Fabricating History, Creating Facts: Critical Responses to *Lebor Gabála Érenn* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De Gestis Britonum*

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INTRODUCTION

At the close of the twelfth century, William of Newburgh (d. c. 1198) wrote a history of England, entitled the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*. The prologue to this text begins with a praise of Bede (672/3–735), one of his most respected exemplars, and Gildas (*fl.* sixth century). However, this praise quickly descended into a well-known diatribe against Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1095–c. 1155), since William believed Geoffrey to have directly contradicted the authority of Bede. Geoffrey had finished his *De Gestis Britonum* (hereon *DGB*) earlier in the twelfth century, and it had begun to circulate between 1123 to 1139.[1] Geoffrey claimed it was not his own original work, but a translation of a 'Britannici sermonis librum uetustissimum'.[2] However, it is clear, both now and to some of Geoffrey's contemporaneous readers, that the *DGB* was overwhelmingly his own composition.[3] Given the length of William's prologue, one small extract will have to summarise the tone of his criticisms of the *DGB*:

[1] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *De Gestis Brittonum*, ed. by Michael Reeve, trans. by Neil Wright, in *The History of the Kings of Britain: An Edition and Translation of* De Gestis Britonum (Historia Regum Britanniae) (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), p. vii.
[2] *De Gestis Britonum* 2, ed. by Reeve, trans. by Wright, pp. 4–5: 'A very old book in the British language'.
[3] Simon Meecham-Jones, 'Early Reactions to Geoffrey's Work', in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. by Joshua Byron Smith and Georgia Henley (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 181–208 (pp. 185–86). On Geoffrey's source material, see, for example, Neil Wright, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and Bede', *Arthurian Literature*, 6 (1986), 27–59; Neil Wright, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and Gildas', *Arthurian Literature*, 2 (1982), 1–40; Ben Guy, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth's Welsh Sources', in *Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, pp. 31–66.

> At contra quidam nostris temporibus pro expiandis his Britonum maculis scriptor emersit ridicula de eisdem figmenta contexens, eosque longe supra virtutem Macedonum et Romanorum impudenti vanitate attolens. Gaufridus hic dictus est agnomen habens Arturi, pro eo quod fabulas de Arturo ex priscis Britonum figmentis sumptas et ex proprio auctas per superductum Latini sermonis colorem honesto historiae nomine palliavit.[4]

This prologue has been well-trodden ground in previous scholarship: although William's criticism has been lauded for its uniqueness – in the words of Michael Staunton, 'bringing a distinctly un-medieval eye to English history' – it nonetheless demonstrates that Geoffrey's work was open to critical appraisal soon after it began circulating.[5]

Roughly fifty years before Geoffrey's work began to circulate, the earliest recension of *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (hereon *LGÉ*) was being collated by medieval Irish redactors. These authors were engaged in a similar project to Geoffrey: namely, they composed a comprehensive account of Irish prehistory. In contrast to the *DGB*, *LGÉ* was multi-authored. Multiple redactors collected together various disparate stories and traditions, written across hundreds of years, into its

[4] William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* 3, ed. by P. G. Walsh and M. J. Kennedy, in *The History of English Affairs* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1988), pp. 28–29: 'But in our own day a writer of the opposite tendency [to Gildas and Bede] has emerged. To atone for these faults of the Britons he weaves a laughable web of fiction about them, with shameless vainglory extolling them far above the virtue of the Macedonians and the Romans. This man is called Geoffrey and bears the soubriquet Arthur, because he has taken up the stories about Arthur from the old fictitious accounts of the Britons, has added to them himself, and by embellishing them in the Latin tongue he has cloaked them with the honourable title of history'.

[5] Michael Staunton, *The Historians of Angevin England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 82. On William's prologue, see, for example, Antonia Gransden, 'Bede's Reputation as an Historian in Medieval England', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 32.4 (1981), 397–425 (pp. 414–19); Siân Echard, '"Hic Est Artur": Reading Latin and Reading Arthur', in *New Directions in Arthurian Studies*, ed. by Alan Lupack (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), pp. 49–68 (pp. 52 and 58); Matthew Fisher, *Scribal Authorship and the Writing of History in Medieval England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012), p. 89.

narrative.[6] Some of this material was perhaps as old as the seventh century: one major source – an extensive poem by Máel Muru of Othan (d. 887), entitled *Can a mbunadus na nGáedel?* ('Whence the origin of the Gaels?') – was composed in the ninth century.[7] Four distinct medieval versions of the text survive today, labelled as Recensions 1, Míniugud, 2 and 3, in order of rough chronological composition.[8] *LGÉ* provides a history of Ireland, beginning with an epitome of the Book of Genesis before tracing six successive invasions of the island, ending with the invasion of the Gaels: *LGÉ* maintained that this group were the eponymous ancestors of the native Irish of the compilers' own day. This match in narrative breadth to *DGB* has led to comparisons between both texts: extensive studies which have included *LGÉ* and *DGB*, however, have tended to focus on comparing their source material, rather than putting both texts into conversation directly.[9] One important distinction between the two texts, however, is that *LGÉ* was not met with the same ire with which William received the *DGB*. The same disbelief expressed by William could have been addressed to multiple events in *LGÉ*: for example, the Gaels encounter sirens (creatures labelled as 'murdúchu', meaning literally a 'sea-singer') on their journey across the Mediterranean to Ireland;[10] or, in a story unique to Recension

[6] John Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend: Synthetic Pseudohistory*, Quiggin Pamphlets on the Sources of Mediaeval Gaelic History, 1 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, University of Cambridge, 1994).

[7] On the oldest sources, see Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, pp. 9–10; Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'Origin Legends in Ireland and Celtic Britain', in *Origin Legends in Early Medieval Western Europe*, ed. by Lindy Brady and Patrick Wadden (Leiden: Brill, 2022), pp. 46–74, esp. p. 47 on Máel Muru.

[8] Richard Mark Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions of the Lebor Gabála', in *Lebor Gabála Érenn: Textual History and Pseudohistory*, ed. by John Carey (London: Irish Texts Society, 2009), pp. 1–20; Richard Mark Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* - Part I: The Growth of the Text', *Ériu*, 38 (1987), 81–142. More detail about the recensions will be given below.

[9] One brief comparison is in Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, pp. 23–24. Extensive comparative studies of earlier insular pseudohistorical material include Charles-Edwards, 'Origin Legends'; Lindy Brady, *The Origin Legends of Early Medieval Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); it should be noted Brady includes the *DGB* in her study, but as a later reworking of the earlier material, and not in direct comparison to *LGÉ*, on pp. 188–94.

[10] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 112, 130 and 154, ed. and trans. by Robert Alexander Stewart Macalister, Irish Texts Society, 35, 5 vols (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1939), II, pp. 18–19, 40–43 and 68–

2, the Tuatha Dé Danann encounter Athenian necromancers who raise an army of the dead.[11] Yet, no such critic emerged in a medieval Irish context.

This paper, therefore, will explore some reasons why *LGÉ* escaped this kind of criticism. In order to contextualise this question, I will first review a wider range of criticisms and critical readings attached to both *LGÉ* and *DGB*: these offer different perspectives as to how medieval readers understood these texts, beyond William of Newburgh's prologue. These responses lie somewhere between William's outright criticism, and wholesale belief in the texts: they questioned and criticised these texts not in a manner which attempted to undermine its overall authority, but which instead addressed specific issues. By correcting or flagging such issues, I will argue that the authors of such comments aimed to reinforce the texts' overall historical authority. Having established the nuance of such readings, I will spend some time considering whether *LGÉ* escaped such criticism because it was written in a vernacular language, not Latin, since this was such an important distinction for William of Newburgh. The final part of this paper will then examine one opportunity where an Irish scribe had the chance to respond to *LGÉ* in a similar manner to William, but chose not to. I will argue that the previously examined comments accrued to *LGÉ* are useful in understanding why the Irish scribe made such a choice, and, overall, I will use these case-studies to underscore the sophistication of reader responses to both texts.

