

Audacht Morainn - The Testament of Morann

The Testament of Morann is the death-bed advice of the mythological judge Morann, to a new king of Ireland. The text was written down first around the year 700, when Ireland was a majority Christian society, although the *Testament* may have circulated orally for some time before then. The earliest surviving manuscript in which the text survives dates from the twelfth century. It is likely that the *Testament* was recited by a judge at a new king's inauguration ceremony. Judges in early medieval Ireland received a highly specialised education which would have involved learning supposedly ancient wisdom like this text.

What can the source tell us about the priorities of early Irish society and the qualities desirable in its rulers?

Here begins the Testament of Morann son of Moen to Feradach Find Fechnach son of Craumthann Nia Nar. This man was the son of the daughter of Loth son of Delerath of the Pictish folk. His mother took him away in her womb after the destruction by the subject tribes of all Ireland's lords, with the exception of Feradach in his mother's womb. He came across afterwards with war-bands, and Morann sent this testament to them. [...]

He should keep my directive which follows here.
Tell him every word.
Bring to him in every word this long-lasting commandment.

He should preserve truthfulness, it will preserve him.
He should raise up truthfulness, it will raise him up.
He should lift up mercy, it will lift him up.
He should be considerate of his tribes, they will be considerate of him.
He should give deliverance to his tribes, they will deliver him.
He should calm his tribes, they will calm him.
Tell him – it is through the sovereign's truth that the death toll of a mighty war-band and great lightning-bursts are kept away from people.
It is through the sovereign's truth that he fulfils peace, tranquillity, the well-being of sages, and comfort.
It is through the sovereign's truth that every heir plants his house-post in his cherished legacy.
It is through the sovereign's truth that the mouth may taste the abundant fruit of the great forest.
It is through the sovereign's truth that milk-yields of numerous cattle may be traded.
It is through the sovereign's truth that there may be plenty of high, tall grain.
It is through the sovereign's truth that an abundance of the water's fish swim up streams.
It is through the sovereign's truth that fair offspring, borne of young women, are well begotten. [...]
Tell him – he should not promote any judge who does not know the true legal precedents.
It is through the sovereign's truth that every great craftsman achieves the diadem [crown] of learning [...]
It is through the sovereign's truth that the borders of every sovereign of truth stretch out so that a cow can attain the extent of its needed pasturage.

It is through the sovereign's truth that every article of clothing is got for the viewing of eyes.
[...]

Tell him – not much should he redden forecourts [the area before a house], because carnage is a vain pouring away of sovereignty and of the sheltering of the sovereignty by the kindred. Tell him to grant any reciprocal giving to which he is obligated, to enforce any bond he should bind, to nullify the shameful blushing of his cheeks with blades on battlefields facing foreign boundaries [...]

Tell him – neither fine gifts nor great treasures nor profits should blind him to the weak ones and their miseries. [...]

He should determine the value of the earth according to its fruits.

He should determine the value of the yew wood according to the value of the things made from it.

He should determine the value of cattle according to their abundance during the overlord's winter circuit.

He should determine the value of milk according to the abundance of porridge it makes.

He should determine the value of grain according to its height.

He should determine the value of streams according to their cleansing washing.

He should determine the value of iron according to the qualities of the tribes.

He should determine the value of bronze by its firmness and soundness and denseness.

He should determine the value of silver according to its worldly worth in bright artefacts.

He should determine the value of gold according to its foreign wonderful ornaments.

He should determine the value of the soil according to its usefulness for tribes seeking fruit.

He should determine the value of sheep according to their coat of wool which is chosen for the clothes of the tribes.

He should determine the value of pigs according to the fatness of their flanks [...]

He should determine the value of warriors who accompany a true sovereign, because every king possesses the rule of his war-band; [...]

He should determine the value of unfree persons and the masses who serve: let them serve, let them supply food, let them measure, let them give in return for the sovereign's true grants of value.

He should determine the value on old men in the places established by their ancestors with the many profits of honour.

He should determine the value of fathers and mothers according to the prosperity of guardianship and steadfastness of duty.

He should determine the value of payments for every guild of artisan according to tangible well-made artefacts.

He should determine the value of what is right and correct, truth and obligation, contract and regulation of every true sovereign towards all his clients.

He should determine the value of the correct honour-price of every grade of free and unfree persons of privilege. [...]

Rise up, go forth,
[...]

To Feradach Find Fechnach.

Announce to him the prominent details of my words.