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The *Enech* of Dúnlaing[*]

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The tale *Echtra Nerai* lists three treasures of the *síd*. In his edition of the text from London, British Library MS Egerton 1782, Kuno Meyer presented the relevant passage and its translation as follows:

> Is *ed* tredi f*ri*th hi suidiu .i. cetach Loeguiri hind-Ard Macho oc*us* in barr Briu*in* la *Con*nachto oc*us* ind enach Dunlaithe la Laigniu hi Cill Daro.
>
> These are the three things, which were found in it, viz: the mantle of Loegaire in Armagh, and the crown of Briun in Connaught, and the shirt of Dunlaing in Leinster in Kildare.[1]

At the conclusion of the story, it is said of the crown of Brión that:

> Is hi si*n* t*r*a in tres issa am*ra* ind-h*Er*inn 7 cetach Loeg*air*e ind-Ard Macho 7 enech Dunluinge la Laigniu hio Cill Daro.
>
> That is the third wonderful gift in Erinn, and the mantle of Loegaire in Armagh, and the shirt of Dunlaing in Leinster in Kildare.[2]

There is much of interest here. Why should treasures of the *síd*, in a tale set in the time of Medb and Ailill around the beginning of the Christian era, be associated with kings who were believed to have flourished in the late fourth and early fifth centuries? And why should two of these treasures be assigned to the great churches of Armagh and Kildare? In this note I shall be considering a more circumscribed question: the meaning of the word *enach* or *enech*, translated 'shirt' by Meyer.

In the notes to his edition, Meyer invoked the authority of Edward O'Reilly's *Irish-English Dictionary*, where *eneach* is said to be a masculine noun meaning 'a shirt or smock; weft'.[3] Here, as elsewhere, O'Reilly appears to have been drawing on Edward Lhuyd's *Archaeologia Britannica* (1707), which contains an Irish glossary with an entry 'Enech, Dunlatha, *i.e.* Leine, *A shirt or smock*. On

[*] I am grateful to Kevin Murray for his helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper, and to Riona Doolan for assistance in obtaining some of the references. All errors are my own responsibility.

[1] Kuno Meyer, 'The Adventures of Nera', *Revue celtique* 10 (1889) 212-28 (pp. 220-21 §9).

[2] *Ibid*., pp. 226-7 §19. Meyer's translation draws here in part on the text in the Yellow Book of Lecan, which reads *intres ascaid is amra inerinn*. Egerton's *in tres issa amra ind-hErinn* can be translated 'one of the three most wondrous things in Ireland'.

[3] Meyer used the revised edition, containing a supplement by John O'Donovan (Dublin: James Duffy, 1864); in the original edition (Dublin: John Barlow, 1817), *eneach* is defined only as 'a shirt, or smock'.

inneach agus on Dluth a deirthear'.[4] This in turn evidently derives from the glossary compiled by Míchéal Ó Cléirigh in 1643, which has *ENECH DÚNLATHA .i. leine .i. on inneach 7 ón dlúth adeirthear* ('*enech Dúnlatha*, i.e. shirt, i.e. it is [so] called from the woof and warp').[5] Ó Cléirigh, obviously, is attempting to explain the same mysterious phrase with which we are here concerned; indeed, his spelling *Dúnlatha* for *Dúnlainge* is close to one of the instances of the name in our text. The proposed connection of *enech* with *indech* is not linguistically workable, and it seems entirely possible that Ó Cléirigh's definition is no more than a guess.[6]

I am not aware of any other conjectures as to the word's meaning, apart from my own in the translation of *Echtra Nerai* that I contributed to the collection *The Celtic Heroic Age* (1st ed. 1994).[7] I there proposed 'snare (?)', but this is not a very plausible suggestion either: the word *enach* 'snare' is only cited in *eDIL* from a single late source, and probably represents a semantic extension of *enach* 'hunting, fowling; game'.[8] Even apart from its rarity and late attestation, I can see no reason why a snare should be part of the *Echtra Nerai* list. It is time to consider the problem again.

We may begin with the variant readings. *Echtra Nerai* is attested in three manuscripts: there are complete texts in Egerton 1782, which Meyer used as the basis for his edition, and in the Yellow Book of Lecan; and there is a fragment in Liber Flavus Fergusiorum.[9] The Liber Flavus fragment breaks off shortly before the first of the lists of treasures, so that we have only two witnesses for the readings that concern us. Egerton 1782, as we have seen, reads *enach* and subsequently *enech*, while the Yellow Book of Lecan has *eineach* and *ein(e)ach*.[10] These variants point to *enech* as the form in the exemplar.

What sort of object is suggested by the context? As I have mentioned, all three of the treasures are associated with early Irish kings: Lóegaire mac Néill Noígíallaig of Tara, his uncle Brión mac Echdach Muigmedóin of Connacht, and Dúnlaing mac Énnai of Leinster. The crown of Brión, moreover, is the prized possession of the king of the *síd* of Crúachan. *Cétach*, the word applied to

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[4] *Archaeologia Britannica*, vol. 1: *Glossography* (Oxford: Printed at the Theater for the Author, 1707); this part of the book is not paginated. For O'Reilly's debt to Lhuyd, see Tomás de Bhaldraithe, 'Góstaí Gaeilge Edward Lhuyd agus a Sliocht', *Éigse* 23 (1989) 131-46 (p. 136).

[5] A. W. K. Miller, 'O'Clery's Irish Glossary', part 1, *Revue celtique* 4 (1879-80) 349-428 (p. 412).

[6] For another instance of the sequence Ó Cléirigh > Lhuyd > O'Reilly, see my article 'The Final Transformation of Étaín', *Ériu* 66 (2016) 1-8 (pp. 2-3).

[7] John T. Koch and John Carey, *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe and Early Ireland and Wales*, 1st ed. (Malden: Celtic Studies Publications, 1994), pp. 117, 120.

[8] *eDIL*, s.v. The dictionary takes the word to have a short vowel in the first syllable in both of these senses, as if identical with *enach* 'moor, swamp, bog; narrow way or passage'. But it is surely derived from *én* 'bird': note that it is often juxtaposed with *íascach* 'fishing' from *íasc*, and/or *fíadach* 'hunting' from *fíad*.

[9] Meyer did not take account of the fragment, which I have printed in 'Sequence and Causation in *Echtra Nerai*', *Ériu* 39 (1988) 67-74 (pp. 73-4).

[10] The *(e)* supplied by Meyer reflects a curious reading in the manuscript. The word occurs across a line break as *ein* | *ach*: *e* has been added after the *n* in lighter ink; and there is an empty space at the beginning of the following line.

Lóegaire's mantle, also designates the mantle which was the chief treasure of an earlier king of Tara, Crimthann Nía Náir.[11] A mantle can be a royal token: a 'king's mantle' (*casal ríg*) and a chariot are two tests for a candidate for the kingship of Tara in the Old Irish text *De Ṡíl Chonairi Móir*;[12] a *deichelt ríg* 'king's mantle' is a sign of royal status in a Middle Irish story about the accession of the ancient king Túathal Techtmar;[13] and a king's crown (*minn*) and mantle (*deichelt*), together with his ring and brooch, are signs of his authority in the story of the births of Brandub mac Echach and Áedán mac Gabráin.[14] Given the associations of crown and mantle, it would be natural for Dúnlaing's *enech* also to be some kind of emblematic correlative of royal rank. That the word *enech* means 'face', and by extension 'personal honour', seems semantically appropriate; but what sense can it make in the passage from *Echtra Nerai*, which speaks of precious objects brought out of a *síd*?

Here it is natural to think of the honour-price (literally 'face-price', *wynebwerth*) paid to the king of Ireland in the Second Branch of the Middle Welsh *Mabinogi*: 'a rod of silver as thick [as his little finger] and as long as himself, and a plate of gold as broad as his face' (*a chlawr eur kyflet a'y wyneb*).[15] As has long been recognised, this derives from legal usage: thus the law tract *Llyfr Iorwerth* includes in the reparation owed to a king for an offense against his wife 'a plate of gold to him, as broad as his face (*klaur eur ydau kyulet a'e vynep*) and as thick as the nail of a ploughman who has been a ploughman for nine years; and a rod of gold as long as himself and as thick as his little finger'.[16] Joseph Loth pointed out that a comparable payment is mentioned in the Book of Llandaf, in a charter assigned to the early tenth century. Here restitution paid to a bishop includes 'the price of his face in length and breadth, in pure gold' (*pretium faciei suae longitudine et latitudine in puro auro*).[17]

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[11] E. J. Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, vol. 4 (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1924), pp. 220-21; Whitley Stokes, 'The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindṡenchas', *Revue celtique* 16 (1895) 31-83, 135-67, 269-312 (p. 73).

[12] Lucius Gwynn, 'De Ṡíl Chonairi Móir', *Ériu* 6 (1912) 130-43 (p. 134).

[13] R. I. Best *et al.*, *The Book of Leinster formerly Lebar na Núachongbála*, 6 vols (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1954-83), line 7326.

[14] Kuno Meyer, 'Gein Branduib maic Echach ocus Aedáin maic Gabráin inso sís', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 2 (1899) 134-7 (p. 134).

[15] Ifor Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi allan o Lyfr Gwyn Rhydderch* (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1930), p. 33.

[16] Aled Rhys Wiliam, *Llyfr Iorwerth: A Critical Text of the Venedotian Code of Medieval Welsh Law, mainly from BM. Cotton Titus D ii*, History and Law Series 18 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1960), p. 73. In other texts of the laws, the *clawr* appears to be conceived as the cover (*cooperculum* in the Latin versions) of a cup: Aneurin Owen, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of Wales* (London: Commissioners on the Public Records of the Kingdom, 1841), pp. 168, 305, 772, 808; A. W. Wade-Evans, *Welsh Medieval Law: Being a Text of the Laws of Howel the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), p. 3. Joseph Loth has argued that where a cup is included it is an addition, suggested by the mention of a 'cover': 'Un genre particulier de compensation pour crimes et offenses chez les Celtes insulaires', *RC* 48 (1931) 332-51 (p. 340).

[17] J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *The Text of the Book of Llan Dâv* (Oxford: Series of Old Welsh Texts, 1893), p. 233; cf. Loth, 'Un genre particulier', pp. 342-3.

An interesting collection of Irish parallels was assembled by Zimmer, Loth and Thurneysen;[18] most of these are in Middle Irish texts. In the famous 'pillow talk' scene at the beginning of the version of *Táin Bó Cúailgne* in the Book of Leinster, Medb states that on marrying Ailill she gave him many valuables, including 'the width of your face of red gold, the weight of your left forearm of *findruine*' (*comlethet t'aigthi do dergór, comthrom do riged clí do finddruini*);[19] and the saga *Cath Ruis na Ríg* speaks of 'the width of his face of red gold' (*comleithet a aigthi do dergór*) as forming part of a reparation paid to Conchobor king of Ulster.[20] The king of Ulster is also said to be entitled to 'the width of his face of gold' (*coimlethid a haigthi d'ór*) as part of his *túarastal* or wage from the king of Tara in *Lebor na Cert*.[21] Similarly in *Airec Menman Uraird Maic Coisse*, a text which concludes with the assertion that a properly qualified *ollam* or chief poet has the same honour-price as the king of Tara, the reparation to an injured *ollam* includes 'the width of his face of gold' (*comlethet a aigthi d'or*).[22]

I am aware of only two clear examples in older sources. At the conclusion of the early version of the tale *Mesca Ulad*, which Thurneysen was inclined to date to the Old Irish period,[23] peace is made between Ailill of Connacht (the same king who obtains the crown of Brión in *Echtra Nerai*) and the men of Ulster: 'The width of his face of gold and silver (*comlethet a enech di or 7 argut*) was given to Ailill, and seven slave women to each of his sons'.[24] In the legal tract *Míadślechta*, in a section described by Eoin MacNeill as 'a rambling discourse about the honourprice of bishops, priests, and laymen who retire into religious life',[25] it is stated that if a 'virgin bishop' is wounded in the face, he is paid 'the width of his face of silver, and [the width?] of the crown of his head of gold' (*comlethet a aighthe do argat, ocus a mullaigh do or*).[26] Here, as in the charter discussed by Loth, a bishop rather than a king is in question; but, according to the Old Irish introduction to the legal collection *Senchas Már*, a king and a bishop had the same honour-price (*comdire do rig 7 epscop*).[27] It is suggestive that the

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[18] Heinrich Zimmer, 'Der kulturhistoriche Hintergrund in der Erzählung der alten irischen Heldensage', *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Jhrg. 1911, pp. 174-227 (p. 215); Loth, 'Un genre particulier', pp. 347-8; Rudolf Thurneysen, 'Ir. *eneclann*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 20 (1936) 205-12 (pp. 206-9).

[19] Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1967), lines 41-2.

[20] Best *et al.*, *Book of Leinster*, lines 22884-5.

[21] Myles Dillon, *Lebor na Cert: The Book of Rights*, Irish Texts Society 46 (London: Irish Texts Society, 1962), p. 126 line 1870.

[22] Mary E. Byrne, 'Airec Menman Uraird Maic Coisse', *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts* 2 (1908) 42-76 (p. 75).

[23] Rudolf Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1921), p. 473, cf. p. 449.

[24] R. I. Best and Osborn Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1929), p. 53.1549-50; J. Carmichael Watson, *Mesca Ulad*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 13 (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1941), p. 47.

[25] Eoin MacNeill, 'Ancient Irish Law: The Law of Status or Franchise', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 36C (1921-1924) 265-316 (p. 313).

[26] D. A. Binchy, *Corpus iuris Hibernici* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978), p. 588.19.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 348.24.

word *coimlethet*, in all of these instances, is such a close cognate of *kyflet* in the Welsh laws.

Finally, Thurneysen noted a passage cited in the glossary *Sanas Cormaic* from the law text *Bretha Nemed Toísech*. Speaking of recompense for the *imdergad* or 'reddening' of Emain (i.e., the shaming of the royal stronghold of the Ulaid), this adjudges seven female slaves, seven male slaves, and 'seven ounces of refined gold, against the modest visage (*fri fialgnuisi*) of Conchobur with his warriors'.[28] Thurneysen was confident that 'one must surely understand the seven ounces of gold "on the face" of the king, [owed] for *imdergad*, as a gold plate... as in Wales'.[29] I am not so certain. There is nothing to indicate that the gold corresponds to the dimensions of the face, a feature shared by all of the other texts that we have considered. Among the many meanings of *fri* are 'with respect to, with regard to', while *gnúis* may have here the same metaphorical sense as *enech*: in this case, the passage could simply be specifying fourteen slaves and seven ounces of gold as an honour price.

What form might the *comlethet* have taken? An indication may be provided by the eighth-century poet Blathmac, who denounces Judas not only because he betrayed Jesus, but also because he did so for an insultingly small reward: ‘even a very-firm enduring plate of red gold (*clár nderccóir*) would be a small price (*luag*) for Christ the son of God’.[30] Irish *clár* is of course the cognate of *clawr*, the word used for the plate of gold in the Welsh sources. The image is singularly apt if the plate is understood, in Blathmac’s case as well, to represent the honour of a king: *luag*, the word that he uses for ‘price’, also appears in *lóg n-enech* ‘honour-price’ (literally ‘face-price’), the Irish equivalent of Welsh *wynebwerth*.

The rationale of such a payment is straightforward. If honour is identified with the face (*enech*), so that injury to a king’s honour is injury to his face, then giving him a piece of gold or silver with the same dimensions as his face signifies that his honour is restored to him unblemished, and indeed glorified.

Zimmer and Loth both proposed that an Irish word for 'honour-price' which they took to have the form *enechlann* should be analysed as *enech* + *lann* 'face-plate', and that this term originally designated the symbolic object that we have been considering.[31] But it is fact doubtful that *enechlann* is reliably attested: this word almost invariably appears as *eneclann*, indicating that the second element of the compound began with a deleniting consonant. Thurneysen accordingly proposed the alternative explanation that it represents *enech* + *glan* 'face-cleaning', and this analysis has been generally accepted.[32] There is also a word that really does appear to have the underlying sense 'face-plate': *eneclár*,

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[28] *Ibid*., p. 2217.40-42; cf. 1515.5-7 ('O'Davoren's Glossary); and Kuno Meyer, *Sanas Cormaic*, Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts 4 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1912), §877.

[29] 'Ir. *eneclann*', p. 207. Thurneysen rendered *fri fialgnuisi* as 'an das züchtige Gesicht'.

[30] James Carney, *The Poems of Blathmac, son of Cú Brettan*, Irish Texts Society 47 (London: Irish Texts Society, 1964), p. 38.

[31] Zimmer, 'Der kulturhistoriche Hintergrund', p. 216; Loth, 'Un genre particulier', pp. 347-9.

[32] 'Aus dem irischen Recht I. [1. Das Unfrei-Lehen]', *ZCP* 14 (1923) 335-94 (p. 342); fuller discussion in 'Ir. *eneclann*'. For a derivation from *enech* + *clú* 'face-fame', see Eric Hamp, 'Varia: 2. enech, ἐνιπή', *Ériu* 25 (1974) 261-8 (pp. 266-7).

apparently from *enech* + *clár*. But this is known only from a single entry in the annals, where it is associated with an altar.[33]

Where *Echtra Nerai* speaks of a precious object called the *enech* of Dúnlaing, apparently a royal talisman, this suggests a further possibility: that the face-plate was simply called an *enech*. If the same word was used for honour, and for the face which symbolised that honour, it may have been used as well for the piece of gold or silver that was a further embodiment of that symbolism.

[33] W. M. Hennessy, *Chronicum Scotorum* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1866), p. 244, where the entry for the year 1005 speaks of 'the *eneclár* of the great altar of Clonmacnoise'. In a footnote, Hennessy comments that 'the exact nature of this article has not been discovered'; *eDIL* suggests that it might be an altar frontal.