

VARIA I*

1. Two quatrains in *Cath Maighe Rath*

A list of a number of the Ulstermen's exploits forms part of a poem in the later recension of *Cath Maighe Rath* which was edited by O'Donovan in 1842 and suggested by Dillon to date from the late-thirteenth or fourteenth century.¹ The earliest copy of the tale is preserved in a portion of the Yellow Book of Lecan (YBL) written in 1398–9 by Murchadh Ó Cuinnlis (cols 281–310).² There are also copies in two seventeenth-century manuscripts written by Dáibhídh Ó Duibhgeannáin and a manuscript of the early-eighteenth century in the hand of Tumultach mac Muirghiosa, namely RIA B IV 1 (236), RIA 24 P 9 (739) and RIA 23 K 44 (58), which are referred to as B, P and K, respectively, below.³ O'Donovan based his edition on YBL but also consulted the copy in K, adopting its readings on occasion to correct 'deficiencies' where he found the text of YBL to be 'obviously defective'.⁴

The poem in question is found in all copies of the tale and begins *Eríg, a Chongail Macha* 'Arise, O Congal of Macha'.⁵ It is written on columns 297 and 298 of YBL and it may be mentioned in passing that part of a note at the top of the folio indicates that the scribe's ink was running out at this point in his work (*ata in dub ag leagad*).⁶ The piece is in *ógláchas* of *deibhidhe* and comprises twenty-two quatrains in YBL, two of which were written at the top and bottom of the folio, respectively, with reference marks to indicate where they should be inserted in the text. The poem takes the form of a dialogue between Conghal Claon, deposed king of the Ulaidh, and one of his warriors who thinks that the odds are stacked firmly against them in the battle as they face the four other provinces of Ireland and a good number of the men of Ulster as well. Conghal states that this need not concern them, as numerous Ulster warriors have overcome their enemies in the past against all odds by performing great deeds of valour. He proceeds to illustrate this by listing some of these warriors and deeds.

The composition *Eríg, a Chongail Macha* is introduced as follows in O'Donovan's edition based on YBL: *Ocus* (7 MS) *ra luaidetar in laid sea, ocus* (7 MS) *laiberthar is in laid, ar* (an MS) *is easbadach dh'a* (da MS)

* I am grateful to the editors of *Ériu* and to an anonymous reader for their helpful comments. All translations are by the present writer unless otherwise indicated.

¹ See Dillon (1954, 201).

² For Ó Cuinnlis and the date of his copy, see Ó Concheanainn (1987, 147) and references cited there.

³ These copies are noticed in Dillon (1954). He also mentions Marstrander's reference to an unspecified copy in Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique. Professor Pádraig A. Breatnach, who is compiling a catalogue of the Irish manuscripts in that repository, kindly informs me that no copy of the tale is found there.

⁴ O'Donovan (1842, vii). See further remarks on the editorial policy in Dillon (1954, 200).

⁵ Text and translation: O'Donovan (1842, 202, 203).

⁶ Cited and translated in *DIL* L 72.11–12; cf. also Ó Concheanainn (1973, 67 n. 21).

h-adbar ‘And this poem was spoken, the argument to which is defective’.⁷ The manuscript is stained where the editor read *ar*, but this notwithstanding ‘an’ may be clearly discerned. The latter part of the sentence should then perhaps be read and interpreted as *laibérthar isin laíd a n-is easbadach dá hadbar* ‘that which is wanting of its subject will be spoken of in the poem’. This comment may refer to the unrevised text at quatrains 6*b* and 21 which is accompanied by corrections, and perhaps also to quatrain 18*c*, the text and meaning of which in YBL differs from that in the other copies and alters accordingly the episode to which reference is made.⁸ Alternatively, the comment may indicate that the scribe took a contrary view of events to that presented in the text.⁹ It is absent from the other copies which read simply: *agus ro raidhsíot an laoidh B*; *agus ro labhrattur an láoidhsi P*; *agas ro raidsead an laoidh K*. In addition to the copies noted above, seven quatrains (1–4, 6–8) are found independently of the tale jotted on the inside back cover of UCD-OFM A 6 (A below), where the first line erroneously reads *Eirigh a Cnocabhair Macha*.¹⁰

The two quatrains (18, 19) which are the concern of this note are printed and translated in the edition as follows:

*Cath nár b’urusa d’áirim,
ic gairig, ic iolgaigcci,
cath ro bris ar sluag Semne,
brislech Muigi Muirthemne.*

*Ced la Concobair d’á claind,
ocus Derg-ruathar Conaill,
d’á tuc Fergus,—forum n-gle,—
na trí maela Midhe*

‘A battle which was not easy to be described, from shouts,—from various shouts,—the battle in which the host of Semne were defeated,—the Breach of Magh Muirtheimhne. / The first day which Conchobhar gave his sons, and the Derg-ruathar Chonaill, in which Fergus,—noble the deed,—took the three Maels of Meath’.¹¹

⁷ Text and translation: O’Donovan (1842, 202, 203). For *ra luaidetar* in this passage, see *DIL* L 220.48–9 where it is rendered ‘they recited’.

