

Flann Mainistrech's *Götterdämmerung* as a Junction within *Lebor Gabála Érenn*¹

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Lebor Gabála Érenn ('The Book of the Invasion of Ireland') is the conventional title for a lengthy Irish pseudo-historical text extant in multiple recensions probably compiled during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.² The text comprises a history of the Gaídil ('Gaels') within the context of a universal history derived from the Bible and from classical historiography.³ *Lebor Gabála* traces the ancestry of the Gaídil back to Noah and follows their tortuous migrations, spanning many generations, from the Tower of Babel to Ireland via Spain. Here, the narrative breaks off to cover the origins, history and demise of the peoples who had inhabited Ireland prior to the arrival of the Gaídil. Then, resuming its account of the Gaídil themselves, *Lebor Gabála* gives an account of their conquest of Ireland and their history thereafter, mainly in the form of a king-list, down to roughly the time of the text's compilation.

¹ I am very grateful to David Alexander and my supervisor, Abigail Burnyeat, for discussing this paper with me, as well as to various delegates at the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic 2012 for their questions and suggestions.

² *Lebor Gabála Érenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, ed. and trans. R. A. S. Macalister, 5 vols., Irish Texts Society Main Series 34–35, 39, 41, 44 (Dublin, 1938–56), although see below, p. 59. For a general introduction, see J. Carey, 'Lebor Gabála and the Legendary History of Ireland', in *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society*, ed. H. Fulton (Dublin, 2005), pp. 32–48.

³ For an overview, see M. I. Allen, 'Universal History 300–1000: Origins and Western Developments', in *Historiography in the Middle Ages*, ed. D. M. Deliyannis (Leiden, 2003), pp. 17–42.

The compilation has a somewhat formidable reputation for complexity. It includes both prose and verse. Its narratives are supported by a wide range of scholarly techniques and genres, including etymology, genealogy and synchronistic scholarship, as well as detailed knowledge and exegesis of the Bible and various historical authorities, its purpose being partially to relate the Gaídil typologically to the children of Israel.⁴

LEBOR GABÁLA ÉRENN: TEXTUAL HISTORY AND CRITICISM

One of the most troublesome—but also one of the most interesting—aspects of *Lebor Gabála* is the significant variance in content, structure and doctrine between its thirteen manuscript texts, which are generally grouped into four recensions.⁵ Since Robert Macalister's edition of *Lebor Gabála*, R. M. Scowcroft has offered another response to the text, as well as to various attempts to describe its textual history.⁶ He has argued that, rather than being derived from an authorial archetype, much of the material in the extant compilation is derived from subsequent commentary and supplementary material, as well as fundamental re-working in subsequent redactions and conflation of material from different versions.⁷ Any original with which the tradition began is no longer extant and Scowcroft does not believe it is possible to reconstruct it definitively.⁸ Therefore, 'the very quest for an "original" [*Lebor Gabála*] ... is misguided'.⁹

⁴ R. M. Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Érenn Part II: The Growth of the Tradition', *Ériu* 39 (1988), 1–66, at pp. 21–6.

⁵ R. M. Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Érenn Part I: The Growth of the Text', *Ériu* 38 (1987), 81–142, at pp. 85–7.

⁶ For previous studies of the textual history of *Lebor Gabála*, see R. Thurneysen, 'Zum Lebor Gabála', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 10 (1915), 384–95 and A. G. Van Hamel, 'On Lebor Gabála', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 10 (1915), 97–197; Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn* I, ix–xxxiv.

⁷ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part I', pp. 87–92.

⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 94–5.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 88.

While the resulting idiosyncratic nature of each extant version may frustrate textual critics and editors, it also provides a useful opportunity for insight into concepts of authority in medieval Irish textual culture and the self-perception of the personnel involved in it. Whether innovative or based on another strand of the tradition, the distinctiveness of each manuscript version suggests a complex and nuanced attitude to the authority of texts and to an extent, a sense of authorial empowerment on the part of those involved in redacting and compiling each version.¹⁰

Poetry in Lebor Gabála Éirenn

In this paper, I illustrate and explore this aspect of the *Lebor Gabála* tradition through the treatment of one poem found in different versions of the compilation. The poem itself changes in only a few meaningful respects but its context, which is—at least partially—the domain of the compiler, varies markedly.

Éstid a eolchu cen ón ('Listen, scholars without flaw') appears in several versions of *Lebor Gabála* and is part of a considerable corpus of lengthy metrical histories found in the compilation.¹¹ It is attributed to the poet and historian, Flann Mainistrech (ob. 1056).¹² Studies of the frequently occurring genre of prosimetrum in medieval Irish literature have generally concluded that the function of the verse

¹⁰ For the medieval practice of *compilatio*, see N. Hathaway, 'Compilatio: from Plagiarism to Compiling', *Viator* 20 (1989), 19–44.

¹¹ *Lebor Gabála* IV, ll. 1909–2076, pp. 224–41. Hereafter *Éstid a eolchu...* will be referenced from Macalister's edition, in this format. A reference will also be included, where appropriate, to the text in the diplomatic edition of the *Book of Leinster: Book of Leinster, formerly Lebar na Núachongbála*, ed. R. I. Best, O. Bergin and M. A. O'Brien, 5 vols. (Dublin, 1954–1967), I, ll. 1307–455, pp. 41–6. The diplomatic edition is cited hereafter as *LL*. For other editions and translations of *Éstid a eolchu...* see below, p. 61.

¹² J. Carey, 'Flann Mainistrech (d. 1056)', in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. L. Goldman (Oxford, 2004)

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9672>>, accessed 15 October 2011.

component is to support the prose either through marking moments of heightened pathos and drama or as evidence for statements made in prose. The evidential quality of a poem is derived from identifying it as the words either of an eyewitness or of a known scholar.¹³ Usually, poetry in *Lebor Gabála* is neither concerned with heightened emotion nor found in the mouths of characters involved in the action. It tends, in general, to be very similar to the accompanying prose in terms of content and doctrine. While much is anonymous, the longer poems tend to be attributed to scholars of the Middle Irish period, such as Flann Mainistrech, who worked shortly before or during the period in which *Lebor Gabála* was compiled.¹⁴

Macalister, Scowcroft and John Carey view much of the poetry as having been originally composed independently, before subsequently becoming extremely influential in the development of the prosimetric compilation. Thus, many are cited *in extenso* as direct sources, rather than supporting evidence.¹⁵ Scowcroft regards the original document behind the extant *Lebor Gabála* as having been written entirely in prose, with subsequent redactors adding and integrating poems into the prose.¹⁶ Macalister has described the verse in *Lebor Gabála* as an ‘unmitigated nuisance’ and, conceiving it to be independent from the prose, edits and prints it separately.¹⁷ However, both Carey and Scowcroft, while understanding the prose as being derived from the

¹³ P. Mac Cana, ‘Prosimetrum in Insular Celtic Literature’, in *Prosimetrum: Cross Cultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, ed. J. Harris and K. Reichl (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 99–130; G. Toner, ‘Authority, Verse and the Transmission of Senchas’, *Ériu* 55 (2005), 59–84.

