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ABBREVIATIONS

A / acc.	accusative	inf.	infix(ed)
abs.	absolute	int.	interrogative
act.	active	-io	io-stem
add.	additional	irr.	irregular
adj.	adjective	l(l).	line(s)
adv.	adverb	L.	Latin
arch.	archaic	len. / ^{l}	lenition, lenites
art.	(definite) article	lit.	literally
-ā	ā-stem	Lit.	literary
c.	conjunction	m.	masculine
cf.	compare	m.1	masculine, 1st declension
cj.	conjunct	m.3, etc.	masculine, 3rd declension
coll.	collective	MI	Middle Irish
comp.	comparative	ModI	Modern Irish
cond.	conditional	MS(S).	manuscript(s)
cons.	consonant	-n	n-stem
cop.	copula	N / nom.	nominative
-d	d-stem	n.	neuter
D / dat.	dative	neg.	negative
dem.	demonstrative	-nn	nn-stem
dep.	deponent	nomd.	nominalized
deut.	deuterotonic	NP	Noun phrase
dim.	diminutive	-o	o-stem
dir.	direct	OI	Old Irish
e.g.	for instance	p(p).	page(s)
ecl. / ^{n}	eclipsis, eclipses	p.p.	past participle
emph.	emphatic	part.	particle
eq.	equative	pass.	passive
f.	feminine	perf.	perfect(ive)
f.2, etc.	feminine, 2nd declension	perh.	perhaps
fut.	future	pl.	plural
-g	guttural stem	poss.	possessive
G / gen.	genitive	prec.	preceding
h.l.	*hoc loco* (here)	pred.	predicative
hab.	habitual	pref.	prefix(ed)
-i	i-stem	prep.	preposition(al)
-ī	ī-stem	pres.	present
-iā	iā-stem	pret.	preterite
impf.	imperfect	prev.	preverbal
impv.	imperative	pron.	pronoun
ind.	indirect	prot.	prototonic
indecl.	indeclinable	qual.	qualifies

q.v.	*quo vide* (see there)	-u	u-stem
-r	r-stem	V / voc.	vocative
red.	reduplicated	vn.	verbal noun
refl.	reflexive	w.	with
rel.	relative	*	unattested
-s	s-stem	/ /	indicates sound
sc.	*scilicet* (namely)	?	doubtful/ unknown
sg.	singular	-?	doubtful stem
subj.	subjunctive	<	(derived) from / form of
suff.	suffix(ed)	< >	indicates spelling
sup.	superlative	>	hence / becomes
sync.	syncopated	1	first person
-t	t-stem	2	second person
tr.	translate(s)	3	third person

CHAPTER 1

§1 Introductory remarks on Old Irish and the other Celtic languages

Irish belongs to the Celtic branch of the Indo-European language family. The oldest textual evidence of this branch for the greater part survives in the form of brief inscriptions. From these, and from even more incidental remnants in the form of names of places and persons as recorded by earlier Greek and Roman historians, linguists have arrived at a division of Proto-Celtic, probably completed well before the beginning of the Christian era, into Continental Celtic and Insular Celtic. A further classification that includes later developments subdivides Continental Celtic into Celtiberian (in Spain) and Gaulish (in France and Northern Italy), and Insular Celtic into British (in Wales, Cornwall, and Britanny) and Goidelic or Gaelic (in Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man). There is also evidence of a Celtic dialect having been used until the fourth century AD in Galatia (Turkey), and of one or two northern dialects of British in Northern England and Scotland: Cumbrian, and possibly Pictish, both of which died out in the early Middle Ages.

Early historians from Greece and the Roman Empire looked upon the Celts as barbarians, and the cultural tradition of the Celts remained primarily an oral one up to the time when the surviving Celtic tribes were converted to Christianity and adopted the Latin alphabet. In fact, very little is known about the precise early relationship between Celtic and other Indo-European languages, the closest branches of which appear to be Italic (including Latin) and Germanic. Since Old Irish has a unique Verb-Subject-Object (VSO) word-order, it has even been surmised that this language may have been influenced by a substratum of whatever member of another language family which may have been spoken in Ireland before the first Celtic settlements there took place, some time between 500 and 300 BC, but this is highly speculative.

