CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	The Floruit of Gilla Cóemáin
Authors	Carey, John
Publication date	2020
Original Citation	Carey, J. (2020) 'The Floruit of Gilla Cóemáin', Ériu, 70, pp. 31-39. doi: 10.3318/eriu.2020.70.2
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.3318/eriu.2020.70.2
Rights	© 2020, Royal Irish Academy.
Download date	2026-11-15 14:55:18
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/11739



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

THE *FLORUIT* OF GILLA CÓEMÁIN

JOHN CAREY

Department of Early and Medieval Irish, University College Cork

j.carey@ucc.ie

ABSTRACT

That the Middle Irish poet Gilla Cóemáin was active in the year 1072 has been generally accepted on the strength of a poem attributed to him, in which this is given as the date of composition. But the poet does not name himself, and the attribution to Gilla Cóemáin appears to depend on a heading in a single medieval copy. This article will examine the evidence afresh, comparing the poem that contains the date with other poems associated with Gilla Cóemáin in terms of metre and of historical doctrine, and attempting to determine whether there are any further indications that speak for or against his authorship.

There appears to be general agreement as to the date of the Middle Irish historical poet Gilla Cóemáin: he is taken to have flourished in the year 1072.[1] The evidence

[1] Presumably inadvertently, some scholars have converted this *floruit* into an *obiit*: Edward O'Reilly, *A chronological account of nearly four hundred Irish writers*, Transactions of the Iberno-Celtic Society 1/1 (Dublin, 1820), lxxx; Eugene O'Curry, *Lectures on the manuscript materials of ancient Irish history* (Dublin, 1873), 55; Douglas Hyde, *A literary history of Ireland from earliest times to the present day* (London, 1901), 379. Brian Ó Cuív stated that Gilla Cóemáin's 'death in 1072 is

for this is quite straightforward: the chronological poem *Annálad a-nall uile* is headed *Gill- Coemain c-c-* in the Book of Leinster copy; and the penultimate quatrain of the same poem states:

> A dó .uii. ṅdeich ar míle.
> o gein Cr*ist* cia chomríme.
> cosin ṁbli*ad*ainseo ci atb*er*.
> i tor*chair* Diarmait durgen.
>
> 'Two [and] seven tens plus a thousand
> from the birth of Christ – howsoever you may compute [it] –
> until this year – though I may say it –
> in which resolute Díarmait [i.e., Díarmait mac Maíl na mBó] fell.'[2]

Like everyone else of whom I am aware, I have always accepted these indications at face value, and I have invoked Gilla Cóemáin's *floruit* of 1072

---

recorded in the annals', but provided no reference for this: 'Some developments in Irish metrics', *Éigse* 12 (1967-1968): 273-90: 283.

[2] *LL* 15407, 15632-5. The translation is taken from Peter Smith, *Three historical poems ascribed to Gilla Cóemáin: a critical edition of the work of an eleventh-century Irish scholar*, Studien und Texte zur Keltologie 8 (München, 2007), 211. I am grateful to **D/M/ER** for pointing out to me that the preceding quatrain, which ends with a *dúnad*, also dates the poem, in this case to five years after the battle of Stamford Bridge. As the battle was fought in September of 1066, *Annálad* was presumably composed before September in 1072.

whenever I have had occasion to write about him.[3] It only occurred to me to have second thoughts on the matter when I read Peter Smith's careful study *Three historical poems ascribed to Gilla Cóemáin*, published in 2007.[4] Here Dr Smith presents editions and translations, with extensive analysis, of *Annálad a-nall uile* (hereafter *Annálad*), together with *hÉriu ard inis na rríg* (dealing with the Irish past from the beginnings down to the time of Patrick; hereafter *hÉriu ard*) and *At-tá sund forba fessa* (dealing with Irish history from Patrick until the death of Brian Bóruma; hereafter *At-tá sund*): these are also attributed to Gilla Cóemáin in the Book of Leinster, where they are grouped together with *Annálad*.[5]

In his discussion of the prosody of these three poems, Smith returns to the findings of Brian Ó Cuív's 1968 article 'Some developments in Irish metrics'. Ó Cuív had studied changes in the use of ornamentation in *deibide* verse over time: an investigation which understandably gave particular attention to the work of datable

---

[3] Thus *The Irish national origin-legend: synthetic pseudohistory*, Quiggin Pamphlets on the Sources of Medieval Gaelic History 1 (Cambridge, 1994), 18-19; '*Lebor Gabála* and the legendary history of Ireland', in Helen Fulton (ed.), *Medieval Celtic literature and society* (Dublin, 2005), 32-48: 44.

