

Tecosca Cormaic: the compilation of a wisdom-text.

Unlike *Audacht Moraind* (hereinafter *AM*), the wisdom-text ‘The Instructions of Cormac’, known as *Tecosca Cormaic* (hereinafter *TC*), has not received much attention since its publication in 1909 by K. Meyer, apart from being mentioned in general discussions on kingship¹.

C. Ireland, in his edition of *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* has covered some topics relating to *TC*, such as its form and affinities with other gnomic texts, its MS tradition, etc., mainly in its relationship to the text he edited.

Ireland concluded his discussion of *TC* proper by saying that “a new, thorough edition of *Tecosca Cormaic* would help us to understand its textual history”².

I am neither aiming to produce a new edition of *TC*, nor to go into detail in analysing the diffusion of its MSS tradition³. For the purposes of this paper, I shall confine myself to a discussion of the portions of the text concerned with kingship.⁴ They would be mainly concerned with two topics: the contents of the paragraph and its structure, mainly looking at alliterative patterns and other literary devices, such as parallelism, contrast etc.

¹ It has been summarised by K. McCone, who has devoted some space to a discussion of *TC*’s topics, such as the qualities of a proper king, the benefits of a pious king flowing from God, the king and his prohibitions (*geissi*), as well as the description of hospitallers and members of *fianna*, etc. He argues that the text owes its origin to the biblical wisdom-genre, citing similarities in style, and the attribution of the text to Cormac, “giving sectionalized practical and moral instructions to his son, just as the king of Jerusalem and Israel, Solomon, is envisaged addressing various chapters (2,3,5,6 etc.) of his Proverbs to his son” (K. McCone. *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish literature*, in: *Maynooth Monographs* 3. An Sagart – Maynooth (1990) 31, hereinafter referred to as McCone, 1990).

² C. Ireland. *An Old Irish Wisdom-Text Attributed to Aldfrith of Northumbria: An Edition of Briathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu*, in: *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, vol. CCV. Tempe, Arizona (1999) 45 (hereinafter referred to as Ireland, 1909).

³ All references are to Meyer’s edition. If a variant from the *apparatus fontium* is involved, it is bracketed and the manuscript from which it is taken is indicated.

⁴ Unless otherwise stated, all translations of the portions of *TC*’s text relevant to our discussion are taken from Meyer’s edition.

I.

§1. *Cid as dech do rí*g, ‘what is best for a king?’.

The opening paragraph presents a collection of maxims on various topics, all centred around the figure of a good king. However, the presentation of the subject-matter is very different from that in *AM*. In the latter, each subject, whether it is the portrait of the good king, or the elements constituting the welfare of his subjects, or the topic of the ruler’s *fides*, loyalties and relations, is introduced by a separate formula. There is no such thing in *TC*. On the whole, §1 consists of three- or two-word maxims, and includes a wide range of topics which – on closer examination – turns out to comprise multiple aspects of a few crucial qualities connected with the figure of a good king, such as uttering truth (occurring in 8 lines of the §1, i.e. ll. 7, 10, 14, 33, 38, 43, 45, 46), preserving peace (occurring in 3 lines, i.e. ll. 12, 29, 40), and the means of consolidating it (keeping hostages, l. 8, sureties, l. 13, fasting upon neighbours, l. 15, raids on their lands, l. 30). The topic of abundance is covered in traditional terms, involving different aspects of fertility: some details peculiar to *TC* can however be noted, such as forfeiture of sea-waifs (l. 27) and purchase of treasures by a ruler (l. 41).

As regards the *alliterative patterns* employed in the paragraph, one can see an abundant usage of line-internal and linking alliteration. Line-internal is mainly used throughout the first section of the paragraph (ll. 1-30), linking is mostly observed in the second section (ll. 31-45). One can observe instances of complex alliteration⁵ in l. 21: *almsana ile*, ‘many alms’; ll. 37-38: *báded bidbadu, bered fírbretha*, ‘let him crush criminals [and] give just judgements’. Note that the opening verbs of ll. 34-35 alliterate, providing another example of complex alliteration: *cairiged gó*i, *carad fírinni*, ‘let him chide falsehood [and] love righteousness’; and that there is a similarity between the verbs *cairiged* and *carad* and the idea of contrast between *gó*i, ‘falsehood’, and *fírinni*, ‘righteousness’.

⁵ In the definition by D. Sproule, “we will take complex alliteration as occurring between two or more stressed words in sequence...when the initial consonants are the same (whether mutated are not...) and the second consonants are the same. In the case of words, beginning with a vowel... when the first consonants in the words are identical”. For a full argument, postulating the use of this type of alliteration in early Irish verse see D. Sproule, ‘Complex alliteration, full and unstressed rhyme, and the origin of *deibide*’, *Ériu* 38 (1987) 183-198, esp. pp. 183-195.

II.

§2. *Cate cóir rechta rí*, ‘of what sort is the [true] contract of a king’s rule?’

The legal aspect of royal behaviour is the main topic of the section. The abundant use of legal vocabulary is to be noted, such as *foglaid*, ‘robber’, *fiach*, ‘fine’, *dílse*, ‘immunity’, *comláithre*, ‘accessory party’, etc. Again, as in §1 above, the multiplication-device is employed to expound the topics of establishing justice and maintaining just and morally good persons (ll. 6, 11, 15, 24), of inflicting punishment for crime (ll. 8, 24-26), and of criminals (ll. 5, 7, 12, 13, 16, 17). An interesting categorisation of crimes in terms of the parts of the body used to carry them out is given in ll. 24-28: the designations are “crimes of hand, ... of feet, ... of eyes, ... of mouth”⁶.

