

51. Concerning the betrothal of a woman

As family law and inheritance are subjects on which we are particularly badly informed, this short text, which survives in the *Textus Roffensis* and the C.C.C.C., MS. 383, and in Latin in *Quadripartitus*, is particularly welcome. The text bears no clear indication of date. Liebermann would place it 975-1030, with a preference for the latter part of this period. The stressing of the need that the woman herself is to accept the suitor suggests that it is not early. It is edited by Liebermann, I, pp. 442-444, and with English translation by Thorpe, I, pp. 254-257.

- H**ow a man shall betroth a maiden, and what agreement there ought to be.¹
1. If a man wishes to betroth a maiden or a widow, and it so pleases her and her kinsmen, then it is right that the bridegroom first according to God's laws and proper secular custom should promise and pledge to those who are her advocates, that he desires her in such a way that he will maintain her according to God's law as a man should maintain his wife; and his friends are to stand surety for it.
 2. Next, it must be known to whom belongs the remuneration for rearing her. The bridegroom is then to pledge this, and his friends are to stand surety for it.
 3. Then afterwards the bridegroom is to announce what he grants her in return for her acceptance of his suit, and what he grants her if she should live longer than he.
 4. If it is thus contracted, then it is right that she should be entitled to half the goods—and to all, if they have a child together—unless she marries again.
 5. He is to strengthen what he promises with a pledge, and his friends are to stand surety for it.
 6. If they then reach agreement about everything, then the kinsmen are to set about betrothing their kinswoman as wife and in lawful matrimony to him who has asked for her, and he who is leader of the betrothal is to receive the security.
 7. If, however, one wishes to take her away from that district into that of another thegn, then it is to her interest that her friends have the assurance that no wrong will be done to her, and that if she commits an offence, they may be allowed to stand next in paying compensation, if she has not possessions with which she can pay.
 8. At the marriage there should by rights be a priest, who shall unite them together with God's blessing in all prosperity.
 9. It is also well to take care that one knows that they are not too closely related, lest one afterwards put asunder what was previously wrongly joined together.