SOME of the medieval Irish legal material concerning cats has recently been scrutinised by Fergus Kelly. Elsewhere he has listed the surviving materials for this examination and has drawn attention to their fragmentary state. The central tract on cats, Catslechta ‘Cat-sections’, was part of the final third of the Old Irish legal compilation known as the Senchas Már (henceforth SM). Glossed fragments of this text survive in TCD ms 1363 (H 4. 22), p. 32 (CIH 1550.15–23), and part of a later commentary is also extant in Bodleian Library, Oxford ms Rawlinson B. 506, fo. 28b (CIH 110.14–21). Some citations from this material are also preserved in O’Davoren’s Glossary (henceforth O’Dav.).

1 This material was first presented as part of our weekly staff-student seminar in the Department of Early and Medieval Irish, UCC; thanks to all who contributed so fully every Wednesday afternoon. Many of the suggestions made here were initially raised at the seminar and these have been credited as follows: JC (John Carey), MH (Máire Herbert), CÓD (Caitríona Ó Dochartaigh), PÓR (Pádraig Ó Riain), DT (Donna Thornton). I wish to thank Dr Carey for additional comments made on the final draft of this paper, and the editors of Celtica for their many valuable suggestions.


3 A guide to Early Irish law (Dublin 1988, repr. 2005) 275 § 49.

4 See L. Breatnach, ‘On the Original Extent of the Senchas Már’, Ériu 47 (1996) 1–43, at 31 no. 29. (This essay has been revised and updated in L. Breatnach, A companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici (Dublin 2005) 268–314 § 5.50 [301, no. 29]). It is followed in SM by Conslechta ‘Dog-sections’: throughout the legal material under examination, therefore, it is no surprise to see that dogs and cats are occasionally listed together and to find the same or similar rules applying to both.

5 CIH = Corpus Iuris Hibernici, ed. D. A. Binchy, 6 vols (Dublin 1978). The fragments surviving in this ms (printed CIH 1542.17–1551.12) are part of a section of six tracts (in order) from the final third of SM (Breatnach, ‘On the Original Extent’, 9–10 § 3.7 [= Companion, 277–8]).

6 The legal material from this ms ‘consists almost entirely of late commentary, with only a few fragments of Old Irish text. It is acephalous, but from [CIH pp.] 81 to 106 we can be certain that it is based on SM, as both the fragments of the original text and the commentary (which closely parallels that on fuller copies of SM) generally follow the sequence of tracts established above from Di Gnímaib Gíall to Bretha im Gatta’ (Breatnach, ‘On the Original Extent’, 6 [= Companion, 274]). Breatnach goes on to demonstrate that CIH pp. 106–117 (our tract is on p. 110) also contains further extracts from SM, which are mainly from the final third. Linguistically, this commentary (pp. 81–117) dates to the late Middle-Irish period.

7 O’Dav. = ‘O’Davoren’s Glossary’, ed. W. Stokes, Archiv für celtische Lexikographie 2 (1904) 197–504 (= CIH 1466.11–1531.24). See Breatnach, Companion, 301. Along with the copy in BL ms Egerton 88 (designated E by Stokes), there is also a second partial copy of O’Davoren’s Glossary (entries for letters A, B and parts of C are missing) preserved in TCD ms 1317 (H 2. 15 b). Stokes, following O’Curry, believed it was in the hand of Dubhaltach Mac Firbhisigh (thus, referring to the ms as F). As N. Ó Muraíle (The celebrated antiquary: Dubhaltach Mac Firbhisigh (c. 1600–1671), his lineage, life and learning, Maynooth Monographs 6 (1996, repr. 2002) 80, 276) points out, however, ‘this is in a hand other than Dubhaltach’s’. A cursory examination of the variants from this ms (from O’Dav. 342 onwards) listed by Stokes, would tend to confirm the view of F. Kelly (Guide, 262) that ‘it often has better readings than Egerton 88’, though as Kelly notes ‘in most cases, the superiority of F lies merely in its closer adherence to O.Ir. spelling’. He lists
should know (CIH 2102.31–2103.32) lists knowledge of Catšlechta among his requirements. Elsewhere in the Laws, fragments of material relating to cats survive in diverse texts.

The purpose of this article is to edit and translate the short passages (noted above) in their entirety so as to make the primary material readily available. All departures from the diplomatic text given in CIH (collated with microfilm copies of the mss involved) are explicitly marked. Thus, the extent of editorial invention (which is kept to an absolute minimum) can easily be judged. Material from Catšlechta is edited in Part I; the different categories of cat are dealt with in Part II and all supplementary legal material on cats that I am aware of is edited in part III (a large percentage of parts II and III is from O’Davoren’s Glossary).

PART I

I.1 CIH 1550.15–23
Bretha for catšleachaibh 7 rl.

Meone .i. a trénchat a do-gní meighligh. Bó cacha rebe .i. dí ba 7 it inunda 7 na .u. séoit tar fut ful i nDúil Roscadhaigh.

Crúipné .i. tréa[h]at a lus a c[h]uípe – cat sabaill 7 muilinn 7 átha .i. bíis oca n-imc[h]omét a trú. Tuictir co los .i. is amlaidh tuicictir amail bíis oc dènum eggnama. Di-renur trí sétaiab .i. na trí séoit ata ćferra bife isin tèigh co rosat trí lèrhuinge.

Feb d’do-nda-cuisnithad .i. c’cidhpeadhfe abus dos-n-ecmaith nò cídh olc, in triach imc[h]ométus is na séoit bìait imnti, do-bertar ind-seom. Ar is do bùachaillib is còir a dìre .i. a trian do bùchailllib 7 a dà [h]rían don rígh. Is 1con-oisceat dìre .i. cumscaighait éiric ina nèntairachtain.

a The use of the compound trénchat is based on the analysis of the final -ne in cats’ names as nia ‘champion’ (JC); cf. CIH 379.11 and O’Dav. 422 (II.1 (a) and II.3 below). b Bó in cacha rébe.

