EARLY Irish literature is notable for its abundant use of imagery—both in the form of metaphor and of simile—which lends an immediacy and vividness to the narrative or theme of a passage. This literary technique is also employed quite frequently in the law-texts to emphasise particular legal concepts. For example, in the law-text Bretha Nemed Tóisech it is stated that a law-case instituted by the Church is as ‘the sea compared with streams’ (*muir tar glasa*). The same phrase is also used in the Old Irish heroic tale Táin Bó Cúailnge ‘the cattle-raid of Cooley’ to express a contrast between the mighty and the insignificant. I suspect that it belongs to the general repertoire of popular sayings of the period, and that it was taken into literary and legal texts from this source.

Other images may be of Biblical origin. In a passage on legal procedure the author states that if the choice of a legal path which an advocate makes in relation to a law-case is not bound (by sureties) it is *gním for gaineam* ‘a work on sand’. This may echo the Biblical parable of the house built on sand which is washed away by wind and floods, as opposed to the enduring house built upon a rock.

Most of the images used in the surviving legal material seem to me likely to be original to the various authors of these texts. Some of these examples are straightforward. In the text on base clientship, Cǎin Aicillne, the author compares the *fine* ‘kin-group’ to a person’s body in the following terms: *imdic caoch corp a meamra . . . corp caich a fine, ar ni bi nach corp cen cenn* ‘every body defends its members . . . the body of every person is his kin-group, for there is no body without a head’. Another fairly straightforward image is that employed by an Old Irish glossator on the coda to Heptad 65. He draws

1This article originated as a paper delivered at the School of Celtic Studies Tionól on 17 November 2007. I am most grateful to all who contributed to the discussion on this occasion, and who subsequently provided me with references. I am indebted to the National Museum of Ireland for supplying the illustration of the Castlederg Cauldron, and to Edward M. Kelly for the two line-drawings reproduced in this article. In particular, I am grateful to Finbar McCormick of the Queen’s University Belfast, who advised on some of the archaeological aspects of the paper. Any errors of fact or interpretation are my own responsibility.


5Matthew 7: 24–29.


7*CIH* iii 906.36–7.
a comparison between ráth ‘fort’ and ráth ‘paying surety’: Can rosaigiged bescnai ratha la Féiniu? .i. is cosmalius na ratha talmanda asherar rath doenda .i. de (= dl) ursain lee .i. dénaidm; fordorus .i. fiadnaisi; a tete innde ni tiagar eissi acht for beolu; is amlaid cuimne raithi 7rl ‘Whence has been established the propriety of surety in Irish law? i.e. the analogy of the earthen fort is applied to a human surety i.e. it has two door-posts i.e. two enforcing sureties; a lintel, i.e. evidence; what goes into it does not come out except through the mouth; thus it is with the memory of a surety, etc.’ The glossator here views the two door-posts (dí ursain) of the fort as corresponding to the two enforcing sureties (dénaidm) of a contract. The two door-posts support the lintel (fordorus) just as the two sureties support the evidence (fiadnaise) regarding the contract. This can be represented diagrammatically:

Figure 1: Image of door-posts and lintel

More complicated images are also to be found in the legal sources. The author of the eighth-century law-text on status Críth Gablach describes legal dishonour with the vivid metaphor of cac for enech ‘excrement on the face’. 8 He then continues the metaphor by posing the question ‘what cleanses somebody’s face?’ (cid dinig di inchaib neich?). To this question he provides the answer biit a trí ocá díumuch .i. slíc 7 uisce 7 anart ‘there are three which cleanse it i.e. lye (?) 9, water and a towel’. The author then identifies the lye


9 The readings of the mss are: CIH ii 564.40–1 sléic, sleic; iii 782.6 sleic, om.; iv 1312.11 slig, slig; vi 2067.29 slíc, slíc. Binchy takes the word to be slíc, and in his Notes (CG, p. 32) suggests that it means ‘pumice’, solidified foam of volcanic origin widely used as an abrasive for cleaning the body, household utensils, etc. In ‘Varia I. Sg. 69a9’, Ériu 33 (1982) 163–4, David Greene supports Binchy’s explanation, but makes a strong case — based on a gloss on Priscian — for taking the Old Irish form to be sléic. Pádraig Ó Néill, ‘Varia V, Old Irish sléic’, Ériú 36 (1985) 185–6, brings the discussion further with the suggestion that the main meaning of sléic is ‘potash as a personal detergent’: this seems to make better sense than pumice as a facial cleansing agent
with the culprit’s public admission of the misdemeanour, pledging that he will not repeat the crime. The water is payment for any fine due, and the towel is the penance according to the books of Canon law.