[4] See n. 2 above.

[5] The attributions are of two kinds: at the end of *hÉriu ard*, a quatrain written in the lower margin by a later hand claims Gilla Cóemáin as the author; while *At-tá sund* bears a heading *Gill- Coemain .c-c-*. I am grateful to **D/M/ER** for stressing the importance of these details. For discussion of the 'signature' quatrain in *hÉriu ard* see Smith, *Three historical poems*, 35: he concludes that 'the presence of a version of the signature quatrain in all extant copies of the poem suggests that [it] is original to the text'.

poets, and which consequently naturally included the poems edited by Smith. As Ó Cuív remarked, there is a conspicuous difference between the level of ornamentation in *hÉriu ard* and *At-tá sund* on the one hand, and that in *Annálad* on the other: where, according to the three criteria that he was using,[6] the first two both had scores of 62%, *Annálad* scored only 46%.[7] Commenting on this discrepancy, Smith has remarked that 'Gilla Cóemáin's ornamentation in *Annálad* is strikingly limited, perhaps because of the difficulty which he experienced in handling foreign personal and place names'.[8]

Such an explanation for the difference is not unreasonable; all the same, the gap between *Annálad* and its two companion poems gives one pause. In the case of six poems that have been assigned to Flann Mainistrech, three of which have scores of 69%, 76% and 75%, while three have only 61%, 54% and 48%, Ó Cuív noted that the difference in ornamentation corresponded to linguistic differences with implications for the attribution, observing that 'the authorship of the last three poems... is far from certain'.[9] There is one more long poem that can be attributed to Gilla Cóemáin with some confidence, as it is ascribed to him in both the first recension and the *Míniugud* recension of *Lebor Gabála Érenn*. This is a composition of 36 quatrains beginning *Goídel Glas ó tát Goídil*: as it is concerned with the

---

[6] The criteria are: *rinn-airdrinn* rhyme; internal rhyme of stressed words (other than the last words in their respective lines) in the second couplet of a quatrain; and alliteration in each line, with alliteration of the last two stressed words in a quatrain's final line; 'Some developments', 277-8.

[7] 'Some developments', 283.

[8] *Three historical poems*, 91.

[9] 'Some developments', 284-5.

wanderings of the Gaels before their coming to Ireland, it too contains several foreign names.[10] By my reckoning, *Goídel Glas* receives a score of 57%:[11] lower than *hÉriu ard* and *At-tá sund*, but still considerably closer to them than it is to *Annálad*.[12]

In my own view, quantifying percentages of ornamentation in this way can provide a useful supplement to other kinds of evidence for authorship, but it is a hazardous criterion if employed alone: as Smith has indicated, there may be specific reasons why a single poet would employ more ornamentation in some poems than in others. Still, the difference between *Annálad* and other poems associated with Gilla Cóemáin, when analysed according to Ó Cuív's criteria, can lead us to look again at the basis for considering this composition to be his work.

In fact, the attribution reposes upon the single piece of evidence which I have already mentioned: the heading *Gill- Coemain c-c-* in the Book of Leinster, which

---

[10] R.A.S. Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, ITS 34, 35, 39, 41, 44 (London, 1938-1956), ii.90-107; cf. *LL* 244-387.

[11] *Rinn-airdrinn* (counting only cases of rhyme x : x + 1): 57/72 = 79%; internal rhyme (counting the number of stressed non-final words in *c* for which there is a rhyme in *d*): 9/82 = 11%; alliteration: 97/144 = 67%; total: 163/288 = 57%.

[12] Another composition attributed to Gilla Cóemáin, the poem *Tigernmas mac Ollaig aird*, is only 14 quatrains long and thus probably too short to yield meaningful statistics: for what it is worth, it appears to have a score of 51%, much nearer to the figure for *Annálad*. For the text, see now 'An edition of *Tigernmas mac Follaig aird*', in E. Purcell, P. MacCotter, J. Nyhan, and J. Sheehan (eds.), *Clerics, kings and vikings: essays on medieval Ireland in honour of Donnchadh Ó Corráin* (Dublin, 2015), 458-76.

contains the oldest copy of the poem. *Annálad* is preceded in this manuscript by *hÉriu ard* and *At-tá sund*, the latter also bearing a heading ascribing it to Gilla Cóemáin.