¹⁴ Carey, ‘Legendary History’, p. 44; R. M. Scowcroft, ‘Medieval Recensions of the *Lebor Gabála*’, in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: Textual History and Pseudohistory*, ed. J. Carey, Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 20 (Dublin, 2009), 1–19, at pp. 8–9.

¹⁵ Macalister, *Lebor Gabála* I, x; J. Carey, *The Irish National Origin Legend: Synthetic Pseudohistory*, Quiggin Pamphlets on the Sources of Medieval Gaelic History 1 (Cambridge, 1994), 19.

¹⁶ Scowcroft, ‘Leabhar Gabhála Part I’, p. 87; Scowcroft, ‘Medieval Recensions’, p. 7.

¹⁷ Macalister, *Lebor Gabála* I, x.

verse, also stress how both forms function integrally within the extant compilation, viewing the result in terms of the well-known medieval literary form, the *opus geminatum*.¹⁸ Scowcroft's analysis is particularly interesting for this study. He suggests that, in *Lebor Gabála*, authoritative verse is not simply invoked in support of prose but, instead, the latent authority of the cited verse is in a dialogic relationship with other poems and within a wider, composite and more complex exposition by the compiler of the recension:

The poetry remains more or less immutable—the voice of named authorities—while the prose, anonymous and adaptable, expounds and integrates their testimony, consolidating its allusive treatment of action and wealth of non-narrative detail into a full narrative line. This prose ‘explanation’ of poetic authority comes therefore to function as a theatre for the historian’s own work as compiler and critic.¹⁹

In the case study presented in this article, the relationship of the ‘historian’s own work’ with the poetic authority is examined through the treatment by different compilers of *Éstid a eolchu...* in the context of their own versions of *Lebor Gabála*. I thus hope to expand upon and stimulate further interest in the dynamic identified by Scowcroft in the development of the compilation.

Editions and Citations

When citing *Lebor Gabála*, one is faced with a dilemma. Macalister’s edition has been heavily criticized in terms of text, translation and editorial strategy, to the extent that Daniel Binchy recommended that studies of the compilation continue to be based on the original manuscripts.²⁰ Conveniently, most of the relevant manuscripts are

¹⁸ Carey, *National Origin Legend*, p. 22; Scowcroft, ‘Medieval Recensions’, p. 7.

¹⁹ Scowcroft, ‘Leabhar Gabhála Part I’, p. 91. For examples of poems in *Lebor Gabála* that Scowcroft believes to be based on existing prose, see ‘Leabhar Gabhála Part I’, p. 90 and ‘Leabhar Gabhála Part II’, p. 5.

²⁰ D. A. Binchy, ‘Review of *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: the Book of the Taking of Ireland. Part 4*’, *Celtica* 2 (1952), 195–209, esp. p. 196; M. Dillon, ‘*Lebor Gabála*

now much more accessible thanks to digitisation but they are still only available to those with the relevant expertise. For various reasons, Scowcroft has, albeit reluctantly, recommended that Macalister's edition continue to be used.²¹ Other options include the text of *Lebor Gabála* in the *Book of Leinster*, which can be found in the diplomatic edition of that manuscript.²² Carey's unpublished edition of what he analyses as 'Recension 1' of *Lebor Gabála* also includes the *Book of Leinster* text.²³ However, both of these editions, while more reliable than Macalister's, are restricted to one branch of the tradition, which Scowcroft has warned is not particularly representative.²⁴ Macalister's edition is, at least, representative. It includes the majority of variants from almost all the extant manuscripts and generally indicates the structural differences between their texts.

It is for this reason that citations of *Lebor Gabála* in this study will be from Macalister's edition, checked against the diplomatic edition of the *Book of Leinster* where appropriate. Quoted text from other versions has been checked against the original manuscripts and I have revised some of Macalister's translations. Mostly, however, this study is concerned with ordering of material, rather than with close reading, so the shortcomings of Macalister's edition, while worth noting, are not relevant to it.

ÉSTID A EOLCHU... IN CONTEXT

Éstid a eolchu... is a rather bleak collection of terse accounts of how seventy individuals of the Túatha Dé Danann ('People of the goddess

Érenn', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 86: 1 (1956), 62–72, at pp. 71–2; Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part I', pp. 82–3.

²¹ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part I', p. 83.

²² *LL* I, ll. 1–1800, pp. 1–56.

²³ 'Leabar Gabála: Recension 1', ed. and trans. J. Carey, (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Harvard Univ., 1983). A translation of this recension is found in, *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe and Early Ireland and Wales*, ed. J. T. Koch and J. Carey, Celtic Studies Publications 1, 4th ed. (Andover, MA, 2003), 226–72.

²⁴ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part I', p. 83.

Danu’) died; the deaths, when not the result of violence or malevolent magic, tend to be the result of sorrow over earlier deaths.²⁵ The Túatha Dé Danann are broadly presented by *Lebor Gabála* as human descendants of Noah and the last people to occupy Ireland before the arrival of the Gáidil.²⁶ Their identity does not appear to have been so straightforward, however; many versions of the compilation also include some discussion as to whether they were, in fact, demons. Some modern scholars have interpreted material concerning the Túatha Dé Danann as pre-Christian mythology and the Túatha Dé Danann themselves as a kind of pantheon, preserved in euhemerized or demonized form in the Middle Ages.²⁷ Medieval sources do indeed, on occasion, describe the Túatha Dé Danann as gods.²⁸ However, a complex range of conceptions, both of them and of the religion of the pre-Christian past, has been identified within medieval Irish literature, possibly based on Patristic models, and further study of this topic is certainly desirable.²⁹

Éstid a eolchu..., with one late exception, is always found as part of *Lebor Gabála*.³⁰ It appears in the following manuscripts.³¹

²⁵ This is the customary translation of their name but see J. Carey ‘The Name “Tuatha Dé Danann”’, *Éigse* 18 (1980–1981), 291–4.