In another complex metaphor we find that a legal commentator has elaborated on the image of the kin-group as a human body mentioned previously, and has identified various circles of the kin-group with points on the upper body, working out from the chest. The taobhfine ‘side-kin’ is identified with the two upper arms in the side (an da dhae isin taobh), while the iarfine ‘after-kin’ is identified with the two forearms (an dá righ). The innfine ‘end-kin’ is identified with the two fists (na da dornn), and the ingen ara méraiib ‘the nail on their fingers’—the furthest circle of kinship recognised in early Irish law—is identified with fingers and nails (méra 7 ingni).

It is clear that the cauldron was an article of great importance in the everyday life of the early Irish. According to Críth Gablach, all commoners of mruigfer rank were expected to possess ‘a bronze cauldron in which a boar can fit’ (caire umai i talla torc). An aire tuíseo ‘lord of precedence’ has an even bigger cauldron, and is said to own ‘bronze vessels including a cauldron which fits a cow along with a flitch of bacon’ (humalestrai im chaire i talla boin co tinniu). In the law-texts the cauldron is associated especially with the briugu ‘hospitaliser’, whose honour-price depends on his ability to provide hospitality. According to the law-text Bretha Nemed Tóisech, the status enjoyed by the briugu comes from three attributes: having a never-dry cauldron, a dwelling on a public road, a welcome for every face (A tri nemiter bruigaid: caire ainsic, arus for tuathset, fo cen fria cach ngnuis).

In the tenth-century tale Esnada Tige Buchet ‘the melodies of the house of Buchet’, Buchet is a hospitaller who is introduced in the first line as coire féile la Laigniu ‘a cauldron of hospitality among the Leinstermen’. The cauldron also features in early Irish mythology: the Dagdae (‘Good God’) has a magic cauldron of unlimited capacity. In the tale Cath Maige Tuired, it is stated that no company ever went away unsatisfied from the cauldron of the Dagdae (coire an Dagdai).


10 CIH iv 1316.3–6.
11 CIH ii 564.7; iii 780.14 = CG 8.197.
12 CIH ii 567.24; iii 783.31–2 = CG 16.405–6.
13 CIH vi 2220.8–9.
of the cauldron is used to illustrate varying degrees of competence in the basics of grammar, metrics and writing. The first cauldron is the *coire goiriath*, a difficult term discussed by Breatnach in the Notes to his edition (pp. 74–5). The *coire sofís* ‘cauldron of knowledge’ represents what the highest grade of learned person possesses over and above the basics. The *coire érmae*, which Breatnach suggests in a later article may mean ‘cauldron of progression’,¹⁷ represents an intermediate stage between the *coire goiriath* and the *coire sofís*. § 4 of this text reads: *Caite didiu bunad ind airchetail 7 cach sois olchenae? Ní ansae; gainitir trí coiri i cach duine .i. coire goriath 7 coire érma 7 coire sois* ‘What does the source of poetic art and every other knowledge consist of? Not difficult; three cauldrons are generated in every person, i.e. the cauldron of *Goiriath* and the cauldron of progression and the cauldron of knowledge’.

A shortened version of this passage is preserved in § 127 of the ninth-century ‘Triads of Ireland’, but another cauldron has been substituted for the *coire sofís*. The Yellow Book of Lecan has *trí coiri bite in cach duini: coiri erma .c. goriath .c. aighedh*, and this is broadly the version used by Kuno Meyer in his edition, though he mistakenly reads *in cach dúini*, which he translates ‘in every fort’.¹⁸ Meyer takes *c. aighedh* to be for Old Irish *coire aígéd* ‘cauldron of guests’, which does not suit the context satisfactorily. However, the corresponding variants in other mss of the Triads seem equally problematic: *aitiu N, notead B, notheadh M*.

