénius's status by crediting him with the invention of the alphabets of the three sacred languages as well as that of

Irish is entirely in keeping with this attitude and is evidence of an immense pride in the vernacular on the part of the learned classes. Such pride is reflected even more strongly in a passage of Middle Irish commentary on *Bretha Éitgid*, where Irish has been elevated to the same status as the sacred languages: *isna ceithri primberlaib .i. a ngreig ⁊ a nabra, a laidin ⁊ a ngaidilg* '…in the four chief languages, i.e. in Greek and in Hebrew, in Latin and in Irish' (*CIH* 926.21–2). In light of this, it is not altogether surprising that traditions reflecting an Isidorian doctrine, in which Fénius played a much reduced role as a 'gatherer' of three alphabets (as in Laud 610) and inventor of only one (as in *LO*), should have fallen out of favour. This would have been particularly likely to happen if, as suggested by the linguistic evidence outlined earlier, the portrayal of Fénius as an inventor of the alphabets of the sacred languages was an early development within the tradition of Middle Irish commentary on the *Auraicept*.

Many questions still remain unanswered. Are *Cín Ollaman* and *In Lebor Ollaman* one and the same text? Both *Cín* and *Lebor* are used in the name of the lost manuscript *Cín/Lebor Dromma Snechtai*. Do the glosses in D preserve additional material from *LO* which is not found in the other manuscripts? A gloss beginning with the words *michorp so* 'this is an incorrect text' appears likely, on stylistic grounds at any rate, to have been drawn from a lost section of *LO*.[39] It has been shown by Ó Néill (2007, 29) that glosses on the fragmentary Psalter of St Caimín, found in a manuscript dated to the late eleventh or early twelfth century, 'bear witness to a Psalter commentary now lost which may have been composed in Ireland during the seventh century'. Some of the glosses in D may prove to be of similar significance in preserving now-lost sections of *LO*. Although much work also remains to be done in identifying the sources used by the author, it is clear from a preliminary examination of *LO* that it preserves the type of material which might have been found in a text such as *Auraicept Muman*, thus providing an insight into the transmission and interpretation of didactic texts in medieval Ireland.

SIGLA[40]

A	RIA MS A ii 4 (738)
BB	RIA MS 23 P 12 (536) (*Book of Ballymote*)
D	TCD MS E 3.3 (1432)
E	National Library of Scotland MS Advocates' 72.1.1
Eg.	British Library MS Egerton 88
G	NLI MS G 53
H	TCD MS H 2.15b (1317)
H¹	TCD MS H 3.18 (1337)
L	RIA MS 23 P 2 (535) (*Book of Lecan*)

[39] This is written between columns on p. 12.
[40] For convenience, I follow Ahlqvist (1982, 22–3) in using the sigla D and T to refer to TCD MS E 3.3 (1432) and TCD MS H 4.22 (1363), respectively.

M   RIA MS D ii 1 (1225) (*Book of Uí Maine*)
T   TCD MS H 4.22 (1363)
YBL   TCD MS H 2.16 (1318) (*Yellow Book of Lecan*)

ABBREVIATIONS

CCSL   *Liber Interpretationis Hebraicorum Nominum*, Corpus Christi-
              anorum Series Latina 72 (Turnholt, 1959).
Etym   W.M. Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi etymologiarum*
              sive originum (2 vols, Oxford, 1911).

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