In contrast to §1, it is not feasible to divide the paragraph into different parts based upon alliteration and syntax:

(1). Line-internal alliteration can especially be noted in the opening lines of the paragraph: *for talman tuind, atáthum, atchous*, ‘upon the surface of the earth, I have it, let me make it known’. It is also observed in l. 6: *mórad maithi*, ‘let him exalt the good’; as well as l. 9: *córaiged coibnius*, ‘let him adjust relationship’; *ainced idnu*, ‘let him protect the just’; l. 21: *co fursmaltaib flatha*, ‘with due exactions for a lord’; l. 24 *foltaib fíraib*, ‘with just substances’.

(2). Linking alliteration is observed between ll. 4-5: *congbad máru, marbad ulcu*, ‘let him restrain the great [and] slay evildoers’; ll. 8-10: *airgaired gait, córaiged coibnius, comúaiged sid*, ‘let him check theft [and] adjust relationship [and] consolidate peace’; ll. 12-3: *cosced indliged, dóerad bidbadu*, ‘let him check unlawfulness [and] enslave criminals’; ll. 14-5: *sóerad enngu, ainced...*, ‘let him set the innocent free [and] protect...’.

Note that examples of complex alliteration can be observed in ll. 17, *fócrad foglaide*, ‘let him proclaim robbers’, 26: *silliud súla*, ‘looking of eyes’⁷.

⁶ *Tecosca Cormaic. The Instructions of King Cormaic Mac Airt*, in: *RIA Todd Lecture Series*, vol. XV. Ed. K.Meyer. Dublin (1909) 7. (hereinafter Meyer, 1909)

⁷ It may be possible to identify a new pattern of complex linking alliteration between ll. 4-5, involving the consonants *m* and *r*, as well as to ll. 14-15, involving a vowel *e* and a consonant *n*.

III.

§3. *Cid as dech do less túathe, ‘What is best for the benefit of the tribe?’*

1. It is important to note that §3 is not directly concerned with kingship, and that in lieu of the king we are dealing with the constituents of the people’s welfare. However, indirectly it does point to a king, who is (as in the previous two paragraphs) held to be totally responsible for anything happening within his domains.

a. Though it cannot be proved, it may be the case that this paragraph was composed as an echo to the previous §§1-2. There are many themes recurring in all three: thus we find the punishment of evildoers (cp. *airdíbdud cech uilc*, §3.8, and *marbad ulcu*, §2.5), taking care of the wretched (cp. *cen fhorbrisiud trúag*, §3.15, and *déicsiu cach thrúaig*, §1.20), mercy combined with justice, (cp. *trócaire co ndagbésaib*, §3.17, and *trócaire co ndlúthugud rechta*, §1.11)⁸, kinship (*dlúthigud coibniusa*, §3.18, and *córaiged coibnius*, §2.9), sureties (*rátha fíála*, §3.26 and *rátha écsamla*, §1.13), giving true judgement (*bretha fíra*, §3.28=§1.14), keeping hostages (*géill do inchaib*, §3.34, and *géill i nglassaib*, §1.8), and defending the borders of the kingdom (*lessugud críche* □ *rc ach n-olc*, §3.51, and *forrána dar crícha*, §1.30, with the variant reading of BB, *forfuaigedh a crícha*, ‘let him consolidate his borders’⁹). Not all the lines of §3 can be paralleled by those in §§1-2, however. Given the universal character of the themes, it may well be that the compiler had §§1-2 in mind, but he did not necessarily set out to compose new dicta paraphrasing the old ones. However, we should be extremely cautious when naming some of the precepts as new and some as old: the age of the maxims, especially those contained in §§1-2 and in the first two sections of the whole, cannot be estimated, as, in words of C. Ireland, “the date of the text cannot be set precisely because of its stylistic simplicity”.¹⁰

⁸ Cp. the passage from the Old Irish Treatise on the Psalter: *Ar is tré trócairi ro-sechar fírinne ocus cresene*, ‘For it is through mercifulness that righteousness and belief are attained’, in: *Hibernica Minora, being a fragment of an Old Irish Treatise on the Psalter*. Ed. by K. Meyer, Oxford (1894) 32.352-33.3. The topic of mercy is also dealt with in §3.46 of TC.

⁹ The translation is my own.

¹⁰ Ireland, 1999, 34.

b. If we are right in taking the opening phrase of §2 *cor recta rí* as ‘a [true] contract of a kings’ rule’, it can be demonstrated that §§2-3 form one semantic unit dealing with the agreement between a king (dealt with in §2) and his people (§3). The view of kingship as the contract between the ruler and his subjects is a commonplace in the OIr. sources. See, for instance, the litany in *Críth Gablach* (hereinafter *CG*) on kingship, starting *cía de as sru[i]thiu, in ríu fa thúath*, ‘who is superior, the king or the people?’¹¹ Some topics dealt with in *CG* also occur in *TC*, such as the three prerogatives that establish the contract of a king over his people(s): *óenach 7 dál...7 tochomrac*, ‘assembly, gathering and convocation’, *CG* 503, cp. *terchomrac dagdóine, dála menci... airecht ríaglach*, of *TC* §3, ll. 4-5, 10. The underlying idea, that all of that is done for ‘the profit of the people’, also occurs in both sources:

CG 503, 506-508:

óenach 7 dál do chundriug 7 tochomrac do chrích... [Gell slógad, gell rechtge, gell cairddi] ar it l(i)essa túaithe huli insin, ‘assembly and gathering for correction and convocation towards the border ... [a pledge of a hosting, a pledge of a royal ordinance and a pledge of a treaty] for these are all the profits of a *túath*’.