CRITICAL RESPONSES TO BOTH TEXTS

In this section, I will consider internal comments accrued to Welsh translations of *DGB* – a collection of texts known under the title *Brut y Brenhinedd*, hereon referred to as *ByB* – as responses to *DGB*'s historicity.[12] This approach is inspired

71; see also John Carey, '*Lebar Gabála*: Recension I' (unpublished PhD thesis, Harvard University, 1983), pp. 86 and 240. I will explain in more detail below which editions of *LGÉ* I am using in this paper.

[11] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 321–22, ed. by Macalister, IV, pp. 138–41.

[12] For an overview of the *ByB* textual tradition, see Patrick Sims-Williams, *Rhai Addasiadau Cymraeg Canol o Sieffre o Fynwy* (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2011).

by the work of Georgia Henley – who has argued persuasively that the *ByB* texts demonstrate a sophisticated and lively engagement with the Latin text of Geoffrey's work – and Nia Wyn Jones, who had already examined many of the below quotes as evidence of the medieval Welsh reception of the *DGB*.[13] I will examine passages from three versions of the *ByB* text: namely, the 'Peniarth 44' and 'Llanstephan 1' versions, which were both in circulation by the mid-thirteenth century;[14] and the 'Dingestow' version, which was written later in the thirteenth century.[15] I will then compare some of the comments added to *ByB* with similar ones added to various recensions of *LGÉ*, and I categorise them under three different headings: calls for more clarity, corrections, and expressions of disbelief in the text.

The textual tradition of *LGÉ* is worth reviewing, since it is notoriously complex: however, the work of John Carey and Richard Scowcroft has greatly furthered our understanding of it.[16] In this paper, I work with the understanding that Recension 1 was composed first, with the Míniugud Recension being composed shortly after, around the first quarter of the eleventh century. Then, Recension 2 was composed almost immediately after them.[17] The re-dating of Recension 1 to earlier than Recension 2 is a recent reassessment made by Carey, on the basis that Gilla Cóemáin (*fl.* c. 1014) was the main compiler of this version, and that his *floruit* can be pushed earlier than previously thought.[18] Recension 3 is a far more nebulous text: it is an amalgamation of Recensions 1 and 2, and it shows the greatest textual variation amongst its witnesses. This variation led

[13] Georgia Henley, 'Reading Geoffrey of Monmouth in Wales: The Intellectual Roots of *Brut y Brenhinedd* in Latin Commentaries, Glosses, and Variant Texts', *Viator*, 49.3 (2018), 103–27 (pp. 105–10); Nia Wyn Jones, 'The Most Excellent Princes: Geoffrey of Monmouth and Medieval Welsh Historical Writing', in *Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, pp. 257–90.

[14] Henley, 'Reading Geoffrey', pp. 106–7. I follow Henley's convention of using quotation marks to distinguish between versions and manuscript shelfmarks; see ibid., 106, fn. 16.

[15] Ibid., pp. 108–9.

[16] The main studies *LGÉ*'s textual tradition are Carey, 'Lebar Gabála'; Scowcroft, 'Part I'; Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions'; John Carey, 'The Floruit of Gilla Cóemáin', *Ériu*, 70 (2020), 31–39.

[17] Scowcroft argued that Recension 2 was composed just before Recension 1: Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 5–18; the re-dating is based upon Carey, 'Floruit'.

[18] Carey, 'Floruit'; on his association with the composition of Recension 1 and the Míniugud Recension, see Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 9–10.

Scowcroft to suggest that the best way to edit Recension 3 (as well as Recension 1) would be to produce individual, diplomatic editions of each of its witnesses. He also argued that Recension 2's witnesses could withstand being edited together into a single critical edition.[19]

Although Scowcroft made these suggestions fifteen years ago, *LGÉ* has not been edited fully since Robert Alexander Stewart Macalister produced his edition for the Irish Texts Society in the early twentieth century. The shortcomings of these volumes have been well-documented in secondary scholarship: perhaps the most memorable is Scowcroft's comment that Macalister 'bequeathed to posterity an edition woefully incomplete, riddled with errors, and all but impossible to read'.[20] The first of these charges is because Macalister died before he could complete the series: this meant that the final volume only 'represents the Editor's first draft', by the admission of the Irish Texts Society's chairman and secretary.[21] However, Scowcroft points out that that even within the previous volumes, which were supposedly complete, the sections on the Picts and on the Túatha Dé Danann are particularly garbled, and many other sections have been omitted or silently rearranged.[22] Therefore, large swathes of the text are poorly edited. Macalister's attempts to harmonise the various witnesses of the four medieval recensions led to an overwhelming number of critical notes, making it 'all but impossible to read': Scowcroft was particularly critical of Macalister's inclusion of all orthographical variants across witnesses in these notes, which, by their sheer volume, obscure more serious variations in text and

[19] Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 14–15.

[20] Quote from Scowcroft, 'Part I', p. 82, but see pp. 82–3 for his comments in full. In addition, see Carey, 'Lebar Gabála', pp. 20–22 and Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 1–2.

[21] See Macalister's preface to the fifth volume of his edition of *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (no page numbers given).

[22] Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', p. 1; see also ibid., p. 2, on the incoherence of the sections on the Picts and the Túatha Dé Danann. On the omission of other sections, see, for example, Scowcroft, 'Part I', p. 121 on omission of a *dindsenchas* text about Emain Macha, and p. 125, on the omission of Flann Mainistrech's *Redig dam, a Dé do nim* and a recapitulation of a section synchronising Irish history with world history.

structure.[23] Nevertheless, Macalister's edition remains the only attempt to edit *LGÉ* in its entirety: since its publication, only Recension 1 has been edited separately by John Carey.

Therefore, as an attempt to account for this editorial state, I have provided at least one dated manuscript witness for each of the following excerpts from *LGÉ*. This, at the very least, provides a broad *terminus ante quem* for when each comment was added to the text. For Recension 1, I will mainly refer to the twelfth-century manuscript Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1339, hereon referred to as the Book of Leinster.[24] I will also occasionally use Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS 23 E 29, hereon referred to as the Book of Fermoy: the portion of this manuscript which contains Recension I of *LGÉ* has been dated to the fourteenth century.[25] For Recension 3, I will use either the late-fourteenth century Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 P 12, hereon referred to as the Book of Ballymote, or the Recension 3 witness in the fifteenth-century portion of the Book of Fermoy.[26] This approach, I hope, will help to compensate for the editorial shortcomings of Robert Macalister's edition; I will still supply references to Macalister for ease of reference, but I will supplement these citations with John Carey's edition whenever they are from Recension 1.

[23] For example, see the volume of footnotes in Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, V, pp. 44–45. On criticisms of including too many 'trifling' orthographical variants in his footnotes, see Scowcroft, 'Part I', p. 82.

[24] Although I use the Book of Leinster due to modern convention, the manuscript is referred to as the Book of Nuachongbála in medieval citations: see Elizabeth Duncan, 'A Reassessment of the Script and Make-up of *Lebor Na Nuachongbála*', *Zeitschrift Für Celtische Philologie*, 59.1 (2012), 27–66 (p. 27, fn. 2).

[25] John Carey, 'Compilations of Lore and Legend: Leabhar Na hUidhre and the Books of Uí Mhaine, Ballymote, Lecan and Fermoy', in *Treasures of the Royal Irish Academy Library*, ed. by Siobhán Fitzpatrick and Bernadette Cunningham (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2009), pp. 17–31 (p. 28).

