



Annals ^{of} Eplaheimr

Official newsletter of the Barony of Eplaheimr



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NEWSLETTER

The Annals of Eplaheimr

Credits: Cover photograph of Oatcakes based on 7th century lisleagh cakes by Meadhbh Rois Inghean Uí Chaoim.

Masthead in JSL blackletter and JSL Ancient. Internal Text in Tahoma. The Annals is created in Open Office. All stock images are royalty free.

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COURT OF LOVE

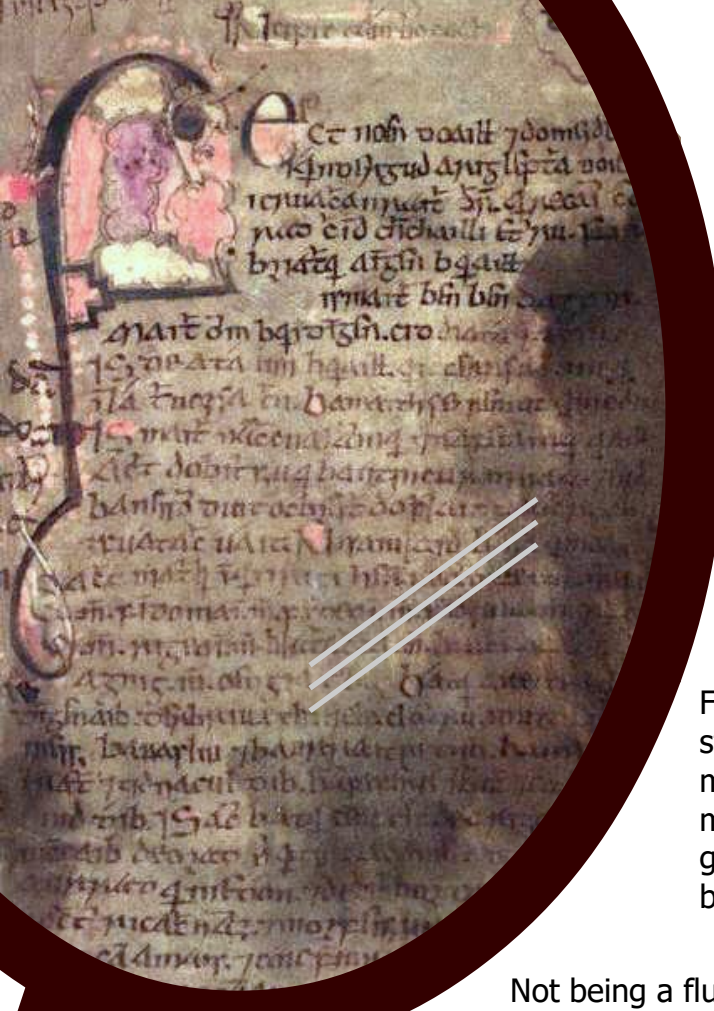
10th - 11th Feb, Clara Scout Den

A weekend of fun, competitions and courtly graces, including the Sos Cómhra, the Great Baronial Bakeoff and much much more!

Archery
Fencing
Games
A&S

Info & Booking

Breakfasts
Potluck Lunch
Crash Space
Camping



Trying to find the colours of Medieval Ireland – old sources

By THL Orlaith Chaomhanách

For absolutely not the first or last time I have been struggling with translation. The more it happens the more I ditch my ideas that I will never, ever try to get my brain around Old Irish and idly dream about maybe going back to college some day just to try to get a better handle on things.

Not being a fluent speaker of my own language makes researching old Irish ..interesting.. but I am finding the more I really poke at it the more it's making my brain sit up and take notice.

That probably is a weird opening for an article on dyeing. The reason for it is that I, as a member of the SCA, have chosen to concentrate on an Irish persona, and I really, really wanted to start seeing if I could pull some actual sources from existing texts. There aren't that many, so far, in the same way that we are not blessed with many written sources anyway. What I'm going to write about in this post is a sort of exercise in trying to pin down how I tried researching this and why I am wading my way through sources from a relevant time period when I feel less than equipped to do so.

The mission: What colours did Irish people wear/dyestuffs did they use that we can be certain of in from actual Irish sources?