Linguistic evidence shows a major division between Q-Celtic and P-Celtic, so called because of the appearance of a /p/-sound in some languages where others retained a reflection of Indo-European /k^w/. Celtiberian and Gaelic are Q-Celtic, and all the others belong to the P-variety. It has therefore been suggested that the westernmost Celtic tribes, which ultimately moved into Ireland and the West of Spain, retained this particular phonemic characteristic in their languages, whereas a "movement" of a sound-change which started from a centre in Continental Europe (where the Celts originated) never reached the far West.

In the outcome, only the six major Insular dialects developed a well-attested written as well as spoken tradition. Of the British languages, Welsh and Breton (the latter of which spread from modern-day southern England into Armorica in the fifth century AD) have survived, whereas Cornish became extinct during the eighteenth century. Gaelic was at first a single language, centred in Ireland. Around 1600, Scots Gaelic (which is still spoken, mainly on the Hebrides) and Manx (which officially became extinct when its last native speaker died in 1974) split off from Irish Gaelic, which therefore has the longest continuous written tradition of all Celtic languages. Chronologically it is generally subdivided into Primitive Irish (c. 400 - 600 AD, almost exclusively preserved in inscriptions and geographical names), Early Old Irish (7th century AD) and Old Irish (c. 700 - c. 900), Middle Irish (c. 900 - c. 1200), Early Modern Irish (c. 1200 - c. 1600), and Modern Irish (c. 1600 to the present day).

§2 Spelling and pronunciation

The earliest records of Irish Gaelic are to be found on several hundred so-called Ogam (or Ogham) stones. Ogam (Oghamchraobh) is the name of a primitive alphabet of twenty (later 25) symbols, consisting of longer or shorter straight or slanted lines, suitable for carving into the edges of standing stones. The use of these mainly commemorative inscriptions is roughly dated from the late fourth to the early seventh century. The year 432 AD is traditionally considered as the year in which Christianity came to Ireland with St Patrick, but the first manuscript records, using an insular version of the early medieval Latin alphabet, are not attested until the seventh century. In fact, the bulk of Old Irish material, comprising texts of a religious nature as well as numerous myths, legends, sagas and epic narratives in prose, interspersed with sections in verse, has come down to us in manuscripts from the twelfth century or later. These Middle Irish manuscripts also contain what are considered to be more or less faithful renderings of older texts. However, quite a few manuscripts dating from the Old Irish period have survived as well, containing glosses which explain the Latin main text, part of them written in the vernacular, Old Irish language. These interlinear glosses, such as those preserved in the monasteries of Würzburg (c. 750), Milan (c. 800) and St. Gall (c. 845), contain a treasure of linguistic information; for this reason they are often used in introductory manuals such as Strachan's *Old-Irish Paradigms.* In the margins of such and similar manuscripts poems were often jotted as well.

The highly alliterative nature of Old Irish poetry and possibly also the fact that Irish end-rhyme is based on only partial phonetic correspondence (what in an English context would be called assonance) testify to the fact that Old Irish generally has the main stress on the first syllable of the word. Early lyrical poems are often extremely short, which is one of the reasons why we shall make use of such texts in this *Primer*. Quite common are quatrains such as Text I, which also gives an idea of the basic characteristics of the Old Irish language — its spelling, its pronunciation, and the basic pattern of its syntactic functions, upon which we will comment in the next chapter.

(All words in the texts will be glossed and annotated as fully as possible. Needless to say, some of the information provided, such as the distinction between nominal declensions, will have to be ignored for the time being. The abbreviations used in the annotations are set out on pp. 9-10 above. For the glosses on Text I, see p. 17.)

Text I

> Daith bech buide a húaim i n-úaim,
> ní súail a uide la gréin,
> fó for fuluth 'sa mag már,
> dag a dagchomul 'na chéir.

Translation (rather free, as in Dillon, p. 154): "Nimble is the yellow bee from cup to cup, / he makes a great journey in the sun, / boldly he flits into the wide plain, / then safely joins his brethren in the hive."

