Boring and Elusive? The *Dindshenchas* as a Medieval Irish Genre[1]

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IT IS NOT A VERY SOPHISTICATED START to acknowledge that the medieval Irish *dindshenchas* ('history of notable places,' i.e., a genre that brings together landscape, history, and name-giving) might never make it onto a list of "the most interesting things to read." Given, however, that a close reading of these texts—while tricky and laborious—is at the same time quite rewarding, they nonetheless hold some appeal for those of us who enjoy the intricate meanderings of a good crime novel. While I maintain that close study of the *dindshenchas* is very rewarding indeed, past scholars seem not to have shared my enthusiasm. As a consequence, the *dindshenchas* has suffered from a comparable scholarly neglect. This neglect even included other kinds of texts which were perceived as having too much *dindshenchas*-material in them, such as *Acallam na Senórach* ("The Colloquy of the Ancients"). While there has been much focus on the *Acallam* in the past years,[2] the *dindshenchas* material, transmitted as an independent genre in the manuscripts, is still awaiting a scholarly renaissance (that is, if there had ever been a *naissance* of interest in the *dindshenchas* at all). Given recent work done on the *dindshenchas*,[3] a re-evaluation of the importance of this genre, which is—at least to my knowledge—unique to medieval Ireland, seems to be emergent.

The Dindshenchas: *State of the Art*

Before I delve into my argument, I need to look at what has been understood by the term *dindshenchas* in the past. *Dindshenchas* is a compound of *dind* ('notable place') and *senchas*, which I would translate as 'history'.[4] Taken together, the term translates as the "history of notable places." This is a rather broad definition, as it has already been noted in the past that this can either mean the history of how a place came into being and received its name or the later history of said place (Thurneysen, 1921, 38). The *dindshenchas* is not only transmitted as a separate genre in the medieval Irish textual tradition, but are also found as individual strands or digressions within the narratives of other genres. One example from the Book of Leinster (LL) version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* will suffice here. At the end of the tale, the bulls which are the object of the cattle raid fight against each other: *Tánic do reme go himmargain Átha Móir 7 ra fácaib a lón in Findbennaig and, gorop de dá tá Áth Luain* ("He [the Donn Cuailnge] came forward to the brink of Áth Mór and there he left the loin of the Findbennach. Whence the name Áth Luain," ed. and transl. O'Rahilly, 1967, ll. 4903-5 and 272). A place like Ath Mór ('Great Ford') is now "The Ford of the Back." Episodes like this one pervade

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[1] I have started working on the *dindshenchas* in conjunction with my Ph.D. thesis on the Book of Leinster (Schlüter, 2010). Arguments expressed in this paper have been presented at conferences in Göttingen, Zürich (published as Schlüter, 2014), and Glasgow, and it is pleasure to thank all those who attended and the editors of *JLO* for their helpful comments and criticism.

[2] Important stages in the re-evaluation of *Acallam na Senórach* have been the publication of Ann Dooley's and Harry Roe's translation (1999) and the studies in Doyle and Murray (2014), as well as those by Anne Connon (for example, Connon, 2013) and Geraldine Parsons (2008) to name just a few examples of recent scholarship.

[3] In recent years there has been an increasing concentration on the interpretation of single *dindshenchas* items, as in the studies by Petra S. Hellmuth (2004) and Clodagh Downey (2010) to name just a random selection.

[4] For the implications of *senchas*, Byrne's 1974 article is still the standard one.

much of what we today call medieval Irish literature.

While the *dindshenchas* is frequently embedded in larger narratives of other genres, they are also preserved as separate, free-standing entities.[5] Scholarship has distinguished three different recensions: Recension A, *dindshenchas* poetry, Recension B, *dindshenchas* in prose, which may contain (short) poetry as well, and Recension C, which combines the longer poetry with the prose. It had been assumed for a long time that recensions A and B had preceded recension C, so that the combination of A and B had resulted in Recension C. This assumption has been challenged by Tomás Ó Concheanainn, who has argued that Recension C was not the end result of the development of the *dindshenchas* as a genre, but rather the starting point out of which Recensions B and A developed (Ó Concheanainn, 1981 and 1982). I will not propose a solution to this problem here; but, as I have argued elsewhere, I am not entirely convinced that labelling the *dindshenchas* in the Book of Leinster as Recension A does justice to the function of the poetry and prose in the manuscript (Schlüter, 2010 and 2014). I will return to this topic later.

