Manuscript Contexts of Early Irish Law Tracts: A Case Study on Uraicecht Becc

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The problem of manuscript contexts of medieval Irish texts is attracting more scholarly attention. Two conferences have been dedicated to the examination of the manuscripts Lebor na hUidre and the Book of Ballymote respectively, with an emphasis on the interaction between texts within their specific manuscript contexts. The fruit of another conference in 2011, recently published and aptly titled Authorities and Adaptations, investigates the manuscript contexts of grammatical, legal, religious and narrative texts throughout the Irish tradition. The organizing principles and textual interrelationship in the Book of Leinster have received a thorough analysis by Dagmar Schlüter. Other celebrated studies include an investigation on Rawlinson B 502 by Edel Bhreathnach and, from the Welsh side, an article on the White Book of Rhydderch by Catherine McKenna.

1 Royal Irish Academy (RIA hereafter) MS 1229. The proceedings have been published as Ruairí Ó hUiginn, ed., Lebor na hUidre, Codices Hibernenses Eximii 1 (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2015).
2 RIA MS 536.
3 Elizabeth Boyle and Deborah Hayden, eds., Authorities and Adaptations: The Reworking and Transmission of Textual Sources in Medieval Ireland (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2014).
4 Trinity College Dublin (TCD hereafter) MS 1339.
5 Dagmar Schlüter, History or Fable? The Book of Leinster as a Document of Cultural Memory in Twelfth-Century Ireland, Studien und Texte zur Keltologie 9 (Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 2010).
6 Oxford, Bodleian Library (Bod. hereafter).
8 National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 4 and MS 5.
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literati understood and treated their texts, and manuscript contexts provide abundant clues to their intellectual backgrounds and activities that transcend the modern division of disciplines and genres. It is only in recent decades that scholars have started paying attention to the making of compilations in medieval Ireland. As observed by Edel Bhreathnach,

scholars, scribes and illuminators ... were not simply antiquarians and not randomly choosing texts, but when compiling substantial miscellanies worked to a plan that was often dictated by their sources, the wishes of patrons or their own scholarly concerns.”

From this viewpoint, the manuscript is more than a physical carrier of texts—it is by itself an elaborate construction that conveys message about its scribes and readers through the arrangement and layout of texts.

When speaking of the manuscript context of a text, we are mainly concerned with four aspects; the first one is the social and historical background of the manuscript itself, such as the identity and affiliation of the scribe(s), the time, location and reason of making the manuscript. The second is the visual layout of the text in the manuscript, such as how it is located on a page, what visual tools have been used to indicate its structure and relationship with the neighboring texts. The third is the textual layers, such as the

accretion of glosses, commentary and indices to the main text. The last aspect, which I will focus on in this paper, is the arrangement of texts in the manuscript.

By examining these aspects, I propose to ask the following questions: 1) Why was the scribe dealing with this text? 2) What was the plan in compiling the manuscript? 3) What was the place of the text in the scribe's system of knowledge? 4) What did the scribe expect to convey to his reader? In what follows I will test these questions on the Old Irish law tract Uraicecht Becc and its derivative texts, and see what new thoughts about this text will emerge from such an enquiry.

Before starting on Uraicecht Becc, however, I would like to briefly review the state of research of the manuscript contexts of early Irish law texts. The most comprehensive guidebook on this topic is Liam Breathnach’s A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici, in which he discusses the forms of manuscript representation of Old Irish text (chapter 3), citation markers, script size and page layout of the legal digests (chapter 6), the contents and dates of glosses and commentary (chapter 7), and authorship of the law texts (chapter 8). An article by Fergus Kelly focuses upon the problem of page layouts, position and content of glosses, decoration and illustration, identity of scribes and activities of legal families. Charlene Eska has briefly described the neighboring texts of Cúna Lámanna in TCD MS 1316 in her critical edition, where she goes into much greater details about the manuscript history and scribal


14 For a list of such derivative texts and their nature, see Liam Breathnach, Uraicecht na Ríar: The Poetic Grades of Early Irish Law (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1987), 3-19. I follow Breathnach’s practice of referring to them in Roman numerals UB I to UB X.

15 Liam Breathnach, A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2005).

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hands. Unsurprisingly, most copies or excerpts of Căin Lánamna, the seventh tract of Senchas Mán, are transmitted with other tracts from that collection. While these excellent studies cover the first three aspects of the manuscript context of legal texts, research of the fourth aspect, that of the arrangement of texts in manuscript, remains largely wanted.