⁸ The relevant passages are discussed below.

⁹ The second suggestion appears to be in line with O’Donovan (1842, 202 n. h), who interpreted the comment as illustrating ‘that the writer of the story had ancient MS. authorities for his facts’.

¹⁰ Dillon, Mooney and de Brún (1969, 14). The connection with the poem in *Cath Maighe Rath* is not made in the catalogue.

¹¹ Text and translation: O’Donovan (1842, 210, 212). The manuscript reads as follows: *Cath nárburusa dairim. ic gáirig ic ilgairig; cath robris arsluag semne. breislech muigi muirthemne / Cedlá concobair daclaind. agusderguathar conaill: datuc fergus forum ngle. na .iii.a (a suprascript) maela mide.*

The incidents referred to are:

- (a) ll 1–2: the final combat of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* at Gáireach and Iorgháireach.¹² Gáireach has been identified as Garhy, a townland in Westmeath, and Iorgháireach explained as ‘eastern Gáireach’, by Walsh.¹³ The form *Iolgháireach* found here and elsewhere may result from dissimilation but was probably also influenced by folk etymology based on the prefix *il-* ‘many’ and a derivation of the second element from *gáir* ‘shout, cry’.¹⁴
- (b) ll 3–4: *Brisleach Muigi Muirthemne* may refer either to the battle in the tale of Cú Chulainn’s death or to an episode of the same title in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in which the youths (*macrad*) of Emain Macha are slain and Cú Chulainn avenges their death.¹⁵ O’Donovan apparently understood the lines as a reference to the early modern version of the former, stating that ‘the battle here referred to was made the subject of an Irish romantic tale, of which there are many paper copies in the collection of Messrs. Hodges and Smith, College-green, Dublin’.¹⁶ This interpretation seems to be supported by the reading of YBL in l. 3. The reading of the other manuscripts presented below would, however, seem to support the second option, which was said to have been one of the three uncountable battles of the *Táin*, a grouping which includes (a) above (*iss ed tres ndírime na Tána .i. Sesrech Breslige 7 Imslige Glennamnach 7 in cath for Gárig 7 Irgárig*).¹⁷ This battle, in which Cú Chulainn was victorious against the odds, may be more appropriate in the context of a passage which is designed to justify the superiority of the Ulster troops by listing exploits in which their ancestors were triumphant and causes the warriors to rise up, as indicated by the passage which follows the poem: *Is and sin ro érg[e]tar oll-catha Uladh ocus allmarach . . . fa chomarcaib croda comergi cath-brostudacha Congail* ‘Then rose the mighty battalions of the Ultonians and foreigners . . . at the warlike and exciting exhortations of Congal’.¹⁸
- (c) l. 5: the incident referred to in this line is not known to be extant, but it is also named in a fifteenth-century poem by Maol Eachlainn ‘na nUirsgéal’ Ó hUiginn which begins *Lámh dhearg*

¹² *TBC I* pp. 118ff; *TBC LL* pp 106ff; note also the title ‘An Cath for Gáirig 7 Irgáirig’ which occurs in Tale List B, for which, see Mac Cana (1980, 51).

¹³ Walsh (1957, 260–2).

¹⁴ Compare *DIL* s.v. *l gáirech* and *MD IV*, 220, 435 where the place-name *Gáirech* is said to derive from a shout (*gáir*).

¹⁵ For the tale of Cú Chulainn’s death, see Van Hamel (1933, 69–133) and Kimpton (2009). For the episode in the *Táin*, see *TBC I* ll 2072–334; *TBC LL* ll 2121–337; on the title and date of this episode, see *TBC I* p 267 (2072ff n.) and Mac Gearailt (1992, 169–72), respectively.

¹⁶ O’Donovan (1842, 211–12 n. p.)

¹⁷ *TBC I* ll 2312–14.

¹⁸ Text and translation: O’Donovan (1842, 214, 215). The letter supplied in square brackets was omitted by the editor.