Although the Book of Leinster's early date gives its testimony a particular claim on our attention, it should be noted that this is the only pre-modern manuscript to associate our poem with Gilla Cóemáin:[13] *Annálad* has no ascription in Rawlinson B 512, in Laud Misc. 610, in the Book of Uí Mhaine, or in the sixteenth-century leaves appended to the Book of Leinster itself. Apart from the Book of Leinster, the earliest manuscript ascribing *Annálad* to Gilla Cóemáin is the seventeenth-century RIA MS B iv 2 (1080); but as the scribe, Míchéal Ó Cléirigh, appends to his copy of the poem a note stating that he had copied it out of the Book of Leinster itself, this does not qualify as an independent witness.[14] Next in date is RIA MS 23 D 5 (156), written early in the eighteenth century. But here the ascription is written according to the cataloguer 'in fresher ink': it may be one of several headings added by Edward O'Reilly in the nineteenth century.[15] The other attributions, all from the nineteenth century, are likelier to reflect contemporary antiquarian surmise than they are to

[13] See the useful table in Smith, *Three historical poems*, 258-9.

[14] T.F. O'Rahilly *et al*., *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy* (Dublin, 1926-70), xxiv.3026: 'sliucht leabhair na huacongbala'. This manuscript subsequently belonged to Roderick O'Flaherty, who annotated it extensively (*Catalogue*, xxiv.3023); this is evidently the source for O'Flaherty's own attribution of the poem to Gilla Cóemáin: *Ogygia: seu, rerum hibernicarum chronologia* (London, 1685), 6-7.

[15] O'Rahilly *et al*., *Catalogue*, iv.458; cf. description of O'Reilly's annotations on p. 456.

preserve an inherited attribution. One of these is in RIA 23 Q 2 (571), a manuscript written by O'Reilly himself; while the ascription in RIA E vi 2 (237) is in a part of that manuscript written by Mícheál Óg Ó Longáin, who had copied the poem out of the Book of Leinster just a few years earlier.[16] The copy attributed to *Giolla Caomhain* in Maynooth MS M 68, written by Tadhg Ó Conaill in 1820, is also accompanied by a note stating that it was taken from the Book of Leinster.[17]

It seems very possible, accordingly, that the sole authority for an explicit attribution of the poem *Annálad a-nall uile* to Gilla Cóemáin is the heading in the Book of Leinster. In the absence of supporting testimony, a devil's advocate could suggest that the scribe, encountering three consecutive lengthy historical poems in his exemplar, one of which was assigned to Gilla Cóemáin,[18] simply assumed that the third was the work of the same poet.[19]

But might not the very fact of the poems being grouped together in this way be a consideration in favour of their common authorship? Again, the situation in the Book of Leinster proves not to be representative. Apart from that manuscript and

---

[16] O'Rahilly *et al*., *Catalogue*, xiv.1767; v.596; vi.724.

[17] Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, *Lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge Choláiste Phádraig Má Nuad: clár*, fasc. 3 (Má Nuad, 1966), 42.

[18] As observed in n. 5 above, the quatrain attributing *hÉriu ard* to Gilla Cóemáin is the work of a later hand in the LL copy.

[19] This would not be the only incorrect attribution in the Book of Leinster. Thus the poem *Sect.o.f.n.*, assigned to Cináed úa hArtucáin by a note at *LL* 29727, has been recognised to be a later composition since the time of Rudolf Thurneysen: 'Allerlei Irisches', *ZCP* 10 (1915): 421-44: 438-40. Cf. now Marie-Luise Theuerkauf, 'A note on *Sect.o.f.n.*', *Celtica* 29 (2017): 76-89: 76 n. 2.

material copied from it in RIA B iv 2, there are only four manuscripts that contain both *Annálad* and *At-tá sund*: Rawlinson B 512, the Book of Uí Mhaine, the eighteenth-century RIA 23 D 5, and the nineteenth-century RIA E vi 2. Of these, it is only in Rawlinson B 512 that they appear as a pair.[20] While this is less than one might have anticipated, it is nevertheless a piece of evidence to be taken into account: that the two poems are found together in two medieval manuscripts may indeed be due to their having been associated with one another from an early date. On the other hand, given their shared subject matter, it may be only a coincidence.

