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Beir Mo Scíath, Scëo Fri Úath
Author(s): Máirín O Daly, Ailill Ólomm and Ailill Ulomm
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BEIR MO SCÍATH, SCËO FRI ÚATH

THIS poem is edited from LL 146[b] where it is immediately followed by *A maccáin ná cí*. Both belong to a version of Cath Maige Mucrime (where they are spoken by Ailill Ólomm) but not to the LL version (ed. Stokes, RC xiii. 426 ff.). They are also to be found in the Ó Cléirigh manuscript B iv. 2, 121[r] f., where they are copied from LL. A very corrupt and incomplete version of the present poem is contained in Edinburgh MS. xxviii (Mackinnon Cat., p. 139). Of this I have seen only a microfilm which was in parts impossible to decipher. I cite a few readings from it below (Ed.). Our poem was edited by Eoin Mac Neill in PRIA (1895), pp. 540 ff. as the second of his 'Three Poems in Middle Irish'. The third is *A maccáin ná cí*.

The language is that of early Middle Irish. The neuter is partly preserved: *comfŭaim ṅglaíd*, § 2*a*, ? *a ṅgol ṅglechrach ṅgarg*, § 13*b*; *nocon ed*, § 18*c*; neut. pron. but masc. art. in *iss ed . . . in scél*, § 19*d*; and is replaced by fem. in *na ríge*, § 18*d*. Disyllabic forms remain in *brëo*, § 1*b*, *bröi*, § 25*d*; but monosyllabic in *breo*, § 10*b*, *dóe* (MS. *dói*), § 25*c*, *niad*, § 25*b*. See also note on *scëo*, § 1*a*. Mid.Ir. apl. *scéoil*, § 23*b* replaces O.Ir. *scél(a)*, and gs. *cinid*, § 25*b*, earlier *ciniuda*.

The metre of the poem is *rannaigecht* beginning with six quatrains of *r. mór* but with a good deal of variation after that. See also notes on §§ 10 and 25. Alliteration is usual but not invariable in each line of the quatrain. *Aicill* is always present between *c* and *d*, except in § 25, and usually between *a* and *b*. *Fidrad freccomail* (see Murphy, Metrics, p. 38) is usual between the quatrains but is absent between 19–20, 22–23, 23–24, and 24–25.

All departures from the manuscript reading are indicated in footnotes. I have marked all contractions except *m*- and *n*-strokes. Insertions are indicated by square brackets, while round brackets show what I think ought to be omitted. Though the translation, particularly of the first five quatrains, is sometimes very tentative, I have used few question-marks, relegating all suggested alternative interpretations to the notes.

MÁIRÍN O DALY

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TEXT

Ailill Ūlomm cecinit.

1. Beir mo scíath, sceo *fri* úath,
bréo *fri* brūach, bruithnech[1] bedg,
co rraib *ar* clíu Chorm*aic* Cais,
for*nairt fri frais* fla[n]nrūad ferg.

2. Fid fō coitled[2] comḟūaim nglaíd[3]
gūal*aire* laích [4]ludi i tress[4]
smerdnide smir gūaile[5] guirm
būa[i]le thiug tuirn tulc[a]id ass.

3. Adlaichda a a[i]scin ri *fraig*
con-gaib[6] óm (ḟ)odbrond com ó;
dia mboí Cú Rúi 'na ni[u]rt nīad
ropad scīath dingbāla dó.

4. Dítnid *tri* chōicer[7] i cath,
[8]cróderg clach cailce[8] *fria* ḟraicc;[9]
talla mucc messa a caill chóir
'sind[10] laind óir lenas dia slaitt.[11]

5. Is lám*aire* laích i ilurg,
co ngé[i]s badb dia burd dia blaī,
ri [12]hagar ttend[12] *tricc* 'ma(d) t[h]ruit
ni gabat *grem grip* guip gaī.

6. Mo gaī, mo chlaideb, mo sciath,
ar cech n-aí nī fiach fir thaiss;
nī dūthracht fir maithlāim meirb
dom ṡeilb for seilb Corm*eic* Cais.

7. Ro choisc cumu mo chlīathaig
ní ī*arfaig* Ēogan mo chró;
fer détla Cass claidib glaiss,
bid lais cenco dūthras dó:

8. Mo da d*ergṡleig*, mo chlaideb,
mo [13]scíath fo[13] sceo *cuma*[i]le,
m'ech, mo ch*arpat*, mo chathb*arr*,
mo gathland ind[14] umaide.

