

ELEGY ON FÉILIM MAC MAGHNUSA MÉIG UIDHIR *OB.* 1487

FÉILIM Mac Maghnusa Méig Uidhir, whose death in 1487 is recorded in the Annals of Ulster, was a brother of Cathal Mac Maghnusa, the compiler of those annals. The relevant entry in the copy in the Trinity College Dublin MS 1282 (H 1. 8), fol. 128 verso, is:

Feidlim mac Mic Maghnusa Méig Uidir .i. mac Cathail oig meic Cathail moir
Meic Maghnusa d'eg in bliadain-si lá Sang Lúcas Suibiscel, feria quinta; 7 dob
fher brighmur beogha daenachtach dercach in Feidlim-sin,

[‘Feidhlim son of Mac Maghnusa Méig Uidhir, that is, the son of Cathal Óg son of Cathal Mór Mac Maghnusa, died this year on the feastday of Saint Luke the Evangelist, the fifth ferial; and that Feidhlim was an active lively humane generous person’.]

His father is called ‘Cathal’ in some sources, e.g. *AU*, *AFM* s.a. 1498, ‘Cathal Óg’ in others, e.g. *AU* s.a. 1487 cited above, 1488, 1494 etc., and ‘Cathal Meodhánach’ in others, e.g. ‘Geinealaighe Fearmanach’.¹ He died in 1480. Under the year 1440 *AFM* record the death of ‘Caterfhina, ingen Duinn, mic Con-Chonnacht Meg Uidhir, idon, ben Mic Maghnusa Meig Uidhir’. I have no doubt that she was Féilim’s mother who is referred to in §§10 and 32 of the poem published here.² Apart from the annalistic record of 1487, his listing in ‘Geinealaighe Fearmanach’ §444, and the elegy on him, I know of no other record of Féilim.

The poem is found on folio 15 verso of TCD 1282, which consists for the most part, that is, from folio 16 on, of the older of the two early copies of the Annals of Ulster. Eleven folios at the beginning of the manuscript have been lost. Folios 12–14 contain an acephalous copy of the ‘World Chronicle’ which was not included by B. Mac Carthy in his edition of the Annals of Ulster but which is found in the recent edition by Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill.³ The recto of folio 15 is blank and, as stated above, our poem is on the verso.⁴ It is written in a good hand, but not that of the main scribe of the Annals of Ulster. For some reason scholars who have discussed or edited the Annals seem to have ignored this item. Neither Mac Carthy nor Mac Niocaill mentioned it, nor did Aubrey Gwynn whose long article ‘Cathal Mac Maghnusa and the Annals of Ulster’⁵ supplements the account of the compiler of the annals given by Mac Carthy. The poem is mentioned by

¹ C. Ua Cadhla, ‘Geinealaighe Fearmanach’, *Analecta Hibernica* 3 (1931) 62–150, p. 95.

² Under the year 1462 *AU* record the death of Gráine, daughter of Tomás Óg Mág Uidhir, King of Fer Manach, described as ‘ben Mic Maghnusa Mheg Uidhir (idon Cathal)’. It is not clear from this whether she was wife of Cathal Mór or of Cathal Meodhánach, otherwise known as ‘Cathal Óg’. Father Aubrey Gwynn believed that she was the wife of Cathal Mór, for he described her (*Clogher Record* 2 [1957–59] 237) as grandmother of the Cathal who was compiler of the Annals of Ulster. That Cathal Meodhánach had another wife as well as the Caitiríona mentioned above is clear from an *AU* entry for 1486 which records the death of ‘Caitilin, ingen hUi Ferghail, idon, ingen Domnaill buidhe, mic Dhonnaill, mic Seaain, mic Domnaill hUi Ferghail, idon bean Mic Maghnusa Meg Uidhir, idon ben Cathail oig, mic Cathail moir’.

³ S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (ed.), *The Annals of Ulster (to AD 1131)* (Dublin 1983) 2–36.

⁴ Fols. 12 and 13 form a bifolium and so do fols. 14 and 15.

⁵ *Clogher Record* 2 (1957–59) 230–43, 370–84.

T. K. Abbott in his *Catalogue of the manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College*, ([Dublin 1900], p. 290) where he says ‘f. 15 *b* commences a poem on the Maguires, under whose patronage the volume was written’. Rather surprisingly this note was omitted by E. Gwynn and the poem itself completely ignored in the 1921 *Catalogue*.⁶

The poem, which is written in two columns, consists of 32 quatrains in the strict form of *rannaigheacht mhór*. It is of no little interest because of the important place which members of the Mac Maghnusa Méig Uidhir family held in the cultural life of Fermanagh. Unfortunately the surface of fol. 15 verso is badly rubbed and the writing is illegible in places, especially in the second column. The author is not named, but many of his remarks indicate that he was closely attached to Féilim and had experienced his generosity. Among the Northern poets mentioned in the Annals of Ulster in the years immediately following Féilim’s death are Athairne Ua hEóghusa (1490), Ua Dálaigh Bréifne .i. Seaán mac Uilliam mic Aedha, saí hi mbairdne (1490), Mac Rithbhertaigh, ollam Meg Uidhir re dán (1502), Cithruadh mac Aitheirne Uí Eóghusa, saí fhir dhána 7 foghlunntech maith 7 fer tighe n-aidhedh (1518), and Mael Sechlainn Ó Cianáin, saí re senchus 7 re filidecht 7 re dán (1520). Perhaps one of these composed the poem on Féilim.