[26] Carey, 'Compilations of Lore and Legend', p. 23 on the Book of Ballymote, and pp. 28–29 on the Book of Fermoy.

A PREFERENCE FOR CLARITY

Translators or compilers express a preference for clarity at numerous points across the versions of *ByB* and recensions of *LGÉ*. For example, Nia Wyn Jones has noted that, in the 'Dingestow' version of *ByB*, the lack of information about Arthur's death or survival after the battle at the river Camblan elicits the comment 'Ac ny dyweit y llyuyr amdanav a uo diheuach na hyspyssach no hynny'.[27] This sense of frustration may stem from other texts which purported to record Arthur's death: for example, the *Vera historia de morte Arthuri*, written in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, added more exciting detail to the moment, such as pouring tempests, earthquakes, and Arthur's body being whisked away in a flash of lightning.[28] With other such narratives circulating, the baldness of Geoffrey's original description may have provoked disappointment such as this.

In a similar vein, some versions of *LGÉ* show a desire for greater clarity amid its medieval redactors. For example, the end of Recension 1 preserves an extended discussion of the progeny of the sons of Míl. Ith's son, Lugaid, and Éber Finn are said to have children; however, there is no information about the children of Míl's other sons, such as Én, Etán and Cacher. One voice expresses a hint of frustration at this state of the sources: 'Noco n-innister clanda na fénned .i. Én, Etan, Cacher, Fulmán, Mantán. Ní fargaib Éber Dond nó Érech claind, dáig ro báitte *ut diximus*'.[29] The Milesian genealogical scheme was a vital pillar in the development of *LGÉ*.[30] As mentioned above, one of the earliest sources used to date the development of the Irish origin legend is a Leinster genealogical poem, written c. 700, which refers to Éremón, son of Míl. Given that a son of Míl was such an important and early part of this genealogical scheme, the lack

[27] *Brut Dingestow*, ed. by Henry Lewis (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1942), p. 185: 'And the book says nothing more certain or clear about it than that'. See Jones, 'The Most Excellent Princes', p. 276.

[28] Michael Lapidge, 'The *Vera Historia de Morte Arthuri*: A New Edition', *Arthurian Studies*, 44 (2001), pp. 115–42; Echard, '"Hic Est Artur"', pp. 52–53.

[29] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 403, ed. by Macalister, V, pp. 44–45: 'It is not told that the warriors had offspring, that is, Én, Etan, Cacher, Fulmán, Mantán. Neither Éber Donn, nor Érech left children, for they were drowned *as we have said*'. Translation from Carey, 'Lebar Gabála', pp. 161 and 318. Witnessed in the Book of Leinster, p. 14.

[30] Charles-Edwards, 'Origin Legends', pp. 48–52.

of information about the offspring of Míl's other sons seems to have caused frustration amidst later readers of *LGÉ*. In short, this comment elucidates the critical reading of *LGÉ*, in a similar manner to that of *ByB* above.

Another moment where more detail is wished for in *LGÉ* is in Recension 3. According to this recension, Nél, the son of Fenius Farsaid, lives with the rest of the Gaels on the shoreline of the Red Sea, near Egypt, at the same time when the Israelites flee Egypt. During the Israelites' flight from Egypt, this version of *LGÉ* purports that the Israelites stayed with the Gaels, and Aaron speaks with Nél and informs him of the miracles performed by Moses in Egypt. Moses also heals Nél's son, Goídel Glas, from a snake bite. Moses commands that neither Goídel nor any of his descendants will die from snakes, and this story is used to explain why Ireland is devoid of such creatures. Nél then worries that he and his people will be punished for helping the Israelites: in exchange, Aaron offers to give the Israelites' ships to Nél. Nél agrees, stating:

> "Is i sin comairle is coir and", ol Nel. No cuirid and sin tra tri mili fear n-armach n-incomloinn maille re Nel gu harm a mbadar na longa 7 doradadh do Niul combhadar ar a comas.[31]

A question, embedded into the main text, directly follows this paragraph: '[Cid] ar na berdais mac Israel fein leo cena longa sin?'.[32] It is reasonably posed, since the Israelites are fleeing from Egypt at this point, and these ships presumably offered a faster escape than on foot. Only a vague reply is given – 'Ar daigh na fadbadh Forann trealma na ndhiaidh' – perhaps implying that the Egyptians could have more easily pursued them over water than on foot.[33]

This question-and-answer format is a familiar one in medieval Irish writing, often used at the beginnings of poems, such as *Can a mbunadus na nGáedel?* mentioned above. Its roots as a pedagogical and memetic technique

[31] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 145, ed. by Macalister, II, pp. 60–61: '"It is that decision which is righ", said Nél. Then, three thousand men, armed and battle-ready, were sent to Nél, to the place where the ships were, and they were put at Nél's disposal'. This and all further translations from Macalister are adapted by me. Witnessed in the Book of Ballymote, fol. 10v.
[32] Ibid., p. 60–61: 'Why did the sons of Israel themselves not take those ships?'.
[33] Ibid., p. 60–61: 'In order that Pharaoh should not find means of pursuing them'.

have been noted previously.[34] This story is not present in Recensions 1 or 2, and must have been included as a way to both answer the question of how the Gaels sailed from Scythia to Spain, and to further intertwine the history of Ireland with that of the Israelites and Old Testament history.[35] As with the passage from *BγB* above, it demonstrates the thought process of one of *LGÉ*'s compilers: the question must have struck them as they were actively reading and engaging with the text. This comment, therefore, reveals that medieval Irish readers thought about the wider implications of such stories: even if a story was added to bolster the prestige of the Gaels, it was still open to scrutiny from its readers. Taken together, all of these responses demonstrate moments where their redactors or translators desired more detail from their source text. Since these medieval readers felt able to make these desires clear, it shows that these texts were flexible, and not only passively and conservatively copied. Moreover, even though disappointment is expressed by the Dingestow's comment and the note about the offspring of the other sons of Míl, this differs starkly to William of Newburgh's direct criticisms: although these reactions are negative, they are expressed in a way which still does not contradict the authority or veracity of the source text. By comparing such responses, then, we can understand further the nuance and sensitivity of these comments attached to *BγB* and *LGÉ*.

CORRECTIONS

At other moments, the compilers or translators of each text go further than to express a desire for more details, and instead issue corrections to the text. Across all recensions of *LGÉ*, many such corrections were issued. One of particular interest describes the period in which Ireland was vacant between the invasions of Partholón and Nemed. One redactor amended the period in which Ireland is unoccupied in the following manner: 'Ba fás trá Hériu iar sain fri ré trí chét mbl.

[34] Bernhard Bischoff, 'Turning-Points in the History of Latin Exegesis in the Early Middle Ages', in *Biblical Studies: The Medieval Irish Contribution*, ed. by Martin McNamara (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1976), pp. 74–160.

[35] On deliberate connections made between Old Testament history and Irish history, see Elizabeth Boyle, *History and Salvation in Medieval Ireland* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), pp. 16–19 and 20–23.

– nó .xii. ar .ccc., *quod verius est* – conos toracht Partholón mac Sera meic Srú'.[36] In the Book of Leinster witness to this section, it is clear that the author of this intervention used the comparative 'verius' ('more true'), rather than 'verus' ('true'), which one might have expected from such a correction: the letter *i* is represented unabbreviated on the line.[37] This use of the comparative, then, suggests that truth existed on a spectrum for the redactors of *LGÉ*. Even discrete facts, such as the number of years between successive invasions, could be comparatively more or less true than other estimates. Moreover, it also demonstrates that *LGÉ*'s compilers were comfortable preserving two different versions of a fact in the body of the text.

