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1. Cormac Gelta Gaeth

The name of the Leinster king Cormac Gelta Gaeth is first attested in the early poem ‘Énna, Labraid luad cáích’, preserved in Rawl. B 502 (R) and in the extraneous leaves attached to the Book of Leinster (L):

Cathach decheng dána fial:
Fedelimid clothach, Corbmac ciar

Caur galie Gelta Gaeth,
grian nime, niamdae saer.

‘A bold and noble pair of warriors: famous Fedelimid, dark Cormac Gelta Gaeth – hero of valor, sun of heaven, brilliant lord.’

Cormac’s name and epithet appear in adjacent quatrains, and are separated by a string of words; but this would appear to be a recognised stylistic device, of which the poem affords three other instances. Elsewhere in the genealogies name and epithet comprise a fixed unit.

What is the epithet’s sense? Cóir Anmann, with uncharacteristic timidity, professes itself unable to answer this question; and the Adademy’s Dictionary remains equally agnostic. Meyer queried ‘ob es einen Kriegerliche bezeichnen sollte, der das land wie Sturmwinde verheerte, eigtl. abgraste?’; this would presumably involve taking gelta to represent geltæ, preposed gen. sg. of gelt ‘grazing’, and understanding the phrase literally as ‘wind of grazing’ or ‘wind which grazes’. Alternatively, gaeth could be gen. pl. object of the verbal noun, thus

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1. AID 1. 27, Corp. Gen. 5. I have followed some of Meyer’s suggested readings, which take into account the evidence of L; several of R’s variants are evidently motivated by a wish to produce heptasyllabic lines. The apparent lack of linking alliteration between saer and Nu in the following quatrains is dealt with by James Carney, ‘Linking alliteration’, Éigse xviii (1981) 259.

2. Setna . . . Sínhbacc, Foglas . . . Feradach, Nuadu . . . Argallám (Corp. Gen. 5); cf. in the poem ‘Nidu dir dermaid’ the separation Fergus . . . Fairrice (ib. 8), and Meyer’s remarks, AID 1. 22.


5. DIL s.v. gelta.

6. AID 1. 32.

7. A comparable instance of a hero likened to wind occurs in the same poem: ‘goeth di muir Muiredach maeth’ (Corp. Gen. 6).
'who grazes winds (or wise men)'. It would be tempting to follow L in reading *gelt gaoth*, and to translate 'wise lunatic'; but this would be to prefer a single manuscript variant to the otherwise unanimous testimony of the sources.

Of these possibilities, that advanced by Meyer seems by far the most plausible. Use of *gelid* to denote the destructive action of wind is instanced in a quatrain preserved in O'Mulconry's *Glossary*:

Ron-brís, ron-bruí, ron-báid,
a Rí richid rindglaine,
ron-geil in gaeth feb geiles
nemaed forderg fidnaige.

'It has broken us, it has ground us, it has drowned us, O King of heaven of stellar purity: the wind has devoured us as the crimson fire of heaven devours kindling.'

If Meyer's explanation is the correct one, the phrase must have become fossilized in its poetic context, then used with no idea of its earlier sense - otherwise we would expect to find *Cormac Gaeth Gelta(e)* in the pedigrees. I see no reason for dismissing this supposition, but can cite no other instances of this kind of petrifaction in the dynastic poetry. There seems at any rate to be room for an alternative hypothesis.

I suggest that *gelta* represents the relative form of the third singular preterite active of *gelid*, and that the name and epithet may be translated as 'Cormac whom the wind devoured'. In its morphology and syntax, such a phrase is perfectly straightforward Old Irish; the glossary quatrain indicates that the figure of speech was viable in poetry.