TC §3.4-5, 10, 54: *terchomrac dagdóine, dála menci... airecht ríaglach ... dech do less túathe in sin*, ‘a meeting of nobles, frequent assemblies ... a regular assembly ... that is best for the profit of a *túath*’.

¹¹ *Críth Gablach*, in: *Medieval and Modern Irish Series*, vol. IX. Ed. D.A.Binchy. Dublin (1941) 19.492.

2. Contrary to the previous two sections, this paragraph does not show much usage of line-internal alliteration, but does so in the case of cross-linking. Linking alliteration, observed at the beginning (*terchomrac dagdóine, dála menci, menma athchomairc*, ll. 4-6) and in the middle (ll. 11-13, 14-15, 17-22), constitutes the structural feature in the paragraph. This can be proved by the fact that the vast majority of examples providing alliteration of any kind have linking alliteration as their organising principle.

Further pursuing the point that linking alliteration is the main stylistic feature in the paragraph as a whole, we shall try to argue that some of the maxims attested here can be seen as later glosses or short references to other dicta (hereinafter termed intrusive glosses). Taking them as such can be a help to restoring linking alliteration between the broken parts.

Line 7 reads *fochmarc di gáethaib*, ‘questioning the wise’. On a closer look one can see that the word *fochmarc* is similar to *athchomairc*, ‘enquiring’, in the line above. Also the theme of a ruler’s mind (*menma*), turning to the wise (*gáethaib*), is a commonplace of the gnomic literature. Taking line 7 to be an intrusive gloss gives us an opportunity to link *athchomairc* of line 6 and *airdíbdud* of line 8.

In line 16, it is easy to see that *cairddine* at the end of the line can be a gloss on *co ndagbésaib*, ‘with good customs’, of the next line. Moreover, it can be referred to any of the words concluding ll. 18-22, as they all relate to some kind of public relationship. Therefore, it is tempting to take it as an intrusive gloss, as it will provide us with an excellent chance to link *trúag*, ‘wretches’, of the l. 15 and *trócaire*, ‘mercifulness’, l. 17, by a complex linking alliteration, involving a consonantal cluster *tr*.

IV.

§4. *Cadeat ada flatha 7 cuirmthige*, ‘What are the dues of a chief and of an ale-house?’.

It can, however, be argued that the next paragraph - §4 - has very little to do with kingship as such, and has been introduced simply as a continuation of §3.53, ‘let him not be greasy in the mead-court house’, (*ní ba gerthide i n-ailt midchúarto*).

AM (rec. B, §28; rec. A, §26) simply refers to an ale-house as one of the three ‘immunities’ from violence at the people’s assembly, without giving any further detail as to how it was arranged¹². The description of an ale-house that one finds in *TC* has some resemblances to the one encountered in *Corus Béscnai* which distinguishes three types of feasts: a godly feast (*fled déodaie*), a human feast (*fled dóendaie*), and a devilish feast (*fled demundaie*). Describing human feast, the law-text says:

Caite in fhled doena? Fled cuirmthige caich dia fhlaith amail bes a dlíged dia nceset a airilltnib feis, fuiririud, dithit... A coimded do cumdach do cach mainiugud do cach leseguad iar nDia 7 duine fri sobes, fri soirecht, fri soairle¹³.

‘What is the human feast? Everyone’s ale-house feast for his lord according to his entitlement with which there go according to deserts dinner party (*feis*), supper (*fuiririud*), lunch (*dithit*)... Protecting his lord with every enrichment and benefit according to God and man as regards good conduct, good law, good attention’¹⁴.

The central topic in the passage just cited is the provision of hospitality and of other obligations due from a client to a lord¹⁵. We find some resemblances to our own passage in the above: we can compare the triad of ‘good conduct, good law, good attention’, as a dutiful expression of obedience to one’s lord in *Corus Béscnai* with ‘good behaviour around a good chief... attentive service, to love one’s lord’ (*costud im daghflaith...fochraibe oc timthirecht, tigerna do charthain*) in *TC*.

Linking alliteration, which is not generally employed throughout the text, makes it an autonomous unit¹⁶. Lines 5 to 11 and 11 to 17 are characterised by alliteration between the last word of the preceding and the first of the following lines. As we have argued, the linking alliteration is also a characteristic feature of the previous paragraph which may be a further argument in favour of our thesis that §4 was composed as an echo to the last line of the previous section.

¹² *AM*, Rec. B = *Audacht Morainn*. Ed. F. Kelly. Dublin (1976) 10-11, §28. *Tress blaí buaid cuirmthige*, ‘The third immunity [is] the privilege of the ale-house’; Rec. A, §26. *Blaí Tige Midchúarda* ‘The [third] is the immunity of House of the Mead Circuit’.

¹³ The text is from *CIH* 525.5-6, 23-25.

¹⁴ Translation is from McCone, 1990, 221.

¹⁵ McCone, 1990, 222.