Éireann Í Eachach.¹⁹ O'Donovan interpreted the first word in the line as being comprised of the elements *céad*- 'first' and *lá* 'day'. The noun *lá* may refer here to 'a battle' and *céad*- could also be understood as an intensifier meaning 'great'.²⁰ This first part of the line may therefore be rendered 'Conchobhar's first/great battle'. The rest of the line reads 'daclaind', which might be translated as 'for his children'. Interpretation is complicated, however, by the fact that there is variation with regard to the preposition employed in the title of this incident in the manuscript tradition of *Lámh dhearg Éireann Í Eachach*. Of the twenty-five copies of that poem known to me, four agree with *Cath Maighe Rath* in reading *dá*;²¹ the other copies which preserve the quatrain have either the preposition *re* 'against' or *le* 'with'.²² Without knowing the details of the incident, it is not easy to decide which is the best reading. However, since *dá* occurs in both *Cath Maighe Rath* and some copies of *Lámh dhearg Éireann Í Eachach*, it may be preferable.

- (d) l. 6: the story of how Conall Cearnach exacted vengeance after Cú Chulainn's death.²³
- (e) ll 7–8: an incident relating the origin of the hills known as *Maola Midhe* which occurs as part of the final combat of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.²⁴ O'Donovan was unable to identify this episode, referred to in (a) and (e).

There is clearly a discrepancy in the text as preserved in YBL in that (a) and (e) are mentioned in separate quatrains. In fact, since these lines refer

¹⁹ A critical edition of the poem is provided in Ó Riain (2008, 87–129). A copy of the poem in UCD-OFM A 25 has now also appeared in a diplomatic edition in *ABM* no. 292. The incident is named at q. 9a (cited in O'Grady 1926, 397) and is one of a number of references to Ulster Cycle tales which occur in the poem at qq 5–13, including those mentioned under (a), (b), (d) and (e) above. These references are discussed with identification of sources where possible in Ó Riain (2008, 91–9); some are also discussed in O'Grady (1926, 396–7). They are not considered further here, however, as they fall outside the scope of this note.

²⁰ For *lá* and *céad*- in these senses, see *DIL* L 10.25–32 and O'Rahilly (1977, 191–3), respectively.

²¹ The preposition *dá* occurs in RIA 23 F 16 (2), NLI G 132, TCD H.1.6 (1280) and British Library Egerton 111 (the last is, however, a copy of 23 F 16). The figure of twenty-five copies does not include late transcripts by O'Curry and O'Donovan which were in Hyde 56, 76ff and 123ff, for which, see de Brún (1988, 20 n. 30) and de Búrca (1926–7, 1321, 1333). A late copy in RIA 12 F 8 (888) should perhaps be discounted since O'Rahilly suggested (with a query) that O'Curry transcribed that manuscript, see *RIA Cat.* Fasc. 1, 31.

²² See Ó Riain (2008, 111, 121 (9a n.)), and for the manuscript tradition of the poem, see (2008, 101–7). It may be noted that the relevant quatrain is omitted in a number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century copies.

²³ This forms part of the death-tale of Cú Chulainn, see Van Hamel (1933, 115–33 §§45–58) and Kimpton (2009, §§25–30).

²⁴ *TBC I* ll 4072–3, *TBC LL* ll 4777–9; for further references to this episode, see Breatnach (2009, 130–1) and *Duan. Finn* no. 20 q. 73, which resembles the first quatrain dealt with here and is worth quoting in full: *Tuc mac Róigh buille curadh / a ccath Ilgháirech Uladh / dar tesc Fergus ba gntom gle / na teóra Máola Midhe* 'The son of Roech gave a champion's blow in the Ulstermen's battle of the many shouts, when Fearghus smote down—it was a bright feat—the three Maols of Meath'. In the line *a ccath Ilgháirech Uladh*, *Ilgháirech* should be read with a lower-case initial and viewed as an etymologising allusion to the place-name *Gáireach*.

to the same episode the relative clause in (e) must form a unit with (a). The second couplets of the quatrains presented above seem, therefore, to have been transposed in YBL or in its exemplar. For this reason, the text provided by the other manuscript copies of *Cath Maighe Rath* is superior to that of YBL in the present instance, in that (a) and (e) occur in the same quatrain. Other significant variants are: *dar shloigh* (< *slaidid*) for *da tuc* ('where . . . brought about') and *ro mhuigh ré* for *ro bris ar*; both of which may also be superior.²⁵ Based on the evidence of the later copies, the quatrains should be read as follows:

