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understandable. It is therefore highly unlikely that Gaulish elements survived uncorrupted in such an environment, if at all. Taking this into consideration, it seems very unlikely that phonological and morphological details would have survived in the extant forms, notwithstanding Meid and Anreiter's claims to the contrary. Also, later scribes copying the text certainly would not have understood any possible Gaulish in the charms and so are likely to have corrupted the charms (even) further, purposely or not. All this suggests that Meid and Anreiter have been much too optimistic about the possibilities of identifying Gaulish items in the language of the charms; the extant text does not allow for such detailed analysis. It follows that the magical formulae in *De Medicamentis*, however interesting, have little value as a source for Gaulish and its sociolinguistic context. Even so, this work remains one of the more sophisticated assessments of the obscure words and formulae in *De Medicamentis* to date and certainly contains many suggestions of great value, especially in its discussion of the plant names. The analysis of the magical formulae, however, shall have to remain controversial.

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Andrew Carnie, *Irish Nouns: a reference guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008. Pp. xi + 350. ISBN 978-0-19-921375-7. EUR 113,99.

Most standard grammars and dictionaries convey the idea that the declension of nouns in Modern Irish is a fairly straightforward affair, but on closer examination it quickly becomes obvious that the issue is much more complicated than that, even in the *Caighdeán* alone and without including the numerous regional or even local variations on the theme of nominal declension.

This situation is what Andrew Carnie sets out to amend with his book and the theoretical framework behind it. The book consists of 8 chapters, followed by two appendices and a *quick reference sheet*. With respect to content, the chapters can be gathered into two parts, and it appears that the second half of the book (actually two thirds of it) seems to serve a slightly different purpose and to address a somewhat different audience than the first.

Thus part 1 can be said to comprise chapters 1 through 3, which are mainly concerned with theoretical and introductory issues. Chapter 1 ("Preliminaries") starts

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with a very basic, easy to grasp introduction to traditional linguistic terminology and concepts. This is followed on page 5 by a discussion of initial mutations, which, although in-depth and detailed, creates the first problems. Rather than the traditional 3 plus 1, or 2 plus 2, division (lenition, eclipsis/nasalisation, aspiration/h-prefix plus t-prefix, or lenition, eclipsis/nasalisation plus h-prefix, t-prefix respectively) Carnie suggests a system of 5 plus 2, that is, he creates an extra pattern for every exception or additional context-related feature of the traditional patterns. Thus he identifies two patterns of lenition and three of eclipsis, but, for instance, separates the lenition and subsequent *t*-prefixation of initial *s*- (as in *an tsráid* 'the street') from the *t*-prefixation of vowels (as in *an t-athair* 'the father'), which are both caused by the article. Although this is doubtlessly as good a way as any other to gather mutations into patterns, it seems doubtful whether it is really apt to alleviate the fears of "students, teachers, and linguists alike" (p. 6), rather than simply replacing a three-way system with some exceptions by an equally difficult to memorize, rather more arbitrary and less tightly linked five-way system. It also somewhat disguises the fact that mutation after a combination of preposition and article may either be lenition or eclipsis, even in the Standard (cf. NIG 12, GRAMADACH 88–89), and that some of the confusion or irregularities surrounding the traditional patterns go back to this simple fact, such as non-eclipsis of dentals after the article, a phenomenon influenced by or indeed originating in delenition processes affecting dental homorganics in contact.

The second and third chapter then deal with nominal declensions, and are thus the central section of what I have termed the first part. In them, Carnie sets out to reform the categorization of Irish nouns, devising a new system based on the synchronic patterns of Irish nouns. Most grammars, such as the NIG, its Irish version GRAIMÉAR, the official guide to standard Irish (GRAMADACH), Ó DÓNAILL 2005, and a number of dictionaries (e.g. FP 2002: viii), employ varieties of a system that goes back to the patterns developed by the 19th-century scholar John O'Donovan (O'DONOVAN 1845: 77–109), which, however, were most certainly not based on a perceived fact that, as Carnie claims, "in Old Irish and Latin, there were also five declensions" (19). While the five declensions may be valid for Latin (in a very broad sense, and ignoring the many subclasses in the 'consonantal' declension), it is most certainly not the case in Old Irish, for which over a dozen stems resp. declensional patterns are identified (e.g. thirteen in STRACHAN 1949: 2–16, and fourteen in STIFTER 2006: 41)¹. In fact,

1 McCONE 2005 (esp. pp. 23–29) reduces this number by about half; his system, however, is roughly based on O'Donovan's, i.e. the traditional Modern Irish patterns.