¹⁶ Cf. *Cormac* – *costud*, *daghflaith* – *lassamna*, *lochannaib* – *luthbas*, *shochaide* – *samugud*, etc. (with a break between ll. 12-23, where *charthain*, ‘loving’, does not alliterate with *mesrugud*, ‘tempering’).

V.

§5. *Cid asa ngaibther flaithefnas for túathaib 7 chlandaib 7 chenélaib, ‘Whence is chieftaincy taken over kingdoms, and clans, and kins?’*

This paragraph is quite short. It consists of two sentences, which provide lists of different virtues that establish the legitimacy of the ruler over his people. As is envisaged by the question, the subject-matter of the paragraph is organised differently as compared to the ones above. Instead of providing the reader with short collocations, joined by alliteration or by a uniform syntax, the author of *TC* has chosen the pattern of arranging the characteristics of the ruler in groups of threes as the main structural feature in the paragraph. This pattern of arranging the subject-matter is also characteristic of the OIr. narrative style. The subject-matter involved would be homorganic, i.e. centred on one topic. This literary device stresses the nuances of the various aspects of kingship, employing alliterative sequences and/or strings of words belonging to the same semantic range. A brief look at instances from other vernacular sources may shed some light on its significance here.

First let us separate the versions of the text contained in the different recensions:

DN² *a feib chrotha 7 chenéoil 7 érgnai, a gáis 7 a gart, a hordan 7 a herlabra, a nert iomghona et sochraidi*

‘From excellence of shape and race and knowledge, from wisdom and generosity, from rank and eloquence, from the strength of fighting and an army’

L *a feib chrotha 7 chenéoil 7 érgnai, a gáis 7 a ordan 7 eslabrai 7 indraccus, a feib dúthchusa 7 airlabra [BB: degurlabra], a nert imghona et sochraite,*

‘From excellence of shape and race and knowledge, from wisdom and rank and liberality and honesty, from virtue of hereditary right and eloquence [BB ‘superior eloquence’], from the strength of fighting and an army’¹⁷.

In *Fled Bricrenn* (hereinafter *FB*) similar collocations are contained in rhetorical praises, serving mainly as an ornamental diction: these evidently derive from a common repertoire of narrative *topoi*. An example is taken from the *Bríatharchath na mban*, ‘War of Words of the women’ episode of the tale, and is contained in the judgements of Emer, daughter of Forgall Manach, Cú Chulainn’s wife. She says, praising herself:

¹⁷ Old Irish text in Meyer, 1909, 12-3. The translation is my own.

ní frith di cruth ná córai na congraim
*ní frith gáes ná gart nā genus*¹⁸,
 ‘Neither beauty, nor good proportions,¹⁹ nor appearance was found,
 neither wisdom nor strength nor chastity was found’
 (such as are to be found in her).

Later on in the tale she recites another piece of verse in praise of Cú Chulainn as an answer to Sencha’s reproof (*cosc*):

Ní faigbistar fer and connestar
a aes 7 a áis 7 a anius.
a guth a gáes a chenel.
a anius a urlabra.
*a ág a gal a gaisced. (etc.)*²⁰
 ‘There will not be found a man who may judge
 his age, his growth and his splendour,
 his voice, his wisdom and his kindred,
 his pleasantness and eloquence,
 his prowess, his fury and his skill at arms, etc.’

As far as the descriptions of the kings (insofar as one can legitimately distinguish them from those of the warriors) are concerned, a famous passage from “The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel” (hereinafter *TBDD*) comes into mind when Ingcél has to recite a description of Conaire. In response, Fer Rogain praises the king in following words:

Is é rígh as bláthem 7 as mínem 7 as becdae dod-áinic... Nícon fil locht and isind
fhir sin cruth 7 deilb 7 decelt. Iter méit 7 chóre 7 chutrumae. Iter rosc 7 folt 7 gili. Iter gais
7 álaig 7 errlabrae. Iter arm 7 erriud 7 écosc. Iter áni 7 imud 7 ordan. Iter gnáis (D ergna)
*7 gaisciud 7 centúl*²¹.

¹⁸ *Lebor na hUidre. Book of the Dun Cow.* Ed. R.I. Best, O. Bergin. Dublin (1929, repr.1992) 8326-7 (FB §24), hereinafter cited throughout as LU.

¹⁹ This is the meaning of *córa*, established by DIL, which, however, cannot be certain in view of its doubtfulness. See DIL, s.v.

²⁰ LU 8445-9 (FB §30).

²¹ *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, in: *Medieval and Modern Irish Series*, VIII. Ed. E. Knott. Dublin (1936, repr. 1975) II. 1073-8 (hereinafter Knott, 1936). In the note she says that “this, save for two unimportant variants, is the same as the description of Conchobar mac Nessa in *Deathtales*, p. 6 (LL 124a)”. (Knott, 1936, p. 90). These two variants, which are really just the same characteristics, arranged in a way different from *TBDD*, come up at the end of the list in *Aided Choncobuir*, §5. Cp. *Fobíth nī rabi for talmain delb duini amail deilb Conchobuir .i. etir chruth 7 deilb 7 dechelt...etir erriud 7 áne 7 ecōsc, etri arm 7 immad 7 ordan, etir gnáis 7 gaisced 7 chenēl. Nīrbo lochtach tra intí Conchobur*, ‘For there was not on earth the shape of a human being like the shape of Conchobar, both for beauty and figure and dress... for raiment and nobleness and equipment, for weapons and wealth and dignity, for bearing and valor and race. That Conchobar was faultless indeed’ (K. Meyer. *The Death-tales of the Ulster Heroes*, in: *RIA Todd Lecture Series*, vol. XIV. Dublin (1906) 6-7).