Anyone who has seen a Medieval Book of Hours knows that there is a very human tendency to present an idea, concept, or event using familiar images – historical biblical figures or Alexander the Great all find themselves depicted as white folk in medieval dress doing medieval things. I'm sure Noah and Moses wouldn't know themselves. With the subject material I am about to discuss I was bogged down in a whole discussion about just how accurate you could treat the material as being before realising that it actually, for my purposes, it didn't matter.

I don't care that the Roll of Kings is likely to have been rewritten by Christians to lever in a pile of lineage to take Ireland's people back to the days of Noah, the fact that someone felt the need to do so is interesting in itself, but not to me right now. I, similarly, don't care what actual colours they were wearing in 1640 BCE, I care what colours a later, medieval era writer felt were plausible in the 10th or 11th century in Ireland, and what that writer felt was important to talk about, which reveals that these are normal but somewhat noteworthy colours for that period.

I similarly got utterly bogged down because what I am going to speak about was something I found first credited to two different kings (Tighernas or Eochu Edgathach (Book of Leinster) and in other places just to Tighernas (Eochaid Ua Flainn's 'Éitset áes ecna aÍbind'). That's a matter of different sources, and again, doesn't actually matter for what I'm trying to talk about, I really need to stop chasing rabbits down rabbit holes. But it does mean I got a strange sort of mild outrage reading one version as fact in, say 'Traditional Dyestuffs in Ireland, an essay by Brid Mahon in Gold under the Furze. Studies in Folk Tradition Presented to Caoimhín Ó Danachair and in Lebor na Nuachongbála now known as the Book of Leinster, and then come across it apparently being *not right* in The History of Ireland by Geoffrey Keating.

And see? Now I have wildly digressed. Again. Tighernas is supposed to have been the 13th High King of Ireland.

1. Tigernmas son of lofty Follach
prince over Banba of rough
judgements,
seven and seventy years
in kingship over the Gáedil.

2. By him were smelted, it is a
tuneful fame,
ornaments of gold at first in Ireland;
green, blue, purple together,
by him were put upon garments.

Source: <https://www.ancienttexts.org/library/celtic/ctexts/lebor6.html>

I am resisting, hard, the temptation to discuss the translation, this is the old Irish:



1. TIGernmas mac Ollaig aird
flaith forin mBanba brethgaairg;
.uiii. mbliadna ar .lxx. dó
i rrige for Gaedeló.

2. Leis ro berbad is blad bind.
méin óir ar tus i nHerind;
uane gorm corcair malle
leis tucad for etaige.

Source: <http://research.ucc.ie/celt/document/G800011A#>

The important thing is "uane gorm corcair mallem leis tucad for etaige." – uanne or uane is the old Irish for green, gorm is blue and corcair is purple. So we know that the author of the Book of Leinster, or the author of the text that was copied into the book of Leinster in approximately 1140 AD or CE, whichever you prefer, felt it was utterly plausible that the colours green, blue and purple were used (together?) from the 1600s BCE for the first time.

Purple, as in Classical society, was obtained from molluscs, and this continued on for centuries. Ireland also obtained purples (and pinks) from lichens. These are a harder process than cooking vegetation to give a wide selection of yellow, so are worthy of special note. Similarly woad, the most likely source for blue in Ireland, was not a straight forward dye, not being water soluble – so has a trick before it can be used. Green is tricky to obtain as a colour straight from nature, but it is easily achievable through over dyeing processes or with the addition of Iron in the process.



Halstatt Fragment dyed with
combination of Woad and Weld



Halstatt Fragment dyed with Woad
and tinted with Cochineal



Halstatt Fragment dyed with Weld

*Extant examples of textile
Fragments from the Bronze Age
Saltmines in Halstatt, Austria - Pics courtesy of NHMV*

Tigernmas son of Follach took the kingship thereafter By him were [drinking] horns first given in Ireland. By him was gold first smelted in Ireland, and colours were put upon garments, and fringes. By him were made ornaments and brooches of gold and silver. Luchadán was the name of the wright who smelted the gold, in Foithri of Airther Life. And he was seventy and seven years in the kingship of Ireland, and he came but little short of destroying the progeny of Éber during that time. So he died in Mag Slecht, in the great Assembly thereof, with three-fourths of the men of Ireland in his company, in worship of Crom Cruaich, the king-idol of Ireland; so that there escaped thence, in that fashion, not more than one-fourth of the men of Ireland;

