Lessons taken from: David Stifter "Sengoidelc"
Old Irish for Beginners

The map to the left illustrates the areas in Western Europe where Celtic languages were spoken at the end of the 19th century. In the meantime these areas have shrunk dramatically.

Key to the map:

1. Irish, 2. Scots Gaelic, 3. Manx, 4. Welsh, 5. Cornish (not spoken anymore at that time), 6. Breton

Illustration 1.13: The modern Celtic languages around 1900

1.4.1. The Gaelic languages

Illustration 1.14: Panceltism

Primitive Irish is an archaic stage of Irish, written in the peculiar Ogam alphabet. As the Ogam alphabet was in use during a decisive period of the development of Irish, a lot of sound changes are directly observable on Ogam inscriptions. That is, in older inscriptions inflectional endings ultimately going back to PIE are still written, whereas in later inscriptions these endings have been lost. Ogam inscriptions practically only consist of personal names in the genitive case.

Irish, *Scottish Gaelic* and *Manx* form the *Goidelic* branch of Celtic. All three languages are 'Gaelic.' To avoid confusion it is best to refer to every language by its individual name. Up until late medieval times there existed only one literary standard. After Ireland had fallen under English dominion Scottish Gaelic and Manx started to develop standards of their own. The orthography of Scottish Gaelic is very similar to that of Irish, but Manx is written with English orthography! This can obscure important phonological distinctions of the language (e.g., the distinction between palatalized and non-palatalized consonants).

All Goidelic languages are minority languages in their respective countries and are in a very weak and vulnerable state. Despite being the first official language of Ireland, Irish as an everyday language is spoken only in a few remote areas, mainly on the west coast of the island. Approximately 2% of the Irish population regularly speaks Irish. Only in the last years has Irish become available on modern mass media like television. Scottish Gaelic is spoken mainly on the north western islands off the Scottish mainland. About 1% of the Scottish population speaks Gaelic. In Nova Scotia (Canada) a few Gaelic speaking villages used to exist, but the language has now ceased to be spoken. Manx was spoken on the Isle of Man and died out in the 1960s. Today efforts are made to revive the language.

1.4.2. The British languages

Welsh (Cymric), Cornish and Breton make up the *British* branch of Celtic. All three are closely related to one another, with Cornish and Breton being especially close. Cumbric, which died out some time in the Middle Ages, was spoken in North England and South Scotland and must have been very close to Welsh. Nearly nothing has come down to us of Cumbric. Perhaps Pictish, a language known from a handful of unintelligiable, early medieval inscriptions from Scotland, was a British language as well, but this is absolutely unclear.

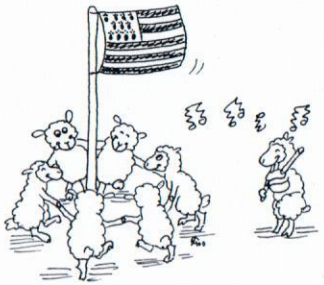


Illustration 1.15: Fest-Noz Brezhoneg

All British languages are minority languages in their respective countries. Welsh has about 600,000 speakers, a quarter of the population of Wales. In recent years it has been possible to halt the former rapid decline of speakers and the numbers have started to rise slightly again. Welsh is also spoken in a few villages in Patagonia (Argentina). Despite being situated on the European continent, Breton is called an Insular Celtic language, because the language was brought to Brittany by refugees from Britain in the early middle ages. Breton has about 250,000 speakers, most of whom are over 60 years of age. Because of France's francocentric language policy Breton is doomed to death in a few decades. Cornish died out in the late 18th century. This century efforts have been made to revive the language. A few hundred people speak it as their everyday language, several hundred more know the language, but they are divided into three different standards.

1.5. What is Old Irish?

The period of the 8th and 9th centuries in Irish language history is called Old Irish. Our first extant manuscripts containing Irish language material date from ca. the end of the 7th century and the beginning of the 8th century. The Irish literary tradition probably started at least a century earlier, but no manuscripts from that time have come down to us. Those texts written in the 7th century that have survived (e.g., many law texts like *Crith Gablach*) are to be found in much later manuscripts from the early modern times.

The earliest Old Irish texts in contemporary manuscripts have mainly survived not in Ireland, but in monasteries on the European continent. For the most part these texts do not contain narrative or poetic literature, but consist of very short interlinear glosses and translations of Latin texts: the Pauline epistles (*Wb.* = *Würzburg glosses*, middle of the 8th century), a commentary on the psalms (*Ml.* = *Milan glosses*, beginning of the 9th century) and the Latin grammar of Priscianus (*Sg.* = *St. Gall glosses*, middle of the 9th century). From Vienna stem two very short collections of glosses on the Easter calculation (*Vienna Bede*) and on Eutychius. In the library of the monastery of St. Paul im Lavanttal the very famous *Reichenau Codex*[2] (9th century) is kept, which contains five Old Irish poems, among them the popular poem on the scholar and his cat *Messe ocus Pangur Bán*. All these texts are collected in the *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* (*Thes.*). Rudolf THURNEYSEN's *Grammar of Old Irish* (GOI), which is the foundation of all modern hand-

[2] This codex can be found online at: http://www.rz.uni-potsdam.de/u/lingtri/schulheft/index.html

books of Old Irish, is based on the language of the Old Irish glosses. This is basically the language you will learn in this course.

Because even in that corpus linguistic variation can be observed, the language of basically the 8th century is called *Classical Old Irish*, while that of especially the end of the 9th century *Late Old Irish*. The language prior to that period, that is from the 7th century or perhaps even earlier, shows decisively older linguistic traits and is therefore called *Early Old Irish*. The period from the 10th to the 12th century is labelled *Middle Irish*. The language of that period shows a great amount of grammatical simplification in comparison to Old Irish, but also an amount of linguistic variation, which points to the state of a language in transition to a different grammatical system. *Modern Irish* then (ca. from 1200 onwards) is again a language with a fixed and standardized grammar.

The language encountered in Old Irish texts shows a surprisingly high degree of uniformity, with hardly any dialectal distinctions discernible, although these certainly must have existed at the time. From this it would seem that Old Irish was a literary language whose standard was taught to the Irish 'men of writing' in school, much as standardized Latin was taught to Continental pupils as a language of literary communication, long after Classical Latin had ceased to be a spoken language of the people. One may wonder if Classical Old Irish was ever spoken as such, or whether it was solely a written standard.

What makes the study of Old Irish maybe a bit more difficult than that of other languages? Apart from the intricacies of the grammar (e.g., it is sometimes hardly possible to recognize the underlying word in a given grammatical form), there are other factors that contribute to the difficulties one encounters when reading Old Irish texts. Most of the texts are not to be found in manuscripts of the time they were originally composed, but in much later copies. Copying, on the one hand, always leads to orthographic mistakes. On the other hand, the language of the scribes was younger than that of the texts they were copying; this often lead to 'automatic corrections,' when the scribes replaced older, obsolete grammatical forms with more familiar ones. Thus the texts changed over the course of time, and often they show an intricately intertwined mixture of Old, Middle and Modern Irish grammatical forms. Additionally, the orthography of Irish changed over the course of time, too, so that you may find in a manuscript one word written in Old Irish, the next in Modern Irish spelling and the third in a completely odd attempt at combining different standards.

You won't, however, encounter difficulties of the latter type in the present book. What I will be using is an idealized grammar of Old Irish in a purity that probably never existed in reality, spelled in a normalized orthography, that today is usually used for modern editions. But you should be aware of the fact that as soon as you start to work with real Irish texts and with manuscripts, you will meet with trouble.

Lesson 2

2.1. The writing of Old Irish

In the course of history three different writing systems were used for Irish:

1. the *Ogam* alphabet
2. the *Cló Gaelach* ('Irish type'—a variant of the Roman alphabet)
3. and the Roman alphabet.