This, to some extent, is a forgivable lacuna. In order to interpret the significance of text arrangement in a manuscript, we have to firstly ensure that the manuscript was intentionally made as a unitary product, rather than a composite volume. By ‘unitary’ I mean that the manuscript was originally produced as a single entity; and by ‘composite’ I mean an assemblage of heterogeneous codicological units that were produced independently. There are, of course, large tracts of grey area between the two poles of single-scribe codex with continuously copied texts and randomly bound-up fragments; moreover, much work needs to be done to elucidate the origins of the numerous fragments in some Irish manuscripts and the relationships between them. Unfortunately, many early Irish legal texts are found in composite volumes. During the age of antiquarianism, medieval manuscripts were rescued, assembled and some arbitrarily bound

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into volumes. As part of a study leading to a better comprehension of the nature of medieval Irish legal manuscripts, here I give a general survey of the manuscripts Binchy consulted for Corpus Iuris Hibernici (hereafter CIH). The following description mostly depends on the information from catalogues, but whenever possible I have also consulted the original manuscripts, microfilms, on-line images or photostats. At present it serves only as a preliminary sketch and will surely be updated by progress in the studies of individual manuscripts.

Occasionally, a single leaf of law text has been inserted into a composite manuscript, such as those found in British Library (hereafter BL) MS Egerton 90, RIA MS 1234 (C i 2), MS 1243

23 In the coming sections, the information of the manuscripts and their contents, unless otherwise specified, is from these published catalogues: BL Cat. = Standish H. O’Grady and Robin Flowers, eds., Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the British Museum, 3 vols. (London: British Museum, 1926-1952).
RIA Cat. = Kathleen Mulchrone et al., eds., Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy, Fasc. i-xxviii (paginated consecutively), (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1926-1970).
24 Fol. 8 = CIH 1619-1623; this single folio contains a pleading concerning the Mac Namara family. The origin of this folio may be explained by the
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(23 Q 6)\(^{26}\) and TCD MS 1308 (H 2.12).\(^{27}\) It is difficult to determine when these folios were made and when they entered the volume. In such cases, the context is too limited for meaningful discussion. On the other hand, it is no easier to disentangle the relationships between the components of some of the most important manuscript sources of early Irish law. TCD MS 1363 (H 4.22), for instance, consists of at least sixteen sections differing in size and hand,\(^{28}\) while we still do not know exactly how many originally independent fragments there are in TCD MS 1336 (H 3.17) and MS 1337 (H 3.18), which have undergone several bindings since the days of Edward Lhuyd till the last century. Vellum size, scribal hand and textual continuity may provide some clues; and there are also cases where an originally unitary codex has been divided and each part was later bound with other manuscripts. A well-known example is the book of Domhnall mac Aodha Úi Dhubhhdábhroíeann, now preserved separately as BL MS Egerton 88, folios 1-92, RIA MS 1243 (23 Q 6), pages 33-52, and Copenhagen Kongelige Bibliotek MS 261B, folios 1-6.\(^{29}\)

The discussion of textual arrangement is naturally only valid within a unitary codicological unit, which may at present exist as an independent codex or be bound with originally unrelated manuscripts into a composite volume. A number of such unitary fragments or complete manuscripts consist entirely of legal materials. BL MS

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Harley 432,\(^{30}\) for example, is thoroughly legal in content. This manuscript consists of twenty folios and records continuously the first two tracts from the Senchas Már with extensive glosses. No folios seem to have been lost; though the law tract it records breaks off incomplete, the scribal colophon at the bottom of folio twenty indicates that the incompleteness is due to a faulty exemplar.\(^{31}\) The textual arrangement in Harley 432 is not very significant apart from confirming the order of the first two tracts of Senchas Már. Comparison between a number of such sources, such as the first part of TCD MS 1433 (E 3.5)\(^{32}\) or the first three parts of MS 1316 (H 2.15A),\(^{33}\) nonetheless contributes to the establishment of the original content and order of the Senchas Már.\(^{34}\) Neither does the second section of TCD MS 1433 (E 3.5),\(^{35}\) which consists solely of an incomplete copy of Bretha Égíd, or the part of BL MS Nero A7\(^{36}\) that contains a seemingly complete copy of Bretha Nemed Toisech,\(^{37}\)

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26 CII 1192-1194. This is a small slip of vellum mounted on fresh vellum.