Admittedly, indications of this kind cannot be said to weigh very much one way or another. Thus it seems natural to regard *hÉriu ard* and *At-tá sund* as having been composed as a pair: one of them chronicles events leading up to the time of Patrick, while the other takes Patrick's time as its starting-point; and indeed, if we translate the first line of *At-tá sund forba fessa* as 'Here is the completion of knowledge', it can be taken to be announcing that it is a sequel.[21] But these two poems are not found conjoined in any early manuscript apart from the Book of

[20] Smith, *Three historical poems*, 255-7.

[21] As **D/M/ER** points out to me, however, the circumstance that a poem is a sequel need not in itself be taken as evidence that it has the same author as the poem that it follows. He notes: 'One could compare the topographical poem by Seaán Mór Ó Dubhagáin (d. 1372), which begins *Triallam timcheall na Fódla* but deals with the Northern Half. To cover the Southern Half, the poem got a sequel by Giolla na Naomh Ó hUidhrín (d. 1420), *Tuilleadh feasa ar Éirinn óigh*.'

Leinster; and they only appear together in two later manuscripts, one of which gives the Book of Leinster as its authority.[22]

Are there any other kinds of evidence that might shed light on the question? All of the poems that are associated with the name of Gilla Cóemáin appear to me to be written in an idiom typical of later Middle Irish didactic poetry: as Smith observes, with reference to Gilla Cóemáin's association with the date of 1072, 'the linguistic evidence of the surviving texts of his poems is of little value in supporting this date and does not point to any precise period'.[23] Speaking subject to correction, I have not discerned any locutions or usages that appear to be typical of Gilla Cóemáin, the presence or absence of which in *Annálad* would be an argument for or against that poem's inclusion in the group; but nor have I found anything distinctive in the language of *Annálad*, which might serve to mark it off from the others in linguistic terms. The nature of all three poems, consisting as they do largely of names and intervals, offers in any case relatively little scope for stylistic idiosyncrasies.

There is a further criterion, and a fairly obvious one: the historical doctrines present in the poems. Is the chronology of *Annálad* compatible with that of *hÉriu ard*

---

[22] These are NLI G 131 (s. xvii; 'amail atbeir Leabhar na hÚa Chongbhala'), and RIA 23 D 5 (156; eighteenth century). I am grateful to Kevin Murray for pointing out to me that a great many copies of *hÉriu ard* are, however, followed by another poem enumerating the Christian kings of Ireland: *Éri óg inis na náem*, by Gilla Mo Dutu Úa Caiside (fl. 1147): a preference for the later poem may have disrupted the original pairing. For discussion, see Kevin Murray, 'Gilla Mo Dutu Úa Caiside', in John Carey, Máire Herbert and Kevin Murray (eds.), *Cín Chille Cúile – texts, saints and places: essays in honour of Pádraig Ó Riain* (Aberystwyth, 2004), 150-62: 155-6, 161-2.

[23] Smith, *Three historical poems*, 101.

and *At-tá sund*? In approaching this question, it seems reasonable to exclude events which would be considered 'historical' in modern terms: that both *At-tá sund* and *Annálad* assign a reign of forty years to Flann Sinna and a reign of three to Níall Glúndub is scarcely a strong argument for shared authorship, as these were events of the recent past concerning which there was presumably general agreement. There is greater potential significance in the circumstance that *hÉriu ard* and *Annálad* appear to agree in positing an interval of two hundred years between the destruction of Conann's tower and the coming to Ireland of the Fir Bolg, events situated far back in the legendary past.[24] There are however differences as well.

There is surprisingly little overlap between the accounts of Ireland's legendary history in *hÉriu ard* and in the early portion of *Annálad*. This is largely due to differences in approach: the former poem is concerned almost exclusively with the lengths of the reigns of kings, while the latter begins with a focus on synchronising the settlements of Ireland with the Eusebian world kingships, and goes on to list the intervals between notable events, especially battles. It is however possible to identify some correspondences, and here there are also some agreements: thus the two poems concur that forty-nine years intervened between the deaths of Muiredach Tírech and Níall Noígíallach;[25] and, somewhat earlier, that there were thirty-seven years between the death of Conn Cétchathach and that of his son Art Óenḟer.[26]

---

[24] Smith, *Three historical poems*, 106-7 (I.12), 192-5 (III.13, 15); cf. *LL* 14701-4, 15456-9, 15464-7.

[25] Smith, *Three historical poems*, 162-3 (I.146-7), 200-201 (III.32); cf. *LL* 15237-48, 15532-5.

[26] Smith, *Three historical poems*, 156-9 (I.135-6), 198-9 (III.28); cf. *LL* 15193-200, 15516-9.