[1] bruich-, *MS.* [2] coid-, *MS.* [3] nghiaid, *MS.* [4–4] ludite frais, *MS.* [5] guala, *MS.* [6] *con*gaib, *MS.* [7] -ir, *MS.* -ear, *Ed.* [8–8] chroderg áclách cailgg, *MS.* [9] f-, *MS.* [10] isd, *MS.* [11] s-, *MS.* [12–12] hadart tend, *MS.* [13–13] *bis*, *MS.* [14] inn, *MS*

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TRANSLATION

1. Take my shield, a shield against terror, a blaze against a (shield-)rim, fiery (its) thrust, that it may be on the left arm of Cormac Cass, mighty against the shower of blood-red, angry weapons.

2. Tree under which the mingled sound of shouting used to be lulled, shoulder-burden of a warrior who went into battle, pointed (butt) of dark iron, a thick [. . .] boss protrudes from it.

3. Most warlike the sight of it against the wall; it extends from my ankle to my ear. When Cú Ruí was in his warrior's might, it would have been a worthy shield for him.

4. It protects three times five men in battle; the lime on its *fraicc* is blood-red; there is room for a mast-fed pig from a goodly wood within the golden plate that cleaves to its edge-strip.

5. It is the arm-burden of a warrior in pursuit; the Badb shrieks from its rim, from its breast; on account of the strong, sudden fear of its attack, spear-points do not quickly prevail.

6. My spear, my sword, my shield, the worth of any one of them is not the ransom of a weakling; it was not the wish of a weak, soft-handed man for my property that it is being entrusted to Cormac Cass.

7. Grief has oppressed my breast; Éogan will not demand my wergeld; Cass of the shining sword is a daring man; it will be his though I desire it not for him:

8. My two red spears, my sword, my shield that was a shield worth a *cumal*; my horse, my chariot, my helmet, my bronze spear-blade.

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9. Uch! mo chride is cirbb(i)de,
m' fēoil da seircne[1] is sí om;
is seinm cruitte dara hamarc
síd a charat ri Mac Con.

10. Cluiche tond, [teine][2] trethnach,
be[i]thir bethrach, breo co neim,
brīathar[3] mná, īarthar mairc mais,
gop con, gop gaī glais fom-geir;
tóeb do thabairt riu (is) dar timna[4]
iss é tigba intí do-beir;

11. Do-biur-sa innamail cōir
—tung[a]im noīl[i][5] fom arm dric dron—
connach córu dia charait
tōeb do thabairt ri Mac Con.

12. Mac Con, mac lāechda Lugaid,
is ar phudair is (d)ēitchi;
orm-sa imroet ulairt,[6]
im-rubairt armo séitchi.

13. Mo secht meic ros marb Mac Con
—iss e[d] a ṅgol nglechrach ṅgarg—
[7]Ēogan, Dub Mercōn, Mug Corp,[7]
Lugaid, Echaid, Di Chorp, Tadc.

14. Temair is a tha[i]n cen Art
im-rualaid bratt dar grēin;
ro tha[i]rngirset na druīde
dos-ficfad uíge do chéim.

15. Con-cicher Cass cluiche maith,
do-fāesat leis laīch don Leirg;
acht mad Mac Con is[8] Cairpre
ni fuil ar na fairpre a feirg.

16. Athnascfid Cass coma ṅgiall,
bid lais riam, rad co faidc,
ó inbiur Ātha Clīath chruind
co Tech nDuind īar nHēirind aird.

17. Apair ri Cass cu[i]nged smacht;
noco gnáth gart cen eirbe,[9]
nucu maith rī acna bīt géill,
noco maith gēill cen geimle.

[1] seche, *MS.* [2] *Ed.* [3] iarthar, *MS.* [4] *line hypermetrical.* [5] nóil, *MS.* [6] *line one syllable short unless* imroet *is trisyllabic, or we read* orom *as in* 22c. [7–7] *order of Ed.* [8] 7, *MS.* [9] serbe, *MS*, eirbe, *Ed.*

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9. Alas! my heart is torn, my flesh wasting away and raw; his friend's goodwill towards Mac Con is like playing on a harp although it is damaged.

