An Examination of the Medieval Irish Text Caithréim Thoirdeálbaigh

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THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE CAITHRÉIM THOIRDHEALBAIGH

The publication in 1929 of Dr. Standish Hayes O'Grady's edition of Caithréim Thoirdeálbaigh made available to historians a work of unparalleled importance for the period and locale with which it deals. Concerning as it does warfare between two branches of the O'Briens of Thomond and that between the dominant O'Brien and the Norman de Clare in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the Caithréim, or Triumphs of Turlough, is in fact the most complete and detailed account of events for northern Munster history in the period 1258–1318, and hence a prime source for the general history of medieval Ireland.

While it is true that the value of the Caithréim has been recognized, and its evidence used, by serious historians—among them Curtis, Orpen, and T. J. Westropp—it has yet been neglected or its worth slighted to a surprising extent in other studies that might have profited from its use. There are several reasons for the neglect and under-estimation accorded the work and it is the purpose of this paper to consider and perhaps dispose of the chief objections raised against the confident use of this work by historians. This seems all the more necessary since it appears that this neglect stems from an uneasy suspicion regarding its authentic character, a suspicion shared by some who have made use of the indispensable material it contains.

No printed edition of this important text existed prior to O'Grady's long-awaited version. Curtis, Orpen, and Westropp made use, in varying degree, of MS sources (not the best in all cases) and O'Grady's then unpublished translation and notes; these

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1 Ir. Texts Soc., vol. xxvi (text) and vol. xxvii (translation).
3 Normans, iv. 53-106.
5 Orpen, for example, though he draws heavily upon the Caithréim for his account of the Normans in Thomond (Normans, iv. 53-106), never ceases to voice scepticism about the validity and reliability of the work.
6 Curtis used an unidentified R.I.A. MS which he mistakenly dated 1608 for his earlier work, and O'Grady's edition later. Orpen had the loan of O'Grady's then unpublished work (Normans, iii. 6). Westropp based his earlier paper on ' R.I.A. MS 14, b. 22 ' (J.R.S.A.I., xxxi, 284) : not to be found among the catalogued MSS, this MS is included in the Ordnance Survey Extracts for Co. Clare. I am grateful to the staff of the Royal Irish Academy Library for informing me that it is a transcription and translation, by O'Curry, of T.C.D. MS H. 1. 18. For his later paper Westropp had access to O'Grady's translation and notes (T.R.I.A., xxxii, sect. c, p. 196).
notes, however, could not of course be available to all, and the number of historians prepared to use the original MSS was not large. This has been the first factor working against a wider use of the Caithréim.

Another difficulty arises from the fact that O'Grady was able to supply neither introduction nor notes to the work. His posthumous edition bears an introduction written by Dr. Robin Flower and this, while it includes an admirable amount of information within its brief compass, could be no substitute for what O'Grady's intimate knowledge of the text should have been able to provide. Thus we are left with no account of the method used in editing the text, nor have we from O'Grady any explicit statement as to his opinion of its historical value. With regard to the latter point, we may, I think, assume that he held the Caithréim in high repute; the lack of exposition on the method is a more serious matter, as it has given rise to problems to be considered presently.

On the crucial question of the selection of materials, O'Grady did indicate his view elsewhere. The principal Irish texts of the work now known are (a) a large fragment on vellum in the Royal Irish Academy (b) an almost complete copy on paper in the handwriting of Andrew MacCurtain of the county Clare, H. I. 18, in the library of Trinity College, Dublin (c) another in the same library, written by the well-known scribe, Maurice O'Gorman. Of these (a) belongs to the XVth cent. (b) was written in 1721 and (c) about 1780. Flower has confirmed that the edition was finally edited from the vellum fragment and T.C.D. MS H.I.18. These two MSS, as we shall see, were properly selected, being the two upon which any edition of the Caithréim must be based; O'Grady's treatment of the sources, however, requires some explanation.