‘He is the king who has come to be the gentlest, the smoothest and the humblest. There is no fault in this man [in] appearance and form and raiment, [in] size and adjustment and proportion. Including [his] eye and hair and whiteness, [in] wisdom and behaviour and eloquence, [in] weapon and equipment and attire, [in] wealth and abundance and dignity, [in] sociability (*D*’s variant ‘understanding’) and skill at arms and kindred’²².

One can see that the list from *TBDD* is formed on a basis similar to that of the one in *FB*, employing alliteration between two or between all three members of each triad. However, the order and the features outlined in *TBDD*’s list are different from those of *FB*.

Another such passage occurs in *Genemain Áeda Slane* (abbreviated *GAS*), where the different personal aspects of Aed Sláne are praised in the following words:

*Áed Slane. 7 at mathi a chland .i. Fir Breg .i. im gart im allud im ordan. im crúas im chána im forlamus. im dírgi im dretra[ch]t im thoidexci. im ord im brugas im buci. im gnáis im alaig im sotlotus. im blad im báig im cridechairi. im cruth im chéill im ergna. im míad im mathius im rothinchi*²³.

‘Aed Sláne; and his descendants are noble, i.e. Fir Breg, on account of strength, fame, dignity; on account of bravery, tributes, supremacy; on account of uprightness, lovableness (?), silent charity (?); on account of rank, hospitality, generosity; on account of sociability, behaviour, dignity; on account of fame, declaring, kindheartedness; on account of form, prudence, understanding; on account of honour, excellence, serenity’²⁴.

b. Though all of the aforementioned speak about practically the same things, it is hard to establish any direct connection between them, as there is neither consistency in detail, nor any underlying pattern in terms of which the arrangement of some of the items could shed light on the whole message.

One can find, for instance, that an alliterating pair *gáis 7 gart*, ‘wisdom and strength’, occurs both in the DN² rec. of *TC* and in *FB*; then again, if the collocation in *TC* is taken in conjunction with following *a hordan 7 a herlabra*, ‘rank and eloquence’, it may be paralleled by *TBDD*’s *gáis 7 álaig 7 erllabrae*, ‘wisdom, behaviour, eloquence’, of which there is a slight echo in *GAS*, *im gnáis im alaig im sotlotus*, ‘sociability, behaviour, dignity’²⁵.

Accordingly, I am not inclined to draw any far-reaching conclusions from these parallels. Most significant may be the simple fact that in many (but not all) cases the threes and twos provide instances of alliteration, involving mainly vowels and several consonants.

²² The translation is my own.

²³ LU 4264-4269.

²⁴ The translation is my own.

²⁵ Note the occurrence of the triad *gnáis alai erlabra* in *Triads*, 80.

VI.

§6. *Caté téchta flatha*, ‘What is proper for a ruler’?²⁶

This part of *TC* is devoted to contrasting categories, mainly stressing the importance of the king’s keeping to a middle way and is itself dominated by the idea of contrast. For instance, cp. *rop becda*, ‘let him be humble’, and *rop mórda*, ‘let him be proud’, ll. 8-9; *rop dían*, ‘let him be quick’, and *rop fossaid*, ‘let him be steadfast’, ll. 10-11.²⁷

All of the qualities listed in the section fall directly into two categories: part (a), which is contained in the first twenty-six lines, tells us of his proper characteristics, and part (b) tells us about his proper actions.

We note occasional alliteration between the words in part (a). The alliteration of the first few lines (as well as of the two in the middle) is based on prefixing *so-*, denoting a good, beneficial aspect of true lordship.²⁸ We can also see sequences of three alliterating words starting with *f-* in ll. 11-3: *rop fossaid*, *rop fili*, *rop fénech* as well as in ll. 22-3: *rop fírén*, *rop féig*, *rop fedil*; and starting with *c-* in ll. 19-21: *rop crúaid*, *rop cartach*, *rop condarcell*²⁹. There are also some alliterating pairs: ll. 14-5: *rop gáeth*, *rop gartaid*; ll. 25-6: *rop ainmnetach*, *rop áintech*³⁰.

However, alliteration does not account for the whole paragraph, and we are still left with the question as to why the list of qualities of a righteous lord suddenly breaks off at l. 27, which starts the second part of the paragraph, part (b). Apart from using present subjunctive 3 sg. of the copula with *ro* as a predicate, it employs regular imperatives, mostly of simple verbs, and the structure of the rest of the sentences becomes more sophisticated. One can note that the compiler gives more attention to the device of

²⁶ I prefer rendering *flaith* as ‘a ruler’, rather than ‘a chief’, as Meyer does.

²⁷ Also in ll. 18-19: *rop máeth - rop crúaid*, ‘let him be gentle, let him be hard’; 31-2: *miscniged góí, carad ffrinni*, ‘hate falsehood – love justice’. Lines 33-4 can be described as proper behaviour towards good vs. bad things; 35-6: many at the gatherings vs. few at council as lordly followers; 47-8: firm covenants vs. lenient levies.

