

Book Reviews

Fergus Kelly (ed.), *Marriage Disputes - a fragmentary Old Irish Law-Text*. Early Irish Law Series vol VI Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2015, x+ 157pp. ISBN 978 1 85500 227 2. Price €35.

Professor Fergus Kelly is the quintessential 'gentleman and scholar'. Through his publications, he has transformed his field from a tiny branch of élite Old Irish scholarship to one now at the forefront of university teaching and interdisciplinary research into Ireland's medieval past. In this, his fourth volume in the Early Irish Law series, he has edited a text which sets out a wide variety of disputes arising within marriage contracts. In so doing, he allows us to perceive something of the family realities for married men and women in this period. This is a topic of increasing interest to Irish historians but the material covered in this book highlights how study to date has hitherto focussed attention on questions of polygamy, adultery and marriage break-up. In *Marriage Disputes*, by contrast, we are introduced to the expectations that early Irish partners and their kin brought to the complicated business of making the marriage contract a success.

The edition is of a text made up of thirty-six Old Irish citations interspersed with extensive Middle Irish commentary which Kelly dates to the late twelfth century, together with many other citations translated and discussed in accompanying notes. Despite the chronological range involved, Kelly sees no fundamental differences in the texts and makes the crucial point that 'it seems justifiable to treat Irish marriage of the pre-Norman period as essentially a single institution' (p. 2). The edited text covers a multitude of social situations including the active lifestyle enjoyed by some unmarried girls, bewitching cattle, a heavily pregnant woman's right to avoid intercourse, the onset of leprosy, fosterage and funerals. In early Ireland, it was customary to hold a *fled chrólige* or 'feast of death-lying' a month after the death which would be paid for out of the deceased's assets. As Kelly points out, the comparisons with the 'month's mind' in modern Irish culture are remarkable (pp 118-20). Some spouses were apparently buried together while others would be buried with their original families.

The topics covered are largely united by the principle that, within a marriage contract, a key payment was the *coibche* or bride price (p. 126). This was calculated as half the honour-price of the woman's father. In the case of the lowest ranking lord, the *aire désa*, this was the equivalent of three in-calf cows, two milk-giving cows and three dry cows (p. 45) while for a *bóaire* or commoner, payment was one milk-giving cow (p. 57). This gift would be given by the groom to the bride's father but he would generally pass much of it or its equivalent to his daughter. (An older woman, entering into second or third marriages would get an increasingly high percentage of the *coibche* directly from the groom.) Serious failures within marriage continued to involve payment of the sums involved in a couple's *coibche*; these included hiding an illness affecting either work or intercourse, failure to feed a doctor and his retinue when he came to treat a spouse (p. 31), a false accusation or declaration about menstruation leading to lack of sexual intercourse (p. 33), destruction of food (p. 43) or the failure to prepare a dead person properly for their transport to the cemetery (p. 51). Failure to provide a *dillat lige* or bed-blanket (p. 37), a woman's kiss with someone not her spouse (p. 33), an attack on a wife by one of her in-laws (p. 43), a wife disposing of jointly owned household goods without per-

mission (p. 35), providing too much meat for guests without a husband's prior agreement or secretly going out at night without a head-covering all had penalty-fines equivalent to one half of the *coibche* (pp 37, 39).

If, however, a married woman was put out of her home, forcing a return to her kin and she and her family are prepared to swear to this, she is deemed free of all future liability to her husband (p. 45) and if a man brought another woman to her bed, she was entitled to a divorce (p. 47). The legal principle involved here appears to be that no matter what her failures may have been, this was not justifiable behaviour. The same idea, bolstered by reference to the seventh-century Spanish writer Isidore and St Paul, also occurs in the contemporary Irish canon law collection (Bk 46:X of *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*). Though a woman was legally the weaker partner in a marriage and might have to resort to fasting to enforce her rights (p. 115), this book makes it clear that she enjoyed a degree of financial resources and social support in her adopted environment. A woman's procreative role was vital in the underpopulated and often relatively inhospitable landscape of early Ireland but her labour in providing both food and clothing for the household was to be considered a valuable resource in the successful running of any establishment. It takes a gentleman to acknowledge it.

Catherine Swift

Pádraig Ó Riain, *Four Tipperary saints: The lives of Colum of Terryglass, Crónán of Roscrea, Mochaomhóg of Leigh and Ruadhán of Lorrha*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2014. 160pp. ISBN: 978-1-84682-550-7. Price €17.50.

When Pádraig Ó Riain blessed the Irish people with his *Dictionary of Irish Saints* in 2011 we thought that the ultimate had been composed, but not at all. It only whetted his appetite. And here he comes, Corkman and all, with his *Four Tipperary Saints*, Colum of Terryglass, Crónán of Roscrea, Mochaomhóg of Leigh and Ruadhán of Lorrha. Leigh is in the parish of Twomileborris, archdiocese of Cashel and Emly, 8km due west of Thurles. The other places are in the diocese of Killaloe.

Latin lives of these four Saints were compiled in the twelfth century, principally under the influence of Augustinian Canons, and possibly in Mochaomhóg's case under Cistercian influence. These Latin lives were handed down in manuscript form, a number of them surviving in Marsh's Library and in Trinity College, Dublin, in the Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, and in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Moreover the Irish life of Ruadhán is preserved in Brussels and in the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin.

It was at one of his fifty-six biennial conferences at Mount Saint Joseph, Roscrea, that George Cunningham pointed out to Pádraig the great need there was for English translation of those lives of Irish saints seeing that so few people can read Latin with ease now-a-days. The response was this beautiful English translation of the lives of these four Tipperary saints.

A great deal of information can be gleaned from this book, where it is presented with the absolute exactitude of immense scholarship and research, and to make it more appealing to us the uninitiated, in the midst of top class colour photographs of places and objects relevant to the stories, there are photos of the beginnings of three of the manuscript lives.

We all knew bits of their stories, but now we have these wonderful translations, based on deep scholarship, but presented in clear simplicity. We can hide with St. Crónán in the milk cart, when unknown to his monks he stole away from his remote monastery near Roscrea to the royal highway where he could be easily found by guests. We learn too the