A careful comparison of these MSS with the printed edition reveals O'Grady's method. The vellum fragment (R. I.A. MS 23Q16, and designated in O'Grady by the letter Q) he used as his basic text, supplying the missing portions (the vellum is defective at the beginning and end and in some interior parts) from T.C.D. MS H.I.18 (designated by the letter H). O'Grady's procedure up to this point is clear enough, but he went beyond this. He did not retain the language of the original texts. A study of his systematic, though not indicated, changes makes it apparent that he attempted to reconstruct the text as it was first written. He set himself a twofold task: to fuse together a vellum fragment, assigned by him to the fifteenth century, and an eighteenth-century paper MS to form one continuous and coherent narrative, and then to create from this fusion a consistently re-written text with the language purified to correspond to his idea of what the original form of the text was or should have been. In attaining his dual object, O'Grady produced an edition that has serious deficiencies from the point of view of the celticist, though it is valid and useful for the historian. There cannot be any question that present-day standards of scholarship in Celtic studies demand a new edition of the work, and it may be that the low estimate which the student of the language attaches to this edition by O'Grady has affected the historian's judgement of the Caithréim itself. If this is indeed the

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1 B.M. cat Ir. MSS, i. 23.
2 Caithr. Thoir, i. xvi.
3 B.M. cat. Ir. MSS, i. 23.
case it is unfortunate because, language apart, O'Grady succeeded brilliantly in selecting and welding together the two MSS best suited to give the most authentic historical narrative possible. This is to say that the historian may profitably use O'Grady; even if he rejects that edition, however, he should not reject the authenticity of the materials on which it was based. I hope to show below why the Caithréim may be held authentic.

The above discussion of O'Grady's sources and procedure has anticipated in some measure the strongest arguments urged against the Caithréim: that it is, or may be, a work of comparatively late origin (early eighteenth century), and that it is really a romance, the historical content of which must therefore be highly suspect. It is certainly true that the earliest complete copy of the work now extant is that written by Andrew MacCurtain in 1721 (O'Grady's H), and this scribe, the argument runs, might be suspected of fabricating the text, either making it up entire or patching in some scraps and tatters of a genuine Caithréim and in any event hopelessly confounding fact, conjecture, and romance. There are enough difficulties in MacCurtain's citation of his sources—a MS written in 1459 (that we do not possess, and may not be identified) by a 'John, son of Rory MacCraith'—to give such suspicion a certain initial plausibility. Nevertheless, the evidence that MacCurtain did not nor could not transmit to us a spurious, or even partially spurious text is conclusive, as we shall see. The evidence obliges us to accept a date at least as early as the sixteenth century; I think, moreover, that this evidence is compelling enough for acceptance of the work as one nearly contemporaneous with the events described—that is, a work originally written not many years after 1318 and one displaying a solid historical content, easily isolated from the literary elements, that is quite as accurate as, and far more detailed than both the annals and state papers covering the period.

It is clear that MacCurtain could not have concocted the Caithréim. This may be established from the following consideration. The work in the form in which we have it today is contained, as the earliest complete text, in MacCurtain's paper MS of 1721 mentioned above. This MS (O'Grady's H) must be compared with the R.I.A. vellum fragment (Q) which O'Grady took as his basic source. The vellum is defective, yet it comprises about one-half of the complete work, and comparison of it with H shows the latter to be a faithful copy, if not indeed of this very vellum, then of another older MS that served as exemplar for both H and Q. Whether MacCurtain copied H from Q—there is of course no question of Q being later than H—is not clear. From his indications at the beginning of H it might appear that he had at his disposal an older MS, perhaps the original, now lost to us; in fact, however, the content of Q is exactly the same as that in the comparable portions of H, save for one short passage. Although H departs from Q in spelling and in grammatical forms,

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10 Caithr. Thoirdh., i. 1; ii. 1.
13 Caithr. Thoirdh., i. 1; ii. 1.
14 The absence of this passage, consisting of a few lines of prose and one verse quatrains, from Q and its presence in the later H is significant for two reasons, though its importance for the text itself is negligible. First, the passage serves as an indication of the early provenance of Q. The passage does not occur in Q for the very good reason that the poem from which the quatrains was taken was itself composed much later than when Q was written. In making his copy H, MacCurtain apparently decided to interpolate this quatrains, known to him from another source,
MacCurtain adopting the usage of his own day, the texts match perfectly in content.
The overwhelming importance of this word for word similarity will be appreciated
when one is aware of the extraordinary penchant for multiple epithets manifested by
the author of the Caithrìüm, who rarely allows himself to mention a name without
adorning it with at least seven or eight compound qualifiers and who rises at one
point\(^{18}\) to the magnificent total of ninety: H matches Q, epithet for epithet, with only
a rare omission or misplacement.