Perhaps this should be read [Di-ren] boin cacha rebe ‘[He pays] a cow for each feat [in compensation]’. Alternatively, it might be read Bó, in[d] cacha rebe ‘A cow, the minimum [compensation] for each feat’ (JC). As written in the ms, rébe could be the gen. sg. of riabh ‘stripe’. c Other examples of the pl. inflection of ferr are to be found in Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise (Anecd. ii) examples of better readings in F, to which the following may be added: 398 clecht F, clèas E; 522 direnaiter F, dorenar E. In the edition of material from O’Dav. below, the primary ms used is E; the readings from F are followed if they are deemed to be superior and significant variant readings are also noted.


9 It has also been possible to check Rawlinson B. 506 with the on-line digital image of this ms available at www.bodley.ox.ac.uk.

10 All examples of the punctum delens have been added by the editor apart from those on selga (CIH 1646.40) and faill (CIH 1647.3).

11 It is impossible to tell how much of the legal material concerning cats in O’Davoren’s Glossary originally formed part of Catšlechta.

12 Anecd. = O. J. Bergin et al. (ed.), Anecdota from Irish manuscripts, 5 vols (Halle 1907–1913).
53.14, 57.19 and 62.8) and TBCL. The use of a pass. form of the impersonal verb do-coissin is exceptional and is not paralleled elsewhere in DIL. Its presence may account for the use in the gloss of the pass. form of do-ecmaing (dos-n-ecmaith). \textit{c-idhpeadh} is here analysed as \textit{cita} + past subj. 3 sg of the copula (Old Irish \textit{cid}; later \textit{ciambad}). This unusual form is paralleled in usage by the same author’s utilisation of \textit{cidhpe} (\textit{CIH} 1549.41) for earlier \textit{cipé}. 

The same phrase is used in a section of Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid (part of SM 2) at CIH 239.13 (= \textit{ALI} v 474.9); aCH TR ireheca conosasad dire ‘but three horses which change the penalty’ and also in O’Dav. 424 (= \textit{CIH} 1481.25-6): \textit{ut est amail ader bretha conslechta a sencilus: conoiscoed dire do suide ‘ut est as Bretha Conslechta in [the] Senchas [Már] state: he changed the payment for the aforementioned’. The closest parallel is to be found below (III.6 (a)) in O’Dav. 470.

Judgements on cat-sections etc.

A \textit{meone}, i.e. a mighty cat that mews. A cow for each feat, i.e. two cows, and they are equivalent to the five \textit{sét}s altogether which are in Dúil Roscadach. 

A \textit{\textit{crúipné}}, i.e. a mighty cat [so called] by virtue of its paw. A cat of barn and mill and drying-kiln, i.e. which is guarding all three. Let it be fully understood, i.e. it is thus it is understood in the manner in which it is [while] performing \textit{feats}. Three \textit{sét}s are paid, i.e. the three \textit{sét}s which are \textit{best} which are in the bag until they may come to three half-ounces.

As they happen to be, i.e. whatever excellence they might have or whatever badness, the bag which protects and the \textit{sét}s which are in it, they are given for him. For it is to \textit{cowherds} that its penalty is due, i.e. a third for cowherds and two-thirds for the king. This is the way they change the penalty, i.e. they change the payment for its non-obtainment.

\textit{It is hard to know whether to take \textit{ms cruipne} as a derivative of \textit{croib} ‘claw’ or \textit{crúib} ‘paw’. A search of the surrounding pages in \textit{CIH} has not yielded any other examples of \textit{p} written for lenited \textit{b}, so in this case it is taken as a derivative of \textit{crúib}. A close relationship between these two words is posited in LEIA, C-251 (s.v. \textit{crúib}): ‘Doit sans doute être rapproché du synonyme plus courant \textit{croib’}. This confusion is also evident in the example from O’Dav. no. 422 (below, II.1 (c)), where the readings in \textit{E} point towards \textit{croib}, while those in \textit{F} show that \textit{crúib} is intended.}


The general guide to currency relationship (which varies considerably) is 1 milch cow = 1 oz. silver = 2 \textit{sét}s = 1/3 cumal (see Kelly, \textit{Guide}, 112–16). Thus, three half-ounces = 3 \textit{sét}s, generally.}

\textit{LEIA = Lexique étymologique de l’irlandais ancien, ed. J. Vendryes et al. (Dublin and Paris 1959–).}
also be translated ‘a feat’ as *eggnama* may be either gen. sg. or pl. The use of the comparative (*ferra*) to express the superlative (as translated) is well attested; see SnaG\(^{20}\) III § 6.15. The exact sense of this sentence is unclear to me, however. Fergus Kelly (*Early Irish farming*, 122) believes cowherds receive the *díre* because ‘cats would be attracted to the warmth and fresh milk of the cowshed’; thus, they may have been responsible for feeding the cats. This seems to be the case, for example, with regard to the *folum* (II.4 below).

I.2 CIH 110.14–21

 BREONE .i. Catt so 7 crōnān 7 comēt \(^{4}\)(nó foīdh guiteach)\(^{4}\) aci 7 trí bāi ind mā tāt arēn aicci – crōnān 7 comēt. Masa nechtar de is bō 7 samaisc nó guna beith ní ar c[h]rōnān eitír 7 is ann atā sein ind in inbaid is mō nā sein comētas nó is cutūma ris. Masa lughu indās nucu tēt dar in nī comētas.

 MEONE .i. Cat cuileadh so 7 mā \(^{b}\)bagabhar \(^{b}\) trí dāmha dā dēnumh gu riacht a ‘fuidhell\(^{c}\) inlān dāibh, is a dēnum dun muinntir gu coinḥētann 0 s[h]ein amach, 7 dā bāi\(^{d}\) ind. Maine faghabar na dāmha dā dēnum eitír nó cīa \(^{b}\)bagabarb, minip dāna risin muinntir a dēnahm, is bō ind.

