

**The ‘then’ and the ‘now’:  
Glimpses into a late medieval Irish legal composite manuscript, TCD MS  
1337 (H 3. 18)**

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Late medieval Irish legal manuscripts are invaluable sources for the field of Celtic Studies, preserving texts that date from the seventh and eighth century onwards. Their survival today is largely due to the diligent collecting and care of numerous discrete manuscripts and fragments by various scribal families, antiquarians and scholars from the early seventeenth century onwards. In 1699, the Welsh scholar Edward Lhuyd purchased a large number of such law manuscripts and fragments which he subsequently bound together into various volumes.

One such example is the composite manuscript TCD MS 1337 (H 3.18). It contains over 800 pages in total, and is comprised of discrete individual sections, as well as countless fragments, written in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. This manuscript was originally bound in two volumes. More recently, it was rebound into 25 volumes (Breatnach 2005, 4–5). However, this new binding is not always ideal with texts on occasion being separated between sections. Moreover, the new division often obscures the original collector’s habits of binding together hitherto disparate manuscripts and fragments.

William O’Sullivan (2000, 441–42), former Keeper of Manuscripts at Trinity College Dublin, made progress in examining the physical aspects and divisions of the original sections, identifying the scribes and owners. Moreover, codicological aspects of certain parts of TCD MS 1337 have been discussed by philologists in their critical editions of texts (see for instance, McLeod 1992, 95–6). While these observations are most welcome, many details are still to be gleaned from the physical and scribal aspects of this *Sammelband*, much of which have not yet been the focus of any detailed investigation. This is the case also for other late medieval Irish legal manuscripts, many of whom have not received adequate attention since they were first catalogued at the beginning of the twentieth century (see for instance Abbott and Gwynn 1921).

In this paper, I wish to present some findings from my current codicological research on TCD MS 1337. I will begin by giving a brief overview of its history, and taking two sections of the manuscript as contrasting case studies, I will examine the manner in which disparate fragments of one of these sections are arranged with a view to establishing the motivations behind why they were bound together. I will then discuss the scribal marginalia and colophons of the two sections to elucidate the dynamic process by which the scribe(s) acted as a selector, transmitter and collaborator of culturally significant and relevant material. On a more general note, this paper will address the current state of scholarship on the care and cataloguing of medieval Irish legal manuscripts and the challenges posed to gain full intellectual control of such complex codices.

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