Because of the condition of the manuscript this edition and my translation must be regarded as tentative. I have silently expanded *m*-strokes, *n*-strokes, abbreviations for *cht* and *us*, suprascript *r* and *v*.⁷ I have used italics to indicate expansion of 7 and suspension strokes, and I have used a macron to mark historically-long vowels not marked by the scribe. Since scribal marking of consonant lenition is erratic I have not supplied lenition marks except in a few instances, such as when use of a superscript contraction might have prevented a scribal mark of lenition, e.g. *chur 3 b*, or where lenition is required for alliteration, e.g. *f[b]ín 5 c*. In such cases I have used square brackets. I have used angular brackets in *2b* and *15a* where I have supplied a letter – other than a mark of lenition – not in the manuscript. I have used round brackets to indicate portions of the text which were difficult to read and about which I have some doubt. For the most part these are in §§17–32 which were written in the second column. I have left blank spaces in a number of places where I failed completely to read any words or letters. I comment in the notes on grammatical and metrical irregularities, as well as some puzzling phrases in the poem.

Finally I must record my indebtedness to the staff of the manuscript department of Trinity College Library for facilitating me in my examination of the manuscript, to the authorities of the Library for permission to publish this poem, and to Dr Pádraig Ó Macháin who read a draft of this article and made several useful suggestions.

⁶ T. K. Abbott and E. Gwynn, *Catalogue of the Irish manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin* (Dublin 1921).

⁷ Expanded as *ur* in stressed position, but as *ar* in *mar*.

TRANSLATION

1. Sorrow is the worst thing in life. What life is not misery for us? A grief which cannot be overcome is upon us; it is difficult to set sorrow aside.
2. No one will live for ever; alas that my sorrow which is akin to death has increased; it is a great misery that it is only beginning.
3. I do not willingly rest since Féilim has been laid in the earth. Why should I be consoled while others are following him.
4. Since I hear the sorrow of the peoples I weep with regret for my lord; my tears are not without cause; lamentations are a normal sound (lit. 'music') in every land.
5. Because of Cathal's son of the smooth locks whereby the lustre of the clouds has altered I shall not drink of the wine which I shall obtain from you apart from raising it up to my lips.
6. I received from him his undivided attention; his obligation to me was a [cause of] sorrow to me; my honour before the death of Conn's descendant beguiled me on a wave of misery.
7. Alas! while he was alive (lit. 'safe') I feared that I would survive him; I behold all who survive of Síol Eachaidh, (but) I should be allowed to be in the company of those who have passed away (or 'along with those who have passed away I should leave all of Síol Eachaidh who live after me').
8. If sorrow for him be like its beginning it will be increasing always; a land to which Féilim's death is of no account yet will be in grief over this matter.
9. Not equal was the advantage he gave to us, [yet] identical was the basis of our sorrow; no less to me in their company is the cry of women before us in Rubha.
10. We regret our impatience over the heir of Donn's daughter, it was hard for him to be as he was towards us; we especially should be lamenting Conn's descendant (or 'it is hard, considering how he was towards us, that we especially should be lamenting Conn's descendant').
11. Alas that the man from whom I used to have my will completed his life-span before me; that I foretold great sorrow in the past has brought me into your presence, o grave.
12. Every creature shows regret for him with their gloom (lit. 'mist') failing to pass away from them; on the sun there is a share of sorrow for him [on] the day when brightness is not manifest in bad weather.
13. The trunks of the trees are uprooted(?) [with] the wind breaking them from their tops; ice is completely congealing the waves so that the place familiar to ships will not be recognised there.
14. Because of the snow [driven] by the harshness of the clouds flocks of birds do not swim on the stream; the ice penetrating into the birds' wings prevents them from flying.
15. After the man's death no strange thing, however great, is to be wondered at since he lives not; did you pay heed to his bright countenance, you who closed the grave on him?
16. For Cathal's son, it is fitting to say it, it was an occasion for meriting praise; poets who might wish to cause his cheeks to blush found no fault with you.

17. A fairy woman ; what dwelling of your grave
 come
18. Though we are not prostrated on your grave your own bed was ours;
 the weeping its own turn
19. There was a time when I did not think that, ; . . my strength in a house
 if it is that which brings me
20. I shall never be without sorrow, full of regret as I am; as I am since you died,
 so shall it be with me as long as I live.
21. Since your death (lit. 'After you') I am not given to wine; I do not take interest
 in ; strange the silence which was desired of me and his eye at rest
22. He took a step down from (or 'to') your friends; from you was the highest
 reward; what is it but a wound there grows not
23. Everyone says to me 'would he not accept another vow from me?'; we would
 be like a base person because we did not consent to swear by his hands.
24. It would be strange that after his death the sun would rise over the bright plain
 of the Erne; every creature is sorrowful because of the hero of Dor; the wind is
 letting us know of this (?).
25. Little strength have I to journey from the man after seeing his grave; I add to
 the intensity of the lamentations when I go into the company of women.
26. My tear of blood is a cause of horror when it flows from my cheek; people
 avoid a cup which has gone and it is not for dislike of drinking.
27. That Síol Uidhir are sorrowful because of his death is a distressful grief to us;
 I lack strength because of shedding tears; the strong one is stronger
28. It is difficult for us to restrain the tears with the practice; it is she herself
 who is the dispenser of my tear; she is even a dispenser
29. After [the death of] Féilim they went away from me and my sorrow does not
 abate. Where is the welcome [I had] wherever he used to be [and] where is the
 wine that used to be dispensed to us?
30. The earth of the graveyard on his cheek that was like the swan released me
 from my folly; if we go again to the Rubha going (with us) is a vision.
31. They have no interest in feasts after [the death of] the one of whom I speak;
 the host of the Erne drink not wine even though they do not seek to rise up from
 drinking.
32. Caitiríona's son who achieved distinction was victorious in deeds; I shall not
 cease lamenting him; it is our welfare to persist with it.

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