\(^{a\text{-a}}\)Originally an interlinear gloss on crōnān? Binchy notes (*CIH* 110\(^{e}\)) that ‘these words appear at the end of the preceding line, but seem to belong here, though the ‘turn of the path’ sign is missing’. \(^{b\text{-b}}\)Initial lenited *f* is here written as *b*. \(^{c\text{-c}}\)It is possible that *fuidhell* represents *fuigell*. \(^{d\text{-d}}\)‘Judgement’ and that the opening section should be translated: ‘Meone, i.e. this is a pantry cat and if three retinues are found to prove her [vigilance] so that her complete judgement came to them’.

\(^{d\text{-d}}\)‘Cow’ is incorrectly treated as masc. here.

iBREONE\(^{i}\), i.e. This is a cat and \(^{i\text{-ii}}\)she\(^{ii}\) has purring and protecting (or an inarticulate cry) and three cows are paid for it if it has both, purring and protecting. If it has one of the two, it is a cow and a heifer or there might not be anything for purring at all and that obtains whenever it is more than or equal to that which it protects. If it is less than this, it does not exceed [in value] the thing which it protects.

MEONE, i.e. This is a pantry cat and if there be found three companies of guests to a firm that their full abundance came to them and its affirmation thenceforth by the household which it protects, and two cows are paid for it. If the companies are not found to confirm it at all or though they be found, if the household does not venture to affirm it, a cow is paid for it.

\(^{i\text{-i}}\)Breone may be better understood as another onomatopoic name for a cat like meone (JC) rather than deriving it from breó ‘flame’, as seems implied by O’Dav. 241 (II.1 (c) below). \(^{ii\text{-ii}}\)Cats of value would generally be female, as male cats are not as good mousers (CÓD). However, in some of the other passages it is clear that the cats being referred to are male.

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\(^{20}\)SnaG = *Stair na Gaeilge*, ed. K. McCone et al. (Maynooth 1994).
PART II

II.1 Baircne

II.1 (a) CIH 379.11 (cf. ALI i 150.11, 152.32–4)

IM *BAIRCNE [i.] CAT BANa .i. im bāirc-nia: nia [i.] tren, tucad a bāirc
bBresail Bricb i mbıt cait bronţína duba.

CONCERNING A BAIRCNE, i.e. A CAT FOR WOMEN, i.e. concerning a
ship-warrior: nía, i.e. a strong one, it was brought from the ship of Bresal
Brecc in which are white-breasted black cats.

a-aKelly, Early Irish farming. 122 n. 142 suggests that BAIRCNE CAT BAN
should be translated ‘a basket for women’s cats’. However, neither this example nor example II.1 (d) below show
the nasalisation expected for such an interpretation. The formation of baircne (paralleled, for
element, by meoinne and breoinne) would also seem to point to it as originally referring to a type
of cat. b-bbThree figures named Bresal Brecc appear in CGH.21 The most important seems to be
the ancestor shared by Laigin and Osraige (118a24–5; p. 19); on p. 101, in the variants from the
Book of Leinster and the Book of Lecan, there is an account of his raiding overseas. Of the other
two characters of the same name, the one associated with Dál nÁraide is also mentioned in RD22
§ 97 (Révue Celtique 16, 47–8); it appears there may have been a (now-lost) tale, Echtra Bresail,
detailing his adventures under Belfast Lough. Nothing further seems to be known of the third
Bresal Brecc.

II.1 (b) CIH 889.23–4

Bairccni .i. ainm cait in-sin bís for cerchaill oc mnáb c’aidche.

Baircne, i.e. that is the name of a cat which is on a pillow beside women
always.

II.1 (c) O’Dav. 242 = CIH 1475.17–18

Baircne .i. cat, is éisidhe cat ban .i. bāircníadh, a hāirc mic Laimníach tuca[d]
ar tús, nó bárchnia [i.] tren, tucad a bāirc Bresail Bric.

Baircne, i.e. a cat, it is a cat for women, i.e. a ship-warrior, from the ark of
[Noah] mac Lamfach it was first brought, or a ship-warrior, i.e. a strong one, it
was brought from the ship of Bresal Brecc.

II.1 (d) CIH 1903.3 = ALI i 150.11–12, 152.32–4

IM *BAIRCNE [i.] CATa BAN .i. nía [i.] tren, cait broinnínda dubha
tucadh a bāirc Bresail Bric.

CONCERNING A BAIRCNE, i.e. A CAT FOR WOMEN, i.e. a warrior,
i.e. a strong one, white-breasted black cats brought from the ship of Bresal
Brecc.

a-aBAIRCNECHAT ms.

II.1 (e) CormY23 115

Barcne .i. cat ban, fo bith is a (m)bāirc dus-fucad.

23 CormY = ‘Sanas Cormaic’ (from YBL), ed. K. Meyer, Anecdota from Irish manuscripts iv
(Halle 1912, repr. Llanerch 1994).
Baircne, i.e. a cat for women, because it is from a ship it was brought.

II.1 (f) CormA

Baircne .i. catt boineand ar (fo bíth) is a "bāirc" dos-fucad.

Baircne, i.e. a female cat, because it is from a ship it was brought.

Note: Examples (a), (b) and (d) are all from *Di Chetharslacht Athgabála* and it seems most probable that the other examples may ultimately be traced back to the same source. The section in question is concerned with the distraint of women’s property.

II.2 Breoinne

O’Dav. 241 = CIH 1475.15–16

Breoinne .i. ainm cait, ut est breoinne .i. cat ō andēth ēsdhē .i. "breō ãn" ina inde, crōnān ina inde.

Breoinne, i.e. the name of a cat, *ut est a breoinne*, i.e. it is a cat from [...] i.e. a wonderful flame in its essence, purring in its essence.

II.3 Crūibne

O’Dav. 422 = CIH 1481.21

Crūibne .i. ainm cait, ut est "crūibne", is ēsīside cat bīsaill 7 muīinn .i. nia [i.] trēn, < trēn ō [h]rūi bē.