This poem probably dates from the eighth or ninth century; its rhythm seems to be free, but there are in fact seven syllables to each line (for instance through elision of the final -e in *buide*), a very common Old Irish measure type. The use of alliteration (as in *bech buide*, *fó … fuluth* and *mag már*), what looks like assonance, but within the Irish prosodic context counts as full rhyme (*húaim* and *súail*, *gréin* and *chéir*), and internal rhyme (*buide* and *uide*, *mag* and *dag*) is clear … to the eye. What about the relationship between spelling and sound?

The Irish version of the Latin alphabet makes use of eighteen letters altogether. The five vowels are spelled <a>, <e>, <i>, <o> and <u> when short; length is indicated by means of the acute sign, known in Irish as *síneadh fada* ("long stretch"). Their pronunciation is the "continental" one, i.e. these vowels are generally pronounced as they would be in Latin or e.g. Italian (<á> being pronounced as in English "bar"). When

weakly stressed before a consonant, OI <a>, <ai>, <e> and <i> are pronounced as a murmur-vowel or **schwa** i.e. /ə/.

Eleven combinations of vowels were used to indicate eight different diphthongs; these are <íu>, <ía>, <éu> or <éo>, <áu>, <aí> or <áe>, <oí> or <óe>, <úa> and <uí> (<ói> and <ái> are also found in MSS). Here, the length-marks (which the scribes did not always carefully provide!) simply serve to mark a diphthong, both members of which together form a long segment. The recommended pronunciation of the diphthongs is as follows:

íu(i)	as in "Ian", but with velar off-glide (cf. Italian "io")
ía(i)	as in "Ian"
éo(i), éu	as in "playoff"
áu	as in "crouch"
áe, aí	as in "aisle"
óe, oí	as in "oil"
úa(i)	as in "brewer"
uí	as in "sweet"

Matters become somewhat more complicated when short vowels are put together (except for <ía> and <úa>, which are always diphthongs), because these combinations do not so much indicate different vowel sounds as whether the consonants that precede or follow them are "broad" (i.e. velar) or "slender" (i.e. palatalized). For instance, in the word *uide* (l. 2), the <i> indicates that the following <d> is to be pronounced with a palatal quality. Similarly, in word-final weakly stressed <ae> and <ai>, the <a> merely serves to indicate that the preceding consonant (cluster) is "broad", and the pronunciation remains /e/ and /i/ respectively. We are dealing here with a spelling convention, which was necessary to be able to represent the fifty-odd different phonemes of Old Irish by means of only eighteen symbols.

According to Thurneysen, the twelve consonants of OI, <b>, <c>, <d>, <f>, <g>, <l>, <m>, <n>, <p>, <r>, <s> and <t>, could have three phonemic realizations: velar, when followed or preceded by <u> or <o>, neutral when followed by <a>, and palatal when followed or preceded by <i> or followed by <e>. Almost all later scholars reject this, reducing the distinction to two varieties. In any case, as will be seen later, only the distinction between the former two (ModI broad) and the latter (ModI slender) is also phonemic, i.e. semantically significant. The finesses of this aspect of pronouncing the language may be picked up more easily by a speaker of ModI than by an absolute newcomer to the field. Since

the phonetics of the older language are in any case only rough approximations, they may to some extent be ignored at an early stage, although it should also be remembered, firstly, that phonemic distinctions not indicated in orthography may conceal cases of so-called "minimal pairs", and, secondly, that the enjoyment of reading poetry is not only a matter of understanding the text but also one of hearing it. (The Lehmanns offer phonetic transcriptions of the first four text fragments in their book, and the student who has no sounding-board in the shape of a knowledgeable teacher might find it of interest to consult these; see also the first twelve exercises in Quin. It should be noted, however, that some experts in historical phonology consider these transcriptions to be partially incorrect.)

Apart from the above-mentioned variants, the consonants are also affected in other, even more vital, ways. We are here referring to the phenomena of voicing, lenition (the term aspiration, which is used e.g. in *O-I P*, had better be avoided) and eclipsis (or nasalization). In the middle or at the end of words, the letters <c>, <p> and <t>, which word-initially are normally voiceless stops (/k/, /p/, /t/), are often to be pronounced voiced (/g/, /b/, /d/), but this is not clear from the spelling. When preceded in a previous word by a nasal in Proto-Celtic (but which had disappeared in OI), a similar thing happened. In ModI, this **eclipsis** is indicated in the spelling by writing a <g> before the <c>, a <b> before the <p> and a <d> before the <t>, but this was not done by the OI scribes. Examples to clarify this point will be given in §5 below.

