

**REMARKS ON THE FACSIMILES.
A LETTER TO THE CHAIRMAN
OF THE COMMITTEE OF POLITE
LITERATURE AND ANTIQUITIES**

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Remarks on the facsimiles. A letter to the chairman of the committee of polite literature and antiquities by Whitley Stokes

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WHITLEY STOKES

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REMARKS

ON THE FACSIMILES

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A LETTER TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE
OF POLITE LITERATURE AND ANTIQUITIES

BY

WHITLEY STOKES,

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE PHILOLOGICAL SOCIETY AND HONORARY MEMBER OF THE GERMAN
ORIENTAL SOCIETY.

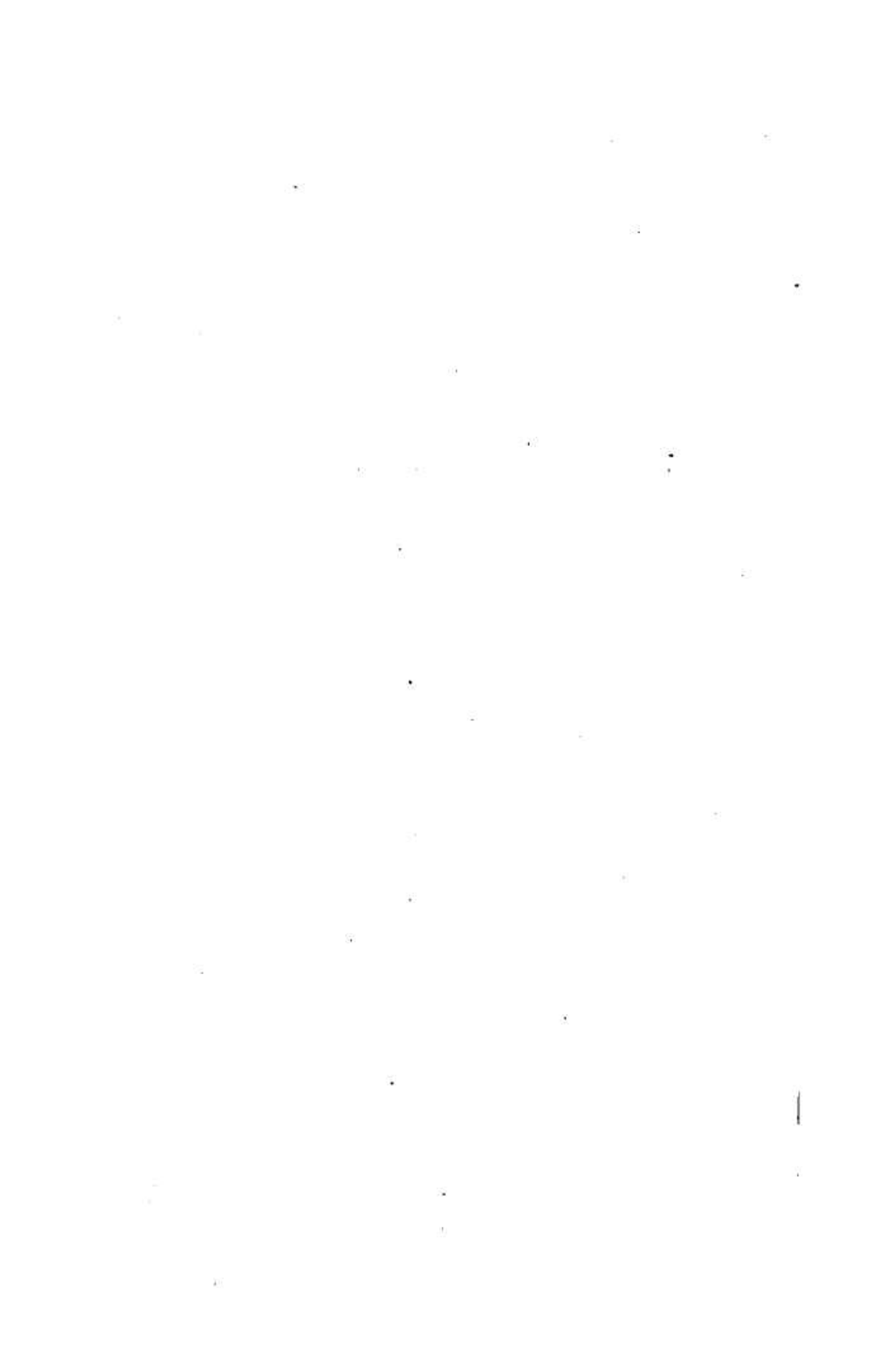


'Yet progress means contention, to my mind.'
Aristophanes' Apology.

SIMLA:

1875.

~~257. d. 60 (e)~~
257x. d. 6



Simla, the 11th July 1875.

MY DEAR MR. FERGUSON,

SINCE I last wrote to you, I have received (*vid* Calcutta) the report to the Council of the Royal Irish Academy made by the Committee of Polite Literature and Antiquities on the twenty inaccuracies of transcription which I alleged to exist in the Academy's facsimile of *Lebor na huidre*. To you, as Chairman of that Committee, I address the following remarks.

First of all, I wish you to thank the Committee for the pains they have obviously taken in testing my criticisms, and to beg them to excuse me for not submitting in silence to their judgment. I feel sure that, on reflection, they will agree with me that to decipher an old manuscript in any language requires not only a keen and practised eye, but a specially instructed mind, and that questions as to the right reading of an Irish manuscript nearly 800 years of age are matter for experts, by which I mean in the present case persons conversant not