²⁸ *TC* §6.3-7, 6.16-7 = Meyer, 1909, 12: *rop sogeis, rop sobraig, rop saigthech, rop soaccobrach, rop soacallmach ...rop sochraid, rop sognais*.

²⁹ *Ib.*, p. 12, 14.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

pairing, but the contrasting of the members is less frequently used³¹ than synonymous usage³².

The subject-matter of the paragraph, therefore, when taken on the whole, seems heterogeneous. It may well be that the paragraph originally consisted exclusively of precepts of the so-called *rop* series, enumerating the characteristics of a proper ruler. Part (b) may be regarded as a later addition, and an argument in favour of this would be the complexities of its style and structure. Another argument would be that in this section we are referred in many instances to previous sections of the text.

I take the precepts *rop sorche fri gnáis, rop grían tige midchúarto*, ‘let him be a light to his acquaintances, let him be a sun of the house of the mead-circuit’ on ll. 37-38, and, probably, l. 39, as referring us back to §3.53 and §4; ‘the court-justice litany’ in ll. 40-49 is presumably an echo of §2.

³¹ Note the contrast between landowners (*grád*) and craftsmen (*dán*) in l. 46.

³² See l. 39, where *dála 7 airechta*, ‘gatherings and assemblies’, are placed side by side; as well as l. 40: *fis 7 érgnai*, ‘knowledge and wisdom’; l. 49: *a bretha 7 a chocerta*, ‘his judgements and his decisions’.

VII.

§§7-8. *Cia bátar do bésa (gníma) intan ropsa gilla, ‘What were your habits (§8. ...deeds) when you were a lad’?*

By devoting two paragraphs to the topic of the king’s or lord’s youth, spent in the *fianna*-brotherhood, *TC* shows that the ‘outlaw’ aspect is important in terms of understanding the nature of ideal kingship³³. As it is pointed out by an opening formula, the first of the two is devoted to various aspects of his behaviour, and the second is rather centered on the activities of a young member of a *fianna*-brotherhood, a *gilla*.³⁴

1. As one of the organising principles of the subject-matter in gnomic texts was alliteration, it should be pointed out that, similarly to what was observed in the preceding paragraph, the compiler of *TC* ignores alliteration in §7 and predominantly uses the device of contrast for purposes of arranging his subject-matter. The whole section can be divided into two parts.

a. The first, comprising ll. 4-16, starts with past 1 sg. of the copula followed by an adjective. Here some of the aspects of a young man’s behaviour are given in pairs of opposites: cp. ll. 5-6, where the young man is portrayed both as being both watchful (*décsenach*) and blind (*dall*), quiet (*tó*) and talkative (*labor*), on ll. 7-8; agreeable (*sulig*) and harsh (*solam*), on ll. 9-10; he used to take pity on the powerless (*ba fann fri amnirt*) and to be strong against the mighty (*ba trén fri rúanaid*) on ll. 14-15. In the latter the contrast is strengthened by attaching objects to each phrase that have opposing meaning: *amnirt*, ‘the powerless’ vs. *rúanaid*, ‘the mighty’³⁵.

³³ These paragraphs of *TC* have been dealt with in T. Ó Cathasaigh. *The Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Airt*. Dublin (1977) 60; most recently in McCone, 1990, 209, where he says that “...a major role in the *fián* is attributed to kings’ sons... an early Irish king had a youth in the *fián* behind him, and it is doubtless against this background that the reminiscences in *Tecosca Cormaic* about juvenile hunting and fighting in groups of various sizes are to be understood”.

³⁴ J. Nagy, in the chapter 5 ‘Finn the *Gilla*’ of his illuminating study of narrative tradition relating to Finn and the *fianna*, points out that “*gillacht* (the state of being a *gilla*) is important to us in the study of Finn’s youth... The *gilla* of medieval Irish literature is a liminal figure still in the process of being initiated into the status of adulthood” (J.F. Nagy. *The Wisdom of the Outlaw: the Boyhood Deeds of Finn in Gaelic Narrative Tradition*. Berkeley (1985) 124, 126, hereinafter Nagy, 1985). He sees the passages from *TC* under consideration here as defining a code of restrained behaviour, expected of the *gilla* in early Irish society: “to win acceptance from adults, the *gilla* must act in a restrained and respectful manner toward his peers and his seniors,... be taught the rules of proper social behaviour and learn to act at his age in the company of elder males” (Ibid.).

³⁵ In interpreting these lines I have employed J. Nagy’s translation of the passage. See Nagy, 1985, 127-8.

b. Lines 17-24 diverge in the N and L recensions.

The N recension³⁶ goes on to give a series of complex phrases³⁷, all negative, each consisting of two antithetical clauses which are linked either by the CONJ. PART. *AR* or COND. CONJ. PART. *CIA* WITH PAST 1 SG. OF THE COPULA. The whole message of the second part in N is that the young *fénnid* never transgressed a certain limit in his actions: for instance, in l. 16 Cormac says: *nírba crúaid ar ná ba máelc[h]end*, ‘I was not hard lest I be satirised’, in l. 19: *nírba labar ciapsa gáeth*, ‘I was not talkative though I was wise’.