Lenition, due to phonetic conditions in Proto-Celtic or to syntactic rules in OI, means that the stops are transformed into fricatives. To indicate such realization, an <h> was added to the letters <c>, <p> and <t>, with realization as indicated in the schedule below. This is in fact the major function of the letter <h>, which is otherwise only used at the beginning of words starting with a vowel in order to avoid amalgamation with a final vowel in the previous word.

Being already voiced by nature, the stops represented by the letters <g>, <b> and <d> cannot obtain extra voicing. Instead, they are lenited in circumstances where the voiceless stops are voiced or lenited. However, no <h> was inserted here in the orthography. On the other hand, when these sounds are eclipsed this is indicated in the spelling, which respectively becomes <ng>, <mb> and <nd>.

Lenited or "voiced" <m> is pronounced /v/ with a nasal sound (=/ṽ/); this sound does not eclipse, but is occasionally spelled double (<mm>) in eclipsing or non-leniting circumstances. Generally speaking, when <c>, <p>, <t> and <m> are written double, this effectively means

that they have their "original" pronunciation. The letter <f> mainly occurs word-initially in OI, in compounds, and in certain verbal endings. When lenited, the scribes sometimes put a dot, the so-called *punctum delens* ("destroying point", ordinarily used to indicate a mistake) over it, as was done over lenited <s>, thus: <ḟ>, <ṡ>. The former is not heard at all (/ø/ or "zero" pronunciation), the latter as /h/. Eclipsis of <f> (pronounced /v/) is not usually indicated (but sometimes spelled <b> in MSS); consonants that do not change their quality by eclipsis may be written double. Vowels of course cannot be lenited, but they can be eclipsed by prefixing <n->.

The remaining consonants <l>, <n> and <r> may also be lenited, but this is not reflected in either spelling or pronunciation. For the user's convenience the various realizations of OI consonants are set out below:

Initial:		Final / Intervocalic:		Lenited:	Eclipsed:
c	/k/	c /g/	c(c) /k/	ch /x/	c /g/
p	/p/	p /b/	p(p) /p/	ph /f/	p /b/
t	/t/	t /d/	t(t) /t/	th /θ/	t /d/
g	/g/	g /ɣ/		g /ɣ/	ng /ŋ/
b	/b/	b /v/		b /v/	mb /m/
d	/d/	d /ð/		d /ð/	nd /n/
m	/m/	m /ṽ/	m(m) /m/	m /ṽ/	-
f	/f/	f /b/		ḟ /-/	f /v/
s	/s/	s /s/		ṡ /h/	-

Note that <c> is *always* a plosive, even when palatalized. Word-medially and word-finally, <m> is often unlenited, and <c>, <p> and <t> not always voiced. Before a front vowel, or word-finally after a front vowel, <s> is pronounced as in "shin", but when following a back vowel, it is broad, also where the back vowel is not written, as in *fis* ("knowledge", ModI *fios*) or *cris* ("belt", ModI *crios*), where a hard /s/ is heard. For more specific details, see §36.

Before moving on to other matters, the word-by-word gloss for Text I will now be provided. Exceptionally, some additional information concerning pronunciation to illustrate some of the points made above will be given as well.