It can be demonstrated, moreover, that the missing portions of Q contained the
same material as the extant text H. The best means for seeing this is to look at those
places in Q where the MS either breaks off or resumes in a passage of poetry. Since
the first and last words of a particular poem are identical, comparison of these words
will determine whether one is dealing with one and the same poem or two fragments
of different poems. In order to show that Q and H are compatible by this test, I must
41-46, H ff. 62b-65, Q pp. 47-52, Q pp. 9-40, Q pp. 53-58, H ff. 93-95, Q pp. 59-64,
H. f. 99-101, Q pp. 65-66, H ff. 102b-110. This arrangement, confusing as it appears,
O'Grady was forced to adopt because the pagination of Q is out of order. His order
presents events in the proper sequence. Now Q p. 41 \(^{16}\) begins with an incomplete
quatrain ending a poem the last word of which (together with scribal markings after it)\(^{17}\)
proves this quatrain to be the continuation of a poem the beginning of which may
be seen in H f. 58: Q p. 46 breaks off in the middle of a poem similarly shown to be
continued in H f. 62b; again, Q p. 58 has the beginning of a poem ended in H f. 93;
H f. 95 is thus connected with Q p. 59; finally, H f. 101 leads in the same way to Q
p. 65. \(^{18}\) It must be stressed that there is nothing arbitrary in these links; they serve
to show conclusively that the missing portions of Q must have had at least the poems
appearing in H. The other points of transition in the scheme above are in prose
passages and are thus not amenable to this test. The sense of the narrative, however,
in an appropriate place in the Caithrìüm (See Caithr. Theoiridh., i. 24 and ii. 26, where brackets
indicate the passage.) The quatrain in question consists of lines 53-6, in which Turlough More
is mentioned, of a poem the genealogical content of which shows that it could not have been
written earlier than 1560: that is, before H, but after Q. Ascribed to Eoghan MacCraith, this
poem is printed in Lr. Main., 387-98. The second significance of this passage lies in its bearing
upon the derivation of the copies of the Caithrìüm that proliferated throughout the eighteenth
and nineteenth centuries. There are at least ten Irish MSS of the work in the R.I.A. and two
in T.C.D.; in addition, the R.I.A. has at least four, and the B.M. two, translations from the
same period. These MSS are all later than MacCurtain's H, and they all contain this short passage
absent from Q. This will serve to show the interdependence of all these MSS (including that by
O'Curry mentioned above) and their eventual derivation from MacCurtain's copy of 1721 (H).
The alternative to derivation from MacCurtain must be dismissed, as it would involve the postula-
tion of yet another text, different from Q and earlier than H, containing the interpolated material.
Such a text we do not possess, nor do we find any mention of it in these post-MacCurtain
copies.

\(^{16}\) In his description of the 'Dismal of Burren' (Caithr. Theoiridh., i. 104 and ii. 93). The author's
enthusiasm for turgidity outruns O'Grady's zeal for translation; for the sake of clarity, many
of the epitaphs have not been rendered.

\(^{17}\) Incorrectly given in Caithr. Theoiridh., i. 63, where 'Q21a' should read 'Q41a.' Also on the
next page 'Q21b, 22a' should read 'Q41b, 42a.'

\(^{18}\) These markings, in the same hand as that of the text, repeat the first line of the poem.
They and similar repetitions are omitted throughout O'Grady's edition.

\(^{18}\) Caithr. Theoiridh., i. pp. 63, 69, 119, 123, and 131 respectively.

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makes it quite apparent that these also are true connections. The evidence of these interior links, in conjunction with the fact, already discussed, that the existing parts of \( Q \) match the relevant portions of \( H \) exactly\(^{19} \) make it certain that the *Caithréim* as we have it today cannot be attributed to MacCurtain. It is true that the beginning and end of the work are to be read only in \( H \), \( Q \) being defective through the loss of some leaves; thus \( H \) alone recounts events prior to the year 1279 and the final events of 1318 at the close. It cannot be directly proven, as it can for the interior parts, that MacCurtain reports no more at beginning and end than is to be found in \( Q \), but for several reasons even elaboration at these points, where the tone and atmosphere is in complete agreement with the surviving portions of \( Q \), seems unlikely. The question must be left open, whether MacCurtain reshaped the first and last scenes of the work. This cannot, however, affect the main argument, that the *Caithréim* is in substance a work not of the eighteenth century but one which must be dated from the time of the vellum fragment, \( Q \), at the latest.