Further back, however, discrepancies emerge. Where *Annálad* reckons 157 years from the death of Conaire Már to that of Túathal Techtmar, and 32 years from Túathal's death to that of Conn,[27] in *hÉriu ard* there are in the first case nine reigns (and five years of interregnum) that add up to 145,[28] and in the second case four reigns totalling 36 years.[29] These are, to be sure, small differences; but nevertheless they seem worth noting, especially as our other sources show extensive agreement regarding the lengths of the reigns concerned.

Earlier still, I would not want to place too much weight on the gap between the 330 years reckoned by *Annálad* as having elapsed between the death of Sírna Sáeglach and the accession of Úgaine Már, and the roughly 397 years that occupy this interval in *hÉriu ard*: the latter poem represents thirty-one kings as having reigned in this period, and so there is ample opportunity for calculations to have gone awry. It is worth remarking, however, that *Annálad* reflects a tradition according to which Sírna died of plague in the battle of Móin Trógaide, while *hÉriu ard* states that he was killed in Ailenn by Rothechtaid Rotha: two conflicting doctrines, whose incompatibility was noted in *Lebor Gabála Érenn*.[30]

Two further comparisons can be made, both relating to the time before the Gaels arrived in Ireland. It is possible to calculate, for both *hÉriu ard* and *Annálad*, the interval between the Flood and the destruction of Conann's tower: in *hÉriu ard*, this is arrived at by adding the years from the Flood until Partholón, the time of

---

[27] Smith, *Three historical poems*, 198-9 (III.26-7); cf. *LL* 15508-15.

[28] Smith, *Three historical poems*, 152-5 (I.123-31); cf. *LL* 15145-80.

[29] Smith, *Three historical poems*, 156-7 (I.132-4); cf. *LL* 15181-92.

[30] Smith, *Three historical poems*, 126-7 (I.60), 196-7 (III.22); Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, v.242-5, cf. *LL* 2394-8.

Ireland's occupation by Partholón's people, the time when the land was empty thereafter, and the time of its occupation by Nemed's people;[31] in *Annálad*, the chronological markers are the Flood, the confusion of languages at Babel, the reign of Ninus, the birth of Abraham, and the crossing of the Red Sea (which the poem synchronises with Conann's tower).[32] The figure thus yielded by *hÉriu ard* is 827, while *Annálad* gives 779. Yet again, the poems appear to be working with different chronologies.

Another contrast is a quite simple one: where *hÉriu ard* states that Partholón came to Ireland 311 years after the Flood, *Annálad* gives the duration as 300 years.[33] These variants clearly represented conflicting doctrines in medieval Irish historical thinking: the figure of 300 is found in the poetry of Eochaid ua Flainn,[34] while 311 is that given by the second recension of *Lebor Gabála Érenn*. The first recension, while at first favouring the 300-year figure,[35] goes on to present 300, and 310 or 312, as alternatives.[36] On a point on which it can be seen that there were two opinions, *hÉriu ard* opts for one, and *Annálad* for the other.

Daniel McCarthy, although he accepts the attribution of *Annálad* to Gilla Cóemáin, has called attention to yet another massive disparity between the chronologies of that poem and of *hÉriu ard*. As he notes, *Annálad* states that the Flood took place 1656 years after the creation, and Christ's birth 3952 years after the

---

[31] Smith, *Three historical poems*, 104-7 (I.5-11).

[32] Smith, *Three historical poems*, 190-93 (III.8-12).

[33] Smith, *Three historical poems*, 104-5 (I.5), 192-3 (III.10).

[34] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, iii.46-7; cf. *LL* 540-43.

[35] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, iii.2-3.

[36] *Ibid*., ii.176-7, 268-9; cf. *LL* 391, 474-5.

creation: this would mean that Christ was born 2296 years after the Flood, and consequently that Patrick came to Ireland (accepting the traditional date of AD 432 for his arrival) 2728 years after it. But, McCarthy continues, 'summation of his intervals and regnal years from the critical edition of *hÉriu ard* yields a total of 3280 years from the Flood to Laoghaire 4, i.e. to Patrick's *uenit*': in other words, there are 552 years more in the latter poem.[37]