2.2. Ogam

The oldest writing system is *Ogam* (Modern Irish spelling *Ogham*), most probably developed in Ireland itself or in the multicultural environment of southwest Britain during the later centuries of Roman rule. Ogam is a monumental script consisting of strokes and notches engraved on the edges of standing stones (*Ogam stones*). The extant inscriptions either served a funeral function or denoted land possession. Maybe Ogam was also used on wooden sticks for other purposes but nothing of that sort has remained in the archaeological record and the odd references in Irish sagas to that practice need not necessarily be taken at face value. Ogam was in use from the 4th to the 6th/7th century. Occasional references in popular books to Ogam inscriptions from North America are pure phantasy.

In medieval manuscript tradition names for the Ogam letters have come down to us. Often tree names are used for the names, but many of these arboreal identifications are more than dubious (a detailed discussion in McManus 1991: 36 ff.). Not all original phonological values of the Ogam letters are absolutely clear; values given in brackets in ill. 2.1 represent the certain or possible original value (cf. McManus 1991: 1–41).

Group I		
T	B	Beithe (Birch)
T	L	Luis (Rowan-tree)
T	F (V)	Fern (Alder)
T	S	Sail (Willow)
T	N	Nin (Ash-tree?)

Group II		
⊥	H (P/J?)	hÚath (Whitethorn, Fear?)
⊥	D	Dair (Oak)
⊥	T	Tinne (Holly?)
⊥	C	Coll (Hazel)
⊥	Q	Cert (Bush?)

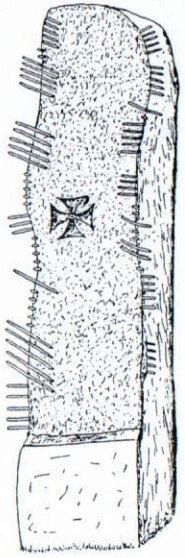
Illustration 2.1a: The Ogam alphabet

Group III		
M		Muin (Vine)
G		Gort (Ivy)
NG (G^{u})		nGétal (Killing)
Z (ST?)		Straif (Sulphur)
R		Ruis (Elder-tree)

Group IV		
A		Ailm (Pine-tree)
O		Onn (Ash-tree)
U		Úr (Heath)
E		Edad (Aspen?)
I		Idad (Yew Tree?)

Illustration 2.1b: The Ogam alphabet

Ill. 2.2 gives a typical example of an Ogam inscription, found at the northwest end of Mount Brandon (Dingle Peninsula, Co. Chiarraí) [CIIC 145, p. 140]. The Ogam inscription reads as follows (from left to right):



In Roman transliteration (Ogam inscriptions are always transliterated in uppercase!):

QRIMITIR RON[A]NN MAQ COMOGANN
'of the priest Rónán, the son of Comgán'

Since the inscription shows linguistically young, i.e., Archaic Irish forms (loss of final syllables, raising of *e* > *i* before a following *i*, loss of *g* between vowel and *n* with compensatory lengthening), it must be from a relatively late date, perhaps the later 5th or 6th century, but no absolute dating is possible. In earlier inscriptions the mentioned sound changes would not have taken place yet; at a Primitive Irish stage the inscription would probably have looked like *QREMITERI RONAGNI MAQI COMAGAGNI. Into classical Old Irish the inscription would translate as **cruimthir Rónáin maicc Comgáin.*

Illustration 2.2: Ogam stone, CIIC 145. Reprinted by permission of Four Courts Press

2.3. Cló Gaelach

In medieval times a special Irish writing style developed from the Roman semi-uncial scipt. At the early modern period with the invention of the printing press this Irish type was standardized as *Cló Gaelach* 'Irish type' for the printing of the Irish language. The *Cló Gaelach* is basically identical with the Roman alphabet, except for the shapes of a few letters (*g*, lowercase *r* and *s*). The *Cló Gaelach* was in use until the 1950s. In secondhand book shops you can find many books in this type, and the type is still often used to give public inscriptions a kind of old Irish flair. Older editions of Old Irish texts, especially from the 19th century, are also printed in *Cló Gaelach*.

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
l	m	n	o	p	r	s	t	u

Illustration 2.3: Cló Gaelach, the basic set of letters

The *Cló Gaelach* is a reduced variant of the Roman alphabet and basically consists of 18 letters. But in addition some of the letters can be combined with the diacritics <ˊ>[1] and <˙>. Moreover there is one special sign <7> for 'and.' The diacritic <ˊ> marks the length of a vowel, never the word accent (which in Old Irish basically is fixed on the first syllable). The name for the length mark in Irish is *síneadh fada*. The diacritic <˙> is the lenition mark, which in modern orthography is expressed by an <h> following the letter. The transliteration below is in modern Irish orthography.

á	bh	ch	dh	é	fh	gh	í	mh
ó	ph	sh	th	ú	agus			

Illustration 2.4: The diacritics of the *Cló Gaelach*

[1] '<' and '>' are the brackets used to indicate *graphemes*, i.e., the basic, distinctive written signs.

This is a detail of page 113 of the famous manuscript *Book of Leinster* (*Lebor Laignech* or LL = TCD MS 1339), written in the 12th century. You'll find the complete page at: http://www.isos.dcu.ie/tcd/tcd_ms_1339/jpgs/113.jpg

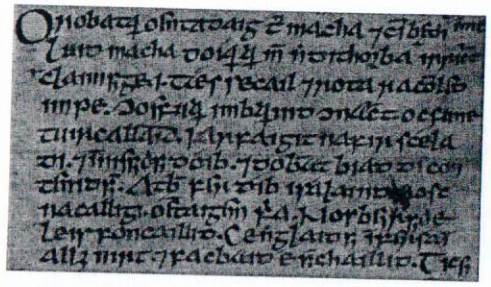


Illustration 2.5: portion of LL 20b. Reprinted by permission of the library of Trinity College Dublin

2.4. The Roman alphabet

Since the introduction of literacy into Ireland in the early Middle Ages Irish was, apart from Ogam inscriptions, written in the Roman alphabet, though in a special character that gradually developed into the *Cló Gaelach*. In the course of the reform of 1953, when a new Irish standard language ('*An Caighdeán Oifigiúil*') was created, the *Cló Gaelach* was abolished as the official Irish script and the standard Western European Roman alphabet with certain adaptations was again adopted. Old Irish texts have been printed using the Roman alphabet since last century.

The orthographic conventions for Irish (Old and Modern) are very different from 'usual' writing rules for European languages and will be dealt with in the following lesson.

Lesson 3

3.1. The phonological system of Old Irish in comparison

Phonemes are the basic sounds of a language that make distinctions between words. Thus it is easily comprehensible that the difference between the two German words <haus> 'house' and <maus> 'mouse' lies in the two initial sounds /h/[1] and /m/, which proves that the two are independent phonemes. But often phonemes of one language are not perceived as different sounds in another. For example /s/ and /z/ are two different phonemes in English, i.e., they make lexical distinctions: /su:/ (spelled <sue>) is something other than /zu:/ (spelled <zoo>), whereas in German they are merely variants of one another: /sone/ and /zone/ are only different pronunciations of the same word <sonne> 'sun.' In this case we say that /s/ and /z/ are allophones in German. The phonological system of a language is the whole complex of its phonemes and their interrelations. Traditionally these phonemes are grouped according to certain phonetic features. Every language, and even every dialect of a language, has its own, individual phonological system that distinguishes it from other languages. Old Irish possesses an extremely high number of phonemes in comparison to other European languages. Old Irish has an especially high number of consonantal phonemes.