Crūibne, i.e. the name of a cat, *ut est a crūibne*, it is a cat of barn and mill, i.e. a warrior, i.e. a strong one, strong from its paw.

II.4 Folum

O’Dav. 915 = CIH 1501.16–17

Folumh .i. ainm cait, ut est folum, is ēisiedi cat buachiailis .i. comētar ccusna buaib isin lis.

Folum, i.e. the name of a cat, *ut est a folum*, it is a cat who herds, i.e. who is kept with the cows in the enclosure.

The name of this cat might mean ‘bare, unprotected’ as its natural environment was out in the *lis* with the cattle (JC). This suggestion is close to the original etymology proposed by O’Rahilly (Ériu 13 (1942) 191–2) for *folum*, i.e. < fo + lomm. This is the unique attestation of this verb cited in *DIL* s.v. *buachiailis*; *cat buachiailis* (or *buachalla*) ‘a cowherd’s cat’ may have been the original ms reading (MH).

Add. no bis gusna buaib isin liss F.


25 Thus, with regard to example (c), Breatnach, *Companion*, 115 no. 242 might possibly be emended accordingly (though this would break the sequence of citations in O’Dav. from the final third of *SM*).
II.5 Glas Nenta

O’Dav. 1045 = CIH 1507.22–3

Glas nenta i.e. ainm do chat, ut est glas nenta do-slī sēt ina dīre; glas nenta i.e. bīs fon nglasnenaigh, nó gabar do nenaigh glais i.e. don nenntōig.

Glas nenta, i.e. the name of a cat, ut est a glas nenta which merits a sēt for its penalty-fine; glas nenta, i.e. which is under the green nettle, or which is brought from a green nettle, i.e. from the nettle.

II.6 Íach

O’Dav. 1109 = CIH 1510.9

Íach i.e. ainm cait, ut est Íach do-renar lethdíre i.e. cat gabur i.e. do ñíatacht. Íach, i.e. the name of a cat, ut est an Íach which is paid half penalty-fine, i.e. a cat which is brought, i.e. from mousing.

II.7 Meoinne

O’Dav. 1246 = CIH 1516.8

Meoinne i.e. ainm cait, ut est meoinne is ñíisside cat a cuile i.e. miu ina inde, nō meoān ina inde i.e. meghel ina inde.

Meoinne, i.e. the name of a cat, ut est a meoinne, it is a pantry cat, i.e. a mew in its essence, or a little mew in its essence, i.e. purring in its essence.

II.8 Rincne

O’Dav. 1365 = CIH 1520.42

Rincne i.e. cat, ut est rincne is ñíisside cat mac i.e. ñíarsind-í ríachus na macāème becca, nō ñíragait na macāim ñíssimh.

Rincne, i.e. a cat, ut est a rincne is a children’s cat, i.e. for the reason that it torments the small children, or the children torment it.

a-Rincne may be connected in some way with ringid ‘tears, mangles’ (JC), though this may be contrary to what is desirable in a child’s cat. This possibility is made more attractive by the presence (in ‘O’Clery’s Irish Glossary’, ed. A. W. K. Miller, RC 4 (1879–80) 349–428; RC 5 (1881–83) 1–69, at vol. 4, 36) of RINGEADH i.e. riaghadh, no crochadh. b-This is an unusual acc. pl. form of maccāem; one would expect O.Ir. maccáemu (later maccáema), but cf. nom. pl. and gen. pl. maccaemi (DIL s.v. maccóem), d-drīgait E, riaghait F.
PART III

III.1 Extracts from *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid*

III.1 (a) *CIH* 238.26–30 = *ALI* v 472.29–34

CIS LIR DÍA RO SUIDIGHE[D] COMDÎRE LA FÉNIU¹. GED² CORR³ CAITÍN⁴ CAILEACH⁵ CANA⁶. IT COMDÎRE LA FÉNIU. NÌ HÍCA NACH ÆE AITHGEIN ARAILE.

¹i.e. what is the amount or what is the number for which equality of penalty-fine has been fixed or has been established according to native law? ²i.e. four geese, i.e. five sèts for it. ³half penalty-fine. ⁴i.e. without activities. ⁵i.e. four birds for it. ⁶i.e. a pup without activity.

How many things are there for which equal penalty-fine has been established in native law? A goose, a crane, a kitten, a cock, a whelp. These have equal penalty-fine in native law. None of them should serve to pay the compensation of another.

How many things are there for which equal penalty-fine has been established in native law? The cat moreover, five sèts as a penalty-fine for it or until it may take up activity, and when it will, it is penalty-fine for it according to the nature of the cat whose activity it may undertake as payment.

This restoration, suggested by Binchy (note b), is based on similar material in *CIH* 1873.17.

III.1 (c) *CIH* 709.37–9

.u. seóit in cach ní ddìb-so sìs: ¹ged co haimsir dotha, corr co haimsir ²gnímraid, ⁷caitin[r] gur ro gabait gnímraid orra, ⁷ ⁷caileach co haimsir untha, (corr co haimsir gnímraid), cuile[ó]n bega gur ro gabait gnímraid orra.

Five sèts for every one of these below: a goose until hatching-time, a crane until time of activity, and kittens until they take up activity, and a cock until time of treading, small pups until they take up activity.

These phrases are also present in *Uraicecht Becc* (*CIH* 1610.6–7 = *ALI* v 84.14). Gnímraid is treated as an o-stem, masc. noun rather than as an a-stem, fem. noun throughout (cf. *DIL* s.v.).
III.2 (a) Celtica 10 (1973) 78 § 4 = CIH 897.37–9

Aithgabáil arc[h]o(i)n: crand tara conumber 7 apud arná bíatar; má bíatar Íar suide, is duine[h]in aire; a c[h]ommut conbuachaill 7 cú otraigh 7 cat 7 oirce 7 milchú má beith i forus; mani bē(t), tögtar a slabraid, 7 apud la cach n-áe.