Most scholars have read the *dindshenchas* as onomastics (such as Baumgarten, 1990), but not all have held that the authors of the *dindshenchas* were particularly successful in their application of that method. Seán Ó Coileáin (1974, 90), for example, notes the following about the *dindshenchas*: "[W]hile it does contain a layer of genuine tradition, [it] is largely based on the etymological tradition deriving from Isidore of Seville. Isidore's *Etymologiae* created such a stir in the Irish literary world that a tradition was invented to the effect that the great *Táin* itself had been exchanged for it. And in a sense it had, for the new method was pursued with depressing thoroughness." But still, while its execution may have been somewhat wanting, etymology as such played an important role in medieval Irish learned culture. This is hardly a surprise, given the great influence of Isidore's *Etymologiae*, which we have already heard about in Ó Coileáin's assessment.

Following Curtius's "Etymology as a category of thought," Rolf Baumgarten (1986/87, 24) has emphasized "that in earlier medieval Ireland 'Etymology was a category of thought and of literary creation.'" It is this form of literary creation which marks the important difference between the *dindshenchas* and the Isidorean model, as Mark Scowcroft (1995, 125) has noted: "What is noteworthy for us, however, is the way words and names inspire *narrative* ideas in Ireland where Isidore and his followers would prefer analysis and exposition." This difference between the Isidorean model and the medieval Irish application has been further examined by Gregory Toner (2005, 74): "Names are rarely explained in the *dindshenchas* simply from an analysis of their constituent parts as in Isidorean etymology, but are instead explained by relating their origin to some pseudo-historical event. Indeed, it is striking that the authors of the *dindshenchas* repeatedly avoid the most obvious and most likely origins of names in favour of explanations based on mythological or quasi-historical events."[6] The Irish *dindshenchas* are therefore not simply an imitation or adaptation of the Isidorean model, but rather an advancement of it.

The Dindshenchas *and Mnemonic Theory*

Given this progress in understanding the onomastic techniques used in the *dindshenchas*, we need to ask whether discussion of these techniques is the final point of what the *dindshenchas* has to offer for academic discourse or whether this is just the beginning. I would argue for the latter, although perhaps not everyone would share my enthusiasm. Charles Bowen (1975/76, 117), for example, has argued that "Toponymic legends belong to the tradition of etiology, not historiography." However,

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[5] The editions by Gwynn (1903-35) and by Stokes (1892, 1893, 1984, and 1895) are still the standard ones.
[6] Toner (2005, 74) goes even further by doubting "whether it is purely or even primarily an exercise in Isidorean etymology."

it is important to note that he made this claim at around the same time when Byrne's seminal paper (1974) called for a revised understanding of the Gaelic historical tradition, taking into account that what modern scholars see as history may not necessarily be the same as what medieval scholars perceived as such.[7]

Donnchadh Ó Corráin (1986, 86), on the other hand, has described the *dindshenchas*, together with *Cóir Anmann* ("The Fitness of Names"), as "'tertiary' genealogical literature," noting that the various recensions "provide a kind of topo-mythography of Ireland, in prose and verse." The *dindshenchas* can therefore function as a medium; as a link between story and landscape. If mediality is understood in an admittedly very basic form in its etymological sense deriving from Latin *medium* ('middle' or even 'transmitter') (Kiening, 2007, 87-88), then the *dindshenchas* mediates between story, landscape, and memory. Without the *dindshenchas*, a landscape would just be an uninhabited space with some place names. It is the *dindshenchas* which serves as a medium to fill that barren landscape with stories. Without landscape, on the other hand, the *dindshenchas* would be meaningless as a genre, since it from that they derive their *raison d'être* . Without places to which the stories are attached, the *dindshenchas* tales are meaningless. This is mediality in its very essence.[8] This notion of "topo-mythography" emphasizes the connection between myth, the past, and places, and takes us into the field of research exploring cultural memory, which has been so prominent in the last two decades or so.[9] Likewise, it takes us a bit further into the world of Classical Antiquity from which cultural memory theory derives at least some parts of its foundation.