Apart from the question - all too probably unanswerable - of the legendary background for such a sobriquet, the appearance of a finite

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1 On the spelling *gelt* for *geilt* 'wild man' see Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin, 1955) 389 n. 2; cf. J. Carey, *Éige* xx. 95 n. 15, where in the last line 'error' should be 'variant'.
2 *Brucht*. 1. 67; cf. O'Mulc. 830g (Arch. 1. 272). For this interpretation of *rindglaine*, more precise than that reflected in Meyer's rendering 'des sternerglänzenden Himmelreichs', I am grateful to Professor Proinsias Mac Cana.
3 Thus in the index to O'Brien's *Corpus* I can find no other instance of a preposed genitive in an epithet.
5 There are certainly tales in which wind plays a crucial role in the deaths of royal personages: such a fate seems to befall those who offend the immortals or the powers of nature. Donn is seized and drowned by the wind after he boasts that he will conquer Ireland by force (LL 1654-9); and when Loegaire mac Néill is killed by the elements after violating his oath upon them, the agents are 'talam do slucud grian de loscud g aeth do dula uad' (ib. 38289-90; cf. *RC* xiii. 52).
verb in an epithet may seem peculiar. This usage is best attested with the copula (obviously a special case): for the preterite may be cited the dynasts *Cruid na Druid* and *Fiachu na Aiccid*, ¹³ for the present Medb and Ailill’s son *Maine as Mó Epirt* ‘M. who is greater than can be told’. ¹⁴ One of Maine’s brothers, as it happens, provides the only unambiguous example known to me of another finite verb employed in an epithet: *Maine Cotagaib Uili* ‘M. who includes them all’. ¹⁵ If the conjecture presented above is valid, it may now be possible to add a further instance. ¹⁶

2. *cobfolaid*

The poem ‘Tair cucum, a Maire boid’, ascribed to Blathmac mac Con Brettan (fl. mid-eighteenth century), contains the following frequently-cited quatrain:

> Cach feb tecomnacht in rí
do luidb ara célsini,
batar moini do mogaib;
ro-coillset a cobfolaid.

‘Every advantage that the King had bestowed upon the Jews in return for their clientship was “wealth to slaves”; they violated their counter-obligations.’ ¹⁷

In a note to his edition of the poem, James Carney pointed out that a problem is posed by the otherwise unattested word *cobfolaid*. It appears to consist of *com*- and *folud*; since the latter is a neuter noun, the accusative should be *cobfolud*. The form with slender ending, confirmed by rhyme with *mogaib*, seems in fact to reflect the adoption, first attested in the later Old Irish period, of feminine flexion by many

¹³ *Corp. Gen.*, index of personal names s.vv. Elsewhere ‘Badrui’ is reinterpreted as a personal name: the three sons of Nemed mac Badrui appear in *Lebar Gabála* (e.g. LL 889-90, 924).

¹⁴ *LU 6854, BDD* line 387 and variant (p. 51). In *Táin Bó Cualnge* he is simply *Maine Mó Epirt*.

¹⁵ E.g. *BDD* lines 386-7.

¹⁶ Another candidate, too tenuous for mention outside a footnote, may be briefly cited here. In *Corp. Gen.* p. 407 the Dál Fiatach king Fergus Dubdétach is given his standard epithet only by LL, while the other MSS offer a lectio difficilior: *do deri Brega* (La.), *do deiri Brog* (Lec.BB.). What this designation may signify is not immediately clear. The only possibility which has occurred to me is to read *do-deraid Brega* ‘who has led Brega’ (cf. *DIL* s.v. *do-diar*); final slender lenited -d is sporadically omitted as early as *LU* (bi 6614, dolu’ 10192).

nouns originally neuter.\textsuperscript{18}

This difficulty was not touched upon by F. J. Byrne in his discussion of the quatrain,\textsuperscript{19} but was subjected to fresh scrutiny by Daniel Binchy. Binchy took the form to be evidence that ‘Tair cucum’ is a Middle Irish poem, observing that ‘to me [cobfolaid] seems but one of several examples that forbid us on linguistic grounds alone to regard it as having been composed before c. A.D. 900. But I hope to examine this problem elsewhere.\textsuperscript{20}