The precise dating of \( Q \) is as yet a matter of some doubt. The vellum has been assigned variously to 1509, to 1459, and more generally to the fifteenth century. Philological evidence, moreover, does not prohibit a fourteenth century dating. Connected with the problems of dating is the question of whether \( Q \) is a copy or a fragment of the original MS of the *Caithréim*. I think that the evidence presented below will show that \( Q \) is an accurate copy, most probably written in the early sixteenth century, of the *Caithréim* and that the original composition of that work may confidently be ascribed to the middle of the fourteenth century (about 1359).

A detailed examination of the evidence must start with the recognition that the vellum MS, from appearance alone, cannot be later than the sixteenth century. Inspection of the physical properties of the MS rules out any later period. Now two dates, 1509 or 1459, have usually been associated with \( Q \), and it seems certain that the vellum is properly assigned to one of these. A brief discussion of the arguments for either dating will introduce us to the more important questions of the date and authorship of the original work.

The case for the 1509 dating is based upon the appearance in the lower right margin of the seventh page of certain figures, written in a hand later than that employed in the text of the MS. The purpose of these figures is not evident, nor are the numerals themselves clear beyond dispute, but assuming that they form an arithmetical calculation based on information contained in an accompanying scribal note that is now illegible, one may conclude that they yield a date 1509. Such is the conclusion given in the Royal Irish Academy catalogue description of this MS.\(^{20} \) O’Curry,

\(^{19} \) This exactitude includes a highly significant gap in the text extending from about 1285 to about 1308, where there is found only a most summary sketch, in a few lines, of the intervening period. This deficiency (noted in the margin of \( H \) in a hand not MacCurtain’s, ‘hic evidenter patet defectus satis extenus’; see T.C.D. MS H. I.18, p. 30) corresponds closely to the well-known general lack of matter in the Irish Annals about this period. The fact that MacCurtain does not attempt to fill in this gap is one more indication of his faithfulness in following this text, and should effectively refute the theory of MacCurtain as a fabricator or romancer of this history. One bent upon writing romance rather than copying a historical text would surely not waive such an opportunity for elaboration and fabrication provided by this gap.

\(^{20} \) *R.I.A. cat. Ir. MSS*, p. 263.
moreover, assigned this MS to 1509, though without giving his reasons for so doing.\textsuperscript{21} On the other hand, there is a tradition associating the earlier date 1459 with this MS. Sir William Bentham, who had it in his possession, favoured the date 1459 and regarded the vellum rather as a fragment of the original than as a copy.\textsuperscript{22} Less definitely, O'Grady himself speaks of it as ‘of the XVth century.’\textsuperscript{23} There is, finally, a note written in a late hand in the upper margin of page sixty-four, in Q that reads ‘15th cent. this was wrote’; this note may refer to the writing of the vellum alone with at least as much probability as attaches to the opinion that it refers to the original composition of the Caithrème, a judgment set forth in the Royal Irish Academy catalogue.\textsuperscript{24}

It is, whatever the truth of the matter, easy to see the source for the date 1459: it occurs in Andrew MacCurtain’s short preface to his copy H, where he testifies that the Caithrème was first written, by Seán mac Ruaidrí MacCraith, in 1459.\textsuperscript{25} As a matter of fact, as we shall see, there is good reason for doubting the accuracy of this statement, but first we may trace its subsequent influence. The older scholars accepted MacCurtain’s statement and applied this date to Q. In so doing, however, they were forced to regard Q as in fact the original—or more exactly, as a fragment of the original, for it existed in the nineteenth century in the imperfect form in which we have it today. The only warrant for this rather rash assumption was that Q was the only extant portion of the work surviving from the period before MacCurtain. The scholars of the last century then identified Q with the MS spoken of by MacCurtain as his exemplar. Confusion over the correct dating, both of Q and of original composition of the Caithrème, has persisted. The situation is further complicated by the fact that MacCurtain’s preface to H gives us no clear picture of his exemplar, and even O’Grady’s translation of this part of the preface preserves a puzzling ambiguity, apt to mislead. It would seem from the preface, that is, that MacCurtain had at his disposal and made his copy from a MS that he implies is the original and in which he found the date 1459. Yet the very argument set forth in the R.I.A. catalogue and given above for assigning the date 1509 to Q involves the assumption that the calculation yielding that date was made in 1720 (H is dated 1721) and made by a hand indistinguishable from MacCurtain’s.\textsuperscript{26} Unless we are willing to suppose a quite extraordinary coincidence of date and hand we must conclude that MacCurtain had Q at his disposal, and since he does not mention more than one exemplar, that he copied H from it. We have already seen that the identity of content in Q and H does nothing to bar this conclusion. How then account for MacCurtain’s statement as to the authorship and date of the original work?