10. Sporting with the waves, a raging fire, a fierce wild beast, a virulent flame, a woman's word, the hind-legs of a splendid steed, a hound's mouth, the point of a bright spear that chafes me; to trust them in violation of precept—it is death for him who (so) trusts;

11. I give a true similitude—I swear an oath by my wrathful steadfast weapons—that it were no better for his friend to trust Mac Con.

12. Mac Con, Lugaid, is a valiant youth; it is by reason of the harm (he has done) that he is most abhorrent; he has caused me to lament, he has used violence upon my comrade.

13. Mac Con slew my seven sons—this is my fierce and clamourous lament for them—Éogan, Dub Mercón, Mug Corp, Lugaid, Echaid, Di Chorp, Tadc.

14. That Temair and its dwelling are without Art has drawn a cloak across the sun; the druids had prophesied that a stranger would come to them from afar.

15. Cass will plan a goodly game, warriors from the Lerg will fall by him; apart from Mac Con and Cairpre there is none against whom he does not prepare his angry attack.

16. Cass will re-impose the giving of hostages; his will ever be, lasting prosperity, (sway) from the rounded estuary of Áth Cliath as far as Tech ṅDuind west of noble Ireland.

17. Say to Cass that he seek (to impose) authority; it is not usual that a field be unfenced; he is no noble king who holds not hostages; it is not good that hostages be unfettered.

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18. Is gat fás flaith cen gīalla,[1]
nī lāech meni *tri*alla treóir,
nocon ed chobras (na) tíre—
naidm na ríge *ar* c[h]i[u]nd in meóir.

19. Is m*air*g a[i]ṅces a bidbaid
in n-inbaid do-chora i llén;
ní hí in chom*air*le mada,
iss ed ro-da-sc*ar*a in scél.

20. Tānic Art chucum [ ]
d'[ ] īasacht mo ṡecht mac;
da tērnad Ēogan *ar* sēt
bar-fāelsaind éc mo ṡé mac.

21. M*air*g tēit *ar* īasacht i cath
is cor anma [ ] i mod;
ro[m]-mert-sa d*ar* ē[i]s mo neirt
aithle mo meic is Meic Con.

22. Rom-chacht-sa cuma Ēogain,
do-chūaid *ar* cīab*air* mo chīall,
orom fadéin ro thrascr*us*
nach oc*um* (fadéin) ro tha[i]sci*us* Cīan.

23. Bid[2] orbba claidib [3]a chuit,[3]
at-chluinfet Scuit scéoil a *air*m;
nocho bīa maith *ar* dé[i]tin,
bid[2] Cass *ar* é[i]cin a ainm.

24. Atom-rulla-sa[4] mo bith,
at-chīu is dom rith dom-raífes;
dom-[g]ní tríamain[5] cacha tías
in coí chías mo laíches.

25. Scret rorinn,
cnet nach cinid, sceo *fri* nīad,
dóe[6] *fri* dói[t]
ferfaid bröi, beir mo scīath. B.

[1] *sic leg., metri gratia.* -u, *MS.* [2] bad, *MS.* [3-3] ocut, *MS.* [4] ardom-, *MS.*
[5] dríamail, *MS.* [6] dói, *MS.*

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18. A prince without hostages is a hollow rod; he is no warrior if he does not endeavour to lead; it is not this that protects territories—that the bond of rule be at the tip of the finger.

19. Woe to him who spares his enemy when he (himself) falls into misfortune; this is no empty counsel; this is the story that demonstrates it.

20. Art on an expedition came to me, he asked for a loan of my seven sons; if Éogan were to come safe from (this) journey, I would endure the death of my six sons.

21. Woe to him who goes to battle for another . . .; I have been brought to naught in spite of my might on account of my son and Mac Con.

22. Grief for Éogan has brought me down, my hope has turned to sadness; I have caused my own overthrow in that I did not keep Cían with me.

23. His share will be sword-land, the Irish will hear tidings of his arms; no good will come of leniency; his name will, inevitably, be Cass.

24. My world has fled away from me; I see that I have been . . . to my course; wherever I go, the lament that my wife utters makes me sad.

25. The shriek of great spears, the groan of some race, a shield against a warrior; arm against arm will wield spear-points; take my shield.