Celtica 10, 78 § 4 = CIH 1466.1–3

Aithgabáil arc[h]on: crand tara conumar 7 apad arná bíathar; ma bíadtar Íar suidhi, is duinec[h]in lais; a chomad conbuachail 7 cú otraigh 7 cat 7 oircné 7 milec[h]ú mā(dh) bet[h] i forus; mana bé(t), táctar a slabra, 7 abad la cach n-áe.

To distrain a watchdog: [put] a plank across his feeding-trough and give notice that he is not to be [further] fed; if he is fed after that it is [deemed to be a case of] human wrong-doing. The same applies to a herding dog and a yard (lit. ‘dung-hill’) dog, to a cat, to a lap-dog, and to a greyhound if it be [kept] indoors; if not, a let its leash be removeda, and notice is to be given with each of them.27

[Mani sár]aighter hé iarna gabáil i n-athgabáil, 7 día sáraighther, is fíach indligid atghabála dó in cach ní dhúl i. Dá *tuctar* biadh don c[h]at nó a slabra arin milec[h]oin, nó dá *n-oslaicter* don c[h]at nó oirce asa n-Íadhain, nó dá *ndertutar* ní arin c[h]lár dar in crois nó darin ndúag im b‘lingarb nó dar in n-ídhe im indeoin 7 olchena, is fíach indligid atghabála dó in cach ní dhé-sín; 7 nembeth neich aíl acu fodera sin do gabáil i n-athgabáil, i. in idh 7 in crois 7 in ndúagh 7 rl-.

If it is not violated after being taken in distraint, and if violated, he [the distrainer] is entitled to the fine for illegality in distraint for each of all of these.

If food is given to the cat or if its leash is put on the greyhound, or if the cat or the lapdog are released from their enclosures, or if anything is done concerning the board in violation of the prohibition or in violation of the hoop around a medicine-bag or in violation of the withe around an anvil and so on, 26

III.2 (b) CIH 789.18–24 (a commentary on the text from Celtica 10) 27

If it is not violated after being taken in distraint, and if violated, he [the distrainer] is entitled to the fine for illegality in distraint for each of all of these.

If food is given to the cat or if its leash is put on the greyhound, or if the cat or the lapdog are released from their enclosures, or if anything is done concerning the board in violation of the prohibition or in violation of the hoop around a medicine-bag or in violation of the withe around an anvil and so on, 26


27 The translation is by Binchy, ‘A Text on the Forms of Distraint’, 78–9. Binchy notes in his comments on this section (p. 82) that ‘the antiquity of this procedure is confirmed in one of the so-called “false judgements of Caratnia” (in reality a list of the more important exceptions to general rules of law)’. 
he [the distrainer] is entitled to the fine for illegality in distraint for any of these actions; and the absence of any other one of them which signified its taking in distraint, i.e. the withe, the prohibition and the hoop, etc.  

a-a These three verbs, formally pass. pl. forms, are functioning here as pass. sgs. However, -tectar and -aslaictect may simply be variant spellings of the pass. sg.  

b-b As Binchy points out (‘A Text on the Forms of Distraint’, 83), lingur is glossed tiag i mbi[í] aidhme lega ‘a bag in which a leech’s instruments are [kept]’ in Dúil Dromma Cetta in TCD ms 1337 (H 3. 18), p. 71 (= CIH 616.35–6; cf. CIH 1075a.3–6).

III.3 Compensation for cats and dogs

III.3 (a) CIH 1628.26–8

Nòmad lòige in chon i ngac[h] cuilèn dia c[h]uilénaìb (γ) nó in c[h]ait i ngac[h] cat dá c[h]aitìnìnbh chena, nó co ro scarat fìriu; ò ò scarthìt, is [s]macht intìb gu ra gab[at] gnìmhraid òrra, is ëiriic in c[h]on nò in c[h]ait isà gnùntad ògèbat òrra intìb.

One ninth of the value of a dog for every one of its pups or a cat for every one of its kittens moreover, or until they may part from them; and as soon as they will part, it is a smacht-fine for them until they may take up activity, it is éric-fine of the dog or the cat for them whose activity they will undertake.

a-a The expansion of its geb- to gèbat follows Binchy. Alternatively, one could expand to gèhta, the classical O.Ir. 3rd pl. rel. fut. of gaibid. These 3rd pl. rel. forms do not survive into Mid.Ir. (see SnaG III § 12.130).

III.3 (b) CIH 1208.41–1209.2

Nòmad loighì a na consta in gac[h] cuilèn dia c[h]uilèn, nò in c[h]ait, co ro scar(s)at riui, ò ò b-scèait, is smacht unnta go ro ghabhaid gnùntad òrra, ò ò gèbhait, is ëiriic fo aigned a ngùntaid unnta.

One ninth of the value of a dog for every one of its pups or of the cat, until they may part from them; and as soon as they will part, it is a smacht-fine for them until they may take up activity, and when they will, it is éric-fine according to the nature of their activity.

a-a Although one could treat this as a gen. pl. form, it would seem better to see it as an example of the treatment of cú as a fem. noun (PÓR). This fluctuation with cú, between masc. and fem., has been discussed with regard to Cú Chulainn’s hound, Bran, by M. Ó Briain in ‘The Conception and Death of Fionn Mac Cumhaill’s Canine Cousin’, in A. Ahlqvist et al. (ed), Celtica Helsingiensia: proceedings from a symposium on Celtic Studies, Societas Scientarum Fennica, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 107 (Helsinki 1996) 179–202, at 180–181. Alternatively, perhaps, nach con ‘of any hound’ > na[c] con with delinition (JC).  

b-b The verb scaraid usually has ë-fut. in Mid.Ir.; the earlier f-fut. is attested above (III.3 (a)); cf. K. Murray, Baile in Scáil, Irish Texts Society 58 (London 2004) 80 n. 169.

28 This translation is based (with additions and modifications) on that offered by Binchy, ‘A Text on the Forms of Distraint’, 76.
III.3 (c) CIH 113.33–6

Cidh fodera trí ba isin cat 7 ná fuil acht coimhét namhá aicci? IS é fáth fodera urscartadh gu marbach da-ní in cat 7 urscartadh gan marbach du-ní in cú thall icca ta in coimhét namhá.