O'Donovan himself claimed to have grounded his declensions on "the most attentive comparison of their systems, and the closest consideration of the variations of the noun of the language, as spoken and written" (O'DONOVAN 1845: 77), and although assertions of this sort are veritable stock phrases in 19th-century scholarship, on the following pages he makes it quite clear that he was indeed familiar with both the "spoken and written" language of his time, and that his abstracted system did (and by and large still does), in fact, make sense. Admittedly, it was created around 150 years ago, and a reform, adjusting the system to meet the present situation, and indeed the requirements of the 21st century, should doubtlessly be considered. Yet it remains to be seen whether Carnie's system, intriguing as it is in its lay-out, is likely to provide a convenient alternative. Earlier attempts at reform were already made in the 1980ies by Mícheál Ó Siadhail (Ó SIADHAIL 1989: 148 ff.), and as Carnie notes, by Garry Bannister in 1984 (quoted by Carnie on pages 19–20); but while Ó Siadhail, in fact, takes abstraction even further than O'Donovan (he only gives three main patterns) and Bannister bases his patterns exclusively on plural formation, Carnie takes an unusual and interesting view at the system of nouns by largely disregarding gender and entirely separating singular from plural declensions. The resulting ten singular declensions are classified according to genitive formation, and this fairly high number of patterns allows Carnie to split up the traditional fifth declension, which generally includes nouns with genitives in *-d*, *-n*, and *-ach*, e.g. *cara*, *teanga*, *caora*. This fifth declension is indeed a rather mixed bag of a selection of paradigms perfectly regular in themselves, which most dictionaries, such as FP, treat as more or less irregular and therefore prefer to quote the respective case form(s) in the relevant entries. Carnie also breaks up the traditional declension m1 by joining m1-nouns in *-(e)ach* (genitive in *-(a)igh*) with f2-nouns of the same ending (genitive *-(a)í*), thereby establishing his new declensional class H. To a certain extent this does make sense, since it is based on the pronunciation of the genitives in most varieties as /i:/. But it also leads to one of the biggest problems of any system (including Carnie's!) of categorizing Irish nouns: the question whether to base such categorization on pronunciation or spelling. This difficulty has been increased by the orthographic reforms of the mid-twentieth century, which, although mostly succeeding in making the spelling more transparent, have also made the declensional system slightly more irregular, at least when using orthography as the basis of declensional patterns. This, for instance, is the case in some feminine nouns that are traditionally categorized as class f2, based on their pre-reform spelling: e.g. <scornach>, gen.sg. <scornaighe>, but illogical in present-day spelling

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<scornach>, gen.sg. <scornai> and therefore categorized as class H by Carnie. The fact that there is no 'real' or generally accepted standard pronunciation for Modern Irish does nothing to improve the situation, since a system like Carnie's, apparently largely based on pronunciation, is immediately confronted with diverging declensional patterns in the several varieties. Carnie is well aware of this problem, however, and one of the remarkable features of *Irish Nouns* are shaded boxes and a number of footnotes that are scattered throughout chapters 2 and 3 and give information on, and discuss (dialectal) variation in pronunciation and the effect it has on the assignment of a given item to a declensional class. Such a discussion is indeed mostly lacking in the majority of 'classical' handbooks and grammars so far, and in this respect the book offers a thorough investigation and discussion of current Irish nominal declension.

In chapter 3, then, Carnie identifies six regular plural declensions, containing two patterns of the weak type (i.e. differentiating case) and four of the strong type (added plural suffixes that do not differentiate case). Apart from the separation from the singular forms there is not much difference to the traditional system here.

With both singular and plural declensions, however, the problem arises that while the system used by Carnie provides an excellent survey of Irish genitive and plural formation, it does not particularly improve matters for the prospective learner – which, after all, seems to be the main aim of the book; while it is certainly true that the new declensions allow for fewer exceptions (obviously no declensional system could contrive to avoid exceptions altogether), especially with regard to appropriate plural patterns (e.g. m1 plus weak plural vs. m1 plus strong plural), the task of having to attribute a given noun to not one but two different declensional classes, for no more than four standard cases altogether, plus the relevant subgroups, would appear to be as complicated and cumbersome to learners and teachers as the traditional system, albeit in a different way. The fact that Carnie's system is entirely independent of the one employed in any other grammar or dictionary is somewhat less problematic; apart from this being the fate of most innovative work, Carnie proves once more to be aware of problems caused by his reform and accordingly offers a guide to mapping between his and the traditional classes in appendix A (335 ff.).