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NOTES

§ 1*a*. *scëo*. Here as well as in 8*b* and 25*b* I take *sceo* to refer to the shield (by synecdoche, see 4 *sceo*, RIA Contribb.). In the Contribb., however, and perhaps rightly, 1*a* and 25*b* are cited under 2 *sceo* 'strife, conflict', and 8*b* under 1 *sceo* 'and'. This last seems less likely. In 8*b* and 25*b* it is monosyllabic, in 1*a* the metre requires a disyllable.

b. *brúach*. Cf. *bruach-réabtha*, ML 18. 23 and *gésidh badhbh dia bruach*, Oss. v. 16. 25 (both referring to shields).

bruithnech (*bruich-*, MS.) occurs in *muilleoir mor bruichnech*, RC xiv. 52. 3 (but *bruith-*, v.l.). Cf. also *gabais tesbach 7 bruithin an banntracht*, BFerm. 189^{b}20. *Bir Brot berthad bruthenda*, LL 3462 ('burning?').

c. *Cormac Cass* a son of Ailill.

d. A later echo of this line occurs in 23 L 24, 293: *Clann Mhórna mhais / do chardaois fras flannruagh ferg*.

§ 2a. *fid* 'tree' i.e. 'wooden shield'.

fō coitled. If this is part of *con-tuil*, one would expect *cotlad*. One might also translate 'under which (its bearer) used to sleep'. My translation of the whole quatrain is very doubtful, but for the idea of sleeping under one's shield cf. *sossad n-aidche, secc lige / . . . / fot aidche daille dube*, Met. Dinds. iv. 332. 41 ff. (of the shield Dubgilla).

b. The MS. reading gives a hypermetric line and a bad rhyme.

gûalaire. Cf. *tuccad a guaileiri cat*[*h*]*a co Cesair .i. cuarsciath*, CCath. 5311.

frais may be a repetition from 1*d*.

c. *smir guaile* is glossed *.i. iarn*, Anecd. iii. 44. 14, and *.i. cuillenn sen*, Auraic. 5633. That a shield might have an iron point at the base appears from *bopulsciath . . . cona loss imthrom iarnaide*, LL 189^{b}3: and *cuarsciath . . . cona let*[*h*]*anloss . . . uiriarainn fuit*[*h*]*i*, CCath. 5326.

d. *tuirn* taken by Mac Neill to be a form of the gs. of *torann*. Perh. gs. of a word *torn* denoting the material of the boss; cf. *tuaircnech na ṅgoband ic méinlegad miannaig 7 ic trenlegad turend*, LL 30951.

tulcaid see RIA Contribb. s.v. *tolgaid*.

§ 3*a*. *ri* = *fri*. Both forms occur in the poem. I have not emended.

'against the wall'. Poss. 'against its (shield-)strap'. See 1 and 5 fraig, RIA Dict.

b. The MS. reading *conṅgaib* would suggest the simple vb. but the context calls for *con-gaib*.

§ 4*a*. *dítnid* translated as simple vb. replacing O. Ir. *do-eim* but it could also, but less probably, be 1 *dítnid* 'protector'.

b. The references to chalk or lime applied to shields are very numerous: *findnél na cailce 7 ind deil asnaib sciatha*, LL 291^{a}10. *sciath rig Gaela . . ./ craeba cailce for a clíu*, Eg. 88, 19^{a}2. *cath . . . in ro dáiled crú dar cailc*, FM an. 978.

fraicc. This is 2 *fraig* of RIA Dict. The rhyme with *slaitt* indicates an unvoiced *-c*. It would appear to be something attached to the face of the shield and could be of iron; *cromsciath . . . fraig iairn imdaṅgen aithlegtha aci*, LL 237^{b}33 (TTr. 1544). But cf. also *fraig a* fraxino *.i. fid rigin*, O'Mulc. 493.