27 No. 8. iii = CII 2204-2208. This loose folio also contains a pleading on behalf of the Mac Mathgamain family, see D. A. Binchy, "Distrain in Irish Law," Ceithic 10 (1973): 22-71, at 67-71. The information given in TCD Cat. p. 80 is inaccurate.


29 CII 1266-1531, 1194-1234, 2233-2254 respectively. See O'Sullivan, "The Book of Domhnall Ó Duibhidhdroíeann."

30 CII 339-422. See Nersis Patterson, "The O'Doran Legal Family and the Sixteenth-Century Recensions of the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to the Senchas Már," Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium 6 (1986): 131-149 at 133, for the identities of two scribes of this manuscript.

31 A dia tabair trocraíre dom amin misi f. agus nó tabrach fer in baion masin orum agus olcas mo cairi agus nár mebruis in seanbarc agus anis art labadrais mo lag agus is oir linn red egin cídh be é. "O God, have mercy on my soul! I am F. and let not the man of the book [i.e. the owner of this MS.] reproach me [for any shortcomings], considering the badness of the copy that I had before me; and sure I had not even studied the old codex. Dysartlawrence is my place of writing; and I am sorry for a certain thing, be that as it may" (translation from BL Cat., vol. 1, 147).

32 Pp. 1-20 = CII 191-249. This part consists of fragmentary copies of some of the tracts that belong to the middle third of Senchas Már. See also Charlene Eska, "Four Marginalia from Trinity College, Dublin MS 1433 [E.3.5]," Studia Cethcic 49 (2015): 115-120.

33 (1) pp. 11-38 = CII 423-479.22; (2) pp. 39-42, 47-66 = CII 479.23-536; (3) pp. 43-46 = CII 537-540.18. All of these are copies of various Senchas Már tracts.


35 Pp. 21-60 = CII 250-337.

36 Fols. 132b-157b = CII 2211-2232.

37 The first third of this tract has been edited in Liam Brethanach, "The First Third of Bretha Nemed Toisech," Ériu 40 (1989): 1-40.
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tell us much about the interaction of these two texts with other texts in manuscripts. On the other hand, TCD MS 1387 (H 5.15),38 which includes extracts with commentary from Findruth Fit habil, Fothae Bec, Fothae Mór and other less well-attested law tracts, may indicate a close relationship between them, perhaps because of their thematic similarity or shared origin, or only because they were available to the scribe at the time of compilation.

It is noteworthy that copies of some law tracts tend to survive on their own in fragments. Apart from the copy in TCD MS 1433 mentioned above, copies of Bretha Étgid are also found in two independent sections of BL MS Egerton 90,39 RIA MS 1243,40 and MS 1242 (23 P 3).41 In these manuscripts the copies of the Bretha Étgid text, all incomplete, are not written together with other texts. This may be due to the unusual length of that tract. The other extreme may be exemplified by the second part of Bod. Rawlinson B 50642 and the first part of RIA MS 1243,43 where late commentaries have been organized under various headings according to miscellaneous topics, thus forming legal florilegia or ‘digests’.44 These ‘digests’ cite extensively from older legal texts, and the logic by which they are arranged awaits detailed studies.

We also possess many unitary sections or whole manuscripts that incorporate both legal and non-legal materials. The above-mentioned Egerton 88, together with folios that are now bound into RIA MS 1243.

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1243 and Copenhagen MS 261B, consists predominantly of legal texts but also of substantial portions of sagas, glossary and grammatical materials. Other manuscripts mainly comprise non-legal materials. The first part of TCD MS 1432 (E 3.3)45 was written by Diarmaid Ó Dubhgaín from a historian family, and TCD MS 1317 (H 2.15B)46 was mainly written by Dubhaltach Mac Fhir Bhísigh, antiquarian from a learned family, and his grandfather.47 The Mac Fhir Bhísigh family also participated in the production of TCD MS 1318 (Yellow Book of Lecan) and was responsible for copying a law-text in it.48 National Library of Ireland (NLI hereafter) MS G 11, being a medical manuscript, nonetheless records several law tracts that are concerned with physicians and sick-maintenance, obviously for the physicians’ reference in case of disputes from their trade.49 These manuscripts tellingly show that law was part of the stock knowledge of the learned class, whichever specific profession they might have been engaged in.50 Bod. MS Rawlinson B 502,51 RIA MS 536 (Book of Ballymote), and NLI MS G 2-352 all contain a small number of law tracts among texts of other topics. In fact, MS 536 and MS G 2-3 were written by scribes who had studied with or worked under the Mac Aodhagáin school, which may explain the source of their legal texts.