merely with palæography, but with the Old and Early-Middle-Irish languages. Now, which of the members of the Committee can be said to be an expert as above defined? The lamentable mistakes made in the 'Description' prefixed to the Academy's edition of *Lebor na huidre* and in the 'Contents' prefixed to the first part of the lithograph of *Lebor Brecc** at once suggest the answer. It is notorious that there are now not more than four

* To the nine mistranslations mentioned in the *Revue Celtique*, ii., 431, the following seven may be added:—

L.U.p.	XV	<i>immram</i>	'wandering'	<i>read</i>	'voyage.'
" "	XXI	<i>indruanado</i>	'of the championship'	"	'of the champion.'
" "	XXIV	<i>amne</i>	'you are'	"	'thus.'
L.B.,	1	<i>foitnech</i>	'wise'	"	'patient.'
" "	4	<i>fiith airio</i>	'cause'	"	'cause of invention.'
" "	"	<i>imrordus</i>	'I celebrate'	"	'I have meditated.'
" "	6	<i>amne</i>	'alone'	"	'thus.'

resident members of the Academy who would attempt to translate, or even to read, three consecutive sentences of *Lebor na huidre*. Of these but two are members of the Committee. One (Deſſn Reeves) did not attend its meetings, and I am not aware that the other (Professor O'Mahony) is a palæographer or has made a special study of Old and Early-Middle-Irish.

I will now notice *seriatim* the statements in the Committee's report.

No. 1 (p. 1, a, 44),—'ahaim' for 'a hainm,' ['its (lit. her) name']. The Committee state that there is no stroke over the *i* in the manuscript. Here I confess that they are right. I mistook a conjectural emendation made in the margin of my copy of the lithograph for a record of the actual state of the manuscript. I regret this mistake and have desired M. Gaidoz to correct it in the next number of the *Revue Celtique*: but it will be seen that of my twenty criticisms this is the only one that I can admit to be erroneous.

