OLD IRISH INNE

Discussing Liam Breathnach’s explanation of Old Irish inne ‘quality; nature, etc.’ as an iā-abstract from the preposition in, E. P. Hamp, in this journal, writes: ‘Breathnach, in a footnote, is diffident on the old and sure spelling -nn-; it is, in fact, the ‘lectio difficilior’, and must be accepted and respected. The definite article itself teaches us that we must not conflate the development of nn in proclitics with that in stressed words nor seek a flow of transfer between these two accentual classes where the conditions for analogy do not obtain.’

However, Hamp’s own reconstructions (*endin-iā > *indiniā > *indiēniā > *iēndiē > *iēndiē) being in obvious conflict with Old Irish phonological rules, do not ‘respect’ inne as the ‘lectio difficilior’: well attested forms such as Wb. 10421 inndiē (2 sg. imperative), Wb. 4419 indniē, 25b27 indnidiu (verbal noun) (from a stem *indi-ni-sed-), show beyond doubt that a (stressed) preform of the shape *indi-niyā would have given Classical Old Irish *indne. Since, for the reasons given by Hamp, the idea that the -nn- in the stressed word inne has been taken over from the proclitic form of the preposition inn seems unlikely, the old spelling -nn- remains puzzling.

Supposing that the spelling -nn- here means [-N-], a simple explanation of the origin of inne (e.g. Wb. 7c1, 27b27, acc. inni 12d5) can be found along the following lines. Non-ambiguous evidence shows that the suffix *-no- could be used to form adjectives from prepositions and adverbs in many Indo-European languages,” e.g. *pr-no ( < *pr-, cf. Skt. purā, Goth. faur ‘before’) in Ocelc. forn ‘old’, *per-no- ( < *per-, cf. Skt. par- in par-āt ‘last year’) in Goth. af fairnīn jera ‘of last year’, Lith. (adv.) pėrnai ‘last year’, Goth. faireinis, OHG firmi ‘old’ (*-iyo-stem). A further example is *kom-no- in Oscan (substantivized) comono (acc. pl. neut.) ‘comitia’, comenei (loc. sg.) from com ‘cum’.

On purely theoretical grounds it is thus possible to speculate whether, in the case of the preposition *en, there might not have been an adjective of the shape *en-no- ‘inner, interior’ in pre-Celtic, structurally identical with the *kom-no- seen in Osc. comono: an iā-abstract ‘the interior’ from this adjective would have had the shape *en-n-iyā: the latter form would have given Old Irish inne by regular phonetic development.

3 Ibid., p. 32. Breathnach, ‘On Abstract Nouns from Prepositions in Irish’, p. 18, note 1, writes: ‘The form inne is well attested in the Würzburg Glosses, cf. Dil. i.e. We should probably expect *inde or perhaps even *inie; see Thurneysen, Grammar, 842. I take it that the -no- has been taken over from the form of the preposition inn, which is found in the earlier period before proclitics beginning with a vowel, cf. Dil. 1 col. 1.’
4 Ibid. p. 33.
5 We would expect the Classical Old Irish reflex of a stressed iā-abstract from the two variant forms of this preposition (i.e. *en and *en) to have been *ine < *en-iyā, *eni-ya.
6 See K. Brugmann and B Dellbrück, Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen 5 parts (Strassburg 1897–1900) iiz 1, p. 270.
7 For the form cf. the sync-stem seen in Goth. faireinis, OHG firmi.
The above speculation finds some support in extra-Celtic material: genetically, the supposed pre-Celtic adjective *en-no- `inner, interior' may, in fact, be identical with the pre-Germanic *en-no- that seems to underlie the adverb Goth. inna `inside, within', OIcel., OE inne, OHG inna, inni, inne, etc.9

Fredrik Otto Lindeman

Oslo

---