Why are there three cows paid for a cat which only guards moreover? The reason is that it is removal with death which the cat does and it is removal without death which the hound yonder does which only guards moreover.

III.4 Cats as pets for children

III.4 (a) CIH 1901.25 (cf. CIH 373.25–7; CIH 888.40–41)

IM ESRECHTA MACRAIDE .i. catín nó lúb nó bacán nó liathróit.

CONCERNING CHILDREN’S PLAYTHINGS, i.e. a kitten or a loop or a small mattock or a ball.

*a*Bacán here may refer to a kind of hooked or crooked stick (JC). Alternatively, perhaps, as Fergus Kelly translates bacc as ‘mattock’, bacán here may refer to a child’s version of the tool (DT), similar to Cú Chulainn’s toy javelin and shield in Macgimnradia Con Culainn.30

III.4 (b) CIH 373.25–7 = ALI 1 i 138.31–3

IM ESSRECHTA MACCRU1,2

1. i. na hi 4roíaisi gatusa serg dona macaib beca .i. bcamána b liathróiti 7 lúboca, c nó cat, uair dís e ar .iii. aithgin na cat e. 2. i. a n-aithgin ar aín.

CONCERNING PLAYTHINGS OF CHILDHOOD

1. i.e. the very noble things which remove decline from the little children, i.e. hurleys and balls and loops, or cats, for restitution of the cats is after three days. 2. i.e. their restitution is after one day.

*a*Correct nom. pl. of an i-stem adj. followed by a rel. vb in the sg. *b*This is not the regular nom. pl. of cammáin (o, m.) in any period of the language. *c*ALI i 138 reads act [no oirce] here. *d* ms ir; this could be omitted, treating it as dittography. *e*e Cf. O’Dav. 470 (III.6 (a) below).

III.4 (c) CIH 888.40–41

IM esrechta macræ .i. a mód a rogada nech a esrechtaí ar mac .i. caténa nó oircce nó alaill cena conid gaib macræ de.

Concerning playthings of childhood, i.e. if anyone may have removed his playthings from a child, i.e. a kitten or a lapdog or anything else besides until childhood takes it from him.

*a*The d of ms mad is intrusive.

29 Early Irish farming, 467.
III.4  O’Dav. 1247 = CIH 1516.10–11

Macrae .i. toirsi nò mifre, ut est ar-gaibh macru macu dàigh .i. geibid mifri .i. toirsi na macu bega fo dàighin.

Macrae, i.e. sorrow or sadness, ut est macrae seizes children as a result. i.e. sadness, i.e. sorrow seizes the little children because of that.

III.4  (e) CIH 35.21–29 = ALI v 250.4, 15–16

EISRECHTA TISCENA8

8 .i. na heis(c)rechta becca tindscetlaither ag neoch .i. coin 7 cait becc[a] (nó) co 4ngabait4 gnìmrad.

EARLY PLAYTHINGS

8 i.e. the small playthings which someone begins with, i.e. small dogs and cats until they take up activity.

a 4gabait has not here been emended to gabat, the regular O.Ir. 3rd pl. conj. form, as abs. and conj. endings are regularly confused from the late Mid.Ir. period onwards (see SnaG III § 12.17; IV § 7.3). A further example, by the same scribe, is found in a gloss (no. 14) to the same piece of canonical text: uair nocha dlegait (CIH 36.3). See also III.1 (c) above, ro gabait, and III.3 (b), ro gabhait. For comments on this development, see K. Jackson, Aislinge Meic Con Glinne (Dublin 1990) 112–13 § lxiv.

III.5 Exemptions for cats32

III.5  (a) CIH 290.32–6 = ALI iii 296.1–10

BLÁ CAT CUILÍ .i. Slàn don chat in biad ro gêba a faill imc[h]oinêta isin c[h]uilid do chaithem, acht nà tuca a daingen tighi nó lestair hê; 7 dà tuca, is amal torbach co n-arm in biadh, 7 amal esbach can arm in cat 7 slàn in cat do marbad and.

BLÁ CAT LUCHGABAL .i. Slàn don chat [int espach] in luchgabail a lochad, 7 lerhřìach uadh isin torbach, 7 metacht a lochad do scor in leithe aile de.

AN EXEMPTION FOR A CAT IS A PANTRY, i.e. the cat is exempt from liability for consuming the food which it may get due to negligence of keeping in the pantry, as long as it may not have taken it from a secured house or vessel; if it has taken [it], the food is like an armed one with business to be there and the cat is like an unarmed one with no business to be there and it is permissible to kill the cat there.

AN EXEMPTION FOR A CAT IS CATCHING MICE, i.e. the cat is exempt from liability for [injuring] someone with no business to be there while catching the mouse, and half-fine [is due] from him for [injuring] someone

31 As Stokes notes (O’Dav. 1247), ‘both the quotation and its explanation seem incomplete’ though the context may refer to the removal of children’s playthings (thus I have inserted it here). Breathnach, Companion, 145 n. 180, takes this citation to be from Bretha for Catslechtaib and to refer to ‘the killing of a cat of the kind called rincne’. As examples III.4 (a–c) derive from Di Chetharslicht Athgabála, however, it may be that this is the ultimate source of this O’Dav. citation (once again, however (see fn. 25 above), this interpretation would break the orderly sequence from the final third of SM).

32 Similar material concerning dogs is printed at CIH 111.29–38.
with business to be there, and the frenzy of its mouse releases it from the other half.

III.5 (b) CIH 1646.39–41

BLAÏ CAT LUCHGABÁL . i. IS slán lium don chatt int espach thecēma etarú 7 in luch aca gabál céin bes meracht a selga air sin; ō rachus de hé, lethfíach isin espach úad 7 láñfíach isin torbach.