The fourth of the men of Ireland who escaped gave the kingship of Eochu Édgathach son of Daire Doimthech of the seed of Lugaid son of Íth. By him were made the manifold cheekerings upon the garments of Ireland—one colour in the garment of slaves, two in the garments of peasants, three in those of hirelings and fighting men, four in those of lordings, five in those of chieftains, six in those of men of learning and of poets, and seven in those of kings and of queens. From that there developed all the colours that are today in the vesture of a bishop.

Source: <https://www.ancienttexts.org/library/celtic/ctexts/lebor6.html>

I am intrigued by this, but was it a thing? Did the number of colours signify rank once in Ireland? At the end of the day though it doesn't matter, because while it is reported as a thing that Irish people did, they were supposed to have done it a millennia before common era, and as such well out of my period of interest. What it does do though is give me a definite idea that colours are, by the 12th century, numerous and well established and understood to have meaning.

The next avenue of research in Irish historical dyeing is looking at the incredibly common idea of the "saffron leine" – because my argument is that there is no way, at all, saffron was a commonly used dye stuff in Ireland, and the colour is descriptive of the colour and not of the source. But that's for later.

Article by THL Orlaith Chaomhanách

**Originally published in the Lidian Dyers Association Blog - <http://lidiandyers.org/>
Images of The Book of Leinster courtesy of TCD Library**

Loughdennaree UNIVERSITY

2nd March, Carmelite Centre, Moate

A day of classes, learning and fun! Keeping checking the website for an update on what will be on offer! Feast is Potluck.

**Book
now!**

Info & Booking



Dyeing with Purple Gromwell

Alternative to Tyrian Purple, from the Far East of Asia

By Baroness Melisende Fitzwalter OL

Purple gromwell (aka red stoneroot and red gromwell) is related to Borage and forget-me-not and has been used both medicinally and for dyeing for literally thousands of years, especially if you consult East Asian texts. In different cultural traditions, it was variously believed to have, when ingested, properties ranging from anti-viral to contraceptive properties to all kidney issues. When used topically it was believed to help with all manner of skin complaints from eczema to smallpox!

Tyrian Purple – the highly prized dye extracted from a Mediterranean mollusc, did not make it over to East Asia, or at least not in enough quantity to become any kind of main source of purple. In fact, purple, while being a high-status colour, did not have the Imperial associations it did in European cultures. I have not yet found evidence that purple gromwell dye made it to Europe in period, either.

It is the root principally that is used. Usually it is dried over 2 to 3 months and then ground up into fine powder. According to old texts, the process in Japan was to dip the fabric or yarn in an alum bath repeatedly over the same period of time. The fabric or yarn was then dipped multiple times into the dye bath, and allowed to air in between dips to allow for oxidation of the colour. The fabric or yarn was then dipped until the desired colour was achieved. Apparently the dyed cloth or yarn was then stored in a dark place for a year until the colour fully matured.

There are warnings written that the process was expensive as it required alum-rich mordanting and similar to most natural dyes, was prone to fading, being very light sensitive and fugitive.

The British Museum houses some silk fragments of what is believed to be a buddist streamer, that were excavated in the 19th century, from a cave in Dunhuang in Western China. They date from the 9th - 10th century CE and have been dyed with purple gromwell.



Photo Credit:
British Museum

All research pointed to alum being exclusively used to achieve the purple hue desired. So I (perhaps heretically given how popular a colour purple tends to be) wondered what colour a different mordant would result in.

I had never used my iron-based mordant and was curious to see what effect it would have on gromwell dye, so I decided to experiment both with an alum mordant and a ferrous one to see what difference that made.



As you can see, the difference is quite startling. Four dips in the dye-bath for the alum-mordanted yarn resulted in a pleasant lavender colour, while the same using the iron-mordanted yarn created quite a definite but pretty natural brown colour. There are accounts of up to 50 dips being required to get a darker purple.