In nearly no alphabetically written language is there a correspondence in the number of phonemes and graphemes. In most cases the number of phonemes exceeds the number of graphemes by far. But there is hardly another language where the difference between phonemes and graphemes is as blatant as in Old Irish. Eighteen letters are used to express 66 sounds, which means that on an average every letter has more than 3 meanings, depending on the position in the word or sentence and depending on the surrounding letters.

In the following table (illus. 3.1) a few languages are compared as regards the numbers of their phonemes and the numbers of letters used in their respective orthographic systems. The phonemes are further separated into consonants, vowels and diphthongs. Sometimes letters may have both consonantal and vocalic values, as in English where <y> can be a consonant as in <year> or a vowel as in <by>. This is indicated by a number after a '+' in the fourth column.

Note:

1. If graphemes for long vowels marked with the *síneadh fada* (which is not obligatory in Old Irish) are counted separately from short vowel graphemes, one arrives at 23 graphemes (13/10). If one adds the letters with the *punctum delens*, which was not used in the earliest Old Irish period and prevailed only in Modern Irish, one arrives at 32 graphemes (22/10).

2. In THURNEYSEN's phonological system of Old Irish (GOI 96 ff.), which has velarization ('u-quality') as a third series of consonantal quality beside palatalization and non-palatalization, and gemination as a further mutation beside lenition, nasalization and aspiration, there is a record number of nearly 100 phonemes in Old Irish. A phoneme system of that type is typologically very improbable, however, and THURNEYSEN's system is generally not used any more today.

[1] Two slashes '/ /' indicate phonemes. I will make heavy use of phonological transcriptions in this book.

language	phonemes total	cons. / vowels / diphthongs	letters total	consonant / vowel graphemes
Old Irish	66	42 / 11 / 13	18	13 / 5
Modern Irish	52	37 / 11 / 4	18	13 / 5
Scottish Gaelic	67	38 / 19 / 10	18	13 / 5
North Welsh	54	26 / 13 / 15	22	14+2 / 5+2
Russian	51	40 / 6 / 5	33	21+2 / 10
English	44	24 / 12 / 8	26	20+1 / 5+1
German	40	22 / 15 / 3	30	21 / 9
Latin	31	17 / 10 / 4	23	17+2 / 4+2
PIE	40	25 / 11 / 4	-	-

Illustration 3.1: The phonological system of Old Irish in comparison with other European languages

3.2. The phonological system of Old Irish

The following illustration lists all phonemes of Old Irish. At the same time it presents the phonological transcription of Old Irish that I will use in this book.

1. vowels:

1.1. short vowels

i u
e ə o
a

1.2. long vowels

ī ū
ē ō
ā

1.3. diphthongs:

aį̄ aų̄ (oų̄) āų̄ (ōų̄)
oį̄ eų̄ ēų̄
(uį̄) ių̄ īų̄
ia ua

2. consonants:

2.1. sonorants:

2.1.1. unlenited, non-palatalized:	m	n	ŋ	r	l	
2.1.2. unlenited, palatalized:	m’	n’	ŋ’	r’	l’	
2.1.3. lenited, non-palatalized:	μ	ν		ρ	λ	
2.1.4. lenited, palatalized:	μ’	ν’		ρ’	λ’	

2.2. occlusives (and fricatives):

2.2.1. unlenited, non-palatalized:	b	d	g	p	t	k
2.2.2. unlenited, palatalized:	b’	d’	g’	p’	t’	k’
2.2.3. lenited, non-palatalized:	β	δ	γ	f/φ	θ	χ
2.2.4. lenited, palatalized:	β’	δ’	γ’	f’/φ’	θ’	χ’

2.3. sibilants (and aspirates):

2.3.1. unlenited, non-palatalized:	s
2.3.2. unlenited, palatalized:	s’
2.3.3. lenited, non-palatalized:	h
2.3.4. lenited, palatalized:	h’

Illustration 3.2: The phonological system of Old Irish

3.2.1. Vowels

3.2.1.1. The vowels are pronounced with their classical European quality, not with their English quality.

3.2.1.2. /ə/ *schwa* is a murmured sound without a distinct quality that in Old Irish appears only in unaccented syllables. Short vowels are sometimes marked by a special diacritic, e.g., /ă/.

3.2.1.3. Sometimes you can find long vowels represented by the vowel followed by a colon, e.g., /i:/. Early Old Irish apparently had two allophones of long e, namely closed /ē/ and open /ɛ̄/, which behaved differently in certain contexts. But for simplicity's sake I will render both with /ē/ in my phonological transcriptions.

3.2.1.4. My rendering of the diphthong system draws an idealized picture valid only for the earliest period of Old Irish. Already in Classical Old Irish /oų̄/ and /aų̄/ had mostly developed into monophtongs. If /uį̄/ ever existed as a separate diphthong different from /oį̄/, the two must have merged very early. The /aį̄/ and /oį̄/ merged during the Old Irish period and eventually developed into a mid high monophthong which in modern orthography is spelled <ao> and <aoi>. The only Old Irish diphthongs still extant in Modern Irish are /ia/ and /ua/. All the other modern diphthongs, very numerous in modern Gaelic languages, developed later from other sound clusters.

The sign /į̄/ represents English consonantal <y>, German <j>, as in *year* or *jahr*. The /ų̄/ represents English <w> as in *water*.

3.2.2. Consonants

Every Old Irish consonant (with the exception of /ŋ/) can appear in four different forms, depending on the presence or absence of the two features *palatalization* and *lenition*. The difference that the various possibilities make can be demonstrated with some examples: /bal/ 'member,' /bal'/ 'members,' /baλ/ 'situation (nom.),' /baλ'/ 'situation (acc.);' or /rōd/ 'road,' /rōd'/ 'roads,' Early Old Irish /rōδ/ 'fierce (sg.),' Early Old Irish /rōδ'/ 'fierce (pl.).'

3.2.2.1. *Palatalization* means the pronunciation of a sound with the back of the tongue raised towards the palate (roof of the mouth). If you try to pronounce a /į̄/ immediately following a consonant you produce its palatalized variant. Non-palatalization, on the other hand, is the 'normal' neutral pronunciation. In phonological transcriptions palatalization is usually marked by an apostrophe <'> after the palatalized consonant; non-palatalization remains unmarked. The Modern Irish term for non-palatalized consonants is *leathan* 'broad,' while palatalized consonants are called *caol* 'slender.'

In Irish the opposition between palatalized vs. non-palatalized extends to all consonants. In other languages (e.g., Romance and many Slavic languages) only some consonants are subject to

this opposition (e.g., in Spanish the opposition between <n> and <ñ>). Another language where the palatalization opposition extends to almost the whole system is Russian. In consequence the number of consonantal phonemes in Russian is nearly as high as in Old Irish (see illus. 3.1).

3.2.2.2. *Lenition* is a complex phenomenon in Old Irish (and in Insular Celtic as a whole), but basically it means the 'relaxed' pronunciation of a consonant. In Old Irish lenition means that the place of articulation of the consonant in question more or less stays the same, but in contrast to the unlenited pronunciation no perfect occlusion is reached during the articulation: the mouth is left open a little bit. In the end this can result in sounds that differ markedly from their unlenited variants.

3.2.2.3. /k p t/ are pronounced, more or less like in English or Standard German, as voiceless stops with a slight aspiration. /b d g f m h/ are pronounced as in English and German, /β φ/ like English <v> and <f>. /s/ is pronounced as in English and German, but palatalized /s'/ is pronounced like English <sh> or German <sch>. /s/ and /s'/ are always voiceless in Irish. It is a matter of dispute if a palatalized variant of /h/ existed, but I set it up in this book for systematic reasons. /ŋ/ is the product of nasalization of /g/, and in Old Irish it is always followed by /g/. It is pronounced like <ng> in English <king>, but unlike in English or German the /ŋ/-sound can also appear at the beginning of a word, e.g., *a ngothae* /a ŋgoθe/ 'their voices.'