CIH 1647.1–9 = AL iii 50

BLAÏ CATT CUILE . i. IS slán don c[h]at in biad ro géba sé isin chuile do chaitheam, acht narub tre daingén tighe nó lestuir do-béra hé. Slán dó-sum é, 7 aithgin ónt-i dår herbad é a coimét, nó is [s]lán fo aicned a ñaillí. MÁS a daingén tighi nó lestaír tucustair in catt in biad, is bithbinchi do rúagail i leth risium; aithgin ina chéitchinuid, lethfíach la háithgin ina chinaid tānaise, láñfíach la háithgin isin tres cínaid. Nó is slán don chatt foliage ñísrechta a i nóidqi, indethbír immurgy madh i lló. Cat comaithech sin; 7 dámad hé cat na cuile bodéin, cídh a hínad daingén cíd a hínadh édaing do-béra(dh), rob éric fo bithbinchi úad isin biad, úair is ris ro herbad comét na cuile.

AN EXEMPTION FOR A CAT IS CATCHING MICE, i.e. exempt from liability in my opinion is the cat [who injures] the one with no business to be there who will chance between it and the mouse being caught, as long as the frenzy of its hunting may be upon him; when it will depart from it, half-fine [is due] from him for [injuring] the one with no business to be there and full-fine for [injuring] the one with business to be there.

AN EXEMPTION FOR A CAT IS A PANTRY, i.e. the cat is exempt from liability for consuming the food which it may get in the pantry, provided that it may not have taken it from a secured house or vessel. It is exempt for it, and restitution from the one who was entrusted with its safe-keeping, or it is exempt from liability according to the nature of its negligence. If it be from a secured house or vessel that the cat took the food, it is the rule of repeat offence with respect to it; restitution for the first offence, half-fine with restitution for the second offence, full-fine with restitution for the third offence. Or the cat is exempt from liability for damaging the playthings during the night, inexcusable (i.e. not exempt), however, if it happens during the day. That is a cat not one’s own; and if it were the pantry cat itself, whether it be from a secured or an unsecured place that it may take [it], it is an éric-fine from it with respect to repeat offence concerning the food, since it is to it the protecting of the pantry was entrusted.

III.6 Miscellaneous references

III.6 (a) O’Dav. 470 = CIH 1483.10–12

Con-oiscet . i. innsaighit, ut est in tan nā tairecct aithgin na cat ar .iii. is ann con-oiscet dire . i. is ann innsaighter in dire-so dona híihb-sín; nó cumsgugud, amail atá: con-oiscet Sreth aAñmc[h]aidea.

Con-oiscet, i.e. they seek, ut est when they do not offer restitution of the cats after three days, it is then that they change [the] penalty, i.e. it is then that
this penalty is sought for these ones; or change, as is: they change Anmchad’s Series.

The regular gen. sg. of Anmcha(i)đ is Anmchada (cf. CGH p. 510). I have no idea what this sareth associated with Anmchad might refer to.

III.6 (b) CIH 1176.9 = ALI iii 532.4 (cf. CIH 335.30 = ALI iii 572).
CUIRM LIUM LEMNACHT LA CAT. 33
ALE FOR ME, NEW MILK FOR A CAT.

III.6 (c) O’Dav. 1110 = CIH 1510.10–11

İadhach ʻ.i. ūagh, ut est cait broinnřfinna duba a sētaib Ḳadhaighi a dīre
.i. fona sētaib bīs ina Ḳaghhaigh, ina Ḳeig, ērnither in-ī is dīr ind.

İadhach, i.e. a wallet, ut est white-breasted black cats from sēt of an
iadhach its penalty-fine, i.e. according to the sēts which are in his iadhach,
in his wallet, the amount which is due is paid for it.

III.6 (d) O’Dav. 1395 = CIH 1522.21–2

Rac ʻ.i. āream, ut est ar cīa racaither trī cait ,ii. ann ʻi. ar cīa āirmither trī
cait ,ii. ann ʻi. ēach, folum, glas neanta.

Rac, i.e. mentioning, ut est for although three other cats are spoken of
there, i.e. for although three other cats are mentioned there, i.e. ēach, folum,
glas nenta.

Following Meyer (see DIL s.v. racaid), it might be best to connect rac and the related verbal
form racaither with Anglo-Saxon reccan ‘tell, utter’ (> Ir. reccaid).

III.6 (e) CIH 349.25–9 = Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie 16 (1927) 176 § 4
(text only) 34

7 DO BRIUGAD DI-RENAR CĒTAIB  OCA MBĪ CAIRE ANSIC 8
CONA THOCHUS TĒCHTA 9.

7.ʻi. ica n-érmither cēta imda ʻi. in aibriugu leitech ʻ.i. da chēt do cach
c[h]rud aici 7 đa chēt fer ʻi mbēsaim mogadh leis, 7 is eisib di-renar ʻi. atā
ibriugu is ferry nās in fer-so ʻi. in briugu oca mbī in coire anisicc ʻ.i. cinmothā
coin 7 cata ʻ.i. cin diabal totgusa, 7 nī aca bīs in coire anisicc.

AND TO A HOSPITALLER WHO IS PAID IN HUNDREDS WHO HAS
A NON-DRY CAULDRON WITH ITS PROPER ACCOUTREMENTS.

7ʻi.e. by whom is bestowed many hundreds, i.e. the hospitaller of width,
 i.e. he has two hundred of every stock and two hundred men functioning as
sirs, and it is from them he is paid, i.e. there is a better hospitaller than this
man, i.e. the hospitaller who has the non-dry cauldron, i.e. excepting dogs and
cats, i.e. without a doubling of possessions, and he does not have the non-dry
cauldron.