A famous anecdote from Cicero's *De oratore* is the tale of Simonides, who had been invited for dinner, then went out of the house. While he was absent, the roof collapsed, killing all those present. Cicero proceeds to tell us:

Quos cum humare vellent sui neque possent optritos internoscere ullo modo, Simonides dicitur ex eo quod meminisset quo eorum loco quisque cubuisset, demonstrator uniuscuiusque sepeliendi fuisse; hac tum re admonitus invenisse fertur ordinem esse maxume qui memoriae lumen afferret. (2.86.353)

And when their friends wanted to bury them but were altogether unable to know them apart as they had been completely crushed, the story goes that Simonides was enabled by his recollection of the place in which each of them had been reclining at table to identify them for separate interment; and that this circumstance suggested to him the discovery of the truth that the best aid to clearness of memory consists in orderly arrangement. (Sutton, 1967, 467)

The story continues:

Itaque eis qui hanc partem ingeni exercerent locos esse capiendos et ea quae memoria tenere vellent effingenda animo atque in eis locis collocanda: sic fore ut ordinem rerum locorum ordo conservaret, res autem ipsas rerum effigies notaret, atque ut locis pro cera, simulacris pro litteris uteremur. (2.86.354)

He inferred that persons desiring to train this faculty must select localities and form mental images of the facts they wish to remember and store those images in the localities, with the result that the arrangement of the localities will preserve the order of the facts, and the images of the facts will designate the facts themselves, and we shall employ the localities and images respectively as a wax writing tablet and the letters

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[7] As an aside, I also note that interpreting the *dindshenchas* purely from an etiological level would then also exclude defining poems or poetry about the later history of a place as *dindshenchas*, even though the medieval term does not explicitly exclude those.

[8] It seems that the authors of the *dindshenchas* were, as in other historical poetry, indeed aware of their importance as transmitters and the intricacy of their material (see the examples in Schlüter, 2010, 156-73)

[9] For recent contributions from the world of Celtic studies, see Rekdal and Poppe (2014).

written on it. (Sutton, 1967, 467)

The connection between places and memory, employed not only by Cicero but also for example by the Auctor ad Herennium,[10] has found, as I have said, its repercussion by the surge of academic works instigated by the publication of Jan Assmann's famous *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*. In it, Assmann has drawn on the classical concept, noting: "Das ursprünglichste Medium jeder Mnemotechnik ist die Verräumlichung . . . Sogar und gerade ganze Landschaften können als Medium des kulturellen Gedächtnisses dienen. Sie werden dann weniger durch Zeichen ("Denkmäler") akzentuiert, als vielmehr als ganzes in den Rang eines Zeichens erhoben, d.h. *semiotisiert*" (2002, 59-60).[11]

This, I would argue, gives us a hint as to how the *dindshenchas* works. The arrangement of localities is Irish geography and, to these points in the landscape, stories of their origin are attached. The *dindshenchas* thus creates a mnemotope in which Irish past and Irish geography are intertwined. On this point, I find myself in agreement with what Gregory Toner (2014, 268) has outlined recently: "The place-name prompts the storyteller to recall a particular event and by travelling through the places the narrator can construct an entire narrative of the past. More importantly, perhaps, the name *is* a link to the past—to the very instant of naming. The name pronounced in some distant era is frozen in time and creates a link between the event of naming and the present. Therefore, a name has power to invoke and preserve the past. It is an avenue by which we can know the past. The interpretation of these naming events is the business of the *dindshenchas*." What the *dindshenchas* describes is a process of land-taking, a process of impropriating a country by giving its places not only a name but also a story. But the *dindshenchas* goes even beyond this, frequently describing "the creation of the landscape, if not the land" (Toner, 2014, 274). For example, when a plain is named after the person who cleared it, the *dindshenchas* functions both as a medium between landscape and tale and also as a creator of the place names.

There is a slight difference, though, in that Assmann considers the landscape (i.e., the landscape as a whole) to be a sign, while the *dindshenchas*, on the other hand, consists of separate stories individually linked to different places. In the *dindshenchas*, the Irish landscape does provide the necessary, unified background; but the pluralistic concept of mediality in the *dindshenchas* favors various separate and independent readings, not a singular one, as Assmann proposed. This is not a radically new notion: in 1988 Proinsias Mac Cana already noted that the *dindshenchas* serves as a "mnemonic index" (333). In its full-blown version, the *dindshenchas* is not merely an index, however, serving as a "pointer to the story" (Toner, 2014, 268), and somehow, therefore, deficient, "but [an index] to the past itself" (Toner, 2014, 268) and thus an important undertaking of the learned classes.