In spite of the high profile of the cauldron in the written sources of the early Christian period, there is no archaeological evidence of its presence in Ireland during this era. There is, however, a partially preserved sheet-iron cauldron from Drumlane, Co. Cavan, which dates from the early Iron Age.¹⁹ By contrast, there is abundant archaeological evidence of cauldrons from the Bronze Age—no less than thirty-two have been recorded.²⁰ These include the magnificent bronze cauldron from Castlederg, Co. Tyrone, which is in near-pristine condition, and is pictured opposite. It dates from about the 7th century BC.

In the remainder of this article, I concentrate on an intriguing use of the cauldron image in a passage of Middle Irish legal commentary which has been preserved only in the British Library manuscript Egerton 88, and published at *CIH* iv 1307.38–1308.7. This passage forms part of a section on judges and judgement which Liam Breatnach has designated as B18 (*CIH* iv 1307.21–1308.12) of a long digest consisting of citations from Old Irish texts, with later glosses and commentary, as well as some Latin citations (*CIH* iv 1289.1–1384.8). The material is organised according to subject-matter, and

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¹⁸Kuno Meyer (ed.), *The Triads of Ireland* (Todd Lecture Series XIII, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin 1906) 16 § 127.
²⁰Michael Ryan (ed.), *Seoda na hÉireann: ealain Éireannach 3000 RCh–1500 AD* (Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann, Baile Átha Cliath 1985) 98.
each section illustrates a particular legal principle.\textsuperscript{21} Egerton 88 was written between 1564 and 1569 AD at the law-school of Domhnall Ó Dubh dá Bhoireann (O’Davoren), and contains a great deal of important legal material, much of it not found elsewhere. I reproduce the text as it stands in the manuscript, with the normal expansions in italics. For ease of reference, I divide the text up into eight sections, using the letters (a) to (h).

Text and translation

(a) \textit{doni dlig caire saordha} don \textit{breithemain}, (b) oir mar ata \textit{æal} \textit{tellach} \textit{grisach} \textit{innbir} \textit{drol} \textit{tine} agan caire umha: (c) \textit{cosmail frisin caire saordha} sin \textit{didiu} i.e. frisin m\textit{breithemain}, (d) i.e. ar is e is tellach dho togha na conaire, (e) \textit{gris[ach]} do tagra ó fir adgair \textit{frega} ó fir adgart[har], (f) \textit{ias} imfoilgnes hi in \textit{biuba} \textit{feichem} toicheda, (g) \textit{is é in der <no int æal>} \textit{saordha} bis aice eipert cin roaird i gi nroísli, (h) \textit{is é in drolma saord} bis fai oga fulang int arach \textit{trobairi} re airisam uirre i.e. ar \textit{breith} an \textit{breitheman}.

(a) and the law makes a figurative cauldron of the judge, (b) for as the bronze cauldron has a fleshfork and a hearth and embers and a bar and a ring and a fire: (c) that is analogous to the figurative cauldron, i.e. to the judge, (d) i.e. for the hearth is for it the choice of path, (e) and the embers for it is the plea from the man who prosecutes and the counter-plea from the man who is prosecuted, (f) and it is the defendant and the plaintiff who sustain it, (g) and the figurative fleshfork which it has is speaking without excessive loudness or excessive softness, (h) and the figurative ring which is under it supporting it is the bond of a surety to abide by it, i.e. by the judgement of the judge.