It is certain that Q as it stands today could not provide MacCurtain with the

\textsuperscript{21} O'Curry, MS materials, p. 237.
\textsuperscript{22} R.I.A. cat. Ir. MSS, p. 265.
\textsuperscript{23} B.M. cat. Ir. MSS, i. 23-4.
\textsuperscript{24} R.I.A. cat. Ir. MSS, p. 264.
\textsuperscript{25} Caithr. Thoirdh., i. O'Grady’s translation of the words ‘phrimlebar seachasa’ in this preface as ‘original book of history’ is apt to mislead by confusing original text and MacCurtain’s exemplar. O’Curry’s rendering of the phrase as ‘prime historical book’ is to be preferred. See O'Curry, MS materials, p. 234, for a translation of this preface.
\textsuperscript{26} R.I.A. cat. Ir. MSS, p. 263.
information he cites. It is possible, however, that the early portions of Q that are missing now were available to MacCurtain and that he gleaned his information from among the eighteen folios now lost. It should be noted that MacCurtain does not actually state that he is copying from the original; he simply says that one can see in the old MS he is using when and by whom the work was first written. The ambiguity of the preface permits of the implication that he had the original to make his copy, but he may not have intended that conclusion.

The evidence seems to show that Q served as MacCurtain’s exemplar. It would also seem that the vellum is itself a copy, and not the original. Among the indications of this is the fact that the text is written in the same hand throughout; that this hand is to be ascribed to Michael Mac Conchubhair, a scribe who is in no discernible way connected with the original writing of the Caithréim, and that there are several places in the MS where the crossing out and correcting of a word or part of a word seems to demonstrate that we have a copyst at work. Since copies usually supply the name of the author and date of original composition, and since these are found nowhere in the extant text, we may reasonably assume that they were given on one of the early pages that are now lost. Though the question is by no means closed, I think that the weight of evidence allows us to date Q at 1509 and to consider it a copy of the original.

An analysis of Q from the linguistic point of view affords additional evidence for attributing the Caithréim to an early period. The language of Q is that of the period transitional from Middle to Modern Irish. Although it is often difficult to date texts of this period with any precision, the number of forms in our texts characteristic of Middle Irish is so great as to rule out the sixteenth century and to render the fifteenth century highly improbable as periods for the original composition of the Caithréim. (Here one should note that the discussion concerns the text of Q and not the time of Q’s writing. Q itself may be an accurate copy, to be assigned to a later date, as discussed above.) O’Grady’s edition cannot help here, because his systematic linguistic changes obscure the true appearance of Q. Recourse to the original MS must be taken for this analysis.

Seán Ó Catháin has demonstrated, on the basis of the language of the Annals of Ulster, how the changes in three linguistic forms may be used as criteria for assigning an approximate dating to a text in this transitional period. He has noted the trend of the following changes: (a) replacement of the infixed pronoun by the independent pronoun; (b) replacement in the past tense of the verb, of the preverb ro by do; (c) spreading of the -r- ending of the reduplicated and -t- preterites into the -s- preterites. An example illustrating all three changes is given by Ó Catháin as ‘the transition of the form ro-s-gabsat of the earlier Annals to the form do ghabhadar of the later.’ More recently, Hull has reported the presence in the text of the Caithréim