In a similar manner, translators of Geoffrey's text could hold several varying versions of events in their mind. As Jones has demonstrated, the treatment of Arthur's nephew – Gwalchmai in various Welsh texts, but Gualguainus in *DGB* – is one such example. Although in *DGB* Gualguainus is said to be the son of Arthur's sister, Anna, Gwalchmai appears with the matronymic 'fab Gywar' in Welsh texts external to *DGB*.[38] Jones argues that 'Llanstephan 1' 'seems to be signalling uncertainty' when it cites that Anna was Gwalchmai's mother 'herwyd gwyryoned er hystorya'.[39] She also notes that the Peniarth 44 version merges both Anna and Gywar together, by saying that Gywar was another name for Anna.[40] Meanwhile, the Dingestow version preserves both names: it uses Anna to refer to Arthur's sister, but exclusively

[36] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 237, ed. by Macalister, III, pp. 120–21: 'Then Ireland was empty for a period of three hundred years – or three hundred and twelve, *that is more true* – until Partholón, son of Sera, son of Srú, landed there'. Translation from Carey, 'Lebar Gabála', pp. 100 and 254.
[37] Book of Leinster, p. 5.
[38] Rachel Bromwich, Trioedd Ynys Prydein*: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, 4th edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), pp. 367–71.
[39] 'according to the authority of the *Historia*'. Noted and translated in Jones, 'The Most Excellent Princes', p. 277. This addition is in the Cardiff, Central Library, 1.363 witness to 'Llanstephan 1', on fol. 140r. A transcription is available on *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg 1300–1425*, 2013 <http://www.rhyddiaithganoloesol.caerdydd.ac.uk> [accessed 16 January 2025].
[40] Jones, 'The Most Excellent Princes', p. 277. Brynley Francis Roberts, 'Astudiaeth Destunol o'r Tri Chyfieithiad Cymraeg Cynharaf o *Historia Regum Britanniae* Sieffre o Fynwy: Ynghyd Ag "argraffiad" Beirniadol o Destun Peniarth 44' (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Wales, 1969), p. 136, ll. 26–27: '[...] ac env e verch wu Anna, a honno hevyt a elwyt Gwyar[.]' ('[...] and the name of the daughter was Anna, who was also called Gwyar'.)

refers to Gwalchmai as 'fab Gywar', separating Anna and Gywar into two different characters.[41] These examples demonstrate how translators of *ByB* incorporated dissent amongst sources: in particular, 'Llanstephan 1' opts for a similar response as *LGÉ* above, in presenting both, conflicting versions of Anna/Gywar's name. What moments such as these signal is that, again, these texts were malleable to those copying them. Whether they began as marginal annotations or were incorporated into the main text from their inception, by the time these witnesses were produced they were directly subsumed into the main body of *LGÉ* and *ByB* respectively. Moreover, such variations were important enough to be recorded alongside one another. These moments seem to signal that these translators and redactors viewed these texts as a forum to gather as much data as they could, inviting further analysis and debate over the veracity of their source. In other words, corrections such as these seem to reinforce the source text's authority, not undermine it.

EXPRESSIONS OF DISBELIEF

Finally, the authors of these texts did, on occasion, signal serious disbelief in their contents. While these responses lack the ire of William of Newburgh's prologue, they nonetheless flag varying degrees of doubt in both texts. In the 'Peniarth 44' version of *ByB*, the translator signals such doubt by saying, in the paragraph before the *Prophetiae Merlini* appear in *DGB*, that Merlin spoke 'anhavd kan dynyadon ev credv'.[42] The translator then followed through on this disapproving comment by removing the *Prophetiae* altogether from this version. What is worth noting is that the translator still flags the existence of the *Prophetiae*, by signalling that Merlin delivered some kind of unbelievable speech. This may have been influenced by the popularity of the *Prophetiae*: they circulated independently of the *DGB* throughout the medieval period and were often

[41] Jones, 'The Most Excellent Princes', p. 277; for uses of Anna, see Lewis, *Brut Dingestow*, pp. 140 and 152; for uses of Gywar, see Lewis, *Brut Dingestow*, pp. 171, 175, 179, 180 and 183.
[42] Roberts, 'Astudiaeth Destunol', p. 121: 'words which are difficult for men to believe'. Noted and translated in Jones, 'The Most Excellent Princes', p. 277.

quoted and reinterpreted by generations of readers.[43] This may have pressured the translator to at least acknowledge the *Prophetiae*'s existence in the text, without having to translate them in their entirety. Nevertheless, the translator's disbelief in the content of the *Prophetiae* directly affected their editorial choices, evidently prompting their total removal.

In *LGÉ*, an expression of disbelief can be found in the Book of Fermoy witness to Recension 1. This passage appears after the sons of Míl have defeated the Tuatha Dé Danann, and encounter three of the eponymous goddesses of Ireland: namely, Fótla, Banba and Ériu. This version of the text describes their meeting with Banba as follows:

> Atbert Lebur Dromma Snechta cor iarfaig Amairgen dia cenel. "Do chlaind Adham dam," ar si.
>
> "Cid cenel do maccaib Noe duit?" ol se.
>
> "Am sini-sea anas Noe," ol si, "for rind sleibe ro basa isin dilind; cosa tel-sa anois," ol si, "dechaid tonda dilend". Is de sin do garar Tel Tuindi sin.
>
> [Acht] chena is ingantach in slecht sin anuas. Canait iarum diceltta forri 7 attarbanath uadaib.[44]

There is some ambiguity in the adjective 'ingantach': its semantic range can stretch from 'surprising' in the sense of 'incredible', or 'wonderful', or surprising' in the sense of 'strange', and therefore signalling disbelief.[45] However, the use of 'chena' – presumably a shortening of the conjunctive phrase 'acht chena' –

[43] Maud McInerney, 'Riddling Words: The Prophetiae Merlini', in *Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, pp. 129–52; on their use by later authors, see esp., pp. 144–45 and 151–52.

[44] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 390, ed. by Macalister, V, pp. 34–35: 'The Book of Druim Snechta says that Amairgen asked about her race. "I am from the offspring of Adam," she said. "Which of the sons of Noah are you descended from?" he said. "I am older than Noah," she said, "I was on top of a mountain during the flood. It was to this very mound," she said, "that the wave of the Flood reached". It is because of this that it is called 'Tel Tuine'. However, the aforementioned passage is surprising. After this, they sang spells against her, and drove her away from them'. Witnessed in the Book of Fermoy, fol. 9v.

[45] See s. v. 'ingantach', in *eDIL* <https://dil.ie/search?q=ingantach>.

suggests that the author wished to contrast his comment more adversely with the story. Regardless, the author of this comment is signalling some kind of incredulity at this story, even if not outright disbelief. When considered together, these accrued comments demonstrate that both texts enjoyed a busy and active readership, invested in the historicity of the events described within the text. They also show that the pages of *LGÉ* and translations of *DGB* became a forum for debate over their contents. Therefore, in a way quite different to William's comments, they display a willingness to tolerate dissent from their sources: instead of meeting such contradictions with dismissal, they seized upon the opportunity for further discussion.

VERNACULAR VERSUS LATIN

So far, I have used William of Newburgh's prologue as a yardstick against which to measure the tone of responses to *LGÉ* and *DGB*, either within the texts themselves or in translations like the *ByB*. But there is another important distinction made by William in the prologue to his work, especially given that many of the responses examined above are in either the Irish or Welsh language. William says specifically that:

> [...] fabulas de Arturo ex priscis Britonum figmentis sumptas et ex proprio auctas per superductum Latini sermonis colorem honesto historiae nomine palliavit.[46]

There are several key assumptions which are implicit in this sentence. First, William creates a dichotomy between a vernacular language and Latin. Then, a distinction in genre follows on from this: William indicates that this translation into Latin is what makes it possible for the *DGB* to gain the 'historiae nomine' – the title or label of history, if not becoming a true 'historia' in itself – and as opposed to remaining a 'figmentum' when recorded in the language of the

[46] William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, 3, ed. by Walsh and Kennedy, in *The History of English Affairs*, pp. 28–29: '[...] he [Geoffrey] has taken up the stories about Arthur from the old fictitious accounts of the Britons, has added to them himself, and by embellishing them in the Latin tongue he has cloaked them with the honourable title of history'.