What is to be made of these differences? One possibility would be to regard Gilla Cóemáin as an unreflective versifier, who turned a variety of sources into poems without caring whether or not they were consistent with one another. Thus he would have produced *hÉriu ard* on the basis of one set of data, *Annálad* on the basis of another set. But the vision of our poet as a sort of somnambulistic drudge is not a very congenial one, and is hard to reconcile with his status as a revered authority for many centuries after his death. It is also not in keeping with Peter Smith's analysis of the background of *hÉriu ard*, for which he argues that Gilla Cóemáin drew upon several different sources, using them to check and to supplement one another: by no means a passive use of evidence. Smith regards *Annálad a-nall* as having been based on a single source, which was different from those used for the other two poems: a set of annals, perhaps belonging to the Clonmacnoise group.[38]

Equally unappealing, in my own view, would be the hypothesis that the differences between the poems are due to Gilla Cóemáin's having changed his mind on the various points at issue. Such a scenario is impossible to disprove, but I cannot see that it has anything positive to recommend it. As an explanatory strategy, it becomes progressively more farfetched the more individual discrepancies

---

[37] *The Irish annals: their genesis, evolution and history* (Dublin, 2008), 283.

[38] Smith, *Three historical poems*, 87-8.

it is required to account for; and in the present case there are many such discrepancies, which do not appear to be due to any single difference of source. Nor does the wording of any of the poems involved give any indication of a radical shift in outlook, such as a statement that the poet is here presenting an account which is to be preferred to others.

A remaining explanation for these differences in chronology – one which appears, indeed, to be the only other possibility – is that *Annálad* is the work of a different poet. I do not regard any of the observations that I have made above as being conclusive as to separate authorship; but I do think that they render this interpretation of the evidence at least as plausible as that which has, so far as I am aware, gone unquestioned hitherto.

If we entertain the hypothesis that Gilla Cóemáin did not write *Annálad*, then we can no longer feel certain that he flourished in 1072 – although, of course, that may have been his *floruit* anyway. Are there any other potential indications of a date? There is one, which is at least worth taking into consideration: *At-tá sund* ends with the death of Brian Bóruma. This could be, and has been taken to be, because Brian was the last king of Ireland 'without opposition' (at least if one ignores the second reign of Máel Sechnaill II).[39] The extended calculations at the end of the poem, listing all of the representatives of each dynasty who held the high-kingship, certainly show that Gilla Cóemáin was preoccupied with this institution's mystique. But might his preoccupation have been topical, the work of a poet reflecting upon a recent loss? If we do translate the line *At-tá sund forba fessa* as 'Here is the

[39] A quatrain on this reign has in fact been added in the three closely related seventeenth-century manuscripts designated PKC by Smith: *Three historical poems*, 61-2, 180-81.

completion of knowledge', it suggests that this poem was in fact intended to take Irish history down to the time of writing.

If Gilla Cóemáin's *floruit* could be moved from 1072 to the years immediately following 1014, at least one literary difficulty would be alleviated. He is regarded as having been one of the sources of *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, or at least of the first recension and the *Míniugud* recension of that work; but a fairly evolved version of the first recension existed already in Lebor na hUidre – probably in the hand of Máel Muire mac Céilechair, who died in 1106.[40] While it is of course not impossible for the first recension to have been composed, and to have gone through three or four redactions, in thirty years or less, a less constricted timeframe has its attractions. In such a scenario, Gilla Cóemáin could be regarded as a younger contemporary of Eochaid ua Flainn and an older contemporary of Flann Mainistrech;[41] and the way would be open for postulating an earlier date for *Lebor Gabála Érenn* itself than has hitherto seemed feasible.[42]

---

[40] Discussion in John Carey, 'The LU copy of *Lebor Gabála*', in John Carey (ed.), *Lebor Gabála Érenn: textual history and pseudohistory*, ITS Subsidiary Series 20 (Dublin, 2009), 21-32.

[41] As Kevin Murray points out to me, this would among other things point to the reverse of the situation envisaged by F.J. Byrne, for whom Gilla Cóemáin and Gilla Mo Dutu 'merely elaborate Flann's history': 'Ireland and her neighbours, *c*. 1014-*c*. 1072', in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vol. 1: *Prehistoric and early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), 862-98: 866. Whereas Gilla Cóemáin in *At-tá sund* does not mention the second reign of Máel Sechnaill, Flann celebrates it (*LL* 15970-77).

[42] I am grateful to Kevin Murray for his kindness in reading a draft of this essay, and for several astute suggestions; and to those who attended my presentation of an oral

version at the International Congress of Celtic Studies, Bangor, in July 2019 for their constructive comments. At a later stage, the text has benefited greatly from the input of Damian McManus, Mícheál Hoyne and an anonymous reader. I bear however sole responsibility for its shortcomings.