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27 Caithr. Thorildh., i. 1; O’Curry, MS materials, p. 234.
28 R.I.A. cat. iv. MSS, p. 263.
30 Ibid., p. 3.
of sixteen instances of the preterite passive plural in -it (-id), a form rarely found after the thirteenth century, its last occurrence in the Annals being in 1307 (Annals of Inishfallen). Hull’s finding is certainly strong evidence for an early attribution of the Caithrém, and in conjunction with the other linguistic criteria examined, this evidence supports the contention that the work was written not long after the events described. The text of Q does contain at least sixteen instances of the preterite passive plural (e.g., do loisíd, ro marbait, ros muinid), Hull’s references to O’Grady’s edition being supported by the MS, since here O’Grady did preserve the language of Q. For the other marks of transition, these points emerge. Only a few instances of the pleonastic infix are found, the true infixed pronoun being absent and the independent pronoun predominating. We should not expect this criterion to apply, however, since the use of the independent pronoun was well established long before the earliest possible date for our text. As to O’Catháin’s second mark, the substitution of preverb do for ro, it may be said that while do predominates in our text, there are still some fifty separate instances of preverb ro (excluding seventy-five instances of the more common usage with the copula). This in itself is not conclusive for a pre-fifteenth-century date, but it tends with the other evidence in that direction. Finally, thirty instances of the preservation of the -s- preterite may be found alongside the more common -r- ending. This again suggests an early date. Examples of these several forms may be seen in the rósfoilsighit (ro, pleonastic pronoun, and preterite passive plural in -it) of Q, p. 82, and the do fhagsat of Q, p. 90.

Taken together, the forms discussed above could not originally appear in a sixteenth-century text, and it is doubtful if they would appear in a text first written in the preceding century. The possibility of deliberate archaizing in a later period must, of course, be reckoned with, but that is unlikely here: the appearance of the older forms is inconsistent and there is certainly no indication of a systematic design of archaizing. The language appears to have a true transitional character. One fact for which there does not appear any ready explanation is that the bulk of the older forms occurs in the later parts of Q, from page seventy (roughly) to the end. Here the earlier modernizing tendency of the scribe might have weakened, or the difference in forms might reflect a difference in sources, or this grouping of the older forms might be merely fortuitous. The explanation cannot be determined at present.

These facts about the language of Q may serve to terminate our discussion of the manuscript tradition and the linguistic evidence. The argument from external evidences, summarized below, gains new force from the preceding when it is seen that this argument does not stand alone, but rather supports the same conclusions about the early provenance and authenticity of the Caithrém.

On the external evidences, little can be added to T. J. Westropp’s admirable analysis of the work and its components. In his study of the Caithrém—‘a critical


examination, from a non-linguistic point of view, as to whether, and if so, how far, the numerous contemporary records and the topography of the country support or contradict the story in this venerable History. Westropp has shown that only one warped statement and two omissions, these of minor import and easily rectified, can be proven against the author of the work, while the remainder, even in very incidental details, agrees perfectly with all the annals and state papers available and relevant. Westropp’s findings are important for his outstanding authority on the topography of the area, so that he is able to state that the author of the Caithréim was intimately familiar with the terrain of his account, as well as for the point-by-point comparison of the work with corresponding accounts in the annals and state papers.

It might be objected that the verisimilitude of the topography and historical events might easily be a late fabrication by a scribe familiar with the locale and who had access to annals. The existence of the Q fragment of the text, however, as is demonstrated above, antedates the era of romance and guarantees that the substance of the Caithréim is no late fabrication. On the hypothesis of composition soon after the events described, it is at least pertinent that the topography and accounts are in fact in accord with independent evidence. Suffice it to say that a fresh comparison between the Caithréim and the annals (to which I have added several important ones not available at the time to Westropp: MacAirt’s edition of Inisfallen, Freeman’s Connacht, and Ó hInnse’s Miscellaneous Irish Annals) brings to light no single detail that might alter Westropp’s conclusions. Save for an evident bias that the author indulges in favour of the party of his patron, a bias that critical reading easily balances, and the two minor omissions, that might well have resulted from mutilation of the MS, it is beyond doubt that the Caithréim is historically accurate and of the same order of relevance as the annals and state papers for the period. In this connection we might point out that the Caithréim is indispensable, for where the annals and state papers, by their nature, record only a series of discrete and seemingly unrelated happenings, the coherent (albeit tortuous) narrative of the Caithréim reveals these same events to be part of a patterned whole. The part played in this pattern by extra-historical, literary elements (supernatural occurrences, mysterious prophecies, appearances of allegorical figures, etc.) has been exaggerated in the past; nothing is simpler than to separate these elements from the solid core of historical fact.