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c. Cf. *imma chrommsciath ndubderg ina teiged torc taisselbtha ina thaul*, TBC 2576.

lann 'a thin sheet of metal'. Here it might be used to ornament or strengthen the *slatt* (see next note). Sometimes a shield had more than one *lann cromsciath . . . co cetheora lanna*, LL 237^{b}31 (TTr. 1453). Cf. also *lann .i. urghabail .i. tlog* (sic) *no buinne . . . a leastar uma no airgit*, ut dicitur . *cuach co ndibh lannaibh*, O'C. 1410 (H. 3. 18, 635). ? 'raised ridges'. Cf. also *lán lainne a scéith di úir*, RC III. 182. 5 and *lann .i. cumdach*, O'Cl., where the *lann* must have covered the entire face of the shield.

d. slatt. Perh. the binding or strengthening strip at the edge of a shield. In the Clonoura shield this was of leather (JRSAI (1962), p. 152). Cf. 'Roman auxiliaries' shields were probably made of wood . . . covered with hide or leather and bound with metal strips (bronze or iron) at the edges', Coles, Journ. Prehistoric Soc. (1962) 175, n. 2.[1] In an Irish shield also the *slatt* could be of metal, *bopulsciath . . . cona slaitt comthind chreduma*, LL 189^{b}1.

§ 5*a. lámaire.* Cf. *Dáirine . . . . cu láimire d'falgib óir*, LL 296^{a}5 (SG 361. 38). Cf. *giialaire* and *guaiteiri*, *2b* above.

c. agar. See ex. from O'C. 174. 3 cited in RIA Contribb. s.v. 2 *adar* (? leg. *ēga adhar*). But perh. here we should read *agra* q.v. *loc. cit.* s.v. *acra(e)* in sense of 'challenge'.

§ 6*b. fiach* 'ransom'. Cf. *beir mo sciath . . . / a Ferguis, is maith in fiach*, SG 248. 15 (Iubdán is offering Fergus a choice of his treasures in return for his liberty).

§ 7*a. cliathach* f. 'hurdles, hurdle-work'. Of the ribs of an animal: *ra chuir a chliathaig uad go Dublind*, LL 12403. Cf. also *ro gabh an t-én a gulbain iar chathaigh a eite*, Mart. Don. May 16.

d. dúthras. The diplomatic edition of LL reads *-acht* assuming the omission of an abbreviation stroke over the *-s*. I take it to be pres. subj. 1 sg. of *do-futhraccair.*

§ 9*c.* Probably a proverbial phrase. *amarc* 'hurt, damage, injury'. See Críth Gabl. 49 and *cin ainem, cin amarc*, O'D. 2226 (Nero A7, 152^{b}). *airthi ro anacht in rī / cen amarc na hilmīli* 'for her the king preserved unhurt', Études Celt. VII. 40, § 27.

d. Perh. 'friends''.

§ 10. The diplomatic ed. assumes here the loss of two lines, the last line of one quatrain and the first of the following. This may be correct (or the missing lines could be the first two of the second quatrain), but it does not seem impossible that a six-line stanza was intended here and the sense is complete as it stands.

a. cf. *do chluiche thuinde*, Acall. 3824.

§ 12*c. imroet.* ? Compd. of *fed-* meaning perh. 'brings upon, causes'.

ulairt^{2} = *ulthairt, ulfairt* 'howling', hence 'lamentation'.

d. séitig is usually used of females, but can be used also of males, see RIA Contribb. Here it may refer to Éogan or to Ailill's wife, Sadb, who is represented

[1] For these two references I have to thank Dr. A. Lucas, Director of the National Museum of Ireland.

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as lamenting in § 24, although in the prose tales her grief at her other sons' deaths is outweighed by her joy at the victory of her favourite, Mac Con.

§ 13*b*. *gol*, ? orig. neut. Cf. npl. *gola*, LB 140^{b}50.

§ 14*a*. The diplomatic edition reads *athan*. If my reading is correct *Temair* here is masc.

§ 15*a*. *con-cicher* fut. 3 sg. of *con-cuirethar*.

b. *don Leirg*. This phrase need not have any specific meaning. In ÉRIU vii. 222, § 26, *in ri . . . din leirg* refers to Elcmaire of Brug na Bóinne, while in LL 18941, *Clanna Eogain . . . / na lleomain don leirg* are the descendants of Éogan, eponym of Tír Éogain. It is possible that in all three exx. it refers loosely to the kingdom of Mide or Tara.

c. *Cairpre*. See Addenda.

d. *fairpre* (: *Cairpre*). s.v. *for-beir*, RIA Dict., Dr. Knott suggests that this may belong to *ar-beir* 'uses, practises'. This would suit the meaning but not the rhyme. A compd. *air-uss-ber-* might be better. Cf. *airopair*.