²⁶ *Lebor Gabála* IV, §§ 304–77, pp. 91–342; *LL* I, ll. 1049–456, pp. 33–46.

²⁷ Van Hamel, ‘Lebor Gabála’, pp. 190–1; *Lebor Gabála* IV, pp. 97–105; Dillon, ‘Lebor Gabála’, p. 67. For further references, see Scowcroft ‘Leabhar Gabhála Part I’, p. 82, n. 1.

²⁸ For example, both *Éstid a eolchu...* and the poem *Éstid in senchas sluagach* (‘Hear the history of hosts’), also found in *Lebor Gabála*, refer to the Túatha Dé Danann as *dee* (‘gods’): *Lebor Gabála* IV, l. 1982, pp. 232–3; *LL* I, l. 1377, p. 43; *Lebor Gabála* IV, ll. 2497–505, pp. 282–91.

²⁹ Carey, ‘The Name’; J. Borsje, ‘Omens, Ordeals and Oracles: on Demons and Weapons in Early Irish Texts’, *Peritia* 13 (1999), 224–48; J. Carey, *A Single Ray of the Sun: Religious Speculation in Early Ireland*, Celtic Studies Publications 3, 2nd ed. (Aberystwyth, 2011), 1–38, see esp. p. 21, n. 30.

³⁰ Cambridge, University Library, MS. Add. 4207 (s. xix), fols. 44v–45r.

³¹ The sigla used hereafter are those used in Scowcroft, ‘Medieval Recensions’, pp. 3–5. For more details concerning the manuscripts and for a guide to how

Recension *m*

- *Lbm* (Book of Lecan): Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 23 P 2 cat. 535 (Connacht s. xv), 19ra3–19rb36.
- *Ym*: Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, D i 3 cat. 539 (s. xiv), 1vb28–2rb7.
- *Rm*: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 512 (Connacht? s.xv/xvi), 93va24–93va26 (first quatrain only).

Recension *a*

- *N* (Book of Leinster): Dublin, Trinity College, H 2 18 cat. 1339 (s. xii), 11ra18–11rb40.³²
- *F* (Book of Fermoy): Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, Stowe D iii 1 cat. 671 (Munster? s. xv), 11vb21–12ra39.³³

Recension *c*

- *B* (Book of Ballymote): Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 23 P 12 cat. 536 (Connacht s. xiv), 19ra37–19va11.
- *Lc* (Book of Lecan): Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 23 P 2 cat. 535 (Connacht s. xv), 281va14–281vb50.

Éstid a eolchu... is not found in recension *b*. In terms of Scowcroft's account of *Lebor Gabála*'s textual history, this associates it with μ .³⁴

they relate to Macalister's edition, see Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part I', pp. 84–6, 139–42.

³² *LL* I, ll. 1308–1455, pp. 41–46; D. Pósdör, 'Twelve Poems Attributed to Fland Mainistrech from the Book of Leinster', 2 vols. (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Trinity College Dublin, 1999), I, 233–62.

³³ This manuscript consists of folios which have become detached from the *Book of Fermoy* proper, which is bound as Dublin, Royal Irish Academy 23 E 29 cat. 1134 (Munster? s. xv).

Scowcroft envisages a terse, original document (ω) being adapted and expanded twice, producing two main traditions (α and μ), each influenced by distinct interests and methodologies. Broadly, m is derived from μ while b is derived from α , a being an attempt to reconcile α and μ .³⁵

A genealogical context within m and N

In Scowcroft's account of the textual tradition, m and N are the earliest in terms of the development of the compilation. *Éstid a eolchu...* is one of only two poems on the Túatha Dé Danann in m , following a body of genealogies which traces them back to Noah.³⁶ It is then followed by a poem and two short anecdotes which focus on a particular character, Tuirill Biccreeo.³⁷ The coverage of the Túatha Dé Danann in m is then complete. If we read poems in *Lebor Gabála* and elsewhere as working in conjunction with accompanying prose, *Éstid a eolchu...* appears to support the genealogies in some way, although m does not make its role explicit.

The prose coverage of the Túatha Dé Danann in N concludes with cognate genealogies, the material on Tuirill Biccreeo being absent.³⁸ *Éstid a eolchu...* is the third of three poems which follow N's prose, each, like *Éstid a eolchu...*, apparently the work of an eleventh-century scholar. *Eriu co n-úaill co n-idnaib* ('Ireland, with pride, with weapons'), is attributed elsewhere to Eochaid Ua Flainn and focuses on the arrival of the Túatha Dé Danann and the reigns of their kings.³⁹ *Túatha Dé Danann fo diamair* ('The Túatha Dé Danann under

³⁴ Scowcroft describes *Éstid a eolchu...* as a 'later addition' to μ but does not elaborate: 'Leabhar Gabhála Part II', p. 5.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 2; Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 4–6.

³⁶ *Lebor Gabála* IV, §§ 316 (N) and 316a (m), pp. 126–33; *LL* I, ll. 1130–89, pp. 35–7. The other poem is *Éstid in senchas sluagach*, see above, p. 75, n. 28.

³⁷ *Lebor Gabála* IV, § 319, pp. 134–7.

³⁸ *Ibid.* § 316, pp. 126–31; *LL* I, ll. 1130–86, pp. 35–7.

³⁹ *Lebor Gabála* IV, ll. 1789–860, pp. 212–9; *LL* I, ll. 1190–261, pp. 37–9; the attribution to Eochaid is found at *Lebor Gabála* IV, § 366, pp. 182–3. See J. Carey, 'Eochaid ua Flannucáin (d. 1004)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National*

obscurity'), attributed to 'Tanaide', lists their major figures and their particular skills.⁴⁰ N is peculiar, in that it does tend to group poems together where other versions intersperse them more regularly with the prose.⁴¹ However, the implication is that the scribe of N does not interpret *Éstid a eolchu...* as directly supporting the genealogies, as the poem is separated from them by seventy lines of manuscript text in N (10vb3–11ra17). These complementary poems can thus almost be read as a verse account of the Túatha Dé Danann in Ireland entirely discrete from the prose.