In addition to demonstrating the soundness of the Caithréim, Westropp tried to fix the date of original composition from the evidences given in the work, without regard to the MS tradition. His conclusion, that the Caithréim was composed by Seán Mac Ruaidhri Mac Craith (a son of the poet Ruaidhri mentioned in the text as a participant in the action) and described in the Annals of the Four Masters as of Leth-Moghra sometime between 1345 and 1360, is based upon information contained in the last two paragraphs of the work and on one earlier passage. Noting, first, that the text makes reference to the death of Murtough O’Brien (in 1343) second,
that the author seems to be unaware of the deposition, in 1260, of Dermot O’Brien; and, finally, that Felim O’Conor, who died in 1365 seems to be spoken of by the author as still alive at the time of writing. Westropp puts the composition of the Caihreim as not earlier than 1345 and not later than 1360. Although Westropp seems to have overlooked the fact that Dermot O’Brien’s death, if not his deposition, is mentioned in the text, his points are worth consideration. Certainly we have an event of 1343 recorded and the passage cited above concerning Felim O’Conor does seem to have been written before his death in 1365. At all events the work seems to have been written at a date closer to 1359 than 1459; the possibility that MacCurtain’s date 1459 derives ultimately from an error in transcribing a postulated date 1359 is a tempting speculation, but no more than the mere guess can be hazarded here. (It is of interest to note that though Dermot O’Brien’s death occurred later, in 1364, the text assigns this event to 1355, which still leaves room for such a speculation.)

None of the attempts to establish a fourteenth century date for the Caihreim can claim final certainty, but the several kinds of evidence brought out here do tend toward a date not too long after the events described. Indeed, T. F. O’Rahilly was willing to believe that the Caihreim was written about 1380, the last two paragraphs being a later addition. While we might not care to assert that much for the Caihreim, we have been able to show that the MS evidence vouches for the existence of the work at least as early as the sixteenth century, that the linguistic evidence points to a period of composition probably in the fourteenth, and certainly not later than the fifteenth century, and that the evidence derived from checking the work against other sources for the history of the period warrants the conclusion of early authorship.

The implications that may be drawn from this examination of the Caihreim are clear. While the text stands in need of re-editing, the Caihreim is valuable documentation for the history of north Munster, and Ireland generally, in the period 1268-1318. We cannot, of course, be sure how much of the original is now lost to us—there is reason to believe, as Westropp suggests, that a part of the ‘Turlough saga’ (corresponding in period to the general deficiency in the annals at the end of the thirteenth century) has been lost—but that does not affect the fact that what remains is reliable and useful.

The potential uses of the Caihreim are many and varied, and only a fraction of them have as yet been realized. In addition to those aspects already exploited—the

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39 See Ann. Conn. for the year 1360.
40 See Ann. Conn. for the year 1365.
41 Caihreim, i. 93; ii. 85.
43 Caihreim, i. 146; ii. 130.
44 Cited in Hull, Ægis, viii. 30.
45 Op. cit., p. 139. Orpen (Normans, iv. 99-104) argues against such a loss. Despite Orpen’s curious attempts to impugn, wherever possible, the authenticity of a work upon which his own account of Thomond history in this period so largely (and necessarily) rests, his argument against a gap in the text (one matched by lapses in all the annals at the close of the thirteenth century) is not convincing. It must be admitted, however, that he is probably right in maintaining, against Westropp, that Thomas de Clare was not overcome and slain in 1277 by Turlough O’Brien—a supposed episode upon which the Caihreim is silent.
history of Munster in the medieval period, for which the Caithréim is the fullest account; the manners and customs of the age, touched upon by Westropp; the family and topographical names of the district—there are many unexplored topics for which the work is apt material. Specific instances include the account given here of the Bruce invasion, or the use of poetry evidently contemporaneous as historical record, a noteworthy feature of the Caithréim. More general topics include the non-military aspects of the relations between the Irish and the Normans. Finally, a detailed study of the intricate family conflict—remembering that the original antagonists, Turlough and Brian Rua O'Brien, stand in an uncle-nephew relationship—that is the substance of the Caithréim could be expected to shed light upon theories of leadership and succession in this period, the Caithréim being a classic example of dynastic struggle.\footnote{Op. cit., pp. 133-98. Westropp's study goes beyond an investigation of the historical value of the work to include chapters on such topics as 'personal description,' 'arms and dress,' 'local traditions,' etc.} \footnote{Caithr. Thoirdh., i. 91, 133; ii. 83, 117.} \footnote{It has been pointed out that although O'Grady's edition of the Caithréim provides the historian with an adequate narrative of the events, his alteration of the language of the MSS makes hazardous the philological study of the text and prohibits the study of the historical implications of the more technical terms in the text as published. I hope to prepare for publication elsewhere an exact transcript of the basic text, R.I.A. MS 23 Q 16.}