*Cath nárbh urusa d'áirimh
ag Gáirigh ag Iolgháirigh
dar shloigh Fearghus—foram nglé—
na teóra Maola Midhe.*

*Céadlá Conchobhair dá chloinn
agus deargruathar Chonaill;
cath ro mhuigh ré sluagh Seimhne
breisleach Muighe Muirtheimhne.*²⁶

'A battle which was not easy to recount at Gáireach and Iolgháireach when Fearghus smote—bright action—the three Maola Midhe. / Conchobhar's first battle for (?) his children and the bloody attack of Conall; the rout at Magh Muirtheimhne (was) a battle in which the host of Seimhne (i.e. Ulstermen) prevailed.'²⁷

There are a number of other differences between the text of the poem as preserved in YBL and that of the other manuscripts, some of which may be noticed in brief here.

(1) *Number of quatrains*

There are twenty-two quatrains in YBL as noted above. Quatrains 5, 12–15 and 20 are absent from B, P and K; in addition, qq 10*cd* and 11*ab* have been omitted in P. Quatrains 9–15 all begin with the words *Ro pad dib*; thus, qq 12–15 may have been omitted through homoeoteleuton or perhaps through an aversion to prolixity on the part of a scribe. The missing quatrains include those which were added in the margin of

²⁵ Note that the verb *sligid*, synonymous with *slaidid*, is used in the account of this episode in *TBC I* ll 4072–3: *Sligis Fergus na tulchai íarom coro ben a teóra máela Midi dá trí béimennaib* 'Then Fergus smote the hills and with three blows which struck off the (tops of the) three hills in Meath (now called) Máela Midi, the flat-topped hills of Meath'.

²⁶ B 71b; P 139; K 82. v.ll. 18 *a* usa B: *urus* K; *dárimh* P: *dáiremh* K *b* *gáiridhi* P; *iolgairide* P: *iolgairghchci* (gh added above line with caret mark) K *c* *shloigh* PK; *foramh* BPK 19 *a* da *chlond B b* et K *c* *sluagh P d* *muighe B*: *mhuighe* P: *mhuighi* K.

²⁷ The phrase *nárbh urusa d'áirimh* 'not easy to recount' presumably derives from the classification of this battle as uncountable, for which see n. 17 above.

YBL (qq 12 and 20). A contains only quatrains 1–4 and 6–8, as noted above.

(2) *Two corrections in YBL*

- (i) *6b is cuig ced a Cind Magair (: n-aghaidh)* ‘and five hundred from Cenn Maghair’²⁸: o Dun Monaid is written above the line in YBL. O’Donovan inadvertently attributed this reading to ‘the paper copy’ K and considered it to be correct, although *Monaidh* does not rhyme with *aghaidh*. B, P, K and A correspond to the original reading in YBL of *Cind Magair* but show variation in the preposition as follows: ‘a ccionn (Mh.)’ B; ‘i ccionn’ P; ‘o chind’ K; ‘aciond’ A.
- (ii) Quatrain 21 states that the Ulstermen never killed a woman with the exception of Mughain and Meadhbh (*Ni dernnsat ban-echta ban . . . acht mad Mugain, tria na seirc, / ocus Medb uathmar, oirderc*).²⁹ In the margin beside the second couplet the scribe has written ‘no sis’ along with a reference mark.³⁰ This mark directs the reader to the bottom of the folio where the following reading is found: *acht mad cuillenn ingen eirc. agus medb uathmur oirderc*. This correction to line *c*, which replaces Mughain with Cuilleann daughter of Earc, was not noted by O’Donovan in his edition, but corresponds to the reading of B, P and K.

Other variant readings occur, a number of which are significant; for example, at qq *2b*, *3a* (i) (A only), (ii) (B, K only), *b* (i) (P only), (ii) (A only), *d* (A only), *4c* (B, A only), *6c*, *d* (A only), *8c*, *10b*, *11b* (B only), *c*, *16b*, *17b*, *22b*. Only some of these can claim to be superior to or on an equal footing with the readings of YBL and a number are clearly inferior. It may also be noted that A has a number of spellings which reflect pronunciation, for example, *maoid* (*3a*) and *bfiuibh* (*3c*) for *amuig* (YBL, P only) and *uaib*, respectively. In what follows, the text of the edition is cited first and the reading of B given as representative of the variants unless otherwise indicated: *2b* ar domun] *anerinn*; *3a* (i) Finnaid] *Fionniom* A; (ii) *amuig* (: Ailig)] *amin*; *b* (i) *aird-rig*] *ardflaith* P; (ii) Ailig] *uladh* A; *d* doib] *dho*; *4c* aidb] *aidhbhle* B: *daibhlíbh* A (: *aidhbhlíbh* K); *6c* dingebat (*dingebdait* MS) *cuiged mád cath*] *dingebhaitt in cuigeadh cath* B: *dingébhaitt cuigedh* ma accath P: *dingebhaitt cuigedh* in (n expunged) *ccath* K: *dingebuid coigedh* mo cat A (character expunged before cat); *d* cethri] *tri* A; *8c* nir lia laech] *nilia fer cruaidh*; *10b* secht meic ailli Fergus] *cuig mic aille fhearghossa* (aonghosa P); *11b* Laime] *aonlámhe*; *c* ba ferrde] *angmhaidh*;