1   daith: adj. -i "nimble", "swift", Lit. ModI *daith.*
    bech: noun -o m., gen. sg. beich "bee", ModI *beach* (f.2).
    buide: adj. -io/-iā "yellow", ModI *buí* (older spelling *buidhe*).
    a: prep. w. dat. "out of", ModI *as*; prefixes <h> to following vowel, hence:
    húaim: < úaim: noun -i f. "cave", "mouth", ModI *uaimh* (f.2), which tells us
    the final <m> was lenited here.
    i: prep. w. dat./acc. "in", "into", eclipses, hence: i **n**-úaim. ModI *i, in.*
2   ní: 3sg. pres. neg. of copula "is not", ModI *ní.*
    súail: adj. -i "small", "trifling", Lit. ModI *suaill.*
    a: poss.pron. 3sg.m., len. "his", "its", ModI *a.*
    uide: noun -io n. "journey", Lit. ModI *uidhe* (m.4): "march", "journey".
    la: prep. w. acc. "with", "by", h.l. (freely) "in", ModI *le.*
    gréin: acc. sg. < grían: noun, -ā f. "sun", ModI *grian* (f.2), gen. sg. *gréine.*
3   fó: indecl. adj. "good", h.l. "boldly", arch. ModI *fó*: "good" (Dinneen).
    for: prep. w. dat./acc. "on", "upon", "over", ModI *ar.*
    fuluth: (verbal) noun ?-u m. "movement", arch. ModI *foluthadh* (Dinneen),
    cf. *foluain* (f., "flight", "giddy movement", "fluttering").
    'sa: = isa < i + n. art. acc. sg. a "into the", ModI *sa.*
    mag: noun, -s n., gen. sg. maige "plain", ModI *má* (f.4; older: *magh*). Here
    acc. sg.
    már: adj. -o/-ā "big", "wide", ModI *mór.*
4   dag: pred. adj. "good", ModI *dea-* (only as pref.).
    dagchomul: < dag- pref. adj. "good" + comal -o n. "union", ModI *comhal*
    (m.1, lit. "cowl", as worn by monks). Because of poss. a the initial <d> would
    be lenited here, as are <ch> and <m>. In compounds, the second element is
    generally lenited, but the lenition of <c> (/k/) after its cognate <g> (/ɣ/) may
    suggest a late date (see §36.2, "exceptions").
    'na: < ina: i(n) + poss. a m. "in his", ModI *ina.*
    chéir: < cíar: noun -a f. "wax", ModI *céir* (f.5).

It will strike the reader to what extent the vocabulary of OI has been re-
tained into ModI, although some of the modern reflexes are now liter-
ary or archaic, and there have been changes in the spelling. A more lit-
eral rendering of the poem than the one provided by Dillon could run as
follows: "Nimble (is) a yellow bee out of a cave into a cave, not trifling
(is) its journey with (the) sun, boldly fluttering into the great plain, well
its union in its wax." The absence of verbs creates the sense of a
snapshot, rather like the effect achieved by a well-turned Japanese
haiku. Perhaps the word *dagchomul* in l. 4 is meant to suggest that the
bee is safely "cowled" in its quasi-monastic hive.

    A few additional remarks about OI prosody may also be noted here.
The use of alliteration is common to the early poetry of all languages
which bear a strong word-initial stress. The oldest OI verse seems to

have been mainly alliterative; the use of a fixed rhythm and of rhyme was probably due to the influence of early medieval Latin hymnody. Poetry written in quatrains (there may be more than just one) often uses a heptasyllabic line, with stresses on the odd syllables, i.e. four per line (\ x \ x \ x \), and a word boundary after the fourth syllable. Unlike in Old English alliterative poetry, the first stress does not alliterate, and the alliteration may continue into a following line. Vowels alliterate with any other vowels, consonants only with each other, even when eclipsed or lenited (except for lenited <f>, which becomes silent), and the clusters <sc>, <sp> and <st> alliterate with themselves as well.

Endrhyme in Old Irish verse allows for greater phonetic freedom than is the case in English — in fact, it often resembles what in English prosody would be called assonance, but with specified restrictions. Each vowel after the stressed vowel must rhyme; as to the final consonants, these must "rhyme" with their phonemic cognates: voiced stops with voiced stops, voiceless stops with voiceless stops, voiced fricatives and lenis or lenited liquids with the same, voiceless fricatives ditto, /m/ and fortis or unlenited liquids ditto, /s/ with itself, and any final vowel with itself. In MI, short final vowels had all become weakened to the so-called "murmur-vowel", which allows such vowels to rhyme with any other such final vowel.

In Text I, these rules are meticulously followed, as in *húaim* and *súail* and in *gréin* and *chéir*, where the vowels have the same respective quality and quantity, and the final consonants are slender and lenited liquids. Often, as also here, a further rule concerning a first stressed word in a following line assonating with the final word in a previous line is followed. For more specific details, the interested reader is referred to Gerard Murphy's *Early Irish Metrics*, Dublin 1961.