Discussion

(a) \textit{caire saordha}. The masculine o-stem \textit{coire} (\textit{caire}) is well-attested in the meaning ‘cauldron’, and is cognate with Welsh \textit{pair} (\textit{peir}) of the same meaning.\textsuperscript{22} The adj. \textit{saordha} (\textit{sàerda}) is a derivative of \textit{sàer} ‘craftsman, artificer’, and is very commonly used in legal commentary in the meanings ‘artificial, conventional, figurative’ as opposed to \textit{aicneta} (\textit{eicenta}) ‘natural, essential’, a derivative of \textit{aicned} ‘nature’. Thus, commentary distinguishes the natural 24-hour day (\textit{laithe aicneta}) from the 12-hour artificial or working day (\textit{laithe sàerda}).\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21}For further discussion on this digest and its contents, see Liam Breathnach, \textit{A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici} (Early Irish Law Series V, Dublin 2005) 53–63.
\textsuperscript{23}E.g. \textit{CIH} v 1605.2–6 = Robert Atkinson (ed.), \textit{Ancient laws of Ireland} (hereafter \textit{AL}) v (Dublin 1901) 62.10–15. For other examples, see E. G. Quin et al., \textit{Dictionary of the Irish language, based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials} (hereafter \textit{DIL}) (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 1913–76; repr. in compact ed. 1983) s.v. \textit{aicnetae}. 
(b) Here the commentator picks out six things associated with the cauldron: (1) the æal ‘fleshfork’ used to spear the meat from the cauldron, (2) the tellach ‘hearth’ in which the cauldron is placed, (3) the grísach ‘embers’, from which the fire is kindled, (4) the innber ‘bar’ to hold the cauldron in place over the fire, (5) the drol (recte drolam?) ‘ring’ on either side of the mouth of the cauldron through which the bar passes, and (6) the tene ‘fire’ which heats the cauldron. For a discussion of drol and innber see (h) below.

(d) tellach. For cooking purposes the cauldron is brought to the hearth (tellach), centrally situated within the house. The term tellach (earlier tenlach) is a derivative of tene ‘fire’ with the suffix -lach.\(^{24}\) The commentator here sees a parallel between the placing of the cauldron in the hearth, and the choosing of the legal path (togha na conaire) in a law-case. The commentator’s source is likely to have been the Old Irish law-text on procedure, Cóic Conara Fugill ‘the five paths of judgement’.\(^{25}\)

togha na conaire. The choice of the path is no doubt normally a matter for the advocate (aigne) who has been engaged by the plaintiff. He must choose

\(^{24}\)See discussion at LEIA T-49 s.v. tene.
the path which is appropriate to the case, and must pay a fine of one cow if he chooses an incorrect path.

(e) *gríš[ach]*. In (b) above, the ms has *gris*–, which I take to be for the fem. á-stem *gríšach* ‘embers’ (*DIL* s.v.), though Binchy expands to *gríšadh*, verbal noun of *gríšaid*(h) ‘causes to glow, incites, enflames, etc.’ (*CIH* iv 1308.1). Here in (e), the ms has *gris*. It is probable that the scribe has omitted the suspension stroke, and that the original had *gríšach*. On the other hand, one could keep the ms form as it stands, and read *gríš* ‘embers’, also a fem. á-stem (*DIL* s.v.). The sense is unaffected.

tagra ó fir adgair. The plea (*tagra*, OIr *tacrae*) is made by the advocate on behalf of the plaintif{f} (*féichem toicheda*), who is discussed in (f) below. Here *fir* (= *fiur*) is dat. sg. of *fer*. The phrase *fer ad-gair* is generally used of a plaintif{f} in a law-suit, e.g. *Cáin Domnaig* § 7: *in fer adgair* ‘the man who sues (in relation to a case of breach of the Sabbath),’ *Triads* § 161: *Tri na fuigletar cia beith ar a ngáes: fer adgair 7 adgaither 7 focrenar fri breith* ‘three who do not adjudicate though they are possessed of wisdom: ‘a man who sues, a man who is being sued, a man who is bribed to give judgement’. In the present commentary, however, the context indicates that *fer ad-gair* and *fer ad-garthar* refer to the advocates acting for the plaintif{f} and the defendant respectively.

fregra ó fir adgart[h]ar. The advocate employed by the defendant makes a counter-plea (*fregra*, OIr *frecrae*) to rebut the plaintif{f}’s case. In Old Irish the 3 sg. pres. indic. passive of *ad-gair* is *ad-gairther*, whereas the 3 sg. pres. subj. passive is *ad-garthar*. Here, however, the context requires that *adgart*[h]ar be taken as pres. indic. passive. *DIL* s.v. *ad-gair* records pres. indic. passives with and without -th-, and with palatalised and non-palatalised -r-, e.g. *adgaither, -garthar, -acarhar, -acarar*.