No. 2 (p. 1, b, 37).—Here the manuscript has 'sidon isind foenici' ('Sidon in the Phœnicia'), while the facsimilist has, in lieu of the oval dot (the *punctum delens*) over the *f*, given a horizontal stroke, the siglum for *or*. The Committee say, 'The siglum in the manuscript could not be taken for that of the aspirate.' Nobody ever said it could: though in the postscript reprinted in the *Revue Celtique*, II, 430,* for want of type, the dotted *f* was, as is usual in printing Gaelic in the Roman character, represented by *fh*. Precisely the same mistake seems to be made in the facsimile of *Lebor na huidre*, p. 21, b, 8, where

* This postscript was added to a letter addressed to Professor Jellett about the *Book of Leinster* and the best way of publishing it. It is right to state that the copy of this letter sent to Professor Jellett did not contain the postscript. The letter was written in Dublin and there sent to him: the postscript was written in India on hearing that the Board of Trinity College had determined to entrust the reproduction of the *Book of Leinster* to the gentlemen answerable for the facsimile of *Lebor na huidre* and for that of *Lebor Brecc*. There is, therefore, no ground whatever for the supposition that Mr. Jellett, having knowledge of the specific charges against the former facsimile, remained inactive when his duty as President of the Academy would have been to call promptly for enquiry.

'do fribaid' ('to heal') is given as 'do forrebaid' and in the facsimile of *Lebor Brecc*, 30, b, 55, where 'don foilsingud' ('for the manifestation') is given as 'don foroilsingud.' In like manner a horizontal stroke is put for a dot over the first *h* in the same facsimile, 41. b. 1.

No. 3 (p. 11, b, 22). Here the manuscript has clearly 'tongdarach' ('wave-voiced'), which the facsimilist has turned into the meaningless 'thodgarach.' The Committee say, "Here, therefore, the copyist is so far in error."

No. 4 (p. 30, a, 15). Here the facsimile gives 'do' for the 'tic' of the manuscript. The Committee do not deny this mistake; but they say "the most careful copyist would be as likely to read 'do' as 'tic.'" Perhaps he would, if (as was apparently the case in the present instance) he did not understand what he was copying, and the person revising his work was equally ignorant. The passage is simple: 'cachranúair tráigid in pian díb. innúair aile tic thairsiu,' that is, 'every second hour the pain ebbs from them; the other hour it comes (*tic*) over them.' To my eyes in 1871 the word 'tic' was written with perfect clearness.

No. 5 (p. 37, b, 42). Here in a note about two recaptured manuscripts, which has been written in a blank space left by the ancient scribe, we find the ordinary phrase 'narnecmuis' 'away from us' (lit. 'in absentia nostrum').* For this the facsimile gives the gibberish

* *n-arn-ecmuis* is for the older *in-arn-écmuis*: cf. *grad éin ol sé do tabairt imm-écmuis-si for mac in chon alta* ('thou hast conferred orders in my absence on the son of the wolf') Rawl. B. 512, fo. 18, b. 1. 'Brigit dorat a chochallsum inaegmais doclam' ('in his, Conla's, absence, Brigit gave his cow to a leper') Rawl. B. 512, fo. 35 b. 1. 'Alaíli banscal robai hitir chíána 7 a mac roadnacht sund haintírsi ina-hécmuis' ('a certain woman was in a far-off land and, in her absence, her son was buried here in this land') Rawl. B. 512, fo. 15, a. 1. Is suail atharbai do neoch ergi a atharda mine dernai maith 'na hecmuis ('it little profits any one to abandon his fatherland unless he does good away from it') LB. 30, a. 60. In écmuis a chéile, O'Don. Supp. to O'Reilly. In ecmuis a ceann 'in the absence of their chiefs,' 2 Laws 290. A fiadnaisi no in-anfis in-ecmuis 'in his presence, or without his knowledge in his absence,' 3 Laws 278. An-ecmuis aodnach 'in the absence of his guardians,' an-ecmuis a finechaire 'in the absence of his family,' *ibid.* 300, 302. An-hegmuis a clasaigh 'without including its groove,' Chron. Scot. 318. Cáid each nécmuis, LU. 49, b, 14.

'narnecustos.*' In this note (as often in fifteenth-century manuscripts) *m* is here written sideways, thus : Ξ , but the facsimilist has turned it into the ordinary siglum for *us*, and he has then made the following *ui* into *to*. The passage is perfectly simple, and it has been rightly read and translated by O'Curry in his *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Irish History*, 1st edition, pp. 183, 570.