Recension L³⁸ is simpler in its exposition, employing phrases consisting of positive/negative past 1 sg. of the copula and a following adjective. In L the overall tone is the same as in N, the underlying principle of moderation being outlined either by using a negation of the adj. with a prefixed *ro-*, which has an intensifying meaning:

nipsa rochrúaid, nipsa roirusa, nipsa rothim,
‘I was not too harsh, I was not too easy, I was not too feeble’³⁹;

or by juxtaposing opposite phrases with each other:

nipsa tromda, basa gáeth... nipsa forlobar (MS. fhorlob), basa thrén;
nipsa airrechtach, nipsa fomsech,
‘I was not oppressive, I was wise... I was not too sick, I was strong;
I was not spirited, I was not measuring’⁴⁰.

c. It may be mentioned in passing that §29, which starts with Cairbre’s question how he should behave between the wise and the foolish, acquaintances and strangers, the old and the young and the innocent and the guilty, echoes §7 in some ways. First, similarly to the passage in the L rec. considered just above, §29’s implicit idea of moderation is expressed by juxtaposing a series of phrases with the structure adjective with a prefixed *ro-*,⁴¹ preceded by the present subjunctive 2 sg. of the copula with a negative particle. Moreover, some of the adjectives are just the same:

³⁶ ll. 16-26 in Meyer’s edition.

³⁷ *nírba crúaid ar ná ba máelc[h]end, nírba ocus ná ba tromm, nírba labar ciapsa gáeth, nírba tairscinach ciarba trén, nírba laimthenach ciarba lúath, ní cuibinn sen ciarba óc, nírba móidmech ciarba gonach.*

³⁸ LL 45904-45914, fol. 343 b 45-50.

³⁹ LL 45904-45906. The translation is my own, based mainly on Meyer’s.

⁴⁰ LL 45907-8, 45911-12, 45913-4. The translation is my own.

⁴¹ With the minor exception of *dimbrígach*, ‘diffident’, of l. 6 = Meyer, 1909, 44-5.

<p>TC §7, LL 45904-45906 <i>nipsa rochrúaid, nipsa roirusa, nipsa rothim</i> LL 45907-8, <i>nipsa tromda, basa gáeth</i> LL 45911-12, <i>nipsa forlobar (MS. fhorlob), basa thrén;</i></p>	<p>TC §29, l.9 <i>ni ba rochrúaid, ni ba rothimm</i> l.5 <i>ni ba rogáeth, ni ba robáeth</i></p>
--	--

Both passages warn a young man against being too harsh (*rochrúaid*), but also against being too meek (*rothim*), although they prescribe only a certain amount of wisdom (*basa gaeth*, ‘be wise’), and not too much of it (*ni ba rogáeth*, ‘be not too wise’). Of the remainder of §29, some of its ideas can be paralleled by the maxims of the first part of §7.

<p>TC §7, <i>ba tó fásaig, ba labor sochuide</i> ‘I was quiet in the wilderness; I was talkative in a crowd’⁴².</p>	<p>TC §29, l.8 <i>ní ba rolabar, ní ba rothó,</i> ‘Be not too talkative, be not too silent’⁴³.</p>
--	--

Here it is important to stress the contrast between the passages. §7 instructs the young lad to behave appropriately in every situation in which he finds himself; §29 is rather a precaution against the extremes that one can follow when addressing different sorts of persons.

On the above grounds I think it may be quite legitimate to consider that §29 is a later composition, and was to some extent inspired by §7, created as a replica to it.

⁴² The translation is by Nagy, 1985, 127.

⁴³ Meyer, 1909, 44-5.

VIII.

Opening and closing formulae of TC.

We shall finish our discussion of the sections of TC devoted to kingship by considering what kind of opening and closing formulae the text employs. TC, unlike other wisdom-texts that are usually composed as monologues, is constructed as a dialogue between a royal father and his son. Here a question by the latter introduces the topic of the following paragraph, and is on many occasions repeated or reformulated by Cormac in a concluding remark. The question-answer technique, however, is quite common in early Irish wisdom and legal literature⁴⁴.

Several patterns can be observed.

Firstly, the opening question is repeated in full at the end of an answer:

§3. *Cid as dech do less túathe? ... dech do less túathe in sin,*

‘What is best for the good of a tribe? ... that is best for the good of a tribe’.

§4. *Cadeat ada flatha 7 cuirmthige? ... it é sin adae flatha 7 cormthige,*

‘What are the dues of a chief and of an ale-house? ... those are the dues of a chief and of an ale-house’.

§6. *Caté téchta flatha? ... ar is triasna téchta sin miditir rí 7 flaithi.*

‘What is proper of a ruler? ... for it is by those qualities kings and rulers are judged’.

Secondly, one or two words of the question are repeated in the concluding remark by Cormac.

§5. *Cid asa ngaibther flaitheanas for túathaib 7 chlandaib 7 chenélaib? ... A feib chrotha... gaibther.*

‘Whence is chieftaincy taken over kingdoms, and clans, and kins? ... By virtue of shape ... it is taken’.

§7. *Cia bátar do bésa intan ropsa gilla? ... ar is triasna bésu sin rosegat óic corbat sen 7 riaglaích.*

‘What were your habits when you were a lad? ... For it is through those habits that the young become old and kingly warriors’.

§8. *Cia bátar do gnúma intan ropsa gilla? ... rop íat sin mo gnúma.*

‘What were your deeds when you were a lad? ... those were my deeds’.

It may also happen that the key-words contained in an opening question may not be repeated in any way. This is the case with the first two paragraphs.