(f) is iat imfoilnges hi. The commentator’s idea seems to be that the original legal issue between the litigants is fanned into flames by the advocates in court. Liam Breathnach (personal communication) compares Modern Irish *aighneas* ‘argument, contention’, a derivative of *aig* (h) ‘advocate’. The form *imfoilnges* is Middle Irish pres. indic. rel. of *imm-foilngi* (*imfoilngidh*) ‘sustains, brings about’.

in biuba 7 féichem toichneda. The most common meaning of *biuba* (OIr *bibdu*) is ‘criminal, culprit, condemned person’. It may also mean ‘defendant in a law-case’, as in the case of the Old Welsh cognate *bibid*, which glosses Latin *rei* ‘accused persons’. In this sense it is regularly paired in legal commentary with the plaintif{f}, *féichem toicheda*, lit. ‘litigant of suing’ (gen. sg. of *toichid*, verbal noun of *do-saig* ‘seeks, sues’).

28 *DIL* s.vv. *aigne, aignes*; Niall Ó Dónaill (ed.), *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (Baile Átha Cliath 1977), s.vv. *aighne, aighneas*.
29 *DIL* s.v. *bibdu* (b).
30 *LÉIA* B-49 s.v. *bibdu*.
31 E.g. *CIH* v 1724.3, 8–9, etc. = *AL* ii 4.13, 25, etc.
(g) in der <no int æel>. In the manuscript no int æel has been inserted as a correction over in der. The word dér ‘tear’ makes no sense here, and æel ‘fleshfork’ has been included as the first item in the list in (a), so it is clearly the correct reading. This disyllabic word occurs in the spellings ael, aiel, æel, and in the later language, adhal.32 Aél is used to explain Latin fuscina ‘fork’ in the Old Irish Glosses on Priscian’s Institutiones Grammaticae in the St. Gall C 904.33 The Karlsruhe copy has beda fuscina tridens i. æel ‘Bede [says] “three-pronged spear” i.e. fleshfork’.34 Aél commonly occurs in association with coire ‘cauldron’. In the law-text on distraint Dì Chethairslicht Athgabálae, aiél and coire are listed together among the standard household cooking equipment.35 Accidents involving scalding or piercing are liable to occur when the fleshfork is being employed at the cauldron. The law-text on accidents, Bretha Éitgid, deals with issues of liability, and stresses that a warning must be given by the attendant before the use of the fleshfork. The best reading is that of the Royal Irish Academy ms D v 2: BLAI CAIRE COM-BRUTH. ACHT ROFOCRA FER ARAFOICHE AÉL A CAIRE ‘the immunity of cauldrons is boiling, provided that the man who attends to [it] gives notice of the fleshfork [going] into the cauldron’.36 Legal heptad no. 8 lists seven reboundings (aithsceanmanda) which may cause injury, but are not liable for penalties unless there is malice or carelessness.37 One of these is aithsceinm mire do aeiel ‘the rebounding of a piece [of meat] from a fleshfork’. The function of the fleshfork is also illustrated in the Old Irish tale Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó.38 The author explains that in the hostel (bruiden) of Mac Dathó, there were seven hearths with seven cauldrons, and a flitch of bacon in each cauldron. Every man who passed by the bruiden would put a fleshfork into the

32Calvert Watkins discusses the origin of the word æel in his article ‘The Old Irish word for “fleshfork”’, in Joseph Falaky Nagy and Leslie Ellen Jones (ed.), Heroic poets and poetic heroes in Celtic tradition: a Festschrift for Patrick K. Ford. CSANA Yearbook 3–4 (Dublin 2005) 377–8. He suggests a Celtic preform *aus-ilao- (less likely *aus-ilo- or *aus-elo-) from the Indo-European root *h₁e₁us- (<h₂a₁us>) with the elemental meaning ‘to fetch the primal necessities of life’. J. Vendryes (LEIA A-20) follows J. Pokorny’s suggestion in ‘Etymologische Mizzellen’ (Streitberg-Festgabe, Leipzig 1924, 292–4) that æel is a borrowing from Old English awul ‘fleshfork, hook, awl’, but Watkins demonstrates that there are phonological and sociolinguistic difficulties with this interpretation.


34Stokes and Strachan, Thesaurus ii 226.30. For Irish references to a three-pronged æel, see DIL s.vv. trebend, trebennach.

35CII ii 368.26 = AL i 122.13.