²⁸ Text and translation: O’Donovan (1842, 204, 205).

²⁹ For the death of Meadhbh, see Hull (1938).

³⁰ It may be noted that *sis* is visible in the manuscript itself, but not in the facsimile (Atkinson 1896, 307.27).

16*b* a coscar ní coidéhta] accosgar (accosgair P: accosgair K) nit (níd P) coitechtae; 17*b* (cath) Duma Beinne] dhúine binni B: duin beinne P: duine beinni K; 22*b* o Ath Eo (: beo)] ó áth cró. Additionally, there is more minor variation between the copies.

Finally, it may be observed that in some instances O'Donovan has (i) made unrecorded changes to the text of YBL or (ii) silently adopted the readings of K as follows:

- (i) 5*b* uí < úa; 6*c* dingebat < dingebdái; 22*c* nimh < neim;
- (ii) 11*a* lucht Chonaille (: Gaibe) K (l. Conáille B; line om. P): don lucht aile YBL; 22*a* cén bam K (gén b. B): o tú YBL (ó tú P).

He has also incorrectly reproduced from K the text of q. 22*cd* as: Ar iad, dar linn, is lerda neimh, / A ócca Emhna erigh.³¹ The manuscript has: asiad (siad BP) dar leam as (om. B) lerga a (added above line with caret mark) nimh (neimh B: *nemh* P), a occa (gilli P) eamhna eirghidh.

2. An unrecorded scribal note in RIA 23 Q 16

RIA 23 Q 16 (89) was apparently written in the early-sixteenth century and contains a substantial fragment of *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*.³² The scribe is unidentified but was clearly concerned with the presentation of his text. The last four lines of the left-hand column on p. 63 contain an introduction to a poem beginning *Uathbás anachain uair sib*; the poem itself begins on the first line of the right-hand column. The introduction runs as follows: mar adubairt file na fedhnach na focailsi ag aithméla in athghluasachta tucad ar na tromsluaghaib 'As the army's poet said in sorrow for that second setting in motion which [by a false alarm] had been inflicted on them'.³³ The final line in the left-hand column consists of only six letters and a suspension stroke ('-sluaghaib'), thus leaving the scribe some room to continue writing. He did not deem it appropriate, however, to begin the poem with its ornate, rubricated capital U on the final line of a column, making the following justification which was written in the space remaining to him in the column as a line filler, but which is not recorded in O'Grady's edition or in the Catalogue: Ni tindscnum tosach sonn ar loigid in luig 'I do not undertake (the) beginning here because the space is so small'.³⁴

³¹ O'Donovan (1842, 214 n. x). This is the only variant noted by O'Donovan.

³² See *RIA Cat.* Fasc. 2, 263–5 and McNamara (1961); the text was edited by O'Grady (1929).

³³ Text (modified to indicate expansion of MS contractions) and translation: O'Grady (1929), vol. 1, 127, vol. 2, 112. A more accurate translation of 'ar na tromsluaghaib' would be 'on the mighty hosts'.

³⁴ For discussion of line fillers, see Ó Macháin (2011, 191); cf. also Ó Macháin (2013, 148–9). An alternative translation to that proposed above would be 'to start', taking *tosach* as a quasi-verbal noun. There are no examples of this usage in *DIL* s.v. *tosach*, however.

3. IGT II 1258

This previously unidentified couplet was excerpted from quatrain 12cd of the poem beginning *Madh fiafraidheach badh feasach* by Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh as edited by McKenna (1947, 67).

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABM</i>	See McManus and Ó Raghallaigh (2010).
<i>Duan. Finn</i>	See MacNeill (1908).
<i>RIA Cat.</i>	See O’Rahilly <i>et al.</i> (1926–70).

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