The next time I use gromwell, I intend to see how repeated dipping will influence the final colour. My readings suggest that the dye is absorbed by the fibre very quickly, so it will probably also require repeated renewing of the dye in the bath.



I am very pleased with the startling contrast in results with just the change in the type of mordant. The brown itself is a warm earthy tone and the two colours go together quite well.



What's On

Court of Love

Sat 10th – Sun 11th February Clara Scout Den, Clara Co.Offaly

The event full of courtesy and Courtly Love returns! There will be competitions including the Great Baronial Bakeoff, Breakfasts provided, lunch is a Potluck. Camping and Crash space provided.

[Info & Booking](#)

Lough Devnaree University

2nd March, Carmelite Centre, Moate Co. Westmeath

The Barony of Eplaheimr will be hosting a fun day of classes and learning. Come be a teacher, or a student in good company!

[Info & Booking](#)

Cluain Oir Activity Day

17th February, St. Nicholas Parochial School, Galway City

Cluain Oir invites all for it's monthly day of Fencing and Crafting! Bring your swords and your projects!

[Info & Booking](#)

Spring Crown Tourney

5 - 7 April, Crawfordsburn Scout Camp, Belfast

The Shire of Dun in Mara is delighted to host Drachenwald's Spring Crown at a site, close to a major city, easily reached from two airports in Belfast, and less than two hours' drive from Dublin.

[Website](#)

Blogs and



A selection of
Blogs and Vlogs
from Eplaheimr
and around the
Knowne World.

This Issue's Theme: Irish Blogs of Interest

Irish Archaeology

A blog by Wexford archaeologists Colm Moriarty and Adrienne Corless

<http://irisharchaeology.ie/>

Early Medieval Ireland and Beyond

A blog about the archaeology and history of early medieval Ireland at UCD School of Archaeology

<https://earlymedievalarchaeologyproject.wordpress.com/>

The Bective Abbey Project

A blog about the excavations going on at Bective Abbey, a 13th - 15th century Abbey in the Boyne Valley.

<https://bective.wordpress.com/category/archaeology-ireland/>

Experimenting with Archaeology

The blog for UCD's centre for experimental archaeology and material culture.

<http://www.myucdblog.com/experimenting-with-archaeology/>

The Irish Archaeology Field School

Blog of IAFS, Archaeology training school based at Ferrycarrig ringwork castle in Wexford.

<https://iafs.ie/blog/>

CLUAIN OIR ACTIVITY DAYS

17th March, St. Nicholas Parochial
School, Galway

Join SCA Galway for a day of A&S and Fencing! These are held monthly and are often themed, so keep an eye on the website for more info!

Book now!

Info & Booking



Baronial



Directory

Barony

Baroness Rogned Stengrimova – baron.eplaheimr@gmail.com

Baroness Adele de Chaddwyke – baroness.eplaheimr@gmail.com

Seneschal (Chairperson) – THL Eplaheimr-Jin Ünegen – seneschal.eplaheimr@gmail.com

Exchequer (Treasurer) – Lord Robaird of Eplaheimr – exchequer.eplaheimr@gmail.com

MoAS (Arts & Sciences) – Lady Kytte of the Lake – eplaheimr.moas@gmail.com

Chronicler (Newsletter) – Baroness Melisende Fitzwalter – chronicler.eplaheimr@gmail.com

Marshal (Combar activities) – Lady Marina de Grado – knightmarshal.eplaheimr@gmail.com

Herald (Coat of Arms Consultation) – Baron Merlin Sparhawke

Tuatha

Báile Ceann an-tSiannan (Limerick)

Sheriff: THL Ünegen – coussotyann@gmail.com

Cluain Óir (Galway City & County)

Sheriff: Baron Etienne Fevre – etiennesca@gmail.com

Capall Uisce (Dromineer & North Tipperary)

Sheriff: Lady Marina de Grado – marinpostir@gmail.com

Tir Chroi (Athlone and surrounds)

Sheriff: Lord Robaird of Eplaheimr – roborourke@gmail.com

Eiscir Airgead (Clara and surrounds)

Sheriff: Lady Alice de la Wode – sheriffeiscirairgead@gmail.com

Name TBC (Longford Town and surrounds)

Sheriff: Lord Aodhán de Pairc – aodhanhudson@gmail.com