3.2.2.4. For the transcription of the lenited sounds I use Greek letters.

/μ/ is pronounced like /β/, but with a nasal quality. In other publications you may find this sound transcribed as /v̄/.

/ν/[2] is more or less pronounced like German or English single <n>. The unlenited Old Irish /n/, on the other hand, is pronounced somewhat stronger, probably taking a bit more time. In other publications you may find the unlenited sound transcribed as /n:/ or as /N/, with /n/ being used for the lenited variant.

/ρ/[3] is pronounced with one flap of the tip of the tongue. The unlenited Old Irish /r/ on the other hand is pronounced with a sequence of trills of the tongue. This opposition is similar to the one in Spanish between <r> in <pero> 'but' and <rr> in <perro> 'dog.' In other publications you may find the unlenited sound transcribed as /r:/ or as /R/, with /r/ being used for the lenited variant.

/λ/ is more or less pronounced like a German or English single <l>. The unlenited Old Irish /l/ on the other hand is pronounced somewhat stronger, probably taking a bit more time. In other publications you may find the unlenited sound transcribed as /l:/ or as /L/, with /l/ being used for the lenited variant.

/β/ is a labial sound as in Latin *Vergilius*. In other publications you may find this sound transcribed as /v/.

/ð/ is pronounced somewhat like the English voiced <th> in <this, that, father>.[4] In other publications you may find this sound transcribed as /ð/.

[2] This sign is a Greek <ν> 'ny'; do not confuse it with Latin <v> 've'!
[3] This sign is a Greek <ρ> 'rho'; do not confuse it with Latin <p> 'pe'!
[4] Maybe, however, the tip of the tongue did not rest between the two rows of the teeth, but rather on the base of the upper teeth (alveols).

/ɣ/ is pronounced like <g> in Dutch, Modern Greek or Ukrainian, like <g> intervocally in Spanish or <gh> in Arabic, that is, it is the voiced counterpart to German <ch>. Palatalized /ɣ'/ is close to /j/.

/φ/ is actually the same sound as /f/. It is only used sometimes for systematic reasons to represent *ph*, that is, lenited *p*.

/θ/ is pronounced somewhat like the English voiceless <th> in <thick, thin>.

Unpalatalized /χ/ is pronounced like German <ch> in <ach, Bach>; palatalized /χ'/ is pronounced like German <ch> in <ich, dich>. Sometimes /x/ is used to represent this sound.

3.3. Pronunciation rules

Until now we have been talking only about the abstract phonological system of Old Irish. Now we are turning our attention to the actual graphematic realization, that is the orthography and the pronunciation of written Old Irish.

The pronunciation rules of Old Irish are very complex. The pronunciation of vowels depends on whether they stand in accented or unaccented syllables, or whether they are simply used as markers for the palatalization or the non-palatalization of consonants, in which case they are not pronounced at all. The pronunciation of consonants is determined by their position at the beginning or inside the word, whether they stand in a consonant cluster or not, and by the quality of the preceding or following vowel. Moreover the syntactical position within the sentence has an impact on the realization of *anlauting*[5] consonants as well. But step by step now (from now on I won't put Old Irish graphemes between < > brackets any more, but I will print them in italics):

3.3.1. *c p t*

1. *c, p, t* are pronounced as voiceless stops /k p t/ in *anlaut*, with some aspiration as in English and standard German, which, however, I won't mark in the phonological transcription: *cor* /koρ/ 'the putting,' *poll* /pol/ 'hole,' *tol* /toλ/ 'wish.' *Anlauting p* appears only in loan words.

2. Between vowels and in *auslaut* after vowels they are pronounced as voiced stops /g b d/: *bucae* /buge/ 'softness,' *boc* /bog/ 'soft,' *popul* /pobuλ/ 'people,' *op* /ob/ 'refusal,' *fotae* /fode/ 'long,' *fot* /fod/ 'length.' In most consonant clusters in the interior of words they represent voiced sounds as well, but no absolute rule can be given for that: *ecnae* /egve/ 'wisdom,' *·eipret* /eb'ρ'əd/ 'they say,' *cétnae* /k'ēdve/ 'the same.'

3. After *r, l, n* in the interior or in the *auslaut* of a word no rule can be given: *derc* /d'erk/ 'hole,' but *derc* or *derg* /d'erg/ 'red,' *olc* /olk/ 'bad,' *delc* or *delg* /d'elg/ 'thorn;' *certa* /k'erta/ 'rights,' *cartae* /kaρde/ 'they who love,' *daltae* /dalte/ 'fosterling,' *celtae* /k'elde/ 'they who hide,' *anta* /anta/ 'staying (gen. sg.),' *antae* /ande/ 'they who stay.' Take special note of pairs such as the following: *altae* /alte/ '(s)he was reared' and *altae* /alde/ 'they who rear.'

4. When written double *c, p, t* most often mean voiceless /k p t/ in the interior or in the *auslaut* of words. Unfortunately *c, p, t* may be written with single letters in these cases as well: *mac(c)* /mak/ 'son,' *boc(c)* /bok/ 'he-goat,' *at(t)* /at/ 'the swelling,' *at(t)ach* /atəχ/ 'refuge, the praying,' *sop(p)* /sop/ 'wisp, tuft.' And even more unfortunately *cc, pp, tt* may mean voiced /g b d/ as

[5] Note the following terms: *anlaut* means absolute word-initial position, *inlaut* is word-interior position, and *auslaut* is absolute word-final position.

well: *macc* /mak/ 'son' and *bratt* /brat/ 'coat' have /k t/, but *becc* /b'eg/ 'small' and *brott* /brod/ 'goad, whip' have /g d/.

3.3.2. *b d g*

1. *b, d, g* are pronounced as voiced stops /b d g/ in *anlaut*: *gel* /g'eλ/ 'bright,' *bun* /buv/ 'ground, base,' *dul* /duλ/ 'the going.'

2. Between vowels and in *auslaut* after vowels they are pronounced as voiced fricatives /β δ γ/: *togu* /toγu/ 'choice,' *mug* /muγ/ 'slave,' *dubae* /duβe/ 'sadness,' *dub* /duβ/ 'black,' *mod* /moδ/ 'manner, mode,' *bádud* /bāδuδ/ 'the drowning.' In most word interior consonant clusters they are pronounced as voiced fricatives as well, although, as can be seen from the examples in 3.3.1.3, they can also stand for /b d g/, especially after *r, l, n*.

3. If written double *bb, dd, gg* mean voiced stops /b d g/, e.g., *abb* /ab/ 'abbot.'

4. After certain proclitic elements and in certain syntactical constructions initial *b, d, g, p, t, c* don't have their *anlaut* values, but those of word interior position. More will be explained about this in the chapter about mutations in lesson 4.

3.3.3. *ch ph th*

1. *ch, ph, th* are the voiceless fricatives /χ φ θ/; *ph* is identical in pronunciation with *f*: *ech* /eχ/ 'horse,' *oíph* /oiφ/ 'beauty,' *áth* /āθ/ 'ford,' *a chatt* /a χat/ 'his cat,' *in phían* /iv φiav/ 'the pain,' *mo thech* /mo θ'eχ/ 'my house.'

3.3.4. *f*

1. *f* is the voiceless fricative /f/: *féil* /f'ēλ'/ 'feast-day,' *léicfid* /l'ēg'f'əð'/ 'he will let.' In certain syntactic constructions it means /β/ in *anlaut*: *a féil* /a β'ēλ'/ 'their feast-day.' *ḟ* (often, especially in old texts, also *f* without the *punctum delens*) represents the 'non-sound' / /: *a ḟéil, a féil* /a ēλ'/ 'his feast-day,' *neimḟírinnech, neimfírinnech* /n'eμ'ĭp'ən'əχ/ 'untruthful.'