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38 CIH 2131-2191. For the content of this manuscript see Bretnach, A Companion, 88-89.
39 (1) Fols. 9-12 = CIH 1623.15-1632.2; (2) fols. 13-16 = CIH 1632.3-1649.
40 Pp. 7-30 = CIH 1151.1-1192.4. This fragment originally belongs together with Egerton 90, fols. 9-12, known as the book of Cairbre mac Domhnaill Uí Dheoradháin, but the order of the folios has been confused.
41 Fol. 24 = CIH 1254.16-1260.15; fol. 25 = CIH 1260.16-1265. These two folios seem to be fragments from a larger gathering, the rest of which is now lost. They are written by the same scribe but belong to two versions of the tract.
42 Fols. 16b-62 = CIH 81-190. For the content see Bretnach, A Companion, 13-23.
43 Pp. 1-6 = CIH 1139-1151. For the content see Bretnach, A Companion, 47-50.
44 For this type of legal writing see Bretnach, A Companion, chap. 6.
45 The law texts are found on pp. 166-18a, 21b-23b = CIH 2336-2343. But see below for law texts in this section omitted from CIH.
46 The law texts are found on pp. 135-156 = CIH 1111-1138.
48 Cols. 920-938 = CIH 2318-2335.
50 For instance, a commentary to Uraicecht Becc states that the major law tracts including Senchas Már and Bretha Nemed are among the courses of a fli, see Bretnach, Uraicecht na Riar, 159 and Mittelirische Verslehrhen II = Rudolf Thurneysen, “Mittelirische Verslehrhen,” in Irische Texte mit Übersetzungen und Wörterbuch, vol. 3, no. 1, ed. Whitley Stokes and Ernst Windsch (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1891): 1-182 at 36.
51 Fols. 62b44-63va1 = CIH 2192-2203.
52 For the law texts in these latter two manuscripts see below.
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_Uraiceht Becc_ (UB hereafter) offers a rare chance for us to look into the position of a legal text in the knowledge system of medieval Irish learned persons, as copies of this tract are found in four of the unitary manuscripts that contain both legal and non-legal materials, in three being the only law tract in the codex. Besides the Old Irish tract itself, extracts from UB and commentaries based on UB appear in a number of manuscripts, and the contexts in which they appear may shed sidelights on the reception and transmission of UB.

A cursory introduction to this law tract is pertinent at this point. UB focuses on the topic of statutes and entitlements of the various grades in Irish society, covering ranks of clergy, lords, poets and freemen of crafts; it also briefly discusses the basis of judgments. It is written in succinct prose, at times turning to paradigmatic exposition and axiomatic couplets, no doubt for mnemonic ends. It quotes from Bretha Nemed⁵⁴ and may have been partly modelled upon Côic Conara Fuigill.⁵⁵ Therefore UB must at least postdate Bretha Nemed, which Bretnach has dated to between 721 and 742,⁵⁶ he also argues that linguistically UB may be even as late as the early tenth century.⁵⁷

Copies of UB, not all of which are complete, are found in these following manuscripts, represented by sigla as employed by Bretnach:⁵⁸

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B: TCD MS 1337, pp. 88a-111b, _CIH_ 634.1-655.23.
C: TCD MS 1318, cols. 920-938, _CIH_ 2318.1-2335.30.
D: NLI MS G 3, fols. 26r-45v, _CIH_ 2255.1-2282.27.
E: TCD MS 1432, pp. 19a33-21b1, omitted from _CIH_ but noticed in _CIH_ p. xxii.

Among these, B has to be taken away from further consideration of manuscript context. This copy occupies a single section of the composite TCD MS 1337; the vellum size is smaller than the previous section and is followed by a section of half-pages. Its original context is thus obscure. Deborah Hayden⁵⁹ has compared the arrangements of texts in the sections that concern us in A and E, from the perspective of transmission of grammatical materials, but here I would like to look at them again from the viewpoint of legal text and to broaden the comparison with the help from other manuscripts.