The Committee's report here contains a passage which I cannot pass over: "the critic appears to us, from the simple palæographical point of view, not to be right in his reading, *for the MS. elsewhere is very uniform in its m's, which have invariably three straight limbs.*" The framer of the report has here deliberately suggested that the manuscript is all by one hand, and deliberately suppressed the fact that the passage under consideration is part of a note made in the year 1470, that is, at least 265 years after the bulk of the manuscript was written. The members of the Committee cannot possibly have been cognizant of the full force of this uncandid passage.

No. 6 (p. 50, b, 1). Here for the common word 'marbad' ('to kill'), which is as clear in the manuscript here as it is in p. 42, b, 42, the facsimile gives 'marbod.' The Committee cannot and do not deny this error: they admit that "the transcriber has erred in not giving the peculiar form of the vowel in question"; but, with a loyalty worthy of a better cause, they seek to protect their scribe's reputation by saying that they do not pronounce "whether it is *a* or *o* in the manuscript."†

* The learned persons who prepared the 'Description' prefixed to the facsimile, having apparently heard of a *custos rotulorum*, render this gibberish, which they print *nar n-ecustos*, by 'out of our custody.' Would they be so kind as to quote a single instance from an authentic MS. of this wonderful word *ecustos*?

† I see that O'Curry (*Seirglige Conculainn*, 122) rightly reads 'marbad' in 50, b, 1. *Marbod* occurs in LU. 42, b, 28, but this is a metrical license to make a rhyme for *tor*.

No. 7 (p. 51, a, 33). Here for the 3d pl. secondary b-future 'fetfais' ('potuerint') the facsimile gives 'fetfuitis.' The Committee say, "The character here may be either *u* or *a*." I can assure them that it is nothing but *a*, and that 'fetfais' would not be Irish of the 11th or 12th century. I see that in the *Round Towers*, p. 99, l. 24, Dr. Petrie (i. e. Dr. O'Donovan or Mr. O'Curry) has given the word as 'fetfais.' I did not notice the accent on the latter *i*, but perhaps it is in the MS.

No. 8 (p. 51, b, 19). Here for 'molbthach' ('praiseworthy') which is perfectly clear in the MS. the facsimile gives 'molbthuch,' which is not Irish. The Committee assert that "Here, also, the character could be read either *a* or *u*."* It is a pity that they did not get a sound palæographer like Dean Reeves, Mr. Hennessy, Mr. Bradshaw, or Mr. Rhys to explain to them the difference (often slight, but always discernible) between *u* and the open *a*.

No. 9 (p. 52, b, 10). Here for the name of the well-known Irish bishop Aed mac Bric,† the facsimile gives 'Aed mac Brio.' The Committee do not deny this mistake: they say that, in the MS. the right bend of the final (misread *o*) "is nearly continuous." In the facsimile, however, it is quite continuous. A similar mistake, 'inoarraic,' for 'incarraic' 'the rock,' is, I believe, made in LB. 56, b, 54. Compare, too, the errors (already confessed), 'conniofitis,' LB. 4, b, 54, 'oen,' 55, b, 59, and 'eomong,' 59, b, 14.

No. 10 (p. 53, b, 34). Here for the phrase 'ni hada in rí conanim inti' ('not lawful therein (in Tara) is the king with a blemish')‡ the facsimile gives 'ni hada in rí conani inti.' The Committee states that there is now an

* In the facsimile the second vowel can only be read *u*. Here then the Committee's assertion is a virtual admission of the inaccuracy of the facsimile.

† See Mone, *Hymni Medii Aevi*, III. 181: Reeves, *Proceedings of the R. I. Academy*, Nov. 8, 1858: *Martyrology of Donegal*, p. xli.

‡ Compare LU. 50, b, 34: ní bá hada rí conanim hi temraig ('not lawful was a King with a blemish in Tara'); ba geis rí g con anim do bith a Temraig ('it was forbidden for a king with a blemish to be in Tara') *Lebor Aiclé*, 3 Laws, 84.