3.3.5. *s x*

1. *s* is the voiceless sibilant /s/: *sail* /saλ'/ 'willow,' *leis* /l'es'/ 'with him.' In word-internal position especially after short vowels, /s/ can be written with double *ss*: *leiss* = *leis* /l'es'/ 'with him,' *cossa* = *cosa* /kosa/ 'feet.' *ṡ* (often, especially in old texts, also *s* without the *punctum delens*) represents /h/: *a ṡíl, a síl* /a h'ĭλ/ 'his seed, his offspring,' *drochṡúil, drochsúil* /droχhūλ'/ 'evil eye;' *x* and *chs* represent the consonant cluster /χs/: *foxal, fochsal* /foχsəλ/ 'abduction.'

3.3.6. *r l n*

1. In *anlaut r, l, n* are pronounced as strong /r l n/: *rún* /rūv/ 'secret,' *lebor* /l'eβəρ/ 'book,' *not* /nod/ 'note.' The same is true for double *rr, ll, nn*: *corr* /kor/ 'crane,' *coll* /kol/ 'hazel,' *cenn* /k'en/ 'head,' *a llibuir* /a l'iβuρ'/ 'her/their books,' *a rríge* /a r'ĭγ'e/ 'the/her/their kingdom,' *cenna* /k'ena/ 'heads.' The same pronunciation is true most of the time for the position before *t, d, s, l, r, n* and after *s, l, r, n*.

2. Between vowels and in *auslaut* after vowels single *r, l, n* are pronounced as lenited /ρ λ ν/: *torad* /toρəδ/ 'fruit,' *tola* /toλa/ 'desires,' *cona* /kova/ 'dogs (acc. pl.),' *cor* /koρ/ 'contract,' *col* /koλ/ 'sin,' *son* /sov/ 'sound.' The same is true for *anlauting r, l, n* when preceded by leniting words: *mo lebor* /mo λ'eβəρ/ 'my book,' *dond noí* /dond voj/ 'to the boat.'

3.3.7. *m*

1. *m* in *anlaut* represents /m/: *marb* /marβ/ 'dead.'

2. In the interior of words and in *auslaut m* is pronounced as the bilabial, nasal fricative /μ/: *dáma* /dāμa/ 'companies,' *dam* /daμ/ 'ox, stag.' The same is true for *anlauting m* when preceded by a leniting word: *a máthair* /a μāθəρ'/ 'his mother.'

3. Double *mm* always represents /m/: *móraimm* /mōpəm'/ 'I praise,' *lomma* /loma/ plural of *lomm* /lom/ 'naked,' *a mmáthair* /a māθəρ'/ 'her/their mother.' Unfortunately, all these cases can be written with a single *m* as well: *móraim* /mōpəm'/ 'I praise,' *loma* /loma/ plural of *lom* /lom/ 'naked,' *a máthair* /a māθəρ'/ 'her/their mother.'

3.3.8. *nd mb*

1. In early Old Irish *nd* and *mb* stood for /nd/ and /mb/ (also in the beginning of words). But from late Old Irish onwards they were pronounced as /n/ and /m/ and are freely interchangeable with *nn* and *mm* in the manuscripts.

3.3.9. *h*

1. In the earliest sources of Old Irish *h* seems to be an empty letter, which means that it stands for nothing (except in the digraphs *ch, ph, th*, where it marks lenition). One theory says that the letter *h* before vowels in the *anlaut* of short words was used to make the word look bigger: e.g., *hi* /i/ 'in,' *hí* /ĭ/ a deictic particle, *húair* /uap'/ 'hour, because.' Phonetic /h/ that results from lenition of *s* is written *ṡ* or *s*: *a ṡúil, a súil* /a hūλ'/. Phonetic /h/ that results from aspiration ('h-mutation') is usually not written: *a ech* /a h'eχ/ 'her horse,' *inna Éirenn* /ina h'ēρ'ən/ 'of Ireland.'[6] In later texts and manuscripts, however, written *h* usually does represent the sound /h/, though instances of cases like *hi* for /i/ also occur frequently.

3.3.10. Vowels

1. The short vowels *a, e, i, o, u* are pronounced with their own quality only in stressed syllables and in absolute *auslaut*, that is in the last syllable if no other consonant follows: *dam* /daμ/ 'ox, stag,' *fer* /f'eρ/ 'man,' *fir* /f'iρ'/ 'men,' *tola* /toλa/ 'desires,' *subach* /suβəχ/ 'happy,' *túatha* /tuaθa/ 'tribes, nations,' *céile* /k'ēλ'e/ 'client,' *céili* /k'ēλ'i/ 'clients,' *inna súlo* /ina sūλo/ 'of the eye,' *a ḟiru* /a ipu/ 'oh men!'

2. In Old Irish all nouns and adjectives are stressed on the first syllable.[7] Only some adverbs, e.g., those starting with *in-*, are stressed on the second syllable. Where necessary, the accent in

[6] For a different opinion on the nature of Old Irish *h* in the earliest sources see: Peter SCHRIJVER, 'On the Nature and Origin of Word-Initial *H-* in the Würzburg Glosses,' *Ériu* 48 (1997), 205–227.

[7] This definition only holds true from a modern point of view of Old Irish parts of speech under the assumption that articles, prepositions and other particles are separate words of their own. It seems, however, that in earliest times Irish men of letters had a different concept of 'words.' Judging by the spellings found, for example, in the Old Irish glosses, it would emerge that anything that fell under one stress was conceived to belong to a single word. In the following two examples the stressed vowels have an understroke: 'he imitates my manners' was spelled with two orthographic words in *Wb.* 9a15 *insa̱mlatharside mobḗsusa*, whereas we would today write *in·samlathar-side mo bésu-sa*; or *tresinfu̱il sto̱ridi ado̱parar cachdia̱ forsinda̱ltoir* (*Wb.* 20d13) 'through the spiritual blood which is offered every day

phonological transcriptions is represented by the acute <ˊ>: *indíu* /in'd'ḯu̯/ 'today,' *innuraid* /inu̯ráðə'/ 'last year,' *alaile* /aλ.a̯l'e/ 'the other, some.' Some word classes like prepositions, possessive pronouns and articles are unstressed. In compound verbs, which means verbs that consist of more than only the verbal root plus ending, at the beginning of the sentence the stress falls on the second element; in fact the second element is treated as the beginning of the word also in other respects. In this book the second element in the 'verbal complex' will be marked by a preceding mid-high dot <·>;[8] the stress falls immediately after the dot: *as·beir* /as·b'e̯p'/ 'he says,' *condid·nderoímed* /kond'əð·n'd'e̯roi̯μ'əð'/ 'so that he should protect him.'

3. In non-final unstressed syllables all short vowels except for *u* represent /ə/ 'schwa,' that is a short, murmured sound without full vocalic quality. How this *schwa* is spelled is determined by the quality of the surrounding consonants:[9]

3.1. /CəC/: <CaC>
If both surrounding consonants are non-palatalized, *schwa* is spelled with *a*: *tabart* /taβərt/ 'the giving.'

3.2. /CəC'/: <CaiC> or <CiC>
If the preceding consonant is non-palatalized and the following is palatalized, *schwa* is spelled with *ai* or *i*: *formait* or *formit* /formədʼ/ 'envy.'

3.3. /C'əC/: <CeC>
If the preceding consonant is palatalized and the following is non-palatalized, *schwa* is spelled with *e*: *epert* /eb'ərt/ 'the saying.'