'Britones'. This is a distinction which has already been the subject of much analysis and debate in previous scholarship.[47] However, it raises an important point when considering why *LGÉ* appeared not to garner the same level of criticism: *LGÉ* was a composition in the Irish vernacular language, not Latin.[48] Therefore, I will now consider the implications of this dichotomy in relation to some other medieval Irish reactions to *LGÉ* or other related material.

One such response appears at the beginning of the so-called Psalter of Cashel. The reason the Psalter is called as such is because its composition was often associated in the medieval period with Cormac mac Cuilennáin, the bishop-king of Cashel who died in 908: it has also been attributed to Brian Bóroime (d. 1014). Bart Jaski has argued that the Psalter was probably composed around the beginning of the tenth century.[49] The introduction to the Psalter includes the following, lively passage:

> Imprudens Scottorum gens rerum suarum obliuiscens acta quasi inaudita siue nullo modo facta uendicat quoniam minus tribuere litteris aliquid operum suorum praecurrat; et ob hoc genelogias Scottigenas litteris tribuam; primo gentis Ēbir secundo gentis hĒremōin tertio hĪr quarto Lugdach meic Ītha.[50]

[47] Echard, '"Hic Est Artur"', pp. 51–52; Kellie Robertson, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Translation of Insular Historiography', *Arthuriana*, 8/4 (1998), 42–57 (pp. 51–52); Sara Harris, *The Linguistic Past in Twelfth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 95–96.

[48] I follow Carey and Scowcroft in believing *LGÉ* did not exist in a Latin version, *contra* Macalister: while a core tract about the Gaels may have originally been composed in Latin, there is nothing to suggest *LGÉ* as a whole did. See Carey, 'Lebar Gabála,' pp. 29–30; Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* - Part II: The Growth of the Tradition', *Ériu*, 39 (1988), 1–66 (p. 19).

[49] See Bart Jaski, 'The Genealogical Section of the Psalter of Cashel', *Peritia*, 17–18 (2003), 295–337 (pp. 324 and 330–31).

[50] This version of the Psalter's introduction was reconstructed and translated in Jaski, 'Genealogical Section', p. 303: 'The foolish Irish race, forgetful of its history, boasts of unheard of deeds or ones that never happened because it has taken little care to commit its deeds to letters; and because of that I propose to write down the genealogies of the Irish race; first, the race of Éber, secondly the race of Éremón, thirdly the race of Ír, and fourthly the race of Lugaid mac Ítha'.

This passage is a valuable insight into historical criticisms made in medieval Ireland which parallels that of William of Newburgh, especially with regards to its tone and focus on the believability of events within a text.[51] For the purposes of this discussion, however, the contrast made here is not between languages in which sources are written. Instead, there seem to be two distinctions made: first, between sources which are unwritten versus written ('tribuere litteris'); and second, between sources which record 'acta quasi inaudita', versus 'genelogia' specifically as a genre. It seems, therefore, that the genre of a text and its capacity to transmit events accurately was more important to verifying its historical veracity, rather than the language in which it was written.

Other evidence from *LGÉ* itself also indicates this distinction between Latin and the vernacular was not held as sharply by Irish readers as with William and the *DGB*. The Míniugud recension introduces its version of *LGÉ* as follows:

> Míniugudh Gabal nErenn, 7 a senchas, 7 a remend rigraidi annso sis, 7 ethre i mbeolu aisneisin, 7 labra og dondni remunn, o thosuch ind libair co tici indso, ut dicit historia.[52]

The exact phrasing of this passage deserves careful analysis. First, the vernacular section of the quote explains what exactly the Míniúgud Recension is in relation to the preceding Recension 2 version, which seems to be referred to as the 'ind libair co tici indso'. *LGÉ* is divided into two distinct parts by the author of this passage: it is comprised of 'senchas' (often translated as 'lore', but sometimes 'history') and a 'rem rigrade' ('kings-list'). *Senchas* is well-known for its capaciousness as a term. Elva Johnston summarises it succinctly as 'a field of study

[51] Máire Herbert, 'Sea-Divided Gaels? Constructing Relationships between Irish and Scots *c.* 800–1169', in *Britain and Ireland, 900–1300*, ed. by Brendan Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 87–97 (pp. 88–89); Ann Dooley, *Playing the Hero: Reading the Irish Saga Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 198–99.

[52] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 101, ed. by Macalister, V, pp. 162–63: 'A setting out of the Takings of Ireland, and her history, and her list of kings, is here below: and it is a recapitulation, and a complete telling of that which is before us, from the beginning of the preceding book down to this, *as the history says*'. I have kept Macalister's translation of 'senchas' as 'history', but will discuss it further below. Witnessed in in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 512, fol. 90v, and Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 P 2, fol. 16v.

that makes use of many other disciplines rather than forming a single autonomous discipline in itself', which might incorporate everything from legal knowledge to expertise in genealogical tracts. This includes some aspects of knowledge common also to the term *historia*, but Johnston also notes that its more direct cognate term in Latin is *peritia* ('experience'), not *historia*.[53]

The Latin phrase at the end of this passage, however, is more directly relevant to our understanding of how *LGÉ* was read and perceived. The two manuscript witnesses of this passage differ slightly, in ways which can affect our interpretation. The Book of Lecan's version, found on fol. 16v, preserves the phrase entirely unabbreviated as 'ut dicit historia', clearly refers to a single 'historia'. This 'historia', therefore, might be referring to the preceding witness of Recension 2 of *LGÉ*, which directly precedes this passage in this witness and in the other manuscript in which it is present. Therefore, this sentence might be interpreted as a medieval Irish author outright labelling *LGÉ* as a *historia*. However, Oxford, Bodleian, MS Rawlinson B 512, records 'd*icu*nt histo*riae*', leaving the *n* of 'd*icu*nt' unabbreviated on the line, and therefore making it clear that *historiae* should be read in the plural. In this reading, it might therefore be seen as saying that multiple other *historiae* record the same events as the preceding Recension 2 witness, without directly labelling *LGÉ* as a *historia* itself. Even in this least generous interpretation of this passage, the overarching point seems to be that either a *historia* or multiple *historiae* corroborate the events contained within *LGÉ*. In short, then, we can see a medieval Irish author comfortably associating *LGÉ* with the authority of the Latin term *historia*.

Code-switching between Latin and the vernacular is also present in some use of Latin comments accrued to *LGÉ*. We have seen this above with the 'quod verius est' comment attached to the range of time between Cessair and Partholón's invasions, which seems to use such a switch into Latin to call attention to a moment of dissent between sources. It is also significant that the 'imprudens Scottorum' passage, and the well-known Táin colophon, are both moments of historiographical criticism written in Latin. I will return to the Táin

[53] Elva Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), pp. 55; see also p. 56.

colophon in more detail below, but for now it is important to note that, as Pádraig Ó Néill has shown, there was significant rhetorical weight behind using the Latin language to criticise the Táin's historicity: this choice links it with critical language used in Latin rhetorical handbooks, such as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.[54] It is also important to note that neither the 'imprudens Scottorum' passage, nor the colophon, link a lack of credibility in a text to the language in which it is written. Finally, judging by the comment attached to the beginning of the Míniúgud recension, this code-switching also appears to also work in the opposite direction. Prefacing *LGÉ* with a comment in Latin, which associates it directly with *historia*, seems to be bolstering, not questioning, its historical authority. Therefore, this ability to associate *LGÉ* with the Latin label *historia* demonstrates that one of William's key contentions against the *DGB* was not so much of a concern to Irish readers of *LGÉ*.