36Bretnach, Companion, 453.20, 30. The D v 2 version of Bretha Éitgid is not included in CIH, but is given as Appendix 2 of the Companion (pp. 381–464). The version in the Trinity College Dublin ms E 3. 5 has BLA COIRE COMBRUTH ACHT ARFOCRA fer foichlid æel a coire (CII i 283.32–4 = AL iii 266.3–8). As Liam Bretnach points out to me, the original text can be reconstructed from the two versions: blai coire combrath, acht ar-fócr a fer ara-foichlea æel i coire.

37CII i 10.38–11.19 = AL v 156.11–17.

38Rudolf Thurneysen (ed.), Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó (Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series VI, Dublin 1935; repr. 1986) 1.11–2.15.
cauldron (*dobered in n-áel isin coiri*), and would eat what he got from the first thrust. If he got nothing from the first thrust, he did not have a second chance.

I am informed that there is no archaeological evidence of fleshforks in Ireland from the Early Christian period. There is a very fine bronze flesh-hook from Dunaverney Bog, Co. Antrim, dating from about the 8th century BC, which Barry Raftery believes to have been imported from Central Europe.\(^39\) This ornate piece—decorated with swans and ravens—has rings, presumably for suspending pieces of meat inside the cauldron. It is clearly of very different design to the fleshfork described in the Old and Middle Irish texts.

**epert cin roaird gín roíslí.** According to the Old Irish text of *Cóic Conara Fugill*, it is a legal offence for the advocate to speak too loudly or too softly in court, and he must pay a fine of one cow for this failing.\(^40\) The commentator draws a parallel between the advocate who addresses the court in an even voice, and the fleshfork used to pick out pieces of meat from a boiling cauldron. I find it difficult to follow his analogy, but he may be emphasising the need for a controlled approach to both tasks. If the wielder of the fleshfork handles it too aggressively or too timidly, he will fail to secure a piece of meat. Similarly, the advocate who speaks too loudly or too softly will fail to make a convincing case.

\(h\) **in drolma saorda.** The form *drolma* of the ms presents difficulties. I suggest that it is a scribal error for *drolam*, which is well-attested of the ring of a cauldron or the handle of a cup,\(^41\) and gives rise to the substantive *drolmach*, used of a wooden vessel with rings or handles.\(^42\) There have been different approaches to providing an explanation for the form *drolam*. Carl Marstrander put forward the theory that it was from *dru-lāmo-* with the elements *dru-* ‘oak, wood’ and *lām* ‘hand, hand-grip’.\(^43\) But this suggestion is not accepted by Vendryes, who includes it among the derivatives of *drol*.\(^44\) I would follow Vendryes in taking *drolam* to be a derivative of *drol* ‘bar, bolt’. The suffix -*am* (-*em*) is commonly used in Old Irish to indicate agency or instrument.\(^45\) Ulla Remmer has carried out a comprehensive survey of this suffix, published in two parts in the journal *Die Sprache*.\(^46\) Her study demonstrates that the use of the suffix -*am* (-*em*) is almost exclusively reserved for the expression of agency or instrument. In the case of *drolam*, however, it seems to have a wider application. Thus, *drol* is the bar, while *drolam* is the object through which

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41 DIL s.v. *drolam*.
42 DIL s.v. *drolmach*.
44 LEIA D-200.
45 Holger Pedersen, *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen* ii (Göttingen 1913) 61 § 402 (3).
the bar passes, i.e. the ring. The suffix here is not strictly one of agency or instrument, but rather indicates that the function of the ring is to enclose the bar.

There is some confusion between *drol* and *drolam*, particularly in the later language. In the tenth-century *Saltair na Rann* there is a clear distinction in lines 4309–4311: *cethri drolaim di ór drón / asind áirc dia himmarchor / dá drol treothu, derg a ngné / dond ór amra forloiscithe* ‘four rings of stout gold attached to the Ark to carry it; two poles through them, of red hue, of famous polished gold’.\(^47\) In a later prose version in the *Leabhar Breac*, on the other hand, *drol* has been substituted for *drolam*: *point-hook, handle*.\(^48\)