§3 Word order in Old Irish

The Irish language is unique in the Indo-European family (apart from Modern Welsh) in having a basic Verb-Subject-Object word order. Except for *ní*, no finite verb occurs in Text I (we are saving these for Chapter 2), but before the first word in the poem the copula *is* is understood. In such sentences, the nominal or adjectival predicate precedes the subject: *(is) daith bech buide* literally means "(is) nimble a yellow bee." As appears to be common to VSO-languages, the attributive adjective (*buide*) follows the noun it qualifies (*bech*). The absence of a copula is more usual in Irish than it is in English, although it is possible there as well, with a similar inversion of predicate and subject, as when Nanki-

Poo sings in Gilbert and Sullivan's opera *The Mikado*: "A wandering minstrel I, a thing of shreds and patches, ..." This structure is adhered to in every subsequent line of Text I. If an adjective precedes the noun it qualifies, it must form a compound with it, as in *dagchomul.* This is also the case with the cardinal number "one", *óen-* (ModI *aon* + noun) and with the adjective "old", *sen-* (ModI *sean-*).

The reader is now first invited to investigate the points mentioned above in Text II.

Text II

Och, a luin, is buide duit
cáit sa muine i fuil do net:
a díthrebaig nad clind cloc
is bind boc síthamail t'ḟet.

1   a luin: voc.sg. of lon: -o m. "blackbird", *lon (dubh)* (m.1).
    is: 3sg. pres. of the copula: "is", *is.*
    buide: -iā f. "thanks", "satisfaction", *buidhe, buí.*
    duit: prep. pron. do: "to", "for" + 2sg. suffixed pers. pron.: "for you", *duit.*
    The combination *is ... do ...* expresses a conviction.
2   cáit: "in whatever place", "wherever", *cáit, cá háit.*
    sa: see I.3. The older form would be isin (see §10).
    muine: -io m. "brake", "thicket", *muine* (f.4).
    i: here used as relative preposition: "in which".
    fuil: rel. form of at-tá, 3sg. "is", *ina bhfuil:* "in which is".
    do: poss.adj. 2sg: "thy", "your", lenites, *do.*
    net: -o m. "nest", *nead* (f.2).
3   a díthrebaig: voc.sg. of díthrebach -o m. "hermit", *díthreabhach* (m.1), voc. *a dhíthreabhaigh.*
    nád: neg. rel. c. "that not", *nach, ná.*
    clind: = clinn, 3sg.pres.cj. of clinnid: "rings", *cling(eann).*
    cloc: -o m. "bell", *clog* (m.1).
4   bind: = binn, adj. -i "melodious", *binn.*
    boc: -o/-ā adj. "soft", *bog.*
    síthamail: adj. -i "peaceful" < síth = síd -s n. "peace" + adj. ending, *síth* (f.2), *-amhail > -úil: síthiúil.*
    t': do "thy", when followed by vowel, *d'l* (Munster Irish: *t'l*).
    ḟet: < fet -ā f. "whistle", *fead* (f.2).

The ModI forms of words ending in <t> and <c> (*net, fet, cloc, boc*) suggest the voiced pronunciation of these sounds in OI. Note the internal (cross-) rhymes in *luin, buide, muine, fuil,* and the correspondences of

sounds in *díthrebaig* (with slender <g>) and *síthamail*, and the double rhymes of *clind cloc* and *bind boc.* Dillon dates this poem as seventh or eighth century, but in *FDA* it is suggested it may be "as late as the eleventh". A late date seems to be confirmed by *sa muine* for more "correct" OI *isin muiniu*, the dat. sg. of a m. io-stem (see §4). Dillon also provides the translation by Kuno Meyer (1858-1919), one of the greatest Celticists ever. It runs: "Ah, blackbird, thou art satisfied / where-ever thy nest is in the thicket: / hermit that clinkest no bell, / sweet, soft, peaceful is thy note." See also Lehmann, p. 147, for a slightly different redaction.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Assignments

1. Make a rough phonetic transcription and practice the pronunciation of Texts I and II.
2. Translate Text A (see Additional Texts at the back of the book).

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>