CRIES OF EMMANUEL? A POSSIBLE SCRIBAL REACTION TO *LGÉ* MATERIAL

For the rest of this paper, I will focus on another type of reaction to material related to *LGÉ*: specifically, marginal notes added to manuscripts. For reasons of space, I will focus on one note in particular. This was added to the very top centre of p. 143 in the Book of Leinster and is comprised of an 'em' with a horizontal abbreviation mark, standing for 'emmanuel'. The content of the main body of this page is pseudohistorical poetry: namely, the last nineteen stanzas of Dublitir Úa Úathgaile's (*fl.* late eleventh century) *Redig dam a Dé do nim* ('Recite to me, O God from Heaven'), and the first part of Gilla in Chomdid úa Chormaic's (*fl.* eleventh c.) *A Rí ríchid réidig dam* ('O King of Heaven, recite to me').[55] These poems do not appear in *LGÉ* itself: the former is more associated

[54] Pádraig Ó Néill, 'The Latin Colophon to the "Táin Bó Cuailnge" in the Book of Leinster: A Critical View of Old Irish Literature', *Celtica*, 23 (1999), 269–75 (pp. 273).

[55] *Redig dam a Dé do nim* can be found in *Sex Aestates Mundi*, 70, in *The Irish Sex Aetates Mundi*, ed. by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), pp. 97–108 and 132–37. A diplomatic edition of *A Rí ríchid réidig dam* is available in R. I. Best, Osborn Bergin, M. A. O'Brien and Anne O'Sullivan, *The Book of Leinster, Formerly Lebar Na*

with the *Sex Aetates Mundi*, and Uáitéar Mac Gearailt argues that Dublitir wrote it specifically to fill a gap in the *Sex Aetates Mundi* where there is no other poetry present.[56] The parts of these poems which appear on p. 143 do, however, contain material which is common or relevant to *LGÉ*. *A Rí ríchid réidig dam*, in stanza 23, mentions Ulysses' use of wax to plug his ears against the sirens, similar to Cacher's advice to the Gaels on their way from Scythia to Spain in *LGÉ*:[57] it also mentions the Fir Bolg in stanza 7, and Éremón in stanza 33.[58] The section of *Redig dam a Dé do nim* which appears on this page also contains material common to *LGÉ*: in stanzas 77 to 81, Dublitir summarises the story of how Fénius Farsaid created the Irish language from the other languages of the world at the Tower of Babel.

Other additions of 'emmanuel' appear in the margins of the Book of Leinster. These instances are almost all abbreviated in a similar way – that is, as 'em' with a contraction mark over the *m* – and occur in roughly the same place in every instance: namely, at the top of the page, roughly in the centre. Overall, I have counted twenty-three such additions in the Book of Leinster, with three other possible instances.[59] There is also an invocation of 'I*n* noimi*n*e dei patr*is*' at the top of a page near the beginning of the manuscript's witness of *Togail Troí*, which is a similar pious invocation.[60] These additions appear most frequently

Núachongbála, 6 vols (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1956), III, p. 574, ll. 17727–18170.

[56] Mac Gearailt, Uáitéar, 'Dublittir Úa hÚathgaile's Poem *Rédig Dam, a Dé, Do Nim* and *Sex Aetates Mundi*', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 34 (2014), 180–214 (p. 205).

[57] A translation and discussion are given by Brent Miles, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 48–49. Barbara Hillers links this motif with *LGÉ* in '*In Fer Fíamach Fírglic*: Ulysses in Medieval Irish Literature', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 16/17 (1996), 15–38 (pp. 29–31).

[58] Best and O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster*, III, p. 576, ll. 17751 and 17856.

[59] These are Book of Leinster, pp. 55, 57, 59, 61, 65–68, 70–76, 83, 98, 143, 157, 195, 207 and 211. Five are not noted in Best and O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster*, II, pp. 72, 98, 157, 207 and 211: p. 98 is the only 'emmanuel' to be written out in full and unabbreviated within the whole manuscript. Two (pp. 74 and 76) are noted in Best and O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster*, II, but I cannot see them in the digitised version of the manuscript: however, I have included them since their inclusion indicates they were visible at the time. The possible other 'emmanuel' annotations are on pp. 171, 236 and 280, but their appearance is so faint and unclear that I am hesitant to include them in the final total without consulting the manuscript in person.

[60] Book of Leinster, p. 222.

within the Táin, with 'emmanuel' written seventeen times in total within its witness.[61]

The reason these annotations are important for this study is because they have been adduced as evidence of medieval attitudes towards the Táin's historical veracity. Since they most frequently appear within the Táin section of the Book of Leinster, they have been interpreted as aghast exclamations of surprise at the contents of each folio upon which they appear: for example, Dagmar Schlüter argues that, 'Generally these exclamations seem to occur where there are, what we would term from a modern point of view, exaggerations in the narrative', and specific examples cited include when the Connachta are completely covered in snow, and when Fergus recovers from a battle frenzy.[62] This connection to the Táin has another, deeper significance for this paper. When these additions of 'emmanuel' have been interpreted as exclamations, some scholars have linked them back to the Táin colophon, attached to the end of the Book of Leinster's witness of *Táin Bó Cuailnge*. The first part is in Irish, while the second is in Latin, and it reads as follows:

> Bendacht ar cech óen mebraigfes go hindraic Táin amlaid seo 7 ná tuillfe cruth aile furri.
>
> Sed ego qui scripsi hanc historiam aut uerius fabulam quibusdam fidem in hac historia aut fabula non accommodo. Quaedam enim ibi sunt praestrigia demonum, quaedam autem figmenta poetica, quaedam similia uero, quaedam non, quaedam ad delectationem stultorum.[63]

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[61] Book of Leinster, pp. 55, 57, 59, 61, 65–68, 70–76, 83 and 98. Dagmar Schlüter, however, noted that 'emmanuel' appears 'twenty-four times on the margin of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in the *Book of Leinster*'; Schlüter, *History or Fable?: The Book of Leinster as a Document of Cultural Memory in Twelfth-Century Ireland* (Münster: Nodus, 2010), p. 221. I have found only seventeen such instances, so perhaps the figure of twenty-four comes from the total number of 'emmanuel's throughout the Book of Leinster, as opposed to just within the Táin.

[62] Schlüter, *History or Fable?*, p. 221. These examples are found on the Book of Leinster, pp. 59 and 61; they can also be found in Best and O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster*, II, pp. 276 and 279.

[63] Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge: From the Book of Leinster* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1967), pp. 136 and 272: 'A blessing on everyone who shall faithfully

Ó Néill has suggested that the first section of the colophon – written in the Irish vernacular – is the work of an earlier scribe, while the latter section in Latin was a direct reaction to the earlier portion: therefore, it shows two distinct phases of critical appraisals of medieval Irish literature. He has also persuasively linked the language of the colophon to rhetorical terminology, such as that used in the *Rhetorica ad Herrenium*.[64] Most importantly for this study, Ann Dooley, Ó Néill and Ralph O'Connor have previously noted the similarities in tone between the Táin colophon and the critiques of William of Newburgh, or other Anglo-Norman critiques of Arthurian material.[65]

The connection between the 'emmanuel' comments and the Táin colophon comes from the colophon's vagueness. This lack of specificity has prompted scholars to try to find specific events in the Táin to which it is referring. William of Newburgh, by contrast, had cited specific parts of the *DGB* he deemed to be unbelievable: namely, stories attached to King Arthur, and Merlin's association with demons.[66] This same level of specificity is not present in the Latin section of the Táin colophon: instead, the author refers repeatedly to 'quaedam', which are never explicitly linked to specific episodes in the text.[67] This vagueness has led to some scholarly speculation, and one strand of this has

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memorise the Táin thus here, and who will not add any other form to it. But I who have written this story, or rather this fable, give no credence to the various incidents related in it. For some things in it are the deceptions of demons, others poetic figments; some are probable, others improbable; while still others are intended for the delectation of foolish men'.