As is the case with many Irish codices, A begins with _Sex Aetates Mundi_ and tracts on synthetic history, including the _Lebor Gabála Érenn_. The next part of the codex focuses on king-lists, genealogies and other synthetic historical works such as _Lebor Bretnach_ and _Senchas Naomh nÉren_. A few narratives about legendary kings ensue, in turn followed by _Lebor na Céart_ and the _Ranschenchas_. From folio 158 on, the scribe initiates a new section which is mainly devoted to the study of poetry, the texts being in the following sequence: a treatise on Irish prosody, _Lebor Ollamh_, versions of texts published as _Mittelirischen Verslehren (MV)_ II and _MV_ I, passages on lawful procedure in the poet’s circuit and his

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rewards for composition, Lebor Ogain, A urinecept na nÉces, the trefhecal tract, discussions on the closing of poem (duinad) and on the retinues for the seven grades of poets. This last item no doubt derives from UB, therefore, though it is separated from the next item, a copy of UB itself, by a blank page, the thematic connection is apparent. UB is then followed by the Dindshenchas and Irish adaptations of classical works such as Togail Troi and Merugud Uilix, before the end of the manuscript.

Columns 573-958 of C (the Yellow Book of Lecan) were written by Giolla Isua Mór Mac Fhir Bhísigh. It starts with several tāna, homilies and accounts surrounding the life of St. Columb Cille, including the Anream Coluim Chille. Most of the texts in this unitary section are religious narratives and stories about legendary kings and poets. After these is a series of tales about Mongán and Conula, anecdotes of the poets Mac Líag and Flann mac Lonán, and an amusing short poem on the condition of wearing a beard for champions. Then there is a copy of UB, the beginning of which is missing probably due to loss of folios before column 920. UB is followed by several tales about the important battles in Irish history and other narratives, until the manuscript concludes with Cán Domnaigh. The original manuscript by Mac Fhir Bhísigh does not end here, but the rest has been bound separately as NLI MS G 4, which again contains religious and saga narratives. Although we may not

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be able to recover the immediate context before UB in the original manuscript, the manuscript is clearly historical-literary oriented, in accordance with the hereditary art of the Mac Fhir Bhísigh family. NLI G 2 and G 3 (D) were originally one compilation before acquired by Edward O'Reilly. The majority of texts are in the hand of the historian Adhamh Ó Cianáin (d. 1373). G 2 consists mostly of genealogies, but it is noteworthy that folios 34v-35v display a marked interest in poetic and grammatical matters. Folio 34v starts with two heavily glossed poems written in the obscure style called bētra na fiéd. Then on folio 35r we find an Old Irish text listing the seven grades of poets, ecclesiastical scholars (ecnai), clerics and lords, most of which are extracts from UB. This is followed by verses on the retinues of the seven grades of poets (UB X), and on the three things required of an ollam, extracted from a commentary to UB. These are followed mainly by accounts of famous kings and saints, but on folio 49r we find again a Middle Irish poem on the gender and declension of Latin nouns, doubtless a rendering of part of Priscian's grammar.

The copy of UB in D occupies a gathering of smaller folios (folios 26-45) and is by a different hand than that of the main scribe Adhamh Ó Cianáin. The marginal note on folio 29r indicates that the scribe belongs to the Mac Aodhagáin school and wrote by the
end of the fourteenth century,\textsuperscript{73} so this gathering may have been inserted into the codex from another source at some point before it entered O’Reilly’s collection. Its position within G 3 is probably accidental, but the inclusion of this gathering may still reflect a shared interest with other parts of G 3. G 3 opens with the Banshenchas and MV II, which are followed by accounts on world history, Irish genealogies and religious and secular poetry. The copy of UB on folios 26-45 is prefixed with a commentary on the “foundation and essence and application” (\textit{bunadh \& inde \& airbheith})\textsuperscript{2} of \textit{cid}, the first word of UB, and ventures into analysis of Latin grammar. This copy of UB also contains a copy of \textit{Còic Conara Fuigill},\textsuperscript{75} perhaps due to the systematic reference to the theory of the “paths of judgment” at the beginning of UB, for which the scribe feels obliged to cite \textit{Còic Conara Fuigill} in full to expound that theory.\textsuperscript{76} After this inserted gathering, from folio 46 onwards the scribe recorded a metrical glossary, two prognostications and a series of grammatical tracts. At least within the gathering itself, UB is