3.4. /C'əC'/: <CiC>
If both consonants are palatalized, *schwa* is spelled with *i*: *baitsid* /bat's'əð'/ 'he baptizes.' Note the possibility of confusion with case 3.2.

Etymological spellings can overrule these rules. In the vicinity of labial sounds (*m, b, p*) *schwa* can be represented by *o* or *u*, e.g., the personal name *Conchobor* /kovχəβəp/. Where *u* is found in an unstressed, non-final syllable it means that /u/ and not /ə/ *schwa* is the sound to be pronounced in this syllable; *iu* in unstressed syllables stands for /u/ after a palatalized consonant, e.g., *fothugud* /foθuγuð/ 'the establishing,' *léiciud* /l'ḛg'uð/ 'the letting.'

4. The long vowels *á, é, í, ó, ú* are pronounced longer than their short counterparts. They always retain their own quality, irrespective of their position. For /ḛ/ sometimes *æ* or *ǽ* is written. Sometimes, especially in early texts, the length of a vowel can be indicated by the double spelling of the vowel, e.g., *rii* or *ríi* /r'ī/ 'king.' It seems as if at no stage of medieval Irish history the marking of vowel length by the *síneadh fada* <ˊ> was obligatory; it could always be left out, leaving the vowel length orthographically unexpressed.

5. Diphthongs (not to be confused with the vocalic digraphs, see 3.3.10.6 below!) always retain their own quality. In normalized editions the diphthong /oi̯/ is written *oí* and *óe*, the diphthong

upon the altar' would break up into the following eight words *tresin fuil storidi ad·oparar cach dia forsind altōir* in modern editions. If we based our phonological analysis of Old Irish accent rules on these spelling conventions, things would become much more complicated and we could in no way speak of regular initial stress in Old Irish.

[8] A hyphen <-> is used by some scholars to indicate the same thing. In many Old Irish text editions, however, and of course in the manuscripts themselves, the pre-accentual part of the verb may be separated from the accented part by a space, or the position of the stress may be not indicated orthographically at all: the verbal form is written as one word.

[9] In this course C is used as cover symbol for all consonants.

/ai̯/ is written *aí* and *ǽe* (note the position of the *síneadh fada*!): *lóech, loích* /loiχ/ 'warrior,' *maíl, máel* /mai̯λ/ 'shorn, bald.' *ǽe* and *óe* can only be used before non-palatalized consonants. The variants *oí* and *aí* stand mostly before palatalized consonants, but they may also be used before non-palatalized consonants.

The diphthongs /ōu̯/ and /āu̯/ are written *óu* and *áu, áo* in normalized editions: *báo* /bāu̯/ genitive singular of 'cow.'

The diphthong /ḛu̯/ is written *éo, éu*, the diphthong /īu̯/ is written *íu*, the diphthong /ui̯/ is written *uí*: *béo, béu* /b'ḛu̯/ 'alive,' *indíu* /in'd'ḯu̯/ 'today,' *druí* /drui̯/ 'druid.'

The diphthongs /ia/ and /ua/ are written *ía* and *úa*: *grían* /g'r'iav/ 'sun,' *trúag* /truaγ/ 'sad.'

Never mistake a manual for real life! In the manuscripts the use and the position of the *síneadh fada* varies freely. To avoid confusion with the vocalic digraphs and with hiatus forms I will adhere to the normalized practice outlined above.

6. In addition to the diphthongs, which count as one syllable, in Old Irish so-called *hiatuses* exist. These are sequences of two vowels (mainly *ia, iu* and *ie*) that have to be pronounced as two syllables. They are recognizable in normalized orthography by the fact that unlike the corresponding diphthongs, no *síneadh fada* is written on them. In transcription they are represented by forms with <¨> *dieresis* or *trema*[10]: disyllabic *fiach* /f'iəχ/ 'raven' (but monosyllabic *fíach* /f'iaχ/ 'a legal due'), *nie* /n'ië/ 'nephew,' *friu* /f'r'iü f'r'ihu/ 'towards them.' Sometimes the *dieresis* is also used in text editions to indicate hiatus. Hiatuses fell together with their diphthongic counterparts rather early in the Gaelic language of Ireland, but they have mostly remained until today in spoken Scottish Gaelic.

3.3.11. The marking of palatalization and non-palatalization

As stated in 2.7.4 above, every consonant in Old Irish can appear either palatalized or non-palatalized ('neutral'). In phonological transcriptions palatalization is marked with the apostrophe <'>;[11] but Old Irish orthography uses other means to express this distinction:

1. An *anlauting* consonant is palatalized if followed by one of the front vowels *i, e, í, é*: *síl* /s'ī.λ/ 'seed, offspring,' *gillae* /g'ile/ 'boy, servant,' *sel* /s'eλ/ 'a while,' *dér* /d'ḛp/ 'tear.'

2. The same is basically true for word interior consonants. In most cases a purely orthographic *i* that has no sound value is added before the consonant in question: *berid* and *beirid* /b'ep'əð'/ 'he carries,' *céle* and *céile* /k'ḛλ'e/ 'client,' *magen* and *maigen* /maγ'əv/ 'field.'

3. In *auslaut* palatalization is indicated by a preceding *i*, which is purely orthographic and has no sound value; cf. the minimal pairs:

ben /b'ev/ 'woman'	vs.	*bein* /b'ev'/ 'woman' archaic acc. sg
ór /ōp/ 'gold'	vs.	*óir* /ōp'/ 'of the gold' gen. sg
gabál /gaβāλ/ 'the taking'	vs.	*gabáil* /gaβāλ'/ 'the taking' prep., acc. sg.

4. The use of *i* to indicate palatalization of a following consonant creates the non-diphthongic digraphs *ai, ei, oi, ui, ái, éi, ói, úi*, which stand for the monophthongs /a e o u ā ē ō ū/ before a

[10] The forms with *dieresis* /ə ä ö ü/ in transcription have nothing to do with German *umlaut*! These letters only represent tautosyllabic /ə a o u/ in Irish words after another vowel.

[11] Of course the reverse is true as well: if in a phonological transcription no apostrophe <'> is written, the preceding consonant is not palatalized.

palatalized consonant: *gaib* /gaβ'/ 'take!,' *beir* /b'eρ'/ 'carry!,' *óir* /ōρ'/ 'of the gold,' *dúin* /dūv'/ 'of the fort' etc. Real diphthongs are written *aí, áe, oí, óe, uí* (see 3.3.10.5. above). The diphthongs *aí* and *oí* are usually used before palatalized consonants; *áe* and *óe* are consistently used before non-palatalized consonants.

5. If followed by one of the back vowels *a, o, u, á, ó, ú*, any consonant is non-palatalized. A consonant in *auslaut* is non-palatalized if no *i* precedes it.

6. To complicate matters, in unstressed word interior syllables *i may* follow directly a non-palatalized consonant or an *a* can be inserted before it: *berid* and *beraid* can both stand for /b'eρəð'/ 'he may carry'[12] (see 3.3.10.3 above).

7. In words of one syllable with *i* or *í* as their vowel no distinction between palatalization or non-palatalization of the *auslauting* consonant can be made: *mind* /m'ind/ nom. sg. of 'diadem,' but *mind* /m'in'd'/ gen. sg. of 'diadem.' In later times and in Modern Irish orthography an *o* is written in such cases to indicate non-palatalization: *mionn* /m'in/.

8. In absolute *auslaut* the following conventions are used: *-i* and *-e may* follow directly a non-palatalized consonant, or a purely orthographical *a* can be inserted before them: *dalte, daltae* /dalte/ 'fosterling,' *dalti, daltai* /dalti/ 'fosterlings' (spellings like *dalte* or *dalti* are of course ambiguous, as they could theoretically also indicate a palatalized consonant before the *e/i*). *-iu* stands for a /u/ after a palatalized consonant: *Laigniu, Lagniu* /laγ'v'u/ 'inhabitants of Leinster (acc. pl.);' *-ea* and *-eo* stand for /a/ and /o/ after palatalized consonants: *doirsea, dorsea* /doρ's'a/ 'doors,' *toimseo* /toμ's'o/ 'measure (gen. sg.).'