[64] Ó Néill, 'Latin Colophon', p. 273.

[65] Ibid., p. 274; Ralph O'Connor, 'Fabulous Content, Historical Purpose and Scribal Strategy in Irish and Icelandic Saga Narrative: Some Comparative Perspectives on the Colophon to the Book of Leinster *Táin*', in *Adapting Texts and Styles in a Celtic Context: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Processes of Literary Transfer in the Middle Ages* (Münster: Nodus, 2016), pp. 305–30 (pp. 312–13); Dooley, *Playing the Hero*, p. 197, although she compares it instead with William of Malmesbury's (c. 1095 – c. 1143) derision of Arthurian material, which predates the *DGB*.

[66] William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, 14–15, ed. by Walsh and Kennedy, in *The History of English Affairs*, pp. 34–37.

[67] 'some things' or 'certain things'. Scholars such as Ó Néill have rightly pointed out a link in the phrase 'figmenta poetica' to the writing of St Augustine (354–430), and his dismissal of stories from classical mythology: but, again, this only allows a reasonable guess at the kinds of episodes which the colophon author may have had in mind: see Ó Néill, 'Latin Colophon', pp. 272–73.

attempted to align the additions of 'emmanuel' with the colophon's 'figmenta poetica' and 'praestrigia demonum'. The argument follows that additions of 'emmanuel' appear on folios which contain unbelievable moments in its main text, and therefore represent the moments to which the colophon author is referring when they express their dissatisfaction and disbelief in events from the Táin. Indeed, this argument might be extended to the addition, for example, of 'in noimine dei patris' on p. 222: on this folio, the text of *Togail Troí* describes the 'druidechta' and the 'diabolacdachta' of Medea, events which could be compared to the unbelievable events in the Táin Schlüter connects with 'emmanuel' annotations.[68] But if these marginal additions do represent aghast exclamations at the contents of the page they appear on, then this same argument could be applied to p. 143, which contains material common to *LGÉ*. Before committing to this interpretation, however, I will spend the rest of this section putting these 'emmanuel' in greater context. Specifically, I will examine in closer detail the lines of argument which have led to the assessments summarised above, in order to understand whether they can reasonably show a similar reaction to *LGÉ* material as to the colophon's reaction to the Táin, and – in a parallel fashion – William of Newburgh's reaction to the *DGB*.

First, it is necessary to trace how these 'emmanuel' citations have been treated in modern scholarship. Charles Plummer was the first to argue that an annotation of 'emmanuel' was written as a direct reaction to unbelievable events in the Táin: namely, above a list of Cú Chulainn's feats in Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 E 25, fol. 73, hereon referred to as Lebor na hUidre. Plummer argued that this comment was an example of when a 'scribe's flesh seems to creep at what he writes or reads':[69] in other words, he read it as a scribe's aghast exclamation at the content of the text on a particular manuscript page.[70] He makes this argument by connecting the use of 'emmanuel' in Lebor na hUidre

[68] R. I. Best and M. A. O'Brien, Togail Troí*: From the Book of Leinster Vol. IV* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1966), p. 1072, ll. 31178–9.

[69] Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 E 25, p. 73. Charles Plummer, 'On the Colophons and Marginalia of Irish Scribes', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 12 (1926), 11–44 (pp. 21–22).

[70] Emmanuel was another name used to refer to Jesus in the Bible (for example, in Matthew 1:23): this was based on the prophecy of Isaiah, in Isaiah 7:14. Therefore, the annotation is generally accepted to be an expression of shock.

to an annotation in the sixteenth-century manuscript Leiden, University Library, MS VLQ 7. This annotation is on fol. 2r, which contains a copy of *Echtra Finn*, and reads 'emmanuel is uaiccnech an scel'.[71] Ó Néill was then the first to link the marginal comment from Lebor na hUidre with the Táin colophon itself, suggesting such marginalia could indicate the kind of events to which the colophon author was reacting.[72] However, O'Connor has already drawn sceptical attention to these comments as representations of aghast outbursts. He argued that there are other moments in both Lebor na hUidre and the Book of Leinster which do not elicit an 'emmanuel' in the margins: for example, Cú Chulainn undergoing his *ríastrad*, and Fedelm's prophecy. He concluded that '[i]ncredulity or amazement of some kind does seem to be expressed by these oaths, but their testimony to a specifically sceptical outlook is ambiguous and calls for more detailed examination of the manuscripts themselves'.[73]

The argument that they are linked to the colophon also relies somewhat on the hand of the marginalia being the same as the Táin colophon author. Given the brevity of these annotations, however, this is incredibly difficult to prove. In accordance with Elizabeth Duncan's recent reassessments of the scribal hands in the Book of Leinster, I will assign the hand which wrote the colophon the name T1.[74] Identifying T1 with the hand of the 'emmanuel' comments is very difficult, given that the ink is consistently very faint, and that it is extremely abbreviated: as mentioned previously, it is written with only an *e*, a *m* and a contraction mark, with the exception of p. 98, where it is written in full. Moreover, there is no discernible pattern between the pages 'emmanuel' appears on and the main scribe of that page, except that they occur with the greatest frequency throughout the Táin than any other text.[75] Therefore, at least within the bounds of this paper, it is difficult, if not impossible, to argue that the author of the 'emmanuel'

[71] 'Emmanuel the story is mysterious'. Ludwig Christian Stern, 'Le Manuscrit Irlandais de Leide', *Revue Celtique*, 13 (1892), 1–31 (p. 2). I will return to this annotation later in this paper.
[72] Ó Néill, 'Latin Colophon', p. 273, fn. 29.
[73] O'Connor, 'Fabulous Content', p. 312.
[74] Duncan, 'Reassessment', p. 36.
[75] For a summary of the different hands and the pages they are found on, see Duncan, 'Reassessment', pp. 35–36.

comments are the same as Duncan's T1 hand who wrote the colophon, or if they are simply the additions of a later annotator.

It is helpful to contextualise the Book of Leinster's instances of 'emmanuel' with those from other manuscripts. The most well-known manuscript to include such invocations is National Library of Scotland, Advocates MS 72.1.46, written in the fifteenth century. This is because Thomas Astle nicknamed this manuscript the 'Emmanuel MS', because 'emmanuel' appears at the top of every page for the entire text of *In Cath Catharda*.[76] First, the sheer frequency of these marginal annotations suggests they are not meant to indicate a reaction to anything specific in the text. Moreover, Charles Graves, in 1847, argued that Astle was being misleading in naming the manuscript after these annotations: he declared that '[i]t was usual for scribes to place some sacred name at the top of a page, by way of hallowing the work which they were commencing'.[77] Indeed, several other Irish manuscripts contain similar annotations. Christina Cleary has noted that 'emmanuel' appears at the top of pages in the seventeenth-century Dublin, Royal Irish Academy C vi.3, fols. 30v and 64v, and commonly throughout the sixteenth-century London, British Library, MS Egerton 1782, without any apparent connection to the main text of each folio. She also notes that on Royal Irish Academy C vi.3, f. 28r, above the beginning of manuscript's witness of the Táin, the scribe wrote 'a nainm dé':[78] this is similar to the invocation of 'i*n* noimi*n*e dei patr*is*' in the Book of Leinster. Therefore, one possible explanation for these annotations is that advocated by Graves: namely, that these were pious dedications written at the top of the page, perhaps as a scribe began their work. Another persuasive explanation is that they could be pen trials: the long *e*, in combination with the *m* and the contraction mark, cover

[76] Thomas Astle, *The Origin and Progress of Writing, as Well Hieroglyphic as Elementary* (London, 1784), p. 123.