**innbir.** Because of its association with *drolam*, it seems best to discuss the difficult term *innbir* here. DIL distinguishes three separate words *in*(*d*)*ber*, all of them masc. *o*-stems. The first is *in*(*d*)*ber* ‘estuary, confluence’, derived by Eric Hamp from *eni-* ‘in’ + *b(h)er* ‘flows, carries’.\(^51\) The second is *in*(*d*)*ber* ‘bar, spit’, where I believe *innbir* (with -ir for -er) in our commentary belongs. This word may be used of a sturdy iron bar used to keep a door shut. In the Old Irish tale *Mesca Ulad*, a door of yew-wood (*comla ibair*) is said to have two rings of iron out of it (*da drolam iaraind esse*) and an iron bar on those two rings (*indber iarind arin dá drolam sin*).\(^52\) Here it is

\(^47\)Whitley Stokes (ed.), *The Saltair na Rann, a collection of early Middle Irish poems* (Oxford 1883) 63; translation by David Greene at www.celt.dias.ie/publications online.

\(^48\)Joseph O’Longan, *Leabhar Breac: the Speckled Book, otherwise styled Leabhar Mór Dína Doighre: the Great Book of Dún Doighre*. Lithographic reproduction of O’Longan’s transcript, with a preface by Samuel Ferguson (Dublin 1872–76) 121a14–15. Note, however, that the distinction between *drol* and *drolam* has been maintained in the prose version in the Yellow Book of Lecan: *ceithri drolaim oir esti rena imluad 7 re himorchur / di drol dergoir trithe amach* ‘four rings out of it to move it and to carry it; two poles of red gold out through it’.\(^49\) In (*b*) of the legal commentary edited here, *drol* likewise appears to have been used in place of *drolam*. In Modern Irish dictionaries, no distinction is noted between the meanings of *drol* and *drolam*.\(^49\) The distinction was, however, maintained in Scottish Gaelic. Thus, in his *Faclair Gaidhlig agus Beurla*, Edward Dwelly gives the headwords *droll* ‘door-bar’ and *drolla* (= Irish *drolamh*) ‘pot-hook, handle’.\(^50\)
clear that the *indber* is passed through the two rings (*arin dá drolam*) to secure the door.

In the other attested instances of *in(d)ber* there is a connection with a cauldron, as in our commentary. In *Críth Gablach* we find a list of the domestic utensils which are expected to be present in the house of a mruig˙fer or prosperous farmer: these include *caire cona inbiur* ‘a cauldron with its bar’. There is an incident in the tale *De Maccaib Conaire* where a warrior is hurled on top of a cauldron so that his upper arm was broken on the far ring (*co memaid a chóir drolam iarthairach*) and his backbone was broken on the bar (*co memaid a choeldruim immon inber*). An *inber* also causes fatal injury in *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*. The warrior Mac Cécht took the iron bar which was holding up the king’s cauldron (*birt inber n-iaraind ro baí fónd rígcoiri*), and struck nine blows against the door of the Hostel, causing the death of nine men at each blow. The sturdiness of the *in(d)ber* is also emphasised in this tale, where the spear-shafts of the three mightiest warriors of the *Cruthentiath* are said to be *remithir indber cairi* ‘as thick as the bar of a cauldron’. In a verse in Mac Con Glinne’s food-vision in the Middle Irish tale *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, we find the terms *inber*, *coire* and *aél* in close association: *atconnarc in luchtaire / fo inbiur in ardchori / ’sa aél ria ais*, which I would translate ‘I saw the food-dispenser below the bar of the high cauldron, with its fleshfork behind him’. In his Glossary to his edition of the *Aislinge*, Kuno Meyer makes the suggestion that *in(d)ber* is a compound of *bir* ‘spit’, and translates it as ‘a large spit’. The *u*-stem *bir* is well-attested of a variety of long sharp objects of wood or iron. It is regularly used of a spit on which meat is roasted over a fire: see the illustration of the spit of Deichen (*Bir nDeichin*) in the *Yellow Book of Leic*an, col. 245. Old Irish *bir* can be traced back to Indo-European *g*ē*reu-* ‘stick, spit’, and is cognate with Avestan *grava-* ‘stick, spit’, Latin *u eru* ‘spit’, Gothic *qâiru* ‘spike’, Welsh *bêr*

53 *CIH* ii 563.19–20; iii 779.38–9 (both mss have inbiurb(h)) = *CG* 7.174. Liam Breatnach points out to me that the same spelling is to be found in the poem ‘Tuathal Techtmar ba rí Temrach’, also with reference to a cauldron: *cona aél cona inbiurb cona chonnud* ‘with its fleshfork, with its bar, with its firewood’ (R. I. Best, Osborn Bergin and M. A. O’Brien (ed.), *The Book of Leinster*, formerly *Leabhar na Núachongbála* i (Dublin 1954) 163.4987). He also notes that the syllable-count in this line confirms *aél* to be disyllabic.