3.3.12. One final word

You'll find tables displaying the spellings of Old Irish phonemes in Appendix F.1 and F.2. In the previous pages many subtleties of Old Irish orthography had to be silently passed over in order not to extend the length of the lesson. Certain aspects of the orthography changed over the centuries, and the scribes often confused old and modern spelling conventions, so that in the manuscripts you will hardly ever encounter texts that conform 100% to the rules laid out above. In reality Old Irish orthography is much more complicated, and the only way to come to terms with it is to read and read and read...

Illustration 3.3: A sheep after having tried to master Old Irish orthography

[12] Note: *berid* can stand for *beirid* /b'eρ'əð'/ 'he carries' and *beraid* /b'eρəð'/ 'he may carry'!

3.4. Sample texts with phonological analysis

3.4.1 *Scél lemm dúib*

The following is an Old Irish poem about the coming of winter in Old Irish orthography and a phonological transcription. I followed Gerard MURPHY (*Early Irish Lyrics*, Oxford 1956: 160) in the wording, but I adapted the orthography of the poem a little bit. The translation is rather free.

Scél lemm dúib	phonological transcription	News of Winter
Scél lemm dúib:	s'k'ɘ̄λ l'em dūβ'	News for you,
dordaid dam,	dordəð' daμ	hear stags bell,
snigid gaim,	s'n'iγ'əð' gaμ'	winter snows,
ro·fáith sam;	ro·fāθ' saμ	summer's gone;
gáeth ard úar,	gaɨθ ard uaρ	wind, strong, cold,
ísel grían,	ɪs'əλ g'r'iav	sun is low,
gair a rith,	gaρ' a r'iθ	short his course,
ruirthech rían;	ruρ'θ'əχ r'iav	heavy sea;
rorúad rath,	roρuað raθ	fern rust-red,
ro·cleth cruth,	ro·k'l'eθ kruθ	lost its shape,
ro·gab gnáth	ro·gaβ gnāθ	wild-goose cries
giugrann guth;	g'iu̯γρən guθ	usual cry;
ro·gab úacht	ro·gaβ uaχt	cold takes hold
etti én,	et'i h'ɘ̄v	of birds' wings,
aigre ré:	aγ'ρ'e r'ɘ̄	time of ice:
é mo scél.	ɘ̄ mo s'k'ɘ̄λ	that's my news.

3.4.2 The opening sentences of *Scéla Muicce Meic Dathó*

The following passage is taken (again with some slight adaptations in spelling) from Rudolf THURNEYSEN's edition of *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó* 'The Tale of Mac Da Thó's Pig' (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. Medieval and Modern Irish Series 6, Dublin 1935). The phonological transcription and the translation again are mine.

Text:

Boí rí amrae for Laignib, Mac Dathó a ainm. Boí cú occo. Im·díched in cú Laigniu uili. Ailbe ainm in chon, ocus ba lán Ériu dia air-dircus in chon. Do·eth ó Ailill ocus ó Meidb do chungid in chon. Immalle dano táncatar ocus techta Ulad ocus Chonchobair do chungid in chon chétnai. Ro·ferad fáilte friu uili, ocus ructha cuci-sium isin mbrudin. Is sí-sin in chóiced bruden ro·boí i nÉrinn isind aimsir-sin, ocus bruden Da-Derg i crích Cúalann ocus bruden Forgaill Manaich ocus bruden Maic Da-Réo i mBréfni ocus bruden Da-Choca i n-íarthur Midi.

Phonological Transcription:

boi̯ r'ĭ aμpe foρ laγ'v'əβ', mak daθō a an'm'. boi̯ kū ogo. im'·d'ĭχ'əð in kū laγ'v'u huλ'ĭ. aλ'β'e an'm' in χov, ogus ba lāv ēp'u d'iä ap'-ð'ər'k'us in χov. do·eθ ō aλ'əl' ogus ō μ'eð'β' do χuŋ'g'əð' in χov. iməl'é dəvó tāvgədəρ ogus t'eχta uλəð ogus χovχəβəρ' do χuŋ'g'əð' in χov χēdvi. ro·f'epəð fāl't'e f'r'ihu huλ'ĭ, ogus ρugθa kugi-s'uμ is'əv mbruð'əv'. is s'ĭ-s'iv' in χōg'əð βρuð'əv ro·βoi̯ i v'ēρ'ən' is'ənd am's'əρ'-s'iv', ogus βρuð'ən da-ð'erg i g'r'ĭχ' kua-λən ogus βρuð'əv orgəl' μavəχ' ogus βρuð'əv μak' ða-ρ'ēu̯ i m'b'r'ēf'v'i ogus βρuð'ən da-χoga i v'iapθuρ μ'ið'i.

Translation:
There was a famous king over the Laigin (Leinster-men), Mac Da-Thó his name. He had a dog. The dog used to guard all Laigin. Ailbe the name of the dog, and Ireland was full of the dog's renown. There came (men) from Ailill and from Medb to ask for the dog. At the same time then they came and the messengers of the Ulaid (Ulster-men) and of Conchobar came to ask for the same dog. Welcome was given to all of them, and they were brought to him in the hostel. This is the fifth hostel that existed in Ireland at that time, and the hostel of Da-Derg in the district of Cúalu and the hostel of Forgall Manach and the hostel of Mac Da-Réo in Breifne and the hostel of Da-Choca in the West of Mide.

3.5. Exercise

Illustration 3.4: *Pangur Bán*

Now try your own luck in transcribing an Old Irish poem. It is the famous poem about the monk and his cat, found in a manuscript in the monastery of St. Paul im Lavanttal in Austria (*Thes.* ii 293.14–294.4). Don't be afraid of making mistakes. Do it like the monk and his cat Pangur: catch whatever comes into your net. And should nothing come into your net, just enjoy the poem.

Messe ocus Pangur bán

Meisse ocus Pangur Bán,
cechtar nathar fría saindán;
bíth a menma-sam fri seilgg,
mu menma céin im saincheirdd.

Caraimm-se fos, ferr cach clú,
oc mu lebrán léir ingnu.
Ní foirmtech frimm Pangur Bán,
caraid cesin a maccdán.

Ó ru·biam (scél cen scís)
innar tegdais ar n-óendís,
táithiunn (díchríchide clius)
ní fris·tarddam ar n-áthius.

Gnáth húaraib ar gressaib gal
glenaid luch inna lín-sam;
os mé, du·fuit im lín chéin
dliged ndoraid cu ndronchéill.

Fúachaid-sem fri frega fál
a rosc anglése comlán.
Fúachaimm chéin fri fégi fis
mu rosc réil, cesu imdis.

Faílid-sem cu ndéine dul,
hi·nglen luch inna gérchrub;
hi·tucu cheist ndoraid ndil,
os mé cheine am faílid.

Cía beimmi ammin nach ré,
ní·derban cách a chéile.
maith la cechtar nár a dán,
subaigthius a óenurán.

Hé feisin as choimsid dáu
in muid du·ngní cach óenláu.
Du thabairt doraid du glé
for mu mud céin am meisse.

The Scholar and his Cat

Myself and Pangur Bán,
each of us at his own art.
His mind is always turned to hunting,
my own mind to my special trade.

I love it quiet, better than fame,
while eagerly studying my book.
Pangur is not envious of me,
he loves his own childish art.

When we two are (no fatigue)
alone in our house,
we have something (unlimited sport)
to point our attention to.