33The phrase lemnacht la cat is discussed by B. Ó Cuív, ‘The Middle Irish Poems’, Éigse 16/1
167–230, at 176 § 4 = ALI i 46.21–5 (cf. CIH 880.15–16; 1659.16–20)
For a discussion of the briugulitech and its proposed etymology (an adj. formation from lei-thet ‘width’), see G. Mac Eoin, ‘Old Irish Briugu “Hospitaller” and Connected Words’, Celtica 23 (1999) 169–73, at 170. This gloss (and some of the other material cited here) is also present in Uraicecht Becc (CIH 654.26 = CIH 1608.35–6 = ALI v 78.15–16). With this phrase, compare the sentence from Din Techtugud: ni biad bésaib moga ‘she would not exist according to the customs of a slave’ (C. Watkins, ‘Indo-European Metrics and Archaic Irish Verse’, Celtica 6 (1963) 194–249, at 234–5). The other versions of this gloss from the Introduction to Senchas Már, viz. CIH 880.15 ff. and CIH 1659.16 ff., do not contain this cat-reference which may be misplaced here. In ALI i 46.23–5, the text reads: in briughadh leithech, i. da cet do cach crudh aici, cinmothá coin ocus cata, ocus da cet fer i mbesaib mogad leis, ocus is eisib direnar. Thus, it seems clear that i. cinmothá coin 7 cata would make most sense if taken as a gloss on in briugu leitech i. dá chéith do cach c[h]rud aici.35

III.6 (f) O’Dav. 421 = CIH 1481.2036

b Cairc[h]ech i. ruibe erbaill, ut est bó i ngac[h] ruibe bís i ngac[h] Cairchech, i.e. hair of a tail, ut est a cow for every hair which is in every Cairchech.

III.6 (g) O’Dav. 918 = CIH 1501.22–4

Fuirestar i. bi[d] dóigh cumadh inann 7 a foghbaí, ut est délegar do Foi gair, ut est it is likely that it is the same as getting, ut est it is due from the aforementioned that a portion should not be kept from mice, i.e. it is due from the cat that food [... ] should not appear from the mice. Fuiréstar. There is a real problem of interpretation here. Éirgither is taken as the pass. sg. of éirgid ‘rises, appears’ (though perhaps it should be understood as the pass. sg. of ad-rig ‘binds’ [recte: airegither]). ms airbertna looks like it should be connected with airbertnaigid ‘pleads’; it cannot be ruled out, however, that here we have a corrupt form of ar-berta ‘proposes’, or, less likely, ar-beir ‘uses, pleads, eats’.

CONCLUSION

The legal material relating to cats seems to have been primarily concerned with (i) sorting the cats into different categories and (ii) working out the compensation owed for the killing of a cat, and to whom the compensation should be paid. The question of compensation for the misdeeds of a cat is not addressed in depth, but this might not have been an issue because of their feral nature and the difficulty in preventing them from roaming, though in select cases (e.g. see III.5 above) they can be killed as punishment for their actions. The importance attributed to cats in medieval Irish legal sources is not paralleled in the Welsh laws:

35 Cenmothá governs the acc.; as cata is acc. pl., coin (rather than interpreting it as acc. sg.) is taken as an example of a nom. pl. form functioning as acc. pl.

36 This reference is not necessarily concerned with cats; Bretnach, Companion, 120 no. 421, however, believes it belongs with Bretha for Catslechtaib.
Gwerth cath, iii.k’. Gwerth kenev cath ew o’r nos e ganher hyt eny agorho y lygeyt, keynnyavc k[yvrethyavl]; ac o henny hyt eny ladho lygot, dwy keynnyavc k[yvrethyavl]; ac gwedy lladho llygot, pedeyr keynnyavc k[yvrethyavl], ac ar henny e tryc vyth.37

The value of a cat, fourpence. The value of a kitten from the night it is born until it opens its eyes, a legal penny; and from then until it kills mice, two legal pence; and after it kills mice, four legal pence, and at that it remains for ever.38

This is much more along the lines that one would expect for the killing of a cat. However, within medieval Welsh law there is minor variation with LLyfr Blegywryd allowing for compensation for a cat which guards the king’s barn up to the value of ‘a milch sheep with her lamb and her wool’.39 Furthermore, an early reference in Trawsganu Kynan Garwyn Mab Brochfael can perhaps be interpreted as pointing towards a higher value for cats: in a list of costly gifts bestowed by Cynan, one finds A phymwpnt cathet ‘and fifty cats(?),’ though this translation is far from certain.40

Apart from this single doubtful reference, Welsh tradition, as described particularly in the legal material, does not give the same prominent position to cats as that afforded by medieval Irish law. Though the fragmentary nature of Cat˙slechta and the lack of context for many of the other surviving references make it hard to come to firm conclusions, it is obvious that cats were more important to medieval Irish society than might have been suspected. Moreover, this accords with recent archaeological research on the subject where the author concludes:

Firstly, the domestic cat had a wide, if not universal distribution, in rural Early Christian Ireland but is present in very small numbers on individual sites. Secondly, the cats present were of a relatively large size. Thirdly, most of the cats present on rural sites were mature or old individuals. This evidence suggests that cats were wellbred and cared for and kept as prized domestic pets.41

This final conclusion is concrete evidence of the interest shown in all types of cat in medieval Ireland, particularly pets and ‘recreational’ cats which go unremarked in the medieval Welsh legal corpus. The benevolent treatment of cats suggested by this archaeological research surely also reflects their importance as predators: for example, recent research shows that ‘the total number

of animals brought home by about 9 million cats living in Great Britain during the five month period April–August 1997 was estimated to be in the order of 92.4 million. Based on such figures, the role of cats in guarding granaries and pantries, a role which is consistently emphasised in our legal materials, would seem to have been of the utmost importance. This is unsurprising when one considers the havoc which can be wreaked on stored grain by rodents and other small animals. Truly, the medieval Irish knew the worth of the animals in their possession.

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42 M. Woods, R. A. McDonald and S. Harris, Predation of wildlife by domestic cats in Great Britain (written for the Mammal Society; available at www.abdn.ac.uk/~nhi775/cat_predation.htm; forthcoming in Mammal Review). Many thanks to Tony Dunne and Daniel Buck, Dept of Zoology, Ecology and Plant Science, UCC, and to Caitríona Ó Dochartaigh for bringing these statistics to my attention.