The general character of *m* and N, however, may provide insights into the role *Éstid a eolchu...* plays in these versions. Both are derived from μ , the focus of which is, Scowcroft argues, on tracing the various settlers in Ireland genealogically back to Noah, establishing a continuous line of its kings and associating them with Tara.⁴² With a few exceptions, *m* does not tend to deviate extensively from these topics. N keeps the structure of μ and interpolates content from α , resulting in a version similar in character to *m*.⁴³

The genealogies of the Túatha Dé Danann appear to have something of a pedigree within the textual tradition of *Lebor Gabála*. First, versions of the genealogies cognate with those in *m* and N appear across the extant versions of the compilation.⁴⁴ Each places twenty-three generations between Noah and Nuadu Argetlám, first king of the Túatha Dé Danann in Ireland. In terms of biblical chronology, twenty-three generations from Noah reaches Obed,

Biography <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50109>>, accessed 15 October 2011.

⁴⁰ *Lebor Gabála* IV, ll. 1861–904, pp. 220–5; *LL* I, ll. 1263–306, pp. 40–1; and for the attribution to Tanaide, see *Lebor Gabála* IV, § 366, pp. 184–5. This more obscure poet is thought to have lived during the eleventh century: Carey, 'Legendary History', p. 44.

⁴¹ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part I', p. 91.

⁴² Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part II', pp. 7, 32. For the kingship of Tara, see B. Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 214–25.

⁴³ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part I', p. 97.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 112.

father of Jesse, father of King David.⁴⁵ This suggests that these genealogies of the Túatha Dé Danann were derived from a chronological scheme which synchronised the arrival of the Gaídil in Ireland with the kingdom of David. Scowcroft has demonstrated that such a scheme underlies the earliest versions of *Lebor Gabála* that it is possible to reconstruct.⁴⁶ The scheme which predominates in later versions generally ascribes the events a much later date, synchronising the overthrow of the Túatha Dé Danann by the Gaídil with Alexander the Great's defeat of the Persians.⁴⁷ The core interest in N and *m* is thus genealogical and regnal history. The poem need not relate directly to these topics but, as I shall argue presently, compilations of death-tales are a well-attested feature in medieval Irish historical writing and the poem can thus be read as an integral part of these two versions of the compilation.

One distinctive feature of *Éstid a eolchu...* in *m* is the inclusion of four additional quatrains at the end of the poem, which are also found in Lc.⁴⁸ These quatrains reject the idea that the Túatha Dé Danann are still alive and living in the *síd* or in Tír Tairngire; instead, they are in Hell.⁴⁹ Carey doubts that these quatrains were part of the poem as originally composed.⁵⁰ However, if they are later additions, it is not clear whether they were added by the compiler of *m* or in an earlier version of the poem. They do not fit comfortably with the rest of *m* or N. The Túatha Dé Danann retreat to the *síd*—a kind of underground world—after the arrival of the Gaídil in Mesca Ulad ('The Intoxication of the Ulstermen') and De Gabáil in tSída ('Concerning the Seizure of the Fairy Mound'), but this does not

⁴⁵ Luke III:23–38; Matt. I:1–17.

⁴⁶ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part II', p. 31; Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', p. 11.

⁴⁷ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part II', pp. 29–31.

⁴⁸ *Lebor Gabála* IV, ll. 2061–76, pp. 240–1.

⁴⁹ *Lebor Gabála* IV, ll. 2064, 2068 and 2074, pp. 240–1.

⁵⁰ Carey, *A Single Ray*, p. 18, n. 25.

happen in any version of *Lebor Gabála*.⁵¹ The term *Tír Tairngire* has been shown by James Carney to be a translation of *terra repromissionis* ('promised land') and generally refers to a Christian paradise.⁵² Only in a few late Middle Irish texts is a place with that name inhabited by the Túatha Dé Danann.⁵³

Within this article, these interesting quatrains must receive less attention than they merit. Suffice to say, while they are clearly of relevance to *Éstid a eolchu...*, they appear to attack a viewpoint not expressed anywhere else in the *Lebor Gabála* tradition, perhaps suggesting that the poem as it appears in *m* was intended for another context. If they are a later addition to the poem, they constitute an interpretation of it akin to those to which we shall now turn.

Gods, demons or humans? F and c

F is generally regarded as a version of recension *a* along with N, although it is the result of a more extensive process of interpolation.⁵⁴ Recension *c* is an attempt to reconcile recensions *a* and *b*. In F and *c*, *Éstid a eolchu...* is found in a similar location towards the end of both recensions' coverage of the Túatha Dé Danann and following a corresponding, although independently expanded, body of genealogies.⁵⁵ It is also preceded by a somewhat opaque passage that is not found in *m*, which discusses the 'gods' (*dei*) and 'un-gods' (*andei*) among the Túatha Dé Danann.⁵⁶ Carey sees some of this material as

⁵¹ *Mesca Ulad*, ed. J. Carmichael-Watson, Medieval and Modern Irish Series 13 (Dublin, 1941), ll. 1–16, 1; 'De Gabáil in t-Shída (Concerning the Seizure of the Fairy Mound)', ed. and trans. V. Hull, *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 39 (1933), 53–8.

⁵² J. Carney, 'Review of *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, Edited with Introduction and Notes by Carl Selmer', in *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature: an Anthology of Criticism*, ed. J. M. Wooding (Dublin, 2000), pp. 42–51, at p. 47.

⁵³ J. Carey, 'The Location of the Otherworld in Irish Tradition', in *The Otherworld Voyage*, ed. Wooding, pp. 113–19, at p. 117, n. 21.

⁵⁴ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part I', pp. 97–8.