§ 16*b*. *faidc* 'compline'. Can *co faidc* be a phrase similar in meaning and semantic development to *co hoidche* > *choidche*?

d. *Tech ṅDuind*. a rock in Kenmare Bay, see Onomasticon.

§ 18*c*. *chobras* usually translated 'helps', but in many early exx. 'protects' is more suitable: *nos cobrat a n-almsana i mmedón in mara tened*, LU 2196. *nochom chobrand mo chrine*, ÉRIU iv. 160. 12. *cobairthe Mag Murthemne ar firu Galeoin*, LL 13779. *cid nachar cobrai, dín cert*, SR 3759.

d. 'at the tip of the finger' i.e. 'loosely held'. Perh. read *ar ind in meóir*.

§ 19*d*. See *scaraid* I (f) 'unfolds', RIA Contribb. *ro* seems to be used here only to infix the pronoun.

§ 20*ab*. The diplomatic edition reads: *Tanic Art chucum d'iasacht / mo ṡecht mac*. I think there is something missing after *chucum* and would suggest: *Tanic Art chucum [for fecht]/do iarr iasacht . . . .*

c. *bar-fāelsaind* sec. fut. 1 sg. of *fo-loing* with Middle Irish inorganic preverb.

bd. The rhyme between identical words is peculiar.

§ 21*b*. One or two syllables are missing. I cannot translate. With *ab* cf. *mairg bheir iasacht a gcath / no doní maith do mhogh*, H. 1. 15, p. 707 (later version of Cath Maige Mucrime).

§ 22*d*. Cían is mentioned in LL 18297 as one of the sons of Ailill Ólomm who had issue. In the poem, *A maccáin ná cí*, there is a reference to Cían having been sent away: *Rolaus Cían* (sic leg., *cian*, edd.) *i cein*, LL 18615.

§ 23 *ab*. If my emendation is correct these two lines would seem to refer to Cían. Cormac Cass inherited a half-share of his father's territory and did not have to win sword-land. Perhaps the whole quatrain refers to Cían, implying that he ought to be called *Cass* (*.i. crúaid, .i. lúath*, Cóir Anm. 165) because of his exploits. The rhyme *cuit*: *Scuit* is not very good but cf. *chuit*: *duit*, LL 18929.

For *Scuit* = the Irish cf. *conadh ōn Scota sin adearar Scuit re Gaedealaibh*, Leb. Gab. (2nd ed.) ii. 52. 5.

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§ 24*b*. *dom raífes*. ? perf. pass. sg. of some compd. of *senn-* with inf. pron. 1 sg.

d. One syllable short unless *coí* can be disyllabic.

laíches 'wife of a *laích*', Laus III. 16. 1, Comm. Corm. Y 795.

25*b*. *cinid* ? gs. of *cined*, *ciniud*, as in MR 156. 7, FM II. 1172. 3. Earlier gs. *cinda*, Laws V. 284. 3: *cinuda*, ÉRIU II. 194 § 7.

This stanza could also be taken as 7 3 7 3.

ADDENDA

§ 7*b*. ? Leg. *ní iarrfaid*, which is translated. Cf. *cro* .i. *corpdire*, O'Dav. 522. *cia lin itira nurrounnter cro* [.i.] *corpdire* 7 *dibadh* [.i.] *set* 7 *maoine*, Laws, IV. 258.10.

§ 10*c*. Cf. *dothaet an mac gan anacal gan imdeagail fo iarthar an eich . . . dobert preib ndo*, Petrie's Tara 195. 12 (a tale concerning Mac Con).

§ 13*c*. *Mercōn* (: *mertbrōn*, Corp. Gen. p. 193. 32).

§ 14*b*. lit. 'a cloak has moved across'.

§ 15*c*. This may be the Cairpre mentioned in Fianaigecht 32. 12: . . . *Mac Con / ní būi i nhÉre cona li / inge Coirpri Galfili* (Meyer's identification in footnote with Coirpre Goll, fifth in descent from Fiacha Muillethan, is clearly wrong), and in Keating: *do b'é an Cormac Cas-so . . . an cúigeadh gaisceadhach is fearr do bhí i nÉirinn 'n-a ré féin. An ceathrar oile Lughaidh Lámha, Fionn mac Cumhaill, Lughaidh Mac Con, Cairbre Gailin*, II. 4285 ff.

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