When a \textit{hapax legomenon} is morphologically anomalous, it is not unreasonable to surmise that it may be simply a garbled version of another word; this is particularly to be suspected when, as with ‘the Blathmac poems’, an early text is preserved in a very late manuscript. In the present case a candidate is not far to seek: \textit{cobfodail}, verbal noun of \textit{con-fodlai}, a word amply attested in the Irish laws and differing from \textit{cobfolaid} only in the metathetic placement of two consonants.\textsuperscript{21}

I can see no obstacle to this emendation on grounds of grammar or prosody; it remains to consider the question of sense. The basic meaning of \textit{con-fodlai} seems to be ‘shares’, and the verb’s range is extended to spiritual concerns in the glosses. Thus M1 53 b 18 glosses \textit{eritis meriti nostri participes} with \textit{con-fodlaibid-si ar n-insorchugud-ni} ‘you will share in our illumination’; the same sense of a sharing which involves a spiritual bond appears in Wb 24 b 19, where in the verse \textit{Uerumtiamen bene fecistis, commonicantes tribulationi meae} ‘Nevertheless you did well, sharing in my suffering’ (Philippians 4:14) \textit{commonicantes} is glossed \textit{a confodli[d]}, \textit{doberid idbarta dún} ‘when you share, you give offerings to us’. The abstract noun \textit{cobodlus}, attested three times in the glosses, means ‘companionship, association, intimacy’.\textsuperscript{22}

\textit{Cobfodail} itself can designate a portion,\textsuperscript{23} or the act of dividing some-

\textsuperscript{18} Carney describes the situation more elliptically: ‘The difficulty here is the treatment of the word as a feminine at such an early date. The text, however, seems sound’ (ib. 133). An alternative to the solution proposed below is the possibility that \textit{cobfolaid} is one of the rare substantives which show the shift to -\textit{i}-flexion found in adjectives formed by compounding a noun with a preposition; the two examples cited by Thurneysen (\textit{Gramm.} §345) are likewise based on neuter -\textit{o}-stems (inchnin, Diarmait).

\textsuperscript{19} Francis John Byrne, \textit{Irish Kings and High-Kings} (London, 1973), pp. 44-5.

\textsuperscript{20} Daniel A. Binchy, ‘Irish history and Irish law: II’, \textit{Studia Hibernica} xvi (1976) 27 n. 27. To the best of my knowledge, Professor Binchy has not returned to this question in print.

\textsuperscript{21} DIL s.v. \textit{cobodail}.

\textsuperscript{22} Wb 9 b 17, M1 22 b 1; note in particular Wb 22 b 26, where \textit{na bith i cobadlus} renders \textit{nolite commonicare}.

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ting into categories or shares; an intriguing example of its use in the last of these senses is provided by the tract Bretha im Gatta:

As-renar secht diabal do nemud i ngai a šeoiit cobadail etter Dia 7 duine amail as-berr i mbrethaiíb Solman. 'A sevenfold [double] amount is paid, with joint participation by God and man, to a dignitary for the theft of his sét, as is said in the judgments of Solomon.'

All of the instances listed in DIL can be adequately rendered by the English words 'division, share, allotment'.

Cobfolaid would, it seems to me, give good sense in the passage under consideration. The first three lines of the quatrain describe the good things conferred by God on the Jews as 'wealth to slaves' (moíni do mogaib); while the quatrain which follows paraphrases Matthew 7:6: 'Do not give what is holy to dogs, or cast pearls before swine':

Ce dod-rindnacht recht doáib
ra-soíbsat co soíbgoáib;
ba noeb do chonaib gortaib,
margarét do méthtorcaib.

'Though he had granted them a law they twisted it with perverse lies; it was a holy thing to hungry dogs, a pearl to fat swine.'

The two quatrains reflect one another thematically, and are further interconnected by parallel phrasing. Thus noeb do chonaib gortaib and margarét do méthtorcaib correspond to móíni do mogaib; and all three evidently refer to the feb 'dignity, wealth' bestowed in the first quatrain, and the recht 'law' bestowed in the second. A similar parallelism links ro-coillset a cobfolaid with recht . . . ra-soíbsat. It seems clear that cobfolaid, like feb and recht, designates the divine gift abused by the Jews - what was received, rather than what was owed. This gift was the cove-


25 E.g. the line atib can nach cobfolaid 'has drunk it without making fair distribution', in J. G. O'Keeffe, ed. and trans., 'Mac Dá Chéar da and Cuimme Foda', Éiri v (1911) 136-7.