⁵⁵ *Lebor Gabála* IV, §§ 316–17, pp. 126–35, § 368, pp. 186–97.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* § 317, pp. 134–35; *LL* I, ll. 1058–66, p. 34.

being derived from an independent tract, which he has reconstructed.⁵⁷

There follows a list of trios who fulfilled certain roles among the Túatha Dé Danann. F then contains a passage, not found in Carey's tract, which introduces *Éstid a eolchu...*:

Atbert tra **araile** beittid demna so, arro fetattatair curpu daenna impu o lo, din as firu; ar mairchetar a ngenelacha for culu, 7 do raebattar la tiachtain creitmi. Conad dia n-aidedaib ro chan Flann Mainistreach in duan-sa sis ga foirgeall.⁵⁸

The argument seems to be that the Túatha Dé Danann were demons and their apparent humanity is an illusion of their own making. An intriguing but obscure passage unique to recension *b* is also concerned with the ability of the Túatha Dé Danann to manufacture human bodies, although their relationship with demons there is more complex.⁵⁹ The formula *atbert araille* implies that the passage in F is countering something else, such as the unqualified description of them as 'gods' in § 317. Indeed, while Macalister prints § 318 as a separate paragraph, it is not separated visually from § 317 in the manuscript.

If their human bodies are illusory, the illusion has depth, as the bodies seem to have genealogies. Alternatively, this passage could suggest that the Túatha Dé Danann have genealogies despite not being human. The reference to them existing at the coming of Christianity is also obscure; in *Lebor Gabála*, the Túatha Dé Danann are placed well before the Christian era and are apparently destroyed by the as yet non-Christian Gaídil, although one manuscript of

⁵⁷ 'A Túath Dé Miscellany', ed. J. Carey, *BBCS* 39 (1992), 24–45. I am grateful to Răzvan Stanciu for this reference.

⁵⁸ *Lebor Gabála* IV, § 318, pp. 134–5: '**Others say**, indeed, that they are demons, since they knew that [they took] human bodies around them by day, which is more true; for their genealogies endure backward and they existed at the time of the coming of [the] faith. So it is in testimony to their deaths that Flann Mainistreach chanted this poem', author's own translation.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* §§ 320–1, pp. 138–41.

recension *c* does attribute the victory of the Gaídil to their precocious faith.⁶⁰ Otherwise, the late Middle Irish *Acallam na Senórach* (‘Colloquy of the Elders’) depicts familiar members of the Túatha Dé Danann interacting with St Patrick.⁶¹ It is perhaps an illustration of the dynamic nature of *Lebor Gabála* that, like the additional quatrains in *Éstid a eolchu...* in *m* and *Lc*, this passage appears to relate to material outwith its own version of *Lebor Gabála*.

Éstid a eolchu... alone does not support the idea that the Túatha Dé Danann existed until the arrival of Christianity, unless that may be implied from the arrival of the Gaídil, who are mentioned in the poem.⁶² However, by exhaustively citing how the Túatha Dé Danann died and by often including illness or physical violence as a cause, the poem can be understood as showing them to have had human bodies. The poem is clearly thought of as relevant to the discussion of the origin of the Túatha Dé Danann, as *F* is particularly explicit in citing it as evidence, the word *foirgeall* (‘authoritative testimony’; OIr *forgeall*) implying that it carries distinct insight or authority.⁶³

In *Lc* and *B*, *Éstid a eolchu...* is cited in the context of the same issue but apparently supporting the other side of the argument:

Ocus ciatberaid araile gomdis demna Tuatha De Danann, ar thiachtain in nErinn gan airigudh, 7 adubradar fein is a nellaibh dorchaidhi thangadar, 7 ar imad a fheasa 7 a n-eolais 7 ar doilghe a ngeinealaigh do breadh iar cul; acht cheana ro fhoghlaimsead eolas 7 filidhecht. Ar gach ndiamair n-dana 7 ar gach lere leighis 7 gach amaindsi eladhna fuil an Erinn, is o Tuatha De Danann ata a bhunadh; 7 ge thainig creideamh an Erinn, ní ro dichuirtea na dana sin, daigh at mhaithe iad. Ocus is follus nach do deamhnaib na dho sidhaibh doibh, **ar ro fheadar cach gur gabhsad cuirp daenna umpu o lo dinas firu 7 airimhthear in geinelach for culu 7 do raebadar la tiachtain**

⁶⁰ *Lebor Gabála* III, § 268, pp. 154–5.

⁶¹ See for example, ‘Acallamh na Senórach’, ed. W. Stokes, in *Irische Texte* 4: 1, ed. W. Stokes and E. Windisch (Leipzig, 1900), ll. 5371–88, pp. 147–8; trans, A Dooley and H. Roe, *Tales of the Elders of Ireland* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 149–50.

⁶² *Lebor Gabála* IV, ll. 2053–6, pp. 238–9; *LL* I, ll. 1448–51, p. 46.

⁶³ *Dictionary of the Irish Language: Compact Edition* (Dublin, 1983), *s.v.* forgeall.

credme. Conadh dia n-aigheadhaibh ro chan Fland
Maineisdreach in duan-sa sis.⁶⁴

The emphasised text closely resembles part of the passage we have cited from F, while the rest of the passage similarly resembles a passage in *b*, which also argues that the Túatha Dé Danann were not demons.⁶⁵ The passage in *c* thus appears to be constructed out of pre-existing material although its arrangement in *c* gives the material from F new meaning. The overall sense of the passage in *c* seems to be that the Túatha Dé Danann are not demons but the passage includes the idea that they only had human bodies by day. Macalister regards this phrase as out of place, describing it as a ‘gloss’ when it occurs in *c*.⁶⁶ However, the phrase is presented as part of the main text in both *c* and F. The rest of the passage from F effectively argues that they are human and cites *Éstid a eolchu...* in support of this view.

Recension *c* is not quite as firm as F in citing the support of *Éstid a eolchu...* but the wording makes a connection clear. Also, across the three manuscripts, the attribution to Flann Mainistrech is worded with sufficient differences to suggest that the attribution is not simply fossilised within the tradition but was re-expressed by the scribes

⁶⁴ *Lebor Gabála* IV, § 371, pp. 200–3: ‘And though some say that the Túatha Dé Danann were demons—for they came into Ireland without being perceived, and they themselves said they came in dark clouds, it is on account of their excessive knowledge and their learning and on account of the difficulty of following their genealogies back—but, in truth, they pursued knowledge and powers of vision, for in Ireland, all obscurity in art, all clarity in reading and every exactitude in craft, their origin is thus with the Túatha Dé Danann and, although the Faith came to Ireland, these arts were not discarded, for they are good. **For all know that they took human bodies around them by day, which is more true. And (their) genealogy can be traced back and they existed at the time of the coming of the Faith, so that of their deaths, Flann Mainistrech chanted this poem**’, author’s own translation and emphasis.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* § 353, pp. 164–5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 203, n. A.

handling it.⁶⁷ This might be said to be evidence of a continued, active interest in linking the poem to the prose.