Very recently, a similar reading of the *dindshenchas* in conjunction with classical and medieval mnemonic theories has been proposed by Morgan Thomas Davies (2013). In a brilliant article based on Mary Carruthers's propositions, he stresses the importance of "locational memory" and *ductus* ('route-making') in his interpretation of Recension C. Recension C, as he notes, is ordered geographically, beginning with Tara, and "the sequence of entries in [this] recension of the *Dindshenchas* generally follows the traditional circuit of Ireland, and in doing so takes a route that is culturally endorsed (or even culturally determined) and therefore mnemonically apt" (Davies, 2013, 97). This is an attractive suggestion, since it would allow the *dindshenchas*'s audience to make a virtual

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[10] For an overview see Berns (2003). I had the pleasure of working as a student assistant on this project and even after all these years, I am very grateful for this inspiring experience.

[11] Translation (2011, 44): "The primal element of all mnemotechnics is placement . . . Even, or indeed especially entire landscapes may serve as a medium for cultural memory. These are not so much accentuated *by* signs as raised to the status *of* signs, that is, they are *semioticised*." The classical example for this is, of course, Palestine, with its arrangement of places that remember the life and death of Christ.

journey through Ireland's important places and their history—whether the *dindshenchas* was orally enacted or simply read.

As an aside, it must be noted that we cannot know for sure how the *dindshenchas* was performed, so we must rely on educated guesswork. There is some evidence the metrical *dindshenchas* were meant to be enacted: The *dindshenchas* of Carmun in Leinster tells us that recitation of the *dindshenchas* was part of the festivities of *óenach Carmun* ('the feast of Carmun'): *Ároisc roscada ri gail,/ 's tecusca fíra Fithail/ dubláidi dindšenchais dait,& tecusca Cairpri is Chormaic* ("Proverbs, maxims of might, / and truthful teachings of Fithal, / dark lays of the Dindsenchas for thee, / teaching of Cairpre and Cormac") (Gwynn, III, 1913, 20-21). While we have to take this statement perhaps with a grain of salt, it is nonetheless remarkable that a genre which most modern scholars so far have tended to view as didactic and/or etiological was depicted here as suitable for oral performance. The *dindshenchas* of Carmun is not the sole example for this. Noting openings such as "Listen ye warriors around Cruachu," Edel Bhreathnach (2000, 310) has raised the possibility that at least some *dindshenchas* poems were "proclaimed at the *óenach*." While I do find that very convincing for some poems and also maybe for Recension C, it is also very hard to prove at the end, as we only have them in their manuscript form. However, in the light of Davies's reading of Recension C, we can perhaps imagine that both oral enactment, be it at a fair or in a monastery, and silent study were possible in the Middle Ages.

The Dindshenchas *in the Book of Leinster*

While the points made thus far are all crucial for my understanding and re-interpretation of the *dindshenchas*, I have omitted one very important topic from the discussion, namely the nature of the manuscript witnesses which preserve the *dindshenchas*. Whereas modern scholars may have been reluctant to deal with the *dindshenchas* in the same manner as they have dealt with other literary narratives such as the *Acallam na Senórach* and *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, this attitude does not mirror the attitude of their medieval counterparts. A case in point: The earliest manuscript attestation of independent *dindshenchas* is in the Book of Leinster (Best, Bergin et al., 1954-83), the largest of the three twelfth-century Irish manuscripts in the vernacular. Not only do the compilers of the manuscript preserve the *dindshenchas*, they devote a substantial amount space to it.[12] Given that manuscript production in the Middle Ages required not only a group of well-connected and well-educated scribes, but—even more importantly—a considerable amount of expensive materials (Heinzle 2004, 27), it seems unlikely that precious vellum would have been spent preserving texts that the compilers of the Book of Leinster thought to be unimportant.