54 L. Gwynn, ‘*De Maccaib Conaire*’, *Ériu* 6 (1912) 148.44–6.


56 Ibid. 23.750, and Note on p. 85 of her edition.


58 Meyer, *Aislinge*, 38.16–18, translates ‘Below the lofty cauldron’s spit / Then the Dispenser I beheld / His fleshfork on his back’. Jackson, *Aislinge*, 16 fn. 15, notes that the H 3. 18 version of this tale has *ós* ‘above’ rather than *fo* ‘below’ of the Leabhar Breac version.


60 *DIL* s.v. *bir*.

61 This is reproduced in Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish Farming: a study based mainly on the law-texts of the 7th and 8th centuries AD* (Early Irish Law Series IV, Dublin 1997; repr.1998) 338.
‘spear, lance, rod, roasting spit’. As far as can be deduced from the occurrences of the two words, it seems that bi(u)r refers to a sharp length of wood or iron designed to impale (in warfare, trapping or cooking) whereas in(d)ber refers to a stout non-pointed bar of iron designed to carry a heavy load. The preposition in(d) ‘in’ presumably indicates that the bar must be inserted within rings to carry out its function. Another possibility is that in(d)ber contains the root *bher- ‘to carry’; cf. Hamp’s explanation for the form in(d)ber ‘estuary’ mentioned at the beginning of this note.

**int arach trebaire.** In a law-case the sureties representing the litigants must give a bond (árach) to guarantee that both sides will adhere to the judgement. The author of our commentary likens the sureties’ bond with the ring which bears the weight of the cauldron. *Trebaire* is abstract of *trebar* ‘secure, prudent’, and is used both of the person who acts as a surety on behalf of another, and of the security which he guarantees. The phrase *árach trebaire* is attested elsewhere in legal material, e.g. in a gloss on § 22 of *Cóic Conara Fugill*, where Thurneysen translates it as ‘die Bindung durch Sicherung’, ‘binding through security’.

In conclusion, I cannot claim to have a full understanding of the image which the commentator presents. There seems no difficulty with the first image (d), which compares the choice of path with the placing of the cauldron in the hearth (*tellach*). There is also a clear logical connection between the embers (*grísach*) of (e) from which the fire is ignited and the plea and counter-plea which set the law-case in motion. As mentioned previously, the comparison in (g) between speaking too loudly or too softly in court and the use of the flesh-fork (*æal*) to pick out pieces of meat from the cauldron is not easy to explain. On the other hand, the comparison in (h) between the sureties’ bond and the ring (*drolam*) which bears the weight of the cauldron makes clear sense. The text may be incomplete, as no comparisons are given for the fire (*tene*) or the bar (*ínber*).

The central image of the judge as cauldron (*caire*) is found elsewhere in the law-texts. A short poem in *Bretha Nemed Déidenach* begins with the question *An ccualae coire breth?* ‘have you heard of the cauldron of judgements?’. It then goes on to say that ‘the belly-cauldron of a judge cooks (i.e. refines) judgements’ (*conberbha bretha brúchaire breithemhan*). Liam Breatnach points out that the title *Caire Breth(a) Moraind*, which appears in a list of texts and their authors at *CIH* v 1655.25, may mean ‘the cauldron of judgements of Morann (a mythical judge)’. It is noteworthy that a lord is likened to a cauldron in the law-text *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, where a very similar phrase to that of the

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63 *CIH* iii 1120.9–15.
64 *Breathnach, Companion*, 227.
poem in Bretha Nemed Déidenach is employed: *fo bíth is n-é coire conberba gach n-uile n-om* ‘because he is the cauldron who cooks every raw thing’.  

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66 _CIH_ vi 2216.1–2. Also quoted in the Royal Irish Academy _ms_ 23 Q 12, p. 284 (Bretnach, _Companion_, 480.14).