Lc is the only manuscript outwith *m* to include the four additional quatrains.⁶⁸ The prose in *c* also specifies that the Túatha Dé Danann are not of the *síd*, which could be inspired by these quatrains or, conversely, could have led to their inclusion. The additional quatrains never explicitly state that the Túatha Dé Danann are human, however.

ANALYSIS

Éstid a eolchu... thus appears in two contexts: as part of a genealogical and regnal account of the Túatha Dé Danann and as part of the discussion concerning their identity. Within the latter context, it appears to be cited in *F* as evidence for identifying them as demons and in *c* for identifying them as human. As I will now show, these contexts are cogent uses for the poem paralleled elsewhere both in the *Lebor Gabála* tradition and in medieval Gaelic literature more widely.

Genealogies, death-tales and historical writing

Within medieval Gaelic historical poetry, lists of the death-tales of prominent figures of a dynasty or particular group are a recognized genre. Peter Smith has categorized them as ‘Versified Battle-lists and Death-tales of the Kings’ in his taxonomy of historical poetry. He draws examples from the seventh to the twelfth century, including *Éstid a eolchu...* but observes that verse compilations of the death-tales of an entire dynasty only begin to appear in the ninth century.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *Lebor Gabála* IV, p. 202, n. 19.

⁶⁸ See above, pp. 76–7.

⁶⁹ P. Smith, ‘Early Irish Historical Verse: the Development of a Genre’, in *Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: Text and Transmission*, ed. P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (Dublin, 2002), pp. 326–41, at pp. 328, 332.

Indeed, death-tale poetry appears with particular frequency among the works of eleventh-century scholars associated with or cited in *Lebor Gabála*. For example, two poems in *Lebor Gabála* record the deaths of the leaders of the Fir Bolg and Gáidil respectively.⁷⁰ In addition, several examples of death-tale poetry occur among the other purported works of Flann Mainistrech. For instance, *Ríg Themra dia tesbann tnú* ('The kings of Tara who lack envy') and *Ríg Themra toebaige iar tain* ('The kings of Tara of the slopes, after that') together list the deaths of the kings of Tara from Eochu Feidlech to Mael Sechnaill mac Domnaill (ob. 1022).⁷¹ Sporadically, cause of death is also supplied in Flann's poem on world kingship, *Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim* ('Unravel for me, O God, your heaven').⁷² An early example from outside *Lebor Gabála* is *Fianna bátar i nEmain* ('Warriors that were in Emain'), which is attributed to the tenth-century poet Cinaed Ua hArtacáin (ob. 975) and recounts the deaths of characters familiar from a wide range of texts and cycles.⁷³

⁷⁰ These poems are *Fir Bolg batar sunna sel* ('The Fir Bolg were here for a season') and *Gáedel Glas ótat Gáedil* ('Gáedel Glas, of whom are the Gáedil'): *Lebor Gabála* IV, ll. 1493–544, pp. 46–53; *LL* I, ll. 893–940, pp. 28–30; *Lebor Gabála* II, ll. 339–510, 347–350, 371–98, 415–8, pp. 90–107, 90–1, 92–7, 98–9; *LL* I, ll. 244–387, pp. 8–13, at ll. 260, 280–91, 304–7. The former is attributed to Tanaide, for whom see above, p. 78, n. 40; the latter is attributed to Gilla Cóemáin (fl. 1072), see *LL* I, §§ 117, 165, pp. 30–3, 78–9; P. J. Smith, *Three Historical Poems Ascribed to Gilla Cóemáin*, *Studien und Texte zur Keltologie* 8 (Münster, 2007), 25–32.

⁷¹ Pódrör, 'Twelve Poems' I, pp. 279–303; *LL* III, ll. 15,640–780 and 15,782–989, pp. 504–8 and 509–15;

⁷² S. Mac Airt, 'A Middle Irish Poem on World Kingship', *Études Celtiques* 6 (1953–54), 255–80; 'A Middle Irish Poem on World Kingship cont.', *Études Celtiques* 7 (1955–56), 18–45; 'A Middle Irish Poem on World Kingship cont.', *Études Celtiques* 8 (1958–59), 99–119, 284–97. The edition ends unfinished.

⁷³ W. Stokes, 'On the Deaths of Some Irish Heroes', *Revue Celtique* 23 (1902), 303–48; J. Carey, 'Cináed ua hArtacáin [Cineth O'Hartagain] (d. 975)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

Examples of death-tale poetry are thus found relating to individuals from the Christian and pre-Christian era, to Gaídil and non-Gaídil and to characters from a variety of literary sources. No example other than *Éstid a eolchu...* relates to individuals whose humanity is noticeably in doubt. Therefore, there seems no *prima facie* reason for interpreting the poem in itself as addressing the question of the Túatha Dé Danann's identity. On the contrary, complementing a regnal and genealogical history is a perfectly appropriate role for this sort of poem. However, this raises the question of the role death-tale poetry played in historical writing and thus exactly how *Éstid a eolchu...* might complement *m* and *N*.

The account of an historical character's death could be useful in constructing chronology: the death of a person cannot happen more than once, it removes the character from subsequent proceedings and, if a killer is involved, it provides a *terminus post quem* for his own disappearance from the record. *Éstid a eolchu...* does not deal with a line of kings or a dynasty with a clear order by generation or succession but with a more complex group, some of whom are contemporary with one another. However, the individual narratives in the poem appear to be in chronological order when compared with the genealogies and with the accounts of their deaths which occur in prose in the *Lebor Gabála* tradition. Carey—without giving reasons—has given 1056, Flann Mainistrech's death-date, as the latest possible date for the production of *Lebor Gabála's* coverage of the Túatha Dé Danann in its extant form, presumably because he sees the structure of *Éstid a eolchu...* as closely following the structure of its account as a whole.⁷⁴ While both prose and poetry could have influenced each other, the point is that a collection of death-tales can play an important role in structuring time and is thus worth citing in an historical compilation.

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50109>>, accessed 15 October 2011.

⁷⁴ Carey, *National Origin Legend*, p. 17.

