

## Travel Bursary Report: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature

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Thanks to the generous support of the Society's travel bursary scheme, I was able to spend the first three weeks of 2011 working as a visiting researcher at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, School of Celtic Studies in Dublin, Ireland. The library at the School of Celtic Studies is an outstanding resource for the study of Celtic languages, literatures and history, and most of my research trip was taken up with exploring its collections. In addition, I discussed my current research and future plans with several academics based at the Institute whose fields of interest and expertise coincide with my own, and on the weekends I had an opportunity to visit some of Dublin's museums.

As a visitor at DIAS I attended two translation seminars each week which were run by Professor Liam Breatnach, one of the Institute's senior members and an expert in early Irish law and language. The first of these seminars examined the medieval Irish saga-text *Cath Maige Tuired*, 'The Second Battle of Mag Tuired', which is an account of the epic battle between the mythological forces of the Túatha Dé Danann and the Fomoiré. The second weekly meeting, which brought together scholars from several academic institutions across Dublin, focused on the law-text *Córus Béscnai*, or 'the regulation of proper behaviour', a tract which deals mainly with the mutual obligations of clergy and laity in medieval Ireland.

The chief purpose of my visit, however, was to complete some of the initial stages of my current research project, which examines the extensive scholia surrounding the medieval Irish treatise on grammar and poetry entitled *Auraicept na nÉces*, 'The Scholars' Primer'. This text, which has long been recognised as a valuable source for the study of literary and intellectual life in medieval and early modern Ireland, consists of a roughly eighth-century core of elementary linguistic doctrine, to which a considerable amount of commentary was added over the course of the following several centuries – testifying to the text's continued relevance and popularity amongst medieval Irish scholars over an extended period. The *Auraicept* constitutes one of the earliest sustained attempts in Western grammatical tradition to contrast a classical language with a vernacular one, as it weaves native terminology, ideas and allusions into a structural framework heavily influenced by classical doctrines on rhetoric, dialectic and Latin grammar. However, the only published edition of both the *Auraicept*'s core text and commentary is that produced by George Calder in 1917, and this was based on just a few of the eleven full and eleven fragmentary copies of the text now known to exist. The *Auraicept*'s manuscript transmission is complex, and much work is needed before a more comprehensive edition of the material can be attempted. I therefore first intend to publish an up-to-date survey of all manuscripts containing *Auraicept* material, including discussion of their provenance and the nature of their contents; this work will be the focus of a three-year project that I will undertake from October 2011 as a Junior Research Fellow at Christ Church, Oxford. This research also forms a necessary preliminary to the future production of a new edition, critical analysis and the first complete modern translation of the *Auraicept*'s exegetical commentary.

During my time at the Institute I examined manuscript copies of *Auraicept na nÉces* for this purpose, and completed an article for the journal *Language and History* which examines the continuity, in both structure and content, of the *Auraicept*'s text and commentary with doctrine found in a collection of so-called 'poetico-legal' texts concerned with the rights and responsibilities of medieval Irish poets. This contribution compares the arrangement of

linguistic and legal material in one of the manuscripts used by Calder for his edition of the *Auraicept*, namely the fourteenth-century Book of Ballymote (Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 P 12), with material surrounding another copy of the text found in Dublin, Trinity College Library MS 1432 (E. 3. 3), the existence of which Calder was apparently unaware. This work has attempted to show that our understanding of *Auraicept na nÉces* as an integral text, and its relationship to other tracts in the medieval Irish literary corpus, can only be fully informed by a closer study of such previously unexamined manuscripts. The article will appear in the May 2011 issue of *Language and History*.

I am grateful to the Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature for funding my trip to the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, which was both a productive and rewarding experience.