\textsuperscript{73} The comment reads: \textit{Atamid i{	extaggr}fhagbail and so gu sondradhach gebe du Leath Mogha le millfadh Gilla na Naemh og mac Aedalan \textit{i.e. mac Conchobair written above} Leath Cuind da coimdhigait gan cuntabairt \& muna dearnad nar fhagbhad a n-oghhealha ina inadhail. “We are obtaining it here especially, whoever from Leth Moga by whom Giaolla na Naemh Óg Mac Aodhagáin (that is, son of Conchobhar) would have been hurt, Leth Cuind will avenge him together without hesitate, and if it was not done or it was not obtained, their heirs [will do it] in their stead” (my translation). The death of Giaolla na Naemh Óg Mac Conchobhair Mhaic Aodhagáin is recorded in AFM 1399.

\textsuperscript{74} These three meta-theoretical concepts can again be found among the teachings of \textit{Auraisecht na nÈces}, though perhaps not in the canonical part; see George Calder, \textit{Auraisecht na nÈces: The Scholars’ Primer} (Edinburgh: J. Grant, 1917), 54-55. They have also been applied to analyzing the word \textit{éigid} in \textit{Bretha Éigid} (\textit{CH} 251.4-14) and the word \textit{senchas} in the commentary to the Introduction to \textit{Sechtori Mair} (\textit{CHI} 344.28-31) as well; see Paul Russell, “The Sounds of a Silence: The Growth of Cormac’s Glossary,” \textit{Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies} 15 (Summer 1988): 1-30 at 23.


\textsuperscript{76} Henry, “A Note on the Brehon Law Tracts.”

associated with the poetico-grammatical learning, a fact which may be collaborated by texts in other parts of G 3.

Such connection is all the more significant in E.\textsuperscript{77} E is also a composite volume, but the section that concerns us, namely pages 1-24, is a unitary manuscript mostly written by Diarmaid Ó Dubhgháin. This starts with the verse epilogue of \textit{Sex Aetates Mundi}, after which Ó Dubhgháin’s hand wrote a copy of \textit{Auraisecht na nÈces}. \textit{Uraicecht na Riar}, a law text on the grades and entitlements of the poets,\textsuperscript{78} ensues, then comes a poem on the retinues of the poets (\textit{UB X}), which we have already encountered in A. Thereafter we find a commentary on the poetic grades and a tract on poets’ training, another copy of which we have also met in A, before the UB proper. UB is followed by a legal text on judgment and procedure,\textsuperscript{79} a poem derived from the commentary of UB (UB IX),\textsuperscript{80} the \textit{trefhocal} tract, a poem on the grades of bards, extracts from \textit{Bretha Nemed Dédenach} on the property of voice,\textsuperscript{81} and other grammatical materials.

Our inquiry may be extended to texts derived from UB.\textsuperscript{82} These texts all focus on the grades, entitlements and qualifications of the poets,\textsuperscript{83} and they cite extensively from UB or its commentary. They constitute a vast body, some of which have already been covered in the discussion above. Of the ten texts listed by Breathnach, the first six are similar in that they all cite or comment on a certain portion of UB that concern the grades of \textit{filid}, namely paragraphs 10 and 20-26, while the rest can be best called “UB-inspired” or merely in keeping with the information set out in UB or its commentary.

\textsuperscript{77} The following account of the contents of TCD MS 1432 comes from the updated catalogue published on-line on ISOS (see note 23). Also see the analysis in Hayden, “Poetic Law,” 25-30.

\textsuperscript{78} Breathnach, \textit{Uraicecht na Riar}.

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{CHI} 2341.8-2342.15.

\textsuperscript{80} Breathnach, \textit{Uraicecht na Riar}, appendix 7.

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{CHI} 2342.16-2343.21.

\textsuperscript{82} Breathnach, \textit{Uraicecht na Riar}, 6-19.

\textsuperscript{83} There are some later texts that address the other classes of persons and their rights and duties, but their relationship with UB is less direct. See Breathnach, \textit{A Companion}, 317.
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Therefore, I will mainly focus on the first six (UB I-VI) here, unless another UB-derived text is found in the vicinity of any of them in the same manuscript.