The *dindshenchas*, therefore, must have had some appeal for the scribes and compilers of the Book of Leinster. But an important question emerges: What is the *dindshenchas* in the Book of Leinster? This may sound like a surprising question, but closer observation of the manuscript shows that there is no clear-cut answer. Summarizing earlier research, William O'Sullivan (1966, 24) has noted in his assessment of the scribes and the compilation of the manuscript: "There are in fact not two, as Thurneysen thought, or a single unit as Gwynn suspected, but four *Dindshenchas* texts in the Book of Leinster: U's metrical version enclosed in his *duanaire*, the prose version (Thurnysen's B) largely A's work; A's metrical version; T's additions to this last and T's further two folios, xiiii-xv, omitted from consideration by Gwynn except for a single poem, *Temair IV*."[13] He further argues:

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[12] A glance at the table of contents in the diplomatic of the *dindshenchas* edition will suffice.

[13] Elizabeth Duncan has recently re-assessed the script of the *Book of Leinster*, suggesting that hand T was in fact four different scribes (Duncan 2012, 30-33). The additions to A's metrical version would then have been written and those "further two folios" have both been written by scribe T2 (Duncan, 2012, 36).

"It is notable that apart from these two odd leaves by F,[14] T is the only scribe who seems to understand the later exclusive concept of place name poetry as a category in itself: A in this section mixes it with other types. U at f. cviii seems to drift insensibly into it in the middle of his *duanaire* and the verso of his second *Dindshenchas* leaf (f. cix) contains a poem rejected by Gwynn" (O'Sullivan, 1966, 22-3). So, as promising as Davies's suggestion of a mental journey through Ireland's history sounds, he, based on Gwynn's suggestion, notes that while there are attempts at a geographical arrangement of the *dindshenchas* in *LL*, it is not fully applied (Davies 2013, 95) so that a mnemonic journey might not have been possible for the audience of the texts as they appear in the manuscript.

Are we therefore back at square one? Did the scribes simply not understand the purpose of the text they were preserving, or the nature of the genre itself? In an attempt to answer this question, we might note O'Sullivan's notion of "the later exclusive concept of placename poetry as a category in itself" expressed above. His argument was based on the received scholarly opinion of his time, which postulated the development of Recension C as the culmination of the *dindshenchas*-genre. If we accept, however, Ó Concheanainn's notion that Recension C was not the endpoint but rather the beginning from which the other recensions evolved, it would seem, therefore, that the scribes of the Book of Leinster were aware of this exclusive concept but apparently decided not to employ it. One reason for this apparent blurring of boundaries may have been that they simply did not feel constrained by generic expectations. However, since these scribes took great care in other parts of the manuscript to provide intra-textual cross-references, weaving a great, well-connected web of historical memory (for a full argument see Schlüter, 2010), I am skeptical of this conclusion. Rather, could it be that the scribes of *LL* had a different understanding of the genre?

In order to elucidate how medieval scribes and compilers conceptualized the *dindshenchas* in *LL*, we must therefore look at its manuscript context. The prose versions need not concern us here, since it is not disputed that they belong to the *dindshenchas* genre and, furthermore, that they form a cluster, a coherent unit of thematically related texts.[15] The poetry, however, seems to be another matter. U's *duanaire* ('poem-book'), that O'Sullivan refers to, is a section of historical poetry,[16] beginning with poems on Irish and world history ascribed to poets such as Gilla Cóemáin and Fland Mainistrech (from *LL*, iii, l. 14661 onwards), which are then followed by *dindshenchas* poetry (from *LL*, iii, l. 19480 onwards) before the prose *dindshenchas* begins (*LL*, iii, l. 21032). Instead of accusing scribe U of beginning the *dindshenchas* without much further ado such as an introductory section, we might ask whether he could have had a different understanding of *dindshenchas* poetry as a genre that fully exploited the meaning of the medieval Irish term. By simply taking the medieval term *dindshenchas* at face-value, it is first of all a compound of *dind* ('notable place') and *senchas* ('historical tradition'), as I explained above. In the truest sense of the word, the *dindshenchas* was part of the medieval Irish historical tradition, as Gregory Toner noted (2005, 74). Despite the problems modern historians may have accepting that thesis—Bowen's statement quoted above and Francis John Byrne's memorable "[t]he muse of history here never escaped from the swaddling bands of *senchas*" (1974, 138), come to mind here—it should also be emphasized, as Toner has done (2005, 72; 2014, 268), that the author's approach to the material in the *dindshenchas* is historiographical, as it is in Recension I of the *Táin*. This was also the stance the compilers of the Book of Leinster *dindshenchas* took.