I am aware of three specific examples where *Éstid a eolchu...* is potentially being used in this context elsewhere. Accounts of the deaths of the kings of the Túatha Dé Danann who ruled Ireland appear in a king-list in the *Book of Leinster*, which cites *Lebor Gabála*.⁷⁵ Some deaths of individuals of the Túatha Dé Danann appear in a body of synchronisms interpolated into *Lc* and in a text known as *Leabhar Comhaimsireachda Flainn Mainistreach* ('Flann Mainistreach's Book of Synchronisms'), found independently in the *Book of Ballymote*.⁷⁶ Scowcroft believes that these latter texts share a common source.⁷⁷ The date and history of the *LL* king-list is uncertain.

In the *LL* king-list and *Éstid a eolchu...* the deaths mentioned occur in the same order. The accounts in the *LL* king-list are a lot terser but what details it gives are the same. Specifically, its account of the death of Bres mac Eladan closely follows the wording in the poem: 'Bress mac Eladan meic Néit .uiii. mbliadna d'ól rota i richt lomma ros marb';⁷⁸ '... ropo domna trota tra / ól rota i rricht ind lomma.'⁷⁹ Also, the *LL* king-list's description of the death of the Dagda (Eochu Ollathair) uses the same distinctive phrase as the poem: 'Eochu Ollathair .lxxx. marb de gae chró';⁸⁰ 'Marb in Dagda do gái chró / isin Bruig, ní himmargó'.⁸¹

⁷⁵ *LL* I, ll. 5360–402 and 5400, pp. 180–1.

⁷⁶ *Lebor Gabála* IV, §§ 376–7, pp. 208–11; *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus No. 830: Texts, Translations and Indexes*, ed. and trans. B. MacCarthy (Dublin, 1892), pp. 286–317. The attribution to Flann Mainistreach in an eighteenth-century hand is unlikely to be correct, see Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part I', p. 128, n. 135.

⁷⁷ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part I', pp. 128–9.

⁷⁸ *LL* I, l. 5384, p. 180: 'Bres son of Elada son of Nét, seven years. He was killed after drinking bog-water disguised as milk', author's own translation.

⁷⁹ *Lebor Gabála* IV ll. 1951–2, pp. 228–9: 'for him it was a cause of quarrel indeed, / drinking bog-stuff in the guise of milk'; *LL* I, ll. 1350–1.

⁸⁰ *LL* I, l. 5386, p. 180: 'Eochu Ollathair, fifty-three years; he died of a spear of gore', author's own translation.

⁸¹ *Lebor Gabála* IV, ll. 2033–4, pp. 236–7: 'The Dagda died of a dart of gore / in the Brug—it is no falsehood', *LL* I, ll. 1428–9, p. 45.

The synchronistic tracts cite the deaths of individuals—although rarely the causes of the deaths—and the accession of new kings among the Túatha Dé Danann using the reigns of the Assyrian kings as a framework. The *Leabhar Comhaimsireachda* goes further and specifies the Assyrian regnal year in which each event occurs. The order of events in *Éstid a eolchu...* and in these tracts is similar, although with some divergences. There are several examples of individuals appearing in the same or adjacent quatrains in the poem and dying during the reign of the same Assyrian king in the tracts. For instance, in Lamprides' reign Cermad mac in Dagda, Corpre File, Etan, Cian, Elloth and Donand died.⁸² These appear in three adjacent quatrains in the poem.⁸³ Once more, *Leabhar Comhaimsireachda* possibly references *Éstid a eolchu...*: two deaths are described as follows: 'ocus isin coiced bliadain deg iar sin, bas Cairbri filed do gae grene ocus bas Eadaine...'.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, in the poem we find 'Marb de gai grene glaine / Corpre mór mac Étaíne...'.⁸⁵

The three texts discussed briefly here employ more advanced chronological devices than *Éstid a eolchu...* does. The first gives lengths of reign and the two synchronistic tracts use the world-kingship to establish a single chronology for the material.⁸⁶ *Éstid a eolchu...*, however, does appear to have been used in their production. Its usefulness may be derived from the potential of this type of poem to provide a relative chronology, as mentioned above. If *Éstid a eolchu...* was also used in the production of synchronistic texts, this would provide a parallel for its role in *m* and *N*, where it complements

⁸² *Lebor Gabála* IV, § 376, pp. 208–11; *Palatino-Vaticanus*, p. 292.

⁸³ *Palatino-Vaticanus*, ll. 1921–32, pp. 226–7; *LL* I, ll. 1432–44, p. 45.

⁸⁴ *Palatino-Vaticanus*, p. 292: 'and in the fifteenth year after that, Cairpre died by a beam of the sun and Étaín died', author's own translation.

⁸⁵ *Lebor Gabála*, IV ll. 1929–30, pp. 226–7: 'of a beam of the pure sun / died Cairpre the great, son of Étaín', author's own translation; *LL* I, l. 1328–9, p. 42. The expected genitive of Étaín would be *Étaíne*.

⁸⁶ Smith suggests that this sort of apparatus developed after the work of Flann Mainistrech and was perhaps based on it: 'Historical Poetry', p. 341.

versions in *Lebor Gabála* that are focused on regnal and genealogical history.

The identity of the Túatha Dé Danann

Both F and *c* are reasonably explicit about why they are citing *Éstid a eolchu...* and attestations elsewhere in the extant literature of the issues and concepts involved have previously been mentioned. If we consider the additional quatrains in *m* and *Lc* to be a later addition to the poem, this would provide a further instance in which *Éstid a eolchu...* might be seen in light of uncertainty as to the identity of the Túatha Dé Danann.

It is not clear if the use of *Éstid a eolchu...* in this context is actually a later development subsequent to the reading evidenced in *m* and N. Indeed, the additional quatrains in *m* demonstrate that such an interpretation had been made by someone at the time of *m*'s compilation. On the other hand, both F and *c* are derived from a lost version or group of versions, termed *U by Scowcroft, which did not influence *m* or N.⁸⁷ The interpretation of *Éstid a eolchu...* in F and *c* could thus be derived from an innovation at that stage.

It is also possible that a general uncertainty concerning the Túatha Dé Danann fluctuated over time or was particular to certain circles of scholars, although both these factors are unfortunately difficult to measure. The compilatory character of *Lebor Gabála* means that inconsistencies in the treatment of certain subjects are to be expected. Indeed, Scowcroft has suggested that the compilation purposefully brings different types of material and different viewpoints together.⁸⁸ For example, as we have seen, F appears to conclude that the Túatha Dé Danann were demons but also includes genealogies tracing them back to Noah; F's remark 'ni fes bunadhus doibh' may represent the compiler's own view, although even that sentence closely echoes the ninth-century text, *Scél Túain maic Chairrill*

⁸⁷ Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 4–5.