26 Vernam Hull, 'Bretha im Gatta', ZCP xxv (1956) 217-8; cf. CIH 478. 15-6. A gloss explains the reference to cobfolaid by stating that there is 'a joint division between the two, pance to God and éraic-payment to man' (Hull, p. 219). I have not followed Hull in capitalising brethaib, as I believe that he was correct in suggesting that the reference is to Proverbs 6:30-1 rather than to a lost work Bretha Solman.

27 Carney, pp. 36-7.
nant: \textit{feb} emphasizes the honor of a special relationship with God,\textsuperscript{28} while \textit{recht} calls attention to its attendant obligations.\textsuperscript{29} If we can in fact read \textit{cobfodail} for \textit{cobfolaid}, the specific sense may be ‘allotted portion’ (the status of the Jews as Chosen People) or ‘joint participation’ (their relationship vis-à-vis God; cf. \textit{cobodlus}): the shades of meaning are not far apart. In either case the line may be rendered ‘They have spoiled what was allotted them’.

3. \textit{Celtica} xviit. 97-100

In a discussion of the possible derivation of two features in \textit{Saltair na Rann}'s description of Heaven from the ‘chambers’ and ‘foreparts’ of Ezekiel 40, I observed that ‘a troubling question remains: why should such straightforward Latin words as \textit{thalamus} and \textit{frons} be rendered by the Irish terms \textit{athchomarc} and \textit{togairn}?\textsuperscript{31} So presented, the problem is even acuter than I indicated; for different equivalents for the Latin words in question would almost inevitably have occurred to an Irish literate. \textit{Thalamus} ‘bedchamber, bed’ would be far more aptly rendered by \textit{imdae} ‘sleeping-cubicle, bed’; and the associated \textit{frons} would irresistibly have suggested the \textit{airenach} ‘forepart, frontage’ so closely linked with the \textit{imdae} in the native sagas.\textsuperscript{32}

I suggested that the \textit{Saltair}'s description drew not on the Vulgate text of Ezekiel but on the Old Latin, where instead of \textit{thalamus} and \textit{frons} appear the transliterated Hebrew terms \textit{theae} and \textit{aelam}. If this was the case, a very different problem would have faced the poet: whither could he turn for help in rendering words which had baffled the sages of the Septuagint?

He might have tapped the glossarial tradition, in which Latin, Greek and Hebrew are called upon to provide Irish etymologies. A possible connection between \textit{theae} and \textit{athchomarc} is suggested by an entry in \textit{Sanas Cormaic}:

\begin{quote}
Temair .i. grec rotruailled and .i. teomoro i.e. conspicio. Temair didiu ceech locc as mbi aurgunum deicsi. . . . 'Temair, i.e. the Greek is corrupt in it: teomoro, i.e. conspicio. Temair, then, is any place
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{28} It may be mentioned that the phrase \textit{fodlai febe} ‘divisions of dignity’ appears fairly frequently in the laws (\textit{DIL} s.v. \textit{feb}); note also in the tract \textit{Cóir Bésena} the line \textit{Cobfodailb fuaireuin foosernatar feba} ‘Dignities are distributed by divisions at a feast’, \textit{CIH} 525. 11.

\textsuperscript{29} For this word’s use to designate the Mosaic dispensation see \textit{DIL} s.v. \textit{lrech} (c)

\textsuperscript{30} Since the transgressions of the Jews had consequences extending down to the poet’s own time (cf. Carney, p. 41: ‘The tongue of every living being has assailed them (\textit{dosroidbi}) with satire and curse; they are under everybody’s thumb’), \textit{ro-coilset} and \textit{ro-soibsat} may be assigned the older perfect sense; Carney discusses the poem’s use of the augmented preterite on p. xxii.