This wider interpretation of how the *dindshenchas* was understood in medieval Irish learned

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[14] These leaves are incorporated in A's and T's metrical version (O'Sullivan, 1966, 22).

[15] Cluster is understood here in the sense proposed by Poppe (2008, 29).

[16] Interestingly, the *duanaire* is begun by scribe A und U takes over (O'Sullivan [1966, 23] and Duncan [2012, 41]).

culture possibly also explains why the *dindshenchas* poems were transmitted in the Book of Leinster in this very specific manner. William O'Sullivan assumed, as we have seen, that the compilers of the manuscript did not completely understand the *dindshenchas* as a distinct genre. I would argue, however, that they understood what they were doing perfectly, but that they did not always place as much emphasis on the *dind*-aspect of the genre as they did on the fact that these were part of *senchas* as an umbrella-category; and, as result, could be preserved in a more flexible manner.

This is particularly true for the part of the manuscript which has been named U's *duanaire*. O'Sullivan accused Scribe U of starting the verse *dindshenchas* abruptly in contrast with versions in other manuscripts which preface the *dindshenchas* with the story of how Fintan mac Bochrai narrated the *dindshenchas* to the men of Ireland.[17] If we look at the texts immediately preceding the *dindshenchas* poetry, however, the picture is a more differentiated one. I would therefore argue that the *senchas*-aspect is what holds the *duanaire* together, and that the *dindshenchas* poetry—with its *senchas*-theme foregrounded above all—serves as a transitory session from "pure" historical poetry to the prose versions of the *dindshenchas*. The argument that we should understand this portion as a transitory section is strengthened by the fact that the first poems of what Gwynn would consider the metrical *dinsdshenchas* following U's *duanaire* (beginning with the poem "Druim Criaich") are ascribed to poets, and that these ascriptions (if Gwynn's edition is reliable) are solely transmitted in the Book of Leinster (see the table in Schlüter, 2010, 178, based on Gwynn's edition).[18] It would seem to me that the poems do not follow a *duanaire* proper but are rather part of it introducing more, anonymous *dindshenchas* poetry before the prose *dindshenchas* that follow. This is what I mean when I say that the compilers of the Book of Leinster exploited the *dindshenchas* to its full potential; and this is also why I take the *dindshenchas* to be a flexible textual genre, which could be employed by authors and compilers variously to fulfill different needs.

This flexibility is also evident when we consider the other sections of *dindshenchas* within the manuscript: The *dindshenchas* poetry transmitted in U's *duanaire* exploits, as I have said, the fact that the *dindshenchas* was essentially *senchas*, and thus part of the vast medieval Irish historical tradition, and is used here to create a smooth transition to the prose *dindshenchas*.[19] The prose *dindshenchas*, which is here an abbreviated version of C in that they contain the prose explanation of the place name and a short stanza,[20] may have been used for reference purposes. The third *dindshenchas* section in *LL* shows that it was perhaps not the compilers' intent to create an all-Ireland collection but rather to focus on Leinster, as it begins with the prose and poetry account of Carmun, parts of which have been quoted above (*LL*, iv, l. 25090). That the intent of the compilers was primarily local is also evidenced by the fact that the *dindshenchas* of Dun Másc is transmitted twice here (prose: *LL*, iii, ll. 211170-21181, verse: *LL*, iii, ll. 21607-21646).[21] The position of the poems on ff. xiii-xv (*LL*, i, ll. 3209-3915),[22] which have not been admitted to the *dindshenchas* canon by Gwynn, can then

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[17] It is edited from the Bodleian *dindshenchas* by Stokes (1892, 469).

[18] This is also true for other parts of metrical *dindshenchas* in *LL* (Schlüter, 2010, 173-4).

[19] Elizabeth Duncan (2012, 42) notes that the *duanaire* (p. 158) "ends with *Maistiu*; not all of column b was used by scribe U and it is clear that this was the end of his stint. Likewise, pages 169 and 170 (CXIX) [the end of the prose *dindshenchas*, D.S] begin and end with complete texts. Noting specifically textual, scribal, or structural connects Hands A and U here, and it is therefore possible that the folios of this 'quire' were brought together at a later hand." However, this is all *dindshenchas* material so I think that there is at least a textual connection which should not be underestimated.