⁴⁴ Cp., for instance, *Críth Gablach* and some portions of *Aipgitir Chrábaid*, esp. §§9-10, starting with *cid as*, ‘what should be’, and *ce dech (messam) do*, ‘what is best (worst) for?’ (V.Hull, ‘*Aipgitir Chrábaid*: the Alphabet of Piety’, *Celtica* 8 (1968) 44-89, esp. pp. 62-3, 74-7). The latter formulae are reminiscent of *cid as dech (cid messam)* openings of §§1, 3, 11, 36 (§§9, 18, 21-8, 33, 37) of *TC*.

The opening formula of the first paragraph, *cid as dech do X*, ‘what is best for X’, is repeated three times throughout the whole text, i.e. in §§3, 11, 36. The paragraphs, however, never agree on the object of the formula. It is the king (*rí*) that §1 has in mind; while with §3 it is ‘the good of a tribe’ (*less túaithe*); the addressee in §11 (*cid as dech dam*, ‘what is good for me?’), asks Cairpre) and the season (*ráithe*) in §36. The opening question of the twelfth paragraph (*cid as fó dam*, ‘what is good for me?’) may simply be an echo of the opening formula of the previous paragraph, replacing *dech*, superl. of *maith*, ‘good’, with a synonym of the latter, *fó*.

Let us now consider the relationship between the opening and closing lines of the relevant part of our text. The only patterns that can be strictly speaking regarded as opening and closing formulae are probably *cid as dech do X* as an opening formula and *ar is tria X* as a closing one. §1 can be regarded as the only section that employs both opening and closing formulae. Other paragraphs employ the formulae less consistently. §5 is exceptional: it employs the repetition device (*cid asa ngaibther... gaibther*), but lacks a closing line.

These speculations, however, do not lead us anywhere, as we cannot assess the problem of the earlier or later character of the relevant paragraphs of *TC* on the basis of the presence or absence in them of the opening/closing formulae. The gnomic material contained in the relevant paragraphs of *TC* may be earlier or later: this cannot, however, be proved because of its stylistic simplicity. One could conjecture that the opening/closing formulae may have been composed independently, and incorporated into the main body of the text at any stage of its composition, compilation or transmission.

Of necessity, these observations are only speculative: in the end, we can only say that *TC* has neither uniform opening nor uniform closing formulae. Indeed, it would be surprising if there were, given the heterogeneous character of this wisdom-text. This heterogeneity argues in favor of the hypothesis – which can, however, never be proven – that the text consists of different segments and that all of the paragraphs of *TC* examined in this talk were composed at different times and for different purposes. We have seen that *TC* is unique in the way in which it employs its own alliterative and syntactic patterns to organise its subject-matter, as well as in the literary devices of parallelism and contrast.

IX.

Conclusion.

In discussing the contents of the text, we proposed that the subject-matter of §1, while exhibiting some details peculiar to the text of *Tecosca Cormaic*, also resembles the contents of *Is tre ff.* series of *Audacht Morainn*.

Following that, we argued that the main topic of §2 is the juridical aspect of royal behaviour.

§3, though not directly concerned with kingship, does point to a king. We proposed that the paragraph was composed as an echo to §§1-2. In favour of this interpretation are not only the repetition of the themes occurring in §§1-2, but also parallelism in wording.

We further proposed that §§2-3 form one semantic block, representing the different aspects of agreement between a king (dealt with in §2) and his people (§3). We supported this hypothesis with examples, taken from the Old Irish legal treatise *Críth Gablach*, ‘Branching Purchase’, where the relationship between the king and his people is also seen in terms of contract.

As far as §4 is concerned, we proposed that it has very little to do with kingship as such, and has been introduced simply as a continuation of a last line of a preceding paragraph.

§5, comprising lists of different virtues of the legitimate ruler, was given a special treatment. We noted analogous lists in other vernacular sources, such as *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, *Fled Bricrenn*, and *Genemain Áeda Slane*, and concluded that these lists formed part of Old Irish narrative style.

By including a description of the career of the future king in the *fianna*-brotherhood in §§7-8 we have made the observation that *TC* shows that an ‘outlaw’ aspect is important in terms of understanding the nature of ideal kingship. In passing, we compared §7 with §29 of *Tecosca Cormaic* in terms of style and syntactic patterns, and concluded that §29 is a later compilation, created on the model of §7.

Discussing the aspects of the style of *Tecosca Cormaic* we concluded that the use of both line-internal and linking alliteration is noted in §§1-2. The former is mainly used throughout the beginning sections of the paragraph, the latter is mostly observed in the middle and at the end.

§3 does not show much use of line-internal alliteration, but has plenty of linking alliteration. In our discussion of the alliterative patterns of §3, we argued that some of the statements attested here can be seen as later glosses or short references to other dicta. If accepted, this analysis helps to establish linking alliteration between most of the lines of §3.

This is also the case in §4, which appears to be governed by linking alliteration. §6 consists of short imperative passages; one can note alliteration between them, which can help arranging them in groups of twos and threes, if the initial *rop* is disregarded. In the concluding paragraphs, relevant for our discussion of *Tecosca Cormaic*, alliteration is ignored and contrast is the main device used for purposes of arranging the subject-matter.

In the closing section of our paper we examined the opening and closing formulae of *Tecosca Cormaic*. We proposed that the only patterns that can strictly speaking be regarded as opening and closing formulae are *cid as dech do X* as an opening formula and *ar is tria X* as a closing one. Given the heterogeneous character of opening/closing formulae, we conjectured that they may have been composed independently, or incorporated into the text at a later stage of its transmission.