UB I is found in the first section of the composite volume TCD MS 1363. The texts in this section were copied continuously but by different scribes and probably from different periods. The section begins with a story of the making of the Amra Coluim Chille, and the following text is a narrative commenting on a passage from Bretha Nemed Toisech. UB I, starting from page 4, cites paragraphs 10 and 20-26 from UB and supplies ample commentary. It is followed by legal fragments and commentary on various topics. Pages 71-86 of TCD MS 1316 is a unitary fragment, which starts with Immacallam in dá thúarad, followed by UB II, derived from both UB and MV II. Then we find a copy of Uraicecht na Riar, followed by miscellaneous materials on poets and poetry, a poem (UB VIII) again based on UB, and a short passage on letters. National Library of Scotland Adv. MS 72.1.7 (Gaelic VII) is a unitary manuscript. The first text there is Còir Annann, followed by Banshenchas and two derivative texts of UB (UB III and IV). The rest of this manuscript contains extensive wisdom texts and the so-called ‘Lecan glossary’. RIA MS 535 (the Book of Lecan) is a magnificent collection of learning, mostly written by Giolla Isca Mac Fhir Bhisigh. The part

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that concerns us here, folios 145r-169r, begins with wisdom texts. After a copy of Immacallam in dá thúarad, there are the Auracept na nEces, a miscellany of short texts on saints and legendary kings, some biblical genealogies and UB V, which is very similar to UB IV. UB V is in turn followed by a tract on the names of the Ogam letters. TCD MS 1336, columns 710-831 seems to belong to a single codicological unit, penned by different scribes, but the mise-en-page stays quite consistent. Columns 740-779 appear to be the work of a single scribe, after which there is a caesura in the volume. This section mainly comprises accounts concerning the history and genealogies of diverse kingdoms and dynasties in Ireland, the exceptions being an excerpt from Còir Annann (col. 752) and UB VI (cols. 778-9), the latter also displaying metrical examples from MV II.

What we observe from these manuscripts is a close affiliation between UB and poetico-grammatical texts. In contrast, only three law tracts are found in proximity to copies of UB or its derivative texts in the unitary manuscripts examined above: 1) Uraicecht na Riar, which exclusively deals with poets and poetry; 2) Còic Conara Fuiigill, which serves not only as the model of part of UB but also as further explanation to UB’s pithy dictum on the basis of judgment; and 3) an extract from Bretha Nemed Dèdenach on the properties of voice in poetic performance. It is apparent, again, that the closeness of these law tracts to UB is thematically motivated, and in the cases of 1) and 3), the poetico-grammatical connotation cannot be more obvious. Moreover, in A and C, and also D if we discount the inserted Còic Conara Fuiigill, UB stands out as the only secular

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84 Pp. 1-17, UB I at 4-9 = CIH 1532.18-1536.40.
86 Bretnach, Uraicecht na Riar, 7.
87 TCD Cat. 91.
88 CIH 549.19-558.25, Bretnach, Uraicecht na Riar, 7-13.
90 CIH 562.3-22, Bretnach, Uraicecht na Riar, 19.
91 For the hands and contents see the relevant section in Ronald Black, Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland (2011), published on-line on ISOS.
92 Bretnach Uraicecht na Riar, appendices 4-5.
94 RIA Cat. 1552.
95 Nine folios (fols. 142-150) are now bound as TCD MS 1319, pp. 172-87 and 192-3; see RIA Cat. 1551.
96 The text on fol. 150 ends incomplete, thus we do not know if any other texts come between Immacallam and Auracept na nEces.
97 Bretnach Uraicecht na Riar, appendix 6.
98 TCD Cat. 357.
99 CIH 2126.1-2127.5, Bretnach Uraicecht na Riar, 18-19.
100 The Old Irish passages on E, p. 21b has not been identified, but probably these come from multiple sources. The narrative preceding UB I in TCD MS 1363 contains two catchwords from Bretha Nemed Toisech (see note 85 above).
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law tract in the whole codex. Considering how many must have been
lost in the transmission of legal texts,\footnote{Ó Corráin, “What Happened Ireland’s Medieval Manuscripts?”} we cannot argue ex silentio
that UB had never appeared in lawyers’ handbooks or that it had not
been copied with other law tracts in the lost manuscripts, but it is
quite likely that the main readers of UB were not professional jurists,
 affordability in the later Middle Ages when most of the manuscript
witnesses were produced.