[20] See Ó Concheanainn (1982, 106): "At any rate, the prose-plus-quatrain would seem to be a natural form to adopt for an epitomized version of the prose-and-verse form of recension C."

[21] Dunamase is the stronghold of the Loígis in whose territory I would place the compilation of the manuscript, for the full argument see Schlüter (2010).

[22] This section contains a poem about Connacht got its name, a poem about the reason for the battle of

be explained by the fact that they nicely bring to a close the all-Ireland history section begun by the *Lebor Gabála*, the medieval Irish origin myth.[23] If we thus free ourselves from what has been seen as the *dindshenchas* canon and the assumption that Recension C necessarily represents *dindshenchas* as they should have been done properly if the scribes had understood what they were doing and allow a more flexible meaning of the term, the transmission and function of the *dindshenchas* in the Book of Leinster make much more sense.

The Way to the Future?

So what are my conclusions from the above? At this stage of research I am a bit reluctant to offer any definite claims about the *dindshenchas* and its functions, since so much depends on the actual manuscript context. What is the position of the *dindshenchas* in its respective manuscripts and what would this tell us about the compilers' interpretation of the genre? In the preceding I have tried to outline a possible interpretation of the *dindshenchas* in the Book of Leinster; and while I have been able to answer questions about the form and function of the *dindshenchas* in this manuscript, it would seem that before we can say anything definite about the *dindshenchas* in other manuscripts, we would need to explore several different avenues further. One avenue is certainly the examination and evaluation of single and specific *dindshenchas* items and putting them into a larger context, something which has been done, for example, by Clodagh Downey (2010).

An important point to keep in mind for future research is the similarity between the function of the places in the *dindshenchas* and those of the places in ancient and medieval mnemonic theory as it connects something we would see as a very typical and unique genre of medieval Irish literature with a wider international context. The implications of Davies's article for a reading of Recension C as a *ductus* through Ireland's past open up a very promising area of research, even though it is not without its problems for the *dindshenchas* in the Book of Leinster, as I have argued. But again, we would need to test this against other manuscripts to come to any definite conclusion here.

As another *caveat*, we should be very careful when we talk about recensions of the *dindshenchas*. In my view, it does not amount to a recension when there are different *dindshenchas* items scattered somewhere in a manuscript, as is the case for the Book of Leinster. In order to qualify as a recension of the *dindshenchas* corpus, we should at least expect a coherent transmission. Thus, while we tend to talk about *Dindshenchas Érenn* as if it were clear exactly what is and is not part of the corpus, examination of the *dindshenchas* in the Book of Leinster has shown that the matter is far from clear-cut. Much of what we assume to know about the *dindshenchas* stems from the editions by Stokes and Gwynn and what they considered to be *dindshenchas*, in distinction with what appears in the manuscript. Secondly therefore, I would call for more research on the precise form and function of the *dindshenchas* as we find them in their respective manuscripts.

But what we can definitely conclude is that while the *dindshenchas* certainly have an onomastic component in the tradition of Isidore of Seville, refined to suit the needs of medieval Irish learned culture, they also have a historical component in the truest meaning of the term *dindshenchas*, and this historical component could be exploited to its full potential by those who were involved in the transmitting them.

From a modern point of view, the *dindshenchas* might not conform to what we see as an

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Muccrima, which interesting had been classed by its editor Myles Dillon as *dindshenchas* (1946, 154) and some material about Tara and Tech Midchúarta. It closes with material for the poet.

[23] See also Dillon's remarks (1946, 154): "It is of some interest, in view of the close relationship between *Lebor Gabála* and the *Dindshenchas*, that they immediately follow the text of *Lebor Gabála* in the manuscript."

aesthetically pleasing work. However, we must remember that earlier generation of scholars, for example, considered *Acallam na Senórach* to be somewhat repetitive and perhaps a bit odd, while nowadays it is seen as "a work of considerable sophistication" (Connon 2013, 98). If we take up that challenge, I am sure we will be rewarded. Given that most works of medieval Irish learned culture are anonymous, we might never solve the "whodunnit" question of *dindshenchas*, but we can certainly know more about the instruments and methods they used to achieve what they have done.

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