

Bringing up boys: four Old Irish terms, Cú Chulainn's two early birth-tales, and Celtic pederasty

Zusammenfassung

Der vorliegende Aufsatz befaßt sich mit vier frühirischen Begriffen und den dadurch bezeichneten sozialen Kategorien, die auf der Erziehung von Knaben bzw. Junggesellen basieren, nämlich **comaltai** ‚Ziehbrüder‘ / ‚co-fosterlings‘, **comaís** ‚Gleichaltrige‘ / ‚co-ivals‘, **gor(-mac)** ‚pflichtbewusst (, Schwestersohn)‘ / ‚dutiful(, sister's son)‘ und **(mac) cóem-lieber** (Sohn/Knabe)‘ / ‚dear (son/boy)‘. Es stellt sich heraus, dass trotz gewisser Gemeinsamkeiten alle vier im Grunde sauber gegeneinander abgegrenzt waren. Während comaltai von denselben Zieheltern zusammen erzogen wurden bzw. worden waren, wurden comaís ursprünglich durch die Aufnahme in einen Männerbund (fian) nach dem Abschluss der Ziehbruderschaft etwa im Alter von 15 Jahren bestimmt. Wegen seines auffälligen ersten Auftretens als „kleiