

A NOTE ON A DIFFICULT PASSAGE IN *BRETHA DÉIN CHÉCHT*

THE FIRST half of § 36 of *Bretha Déin Chécht* reads as follows: **T** *Lanad cach colpthai aniar no a mmedon mes mithir fri trelæg toimsi mani timarr seis.*¹ Binchy translates this as '[For] hurt (?) to every shin from the rear or internally award is made: it is to be assessed at [the value of] a cow after calving unless it hinder. . .'.² Commenting on the phrase *timarr seis* Binchy observes that: 'The sense appears to be that a cow after calving is the normal penalty unless the injury prevents the victim from performing some function or engaging in some activity; if so, the amount will be increased. But what is *seis* (or *séis*)? Even if we postulate an archaic form **sess* "sitting", a substantivized use of the old verbal adjective (*sed-to-*) like *lecht* from *laigid*, it is hard to see how the most severe damage to the tibia could "hinder sitting".³

Taking *seis* to be the dative sing. of **seis* i-f. (?) 'sitting'⁴ (or of **sess* ā-f.?), used here – as frequently in legal texts – 'to express the instrument or accompanying circumstances',⁵ we may interpret *mani timarr seis* as (literally) 'if it [*sc.* the damage to the tibia] hinder him not (*mani* = *mani n-* with 3rd sing. masc. inf. pron.) by sitting', i.e. unless the damage to the tibia forces him to sit (thereby preventing him from going about his work).

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¹D. A. Binchy, *Ériu* 20 (1966) 1–66, p. 46.

²*ibid.*, 47.

³*ibid.*, 65.

⁴Cf. *bit oc seis coir* 'they remain properly seated' (D. A. Binchy, *Corpus iuris Hibernici* II (Dublin 1978) 601.31). See the edition of this text by Fergus Kelly, 'An Old-Irish text on court procedure', *Peritia* 5 (1986) 74–106, p. 86. If the Old Irish form of the noun in question is *seis* i-f. < **sed-ti-*, we may connect it with Old Indic *satti-* 'sitting, resting', *nī-satti-* 'sitting, resting' (Rigveda IV, 21.9).

⁵See R. Thurneysen, *A grammar of Old Irish* (Dublin 1946) 161 § 251.3.