The rather complex material contained in chapters 2 and 3 is presented in a very clear style, but the many tables in all the minute detail they present may prove a double-edged sword: they may be a useful and valuable tool, provided the reader is already familiar with Irish grammar, but can be expected to be rather daunting and confusing for absolute or near-absolute beginners, per-



haps even more so than most other material offered in various already existing handbooks.

What I have termed the second part of Carnie's book basically consists of chapters 4 through 8 and the appendices. This part is mostly composed of lists, and constitutes the part of the book that could be truly useful to learners, particularly at a fairly early stage of study. Chapter 4 deals with pronouns, including the inflected prepositions, and contains an additional short section on pronoun usage in the main varieties of Irish, a feature that is also sadly lacking in most dictionaries and grammars. Chapter 5 after a brief general note provides an extensive list of verbal nouns. On full ten pages the verbal noun of virtually every verb a learner is likely to need in the first years is given, with its declensional class (following, of course, Carnie's system), and both its genitive forms, i.e. the noun genitive and the verbal adjective. Although the information contained in these two chapters may be easily obtained from at least the standard Ó Dónaill dictionary (Ó DÓNAILL [2005]) – FP is notoriously difficult to interpret in that respect – it is extremely convenient to have the nominal paradigms all neatly arranged and accessible at one glance.

This is followed by chapters 6 and 7, which contain a list of 1,200 fully declined nouns and a list of 10,000 undeclined nouns respectively, but even the latter are accompanied by their most important cases, usually genitive singular and common case plural. Furthermore in both chapters the entries are supplied with information on gender, singular and plural declension (again according to Carnie's system) and an English gloss. In spite of objections he expects from linguists and native speakers, Carnie makes a point of including *all* cases into his lists of declined nouns, even the vocative, which, as he rightly stresses (17–18), is rarely attested for inanimate nouns. He most certainly has a point here – including rare plurals or the vocative endows his lists of paradigms with an air of completeness that, unrealistic as it doubtlessly is, tends to be (in my own experience as both a learner and a teacher of Irish) precisely what learners look for and feel they need to brace confidence in what they have learned, even if they are aware that they are unlikely to ever use it.

Finally, chapter 8 offers a brief discussion of adjectival mutation and declension, along the same lines as his noun patterns, followed by a list of some 2,700 undeclined adjectives, which, however, are once more accompanied by the relevant information as to declensional class in singular and plural and in the two genders, their most common cases and an English gloss.

The mapping guide mentioned above as well as an overview of the use of IPA for Irish make up the appendices, which are followed by a quick reference

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sheet summarizing the main features of Carnie's declensional system.

All in all, Carnie's *Irish Nouns* leaves me in two minds. It seems to be directed at more than one readership, perhaps in an attempt to provide material for and please everybody. While most of the introductory notes, the word lists, declensional tables and the section on the Irish phonological transcription are clearly aimed at learners of the language in early stages of acquisition, the first part seems to be mainly directed at more competent users of Irish, who, however, are unlikely to need the complete declensions for most nouns and adjectives (apart from perhaps the odd exceptional form), and neither are likely to need information on such basic terminology as is given in the beginning of chapter 1 and in appendix B. The discussion of variant forms will also be interesting to most of the latter, but supplies beginners with an excess of information that they may not be able to cope with. One needs to work through this theoretical part, however, since it provides the material necessary to really make sense of the notation in the lists! On the other hand again, there is some extremely basic information very likely to irritate the scholarly user. Even though the two parts are closely linked and the second, more practical part is dependent on the first, for me the book conveys the impression that this theoretical part, the contents of which would have made for an interesting paper on their own, was added as a 'scholarly excuse' to publish this book in the first place.

Carnie's system as such offers an alternative and certainly interesting view on the topic and is undoubtedly useful for the purpose of this particular book, but it is questionable whether it will in fact prove useful enough to replace, or even is preferable to, the traditional system. It is debatable whether his way of arranging and organising nominal declension and mutations into patterns really makes a learner's life that much easier, or whether it is not rather a case of replacing a complicated and perhaps not perfectly logical system plus exceptions with a probably more logical but at least equally confusing one, which, in spite of its complexity, still cannot make do without the odd exception. For this reason, *Irish Nouns* can be recommended only for the adventurous natures among students of Irish at beginner level; but more accomplished Irish speakers and scholars of Irish when ignoring the beginners' material should find it a stimulating read.