\textsuperscript{31} 'The heavenly city in \textit{Saltair na Rann}', \textit{Celtica} xviit (1986) 99.

\textsuperscript{32} E.g. \textit{Fled Bricrenn}: ‘imdui Ailella 7 Medba . . . airinig airgiddi impe’ (\textit{LU} 8733-4), \textit{Táin Bó Fraich}: ‘imdui Ailella 7 Medba . . . dá aurainech argagait impe’ (Meid’s ed., lines 73-4), \textit{Serglige Con Culainn}: ‘airiniuch na imdai’ (\textit{SC} 91).
from which there is a good view. . . . \(^{33}\)

The teomoro glossed with conspicio ‘catch sight of’ is evidently a ‘corrupt’ version of Greek τεομομεν ‘view, gaze upon, behold’, influenced perhaps by the more or less synonymous τεωρημεν. Athchomarc ‘question’ is, as I have noted, derived from a verb used of gatekeepers challenging approaching strangers;\(^{34}\) the association of a ‘Greek’ lexical item τ(h)eo- with points of vantage may provide a further link in the chain of correspondences which I have tentatively proposed.\(^{35}\)

I know of no extant glossarial item which seems to offer assistance in getting from aelam to togairm; but the Irish fascination with the ‘tres linguæ sacrae’ may nevertheless provide a solution for this problem also. In the LL version of Táin Bó Cuailnge, a word élé appears alongside iptha ‘charms’ and orthana ‘prayers’ in the list of healing spells exchanged by Fer Diad and Cú Chulainn;\(^{36}\) and the poem of exhortation addressed to Cú Chulainn by Lug is given the title élí Loga in the margin of LU.\(^{37}\) It has been proposed that this élé is a borrowing from the line Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani uttered by Christ upon the cross (Matt. 27:46, Mark 15:34),\(^{38}\) and such an Aramaic derivation would neatly fit the context of the present inquiry; in any case, the semantic resemblance between élé ‘invocation’ and togairm ‘act of calling, invoking, summoning’ is clear enough.

A learned Irishman would accordingly have had some justification for guessing that theae and aelam meant ‘interrogation’ and ‘invocation’. That athchomarc and togairm are the specific equivalents found in the Sultair is doubtless due as much to the exigencies of internal rhyme as to any other cause.

\(^{33}\) Corm. Y 1212. Cf. Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae 15. 2. 34: ‘Theatrum autem ab spectaculo nominatun, ἀπὸ τῆς τεωρῆς, quod in eo populus stans desuper atque spectans ludos scenicos contemplatur’.

\(^{34}\) Art. cit. 98.

\(^{35}\) The Ædmair etymology also seems to support my hypothesis that the athchomarc mentioned in SR 408 and 464 derives from the pírgus (< Gk. πύργος ‘tower’) of Visio Sancti Pauli (ib. 100 n.52).

\(^{36}\) Cecile O’Rahilly, ed., Táin Bó Cuailnge from the Book of Leinster (Dublin, 1970), lines 3167-9. This is probably the source of Micheál Ó Cléirigh’s gloss élé .i. ortha (RC iv. 410).

\(^{37}\) O’Rahilly, Táin Bó Cuailnge: Recension I (Dublin, 1976), line 2117.

\(^{38}\) DIL s.v. The magical efficacy of the words spoken on the cross is attested in the St. Gall incantation against a thorn (Thes. 2. 248. 3-4); cf. the Vita Secunda Patricii, where the words ro guidh Eli, referring to Patrick’s invocation of Elias, might be taken to mean ‘he prayed an élé’ (L. Bieler, ed., Four Latin Lives of St. Patrick (Dublin, 1971) 71. 21). The Christian associations of the word were recently re-examined by Ann Dooley in her paper ‘The significance of the poem ‘Moenurán dam ar étib’ in TBC I’, presented at the Eighth International Congress of Celtic Studies in Swansea, 20 July 1987.

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