Regularly, after a violent rush,
a mouse clings to his net.
And I, into my own net falls,
a dark, but important statement.

Towards the wall he points
his bright and penetrating glare.
Towards the keenness of knowledge
I point my own clear, but weak glare.

He rejoices in dashing around,
when a mouse clings to his sharp claw;
when I grasp a dark but dear problem,
it is I myself who rejoices.

Though we are like this all time,
no-one disturbes the other.
Each of us loves his art,
and is glad in it alone.

He himself is his master
of the job he does each single day.
But to bring dark to light,
in my own way, that's what I do.

3.6. Exercise

And now go ahead with a longer piece of prose. It tells about the arrival of the greatest hero of the Ulaid (inhabitants of the northern Irish province of Ulster) *Cú Chulainn* as a small boy of five years at the court of the province's king *Conchobar mac Nessa*. The passage is taken from John STRACHAN's *Stories from the Táin* (Dublin 1904), a beginners' reader in Old Irish saga texts. If you want to read the whole story of the Cattle Raid of Cúailnge, the translation of Thomas KINSELLA (*The Tain*, Oxford University Press 1970) can be recommended. Try to analyze each word on its own.

'Altae-som ém,' ol Fergus, 'la máthair 7 la athair ocond Airgdig i mMaig Muirtheimni. Ad·fessa dó airscélae na maccraide i nEmain. Ar bíit trí cóecait macc and,' ol Fergus, 'oca cluichiu. Is samlaid do·meil Conchobar a flaith: trian ind laí oc déicsin na maccraide, a trian n-aill oc imbirt fidchille, a trian n-aill oc óul chormae, conid·gaib cotlud de. Cía beimmi-ni for longais riam, ní·fil i nÉire óclaig bas amru,' ol Fergus.

'Guidid Cú Chulainn dia máthair didiu a léiciud dochumm na maccraide. "Ní·regae," ol a máthair, "condit·roib coímthecht di ánrothaib Ulad." "Rochían lemm-sa anad fri sodain," ol Cú Chulainn. "Inchoisc-siu dam-sa ced leth at·tá Emain." "Fathúaid ammne," ol a máthair, "7 is doraid a n-uide," ol sí, "at·tá Slíab Fúait etruib." "Do·bér indass fair," ol Cú Chulainn, "ammin."

Téit ass íarum, 7 a scíath slissen laiss 7 a bunsach 7 a lorg ánae 7 a líathróit. Fo·ceirded a bunsaig riam conda·gaibed ar loss resíu do·rotsad a bun for lár.

Téit cosna maccu íarum cen naidmm a fóesma forru. Ar ní·téiged nech cuccu inna cluichemag co·n-arnastae a fóesam. Ní·fitir-som a n-í-sin. "Non·sáraigedar in macc," ol Follomon macc Conchobuir, "sech ra·fetammar is di Ultaib dó." Arguntais dó. Maidid fóo.

Fo·cerdat a trí cóecta bunsach fair, 7 ar·sissetar isin scíath slissen uili leis-seom. Fo·cerdat dano a líathróiti uili fair-seom. Ocus nos·gaib-seom cach n-oín líathróit inna ucht. Fo·cerdat dano a trí cóecta lorg n-ánae fair. Ara·clich-som connách·ráncatar, 7 gabais airbir diib fria aiss.

Ríastarthae imbi-seom i suidiu. Inda lat ba tindorcun as·n-ort cach foiltne inna chenn lasa coiméirge con·érracht. Inda lat ba oíbell teined boí for cach óenfinnu. Ísadais indala súil connárbo letha indaas cró snáthaite. As·oilgg alaili combo móir béolu fidchoich. Do·rig dia glainíni co·rrici a áu. As·oilg a béolu coa inairdriuch combo ecnae a inchróes. At·recht in lúan láith assa mulluch.

Benaid fona maccu íarum. Do·scara cóecait macc diib resíu rístais dorus nEmna. Fo·rrumai nónbar diib toram-sa 7 Chonchobar; bámmar oc imbirt fidchille. Lingid-som dano tarsin fidchill i ndegaid ind nónbuir.

Gaibid Conchobar a rigid. "Ní maith ar·ráilter in maccrad," ol Conchobar. "Deithbir dam-sa, á phopa Conchobuir," ol se. "Dos·roacht do chluichiu óm thaig óm máthair 7 óm athair, 7 ní maith ro·mbátar friumm." "Cía th'ainm-siu?" ol Conchobor. "Sétantae macc Sualtaim atom·chomnaicc-se, 7 macc Dechtire do fethar-su. Níbu dóig mo choinfére sund." "Ced náro·nass do fóesam-so dano forsna maccu?" ol Conchobar. "Ní·fetar-sa a n-í-sin," ol Cú Chulainn. "Gaib it láim mo fóesam airriu didiu." "Atmu," ol Conchobar.

La sodain do·ella-som forsin maccraid sechnón in tige. "Cid no·taí dano doib indossa?" ol Conchobar. "Co·ronastar a fóesam-som form-sa dano," ol Cú Chulainn. "Gaib it láim didiu," ol Conchobar. "Atmu," ol Cú Chulainn.

Lotar uili isa cluichemag íarum, 7 ata·rechtatar in maicc-hí ro·slassa and. Fos·ráthatar a muimmi 7 a n-aitti.'

Lesson 4

4.1. The initial mutations

One of the most striking features of all Insular Celtic languages are the so-called *mutations*, the systematic changes in the *anlaut* of words, governed by the syntactical properties of the preceding word. Mutations seem to be an exclusively Insular Celtic morphonematic phenomenon: there is no certain evidence that Continental Celtic had anything of that kind. In the context of European languages initial mutations take up an 'exotic' position: no other European standard language has them, but, for example, in a number of dialects of Romance languages (Andalusian, Sardian, etc.) comparable phenomena occur.

To give you an impression of how mutations operate and what they can look like (observe only the changes in the *anlaut* of the following words, don't be worried about the changes in the interior and in the end): *ech* means 'horse,' *becc* means 'small.' With the article *in*, the nominative singular 'the small horse' is realized as *int ech becc* /int eχ b'eg/. In the genitive the whole phrase becomes *ind eich bicc* /ind eχ' β'ig'/—nothing has changed in the *anlaut* of *eich*, but the *anlaut* of *becc* /b'eg/ was *lenited* to *bicc* /β'ig'/, due to the influence of the form *eich*. In the accusative the phrase becomes *in n-ech mbecc* /in n'eχ m'b'eg/: an *n* was added to the *anlaut* of *ech*, and in a similar way *becc* was *nasalized* to *mbecc* /m'b'eg/, all these changes triggered by the preceding word.

Mutated forms are those forms that are actually encountered in the texts. If you want to look up a word in the dictionary you always have to look for the unmutated form.

4.2. The mutations of Old Irish

Old Irish has three different types of mutations (British languages can have even more):

1. lenition (Mod. Ir. *séimhiú*)
2. nasalization ('eclipsis') (Mod. Ir. *urú*)
3. aspiration ('h-mutation')

Mutations usually affect words within a phrase (noun phrase, verbal phrase). Phrases are the constituent parts of the sentence, that is subject, object, prepositional phrase, verb, etc. To take an English example: in the sentence *My big brother can see the small, spotted puppy happily playing in the blooming garden with a group of children*, the subject phrase is 'my big brother,' 'the small, spotted puppy' is the object phrase, 'in the blooming garden' and 'with a group of children' are prepositional phrases and 'can see' is the verbal phrase.

Mutations usually, although not absolutely, have no effect across the phrase boundary. That means that, e.g., the last word in a subject phrase would not affect the first word of an object phrase, even though the latter would immediately follow the first. In Early Old Irish mutational effects even across phrase boundaries may be encountered.