[77] Graves gives examples of 'Jesus', 'Maria', 'In nomine Sanctae Trinitatis', and 'Amen': Charles Graves, 'On Irish Manuscripts in the Possession of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (1836–69)*, 4 (1847), 255–60 (pp. 258–59). I have not seen examples of these phrases inscribed at the top of Irish manuscripts, but they may appear across manuscripts from different cultures.

[78] 'in the name of God': see Christina Cleary, 'An Investigation of the *Remscéla* to the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*; and an Edition and Translation of *Aislinge Óenguso*' (unpublished PhD Thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2018), pp. 26–27.

a range of different pen strokes, which could have been used to test ink flow before beginning to copy a text proper.[79] In short, while I believe that Schlüter and Ó'Néill correctly identified the kind of episodes in the Táin to which the colophon author was referring, I do not believe that we can use the 'emmanuel' exclamations to identify exactly which episodes they were. These annotations are numerous throughout this Táin witness, but this may have a misleading effect. As with Advocates MS 72.1.46, their frequency means that several are bound to appear on pages which might have piqued the ire of the Táin colophon's author.

Another reason to be cautious is that these annotations are consistently placed at the top of these pages, far removed from the main text itself. Scribes throughout the Book of Leinster were not adverse to directly annotating text as a reaction: Christina Cleary, for example, has already examined the use of critical marks to add comments and corrections to the Táin in the Book of Leinster.[80] Given that scribal activity in the manuscripts demonstrates an affinity for marking text directly, it seems strange that direct reactions would be so far-removed from the main body of the text. Finally, reading these annotations as exclamations originally stems from Plummer's study of scribal marginalia, and his reading of 'emmanuel' as an outburst in Leiden, University Library, MS VLQ 7. However, going back to this manuscript, the 'emmanuel' and the rest of the comment, treated as one by Stern and Plummer, are written in two different ink colours, with the latter being much darker in colour. This, and differences in the letter forms (such as the *l* at the end of 'emmanuel' and 'scel') would suggest they are two different comments made by separate authors.[81] To summarise, then, there appear to be more satisfactory ways of explaining the additions of 'emmanuel' to manuscripts such as Lebor na hUidre and the Book of Leinster,

[79] I am very grateful to Máire Ní Mhaonaigh for this suggestion.

[80] Christina Cleary, 'Critical Notes and Signs in the Book of Leinster Táin Bó Cúailnge', in Táin Bó Cúalnge *from the Book of Leinster: Reassessments*, ed. by John Carey (London: Irish Texts Society, 2020).

[81] '[Historia Herois Hibernici Finn Mac Cumaill Vel Fingal], Initium Deest Deperditis Foliis. - Fled Bricrend: "Bai Fled Mar La Bricrinn Nemthengai", Etc. (Hibernice) VLQ 7', *Leiden University Libraries Digital Collections* <hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:3218239> [accessed 20 November 2023].

rather than ascribing them as pearl-clutching outbursts of scribes reacting to unbelievable material in a manuscript page's main text.

However, there may be one other way of using the Táin colophon productively to think about the reception of *LGÉ* within the Book of Leinster. Why, in other words, was this colophon was addressed to the Táin, and not *LGÉ*, given that it contains material which might also be described as 'figmenta poetica', such as the sirens enticing the Gaels as they travelled across the Mediterranean? One answer might lie in returning to the exact language the colophon uses. In the vernacular section of the colophon, the author praises anyone who 'ná tuillfe cruth aile furri':[82] the Latin author seems to be responding, at least in part, to the vernacular author's/authors' call for the unquestioning preservation of the text. However, as we have already seen in the first section of this paper, *LGÉ* could be described as a flexible text. It accrued comments, corrections, and questions to its main body, just as the *DGB* did in its later Welsh translations. Therefore, it already shirked the conservativeness against which the Latin author of the colophon reacted. Indeed, if T1 themself was the Latin author of the colophon, they were adept in implementing changes in the Book of Leinster. For example, Duncan notes that on pp. 17, 21 and 22, T1 went back over the work of hand A, erasing it and squeezing new text into a smaller space.[83] The main body of these pages contain *Do fhlathiusaib Érenn*, a kings-list at the end of *LGÉ* which filled the chronological gap between the Milesian invasion and the first recorded historical kings in Ireland.[84] An exhortation to leave texts unchanged, then, directly contrasts with the behaviour of scribe T1 throughout the rest of the manuscript, and especially with material related to *LGÉ*. Therefore, I suggest that the flexibility of *LGÉ* – its ability, as we have seen above, to welcome additions, changes and comments into its narrative – made it less susceptible to the ire of authors like that of the Latin part of the Táin colophon.

[82] 'does not add any other form to it'.
[83] Duncan, 'Reassessment', pp. 38–39.
[84] See Scowcroft, 'Part I', pp. 118–22.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has argued three things. First, that the responses to both *LGÉ* and *DGB* amid their respective redactors and translators can be remarkably similar. Those who translated, copied, or redacted these texts were creative and flexible in their approach: the chatter of varying versions of events, comments, corrections and expressions of doubts percolate throughout their textual transmission. By studying such critical comments and responses, we can begin to untangle the intellectual thought processes which went into building their authority. Moreover, this type of criticism differs starkly to responses like William of Newburgh's prologue. Various translators and redactors of both texts added these comments not to undermine the texts' authority, but instead to bolster it. What they demonstrate above all was that both texts were deemed important enough to correct. It clearly mattered to these redactors and translators that they were accurate, to the best of their abilities. Comparing the responses of William of Newburgh with other critical responses to historical material in medieval Irish contexts can give us a more granular understanding of what exactly was being criticised in each instance. In the case of responses like the introduction to the Psalter of Cashel and the Táin colophon, we can see that such authors were far less concerned with the language in which a source was written than William of Newburgh was with the *DGB*. Nevertheless, code-switching into Latin for such critiques was still an important technique to bolster the authority of some criticisms.

Although marginalia can illuminate important new readings of texts, as well as provide direct evidence for reader responses, the final part of this paper argued for caution in their interpretation. But I have also argued that scribal activity in the Book of Leinster's *LGÉ* can add to our understanding of why, in particular, it did not face the same criticisms as levelled in the Táin; namely, because of its historiographical flexibility, and ability to tolerate narrative accretions. This flexible approach to *LGÉ* is exemplified in a passage from Recension 3. This section of *LGÉ* discusses the languages spoken by the sons of Míl, and concludes in the following manner:

> [...] ar bui ic maccaib Miled nama bui Gaedhealg, o ro-gabsat fein nert for Erinn ro-fortamlaig in Gaedhealg ro-lai faill forsin nGrec. [...] Manip inund, no manip maith la neach, in dream sin, fagbaidh ius a ferr 7 genaid ius uadh.[85]

Even if some events could be 'ingantach', 'inund', or 'anhavd credv', the ability to add corrections or different versions of events allowed readers of *LGÉ* and *DGB* to not only tolerate, but to enjoy the intellectual activity of appraising the likelihood of such episodes.

[85] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 497, ed. by Macalister, V, pp. 184–85: 'For only the sons of Mil had Irish, [and] when they held power across Ireland, Irish prevailed, while Greek fell into neglect. [...] If this passage [lit. band, throng] is unbelievable, or if it does not sit well with anyone, let him find out knowledge that is better, and we shall receive knowledge from him'. Witnessed in the Book of Fermoy, fol. 2r, and the Book of Ballymote, fol. 23v.