⁸⁸ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part I', p. 91.

(‘The Tale of Túan mac Cairril’).⁸⁹ In contrast, N does not mention the possibility that the Túatha Dé Danann are demons and similarly includes their genealogies; nonetheless, N remarks cryptically that they initially came to Ireland in dark clouds.⁹⁰ Integrating a range of authoritative sources seems to have been at least as much of a priority in *Lebor Gabála* as propagating particular interpretations was; this seems starkly evidenced by the way *c* constructs a discussion of the Túatha Dé Danann entirely out of material from *a* and *b*.⁹¹

The interpretation of *Éstid a eolchu...* in F and L*c* could thus be derived from an attempt to reconcile it with other material in the tradition. Rather than taking a cavalier approach to the *intentio auctoris* of the poem and use it to propagate their own views, the redactors of *Lebor Gabála* can be understood as questioning and engaging with the poem in the context of other early material in the tradition. For example, *b* does not include *Éstid a eolchu...* but it does cite the deaths of the Túatha Dé Danann as a reason for regarding them as human.⁹² Both this passage and the corresponding section of *c* cite their knowledge and skills as an argument that they are not only human but also good.⁹³ The difficulty of tracing their genealogies is cited as key to the debate about whether they are human, as it is in the passages introducing *Éstid a eolchu...* in F and *c*.⁹⁴

In *m* and N, *Éstid a eolchu...* follows on from genealogies. In F, it follows both genealogies and material on the knowledge and skills of the Túatha Dé Danann. There is, therefore, considerable overlap between the topics of the debate on their identity in *b*, F and *c* and the poem’s wider context in N and *m*. If N or *m* were read in light of the debates found in *b*, their human ancestors, their deaths and the

⁸⁹ *Lebor Gabála* IV, § 306, pp. 106–9: ‘their origin is uncertain’, author’s own translation; ‘Scél Túain maic Chairril’, ed. and trans. J. Carey, *Ériu* 35 (1984), 93–111, at l. 57.

⁹⁰ *Lebor Gabála* IV, § 306, pp. 106–9; *LL* I, ll. 1054, p. 33.

⁹¹ See above, p. 76.

⁹² *Lebor Gabála* IV, § 353, pp. 164–5.

⁹³ *Ibid.* § 371, pp. 200–3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* § 353, pp. 164–5.

broadly realistic reign-lengths of their kings in these versions could easily be re-analysed as arguments that they are human, whatever the original purpose of such material.⁹⁵ Indeed, it has been suggested by both Carey and Myles Dillon that the original purpose of locating the Túatha Dé Danann in the historical scheme set out in *Lebor Gabála* was to render them human beings and thus euhemerize them.⁹⁶ This may also explain the presence of the additional quatrains in the texts of *Éstid a eolchu...* in *m*. The later versions may thus be interpreting the intention behind the material more accurately than the earliest extant versions.

Specifically, suspicion concerning the ancestry of the Túatha Dé Danann could be due to the archaic nature of these genealogies within the *Lebor Gabála* tradition. As discussed above, these genealogies are based on synchronising the arrival of the Gaídil with King David, while subsequent versions of the compilation date the same event much later.⁹⁷ Such a discrepancy may be behind the suggestion in *b* that the genealogies of the Túatha Dé Danann cannot be reckoned back.⁹⁸

The interpretation of *Éstid a eolchu...* in *F* and *Lc* could be regarded as rhetorical invention reflecting a new agenda of the compilers, comparable with the treatment of *intentio auctoris* in medieval commentary tradition, as analysed by Rita Copeland.⁹⁹ There were undoubtedly wider cultural and intellectual anxieties that influenced the treatment of the Túatha Dé Danann in texts like *Lebor Gabála*. However, the debate concerning them, into which *Éstid a eolchu...* is explicitly drawn in *F* and *c*, very often concerns material already contained within the *Lebor Gabála* tradition. The debate may thus be an expression of perceived tensions and disagreements arising from

⁹⁵ For the use of genealogies of gods in refuting paganism elsewhere, see T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 201.

⁹⁶ Dillon, 'Lebor Gabála', p. 62; Carey, *A Single Ray*, p. 16.

⁹⁷ See above, p. 75.

⁹⁸ *Lebor Gabála* IV, § 353, pp. 164–5.

⁹⁹ R. Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 186–220.

attempts to reconcile the different versions of the compilation and not the conscious imposition of an entirely new interest on the material. There are problems with this interpretation, however. For example, it assumes a detailed, general knowledge of the entire tradition on the part of the scribes and compilers. This is not at all impossible but it is not evidenced in the texts they actually produced, which have been shown to have definite affiliations.¹⁰⁰

CONCLUSION

Éstid a eolchu... is a junction for some of the key concepts and methodologies within the *Lebor Gabála* tradition. Its various interpretations and uses give the impression that the meaning of an ‘authoritative’ poem could, in fact, be manipulated by later compilers or continuators, with interesting implications for the nature of its authority. However, this manipulation should not necessarily be understood as conscious deception. The treatment of the Túatha Dé Danann as an historical people and the discussion of whether they are human, while differing in presentation, have been shown to be potentially interlinked conceptually and based on the same material. The different uses of *Éstid a eolchu...* may thus be the product of the developing understanding and discussion of that material in the course of the *Lebor Gabála* project, rather than the imposition of new readings upon it. The poem was considered authoritative but its meaning was derived from a wide-ranging consideration of the *Lebor Gabála* tradition and perhaps other texts as well. Indeed, the frequency of references in the treatment of this poem to ideas not expressed in *Lebor Gabála* itself in or around *Éstid a eolchu...* adds a new dimension to the poem’s treatment; these include the existence of the Túatha Dé Danann at the coming of Christianity or their repose in *Tír Tairngire*. These remind us that even a text with the scope of *Lebor Gabála* was composed, compiled and intended to be read in a wider literary and cultural context which may also have been

¹⁰⁰ Scowcroft, ‘Medieval Recensions’, p. 18.

authoritative and influenced the treatment of material within the compilation.