Meanwhile, in four manuscripts\footnote{RIA MS 535, MS 536; TCD MS 1432, MS 1316.} UB or its derivatives are
copied in proximity to Uraicecht na Riar or Auirceacht na nÉces or
both. This implies that these three texts share close ties to each other,
and form a thematic group in the course of codex compilation and
text transmission. A further support to such a thematic link comes
from the shared element in their titles. There is a caveat to the title of
UB as it was headed Auirceapt via Colla in E, and in another instance
referred to as Uraicecht i Colla.\footnote{Bretnach, A Companion, 315-316.} Nevertheless, Uraicecht is surely
part of the title, which is a variant of Auircecht, both being a
acceptus in the grammatical teaching context, according to Burnyeat,
denotes “assignment to be memorised by the students in preparation
means ‘primer.’ Auirceacht na nÉces’s primary function is, summarised by
Hayden, “a basic linguistic manual for aspirants to the poetic
profession,”\footnote{Hayden, “Poetic Law,” 3.} and Uraicecht na Riar encapsulates the legal matters
pertaining to poets. Accordingly, Binchy thinks that UB might be
written as “a ‘short primer’ of, or a ‘brief introduction’ to Bretha
Nemed. It may have been used as a textbook to initiate students into
the obscurities of the older language.”\footnote{Binchy, “The Date and Provenance of Uraicecht Becc,” 48.}

The examination of textual arrangement across a number of
manuscripts demonstrates, however, that UB was more likely used as
a synopsis of law of status for a wide range of readers in the fields of
poetry, grammar, history and other learned subjects in late medieval
Ireland than as an Institutes to higher legal curriculum for aspirant
lawyers. Certainly, in many circumstances, especially for the high-
ranked literati, a learned individual can have more than one
expertise, for instance in law and poetry, in exegesis and history or in
all of them. But excellence in multiple disciplines must have been
exceptional; elementary competency in all aspects of scholarship,
while being specialised in one of them, may probably have been the
usual case.\footnote{Anders Ahlqvist, The Early Irish Linguist: An Edition of the Canonical Part of the Auirceacht na nÉces, Comentationes Humanarum Litterarum 73 (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1982), 13.} UB may have served as a handy manual for professionals to check their entitlements and duties.\footnote{Neil McLeod, “The Metalworking Tradition in Medieval Irish Law,” in Between Intrusions: Britain and Ireland between the Romans and the Normans: Papers from the 2003 Melbourne Conference, Sydney Series in

\footnote{The judges, for instance, are required also to be learned in the details of Auirceacht na nÉces (CH I 2103.20-22), see Ahlqvist, “Old Irish auircecht ‘Primer, etc.’” 233. The higher ranks of practising lawyers are said to have possessed filledacht or the breth filed; see Liam Bretnach, “Lawyers in Early Ireland,” in Bretons, Serjeants and Attorneys: Studies in the History of the Irish Legal Profession, ed. Daire Hogan and W. N. Osborn (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990): 1-13 at 7. However, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, The Early Mediaeval Gaelic Lawyer, ASNC Publications 4 (Cambridge: Dept. of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, 1999), 42-43, for argument for variation and specialisation in learning. Also see the chart of pre-Norman learned persons from annalistic sources in Michael Richter, “The Personnel of Learning in Early Medieval Ireland,” in Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: Learning and Literature = Irland und Europa im früheren Mittelalter: Bildung und Literatur, ed. Próinséas Ni Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1996): 275-308.}
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Bretha Nemed and Cóic Conara Fuigill but presents in a plain, paradigmatic form and employs mnemonic devices such as heptads and axiomatic couplets. Even so, in a number of manuscripts intended for readers of poetic background, only excerpts from UB and its commentary, especially those pertaining to the rights and duties of the poetic grades, are preserved, revealing how the interest of readers can have affected the transmission and adaptation of a text. UB delineates the fundamental legal framework of early Irish society and synthesises information from other law tracts, and judging from the manuscript contexts of its surviving copies, it was primarily read by non-specialists of law in post-Norman medieval Ireland.

Thus far the study of manuscript context, especially of text arrangement in codices, has been applied to one law tract. One has to bear in mind, of course, that this methodology should not be overstretched. Apart from the challenges imposed by the diverse ways composite volumes are formed, even the textual arrangement in a unitary manuscript is always subject to the availability of exemplars in a given scriptorium and the interests of individual scribes. During the binding and re-binding processes, the sequence of the quires may have been disrupted, thus concealing the original intent of the compiler, especially when the beginning of a text coincides with a new folio or a new quire. Despite these inherent difficulties, however, certain patterns do emerge from this investigation, and I am confident that the study of manuscript context will surely reveal more about how early Irish law texts were produced and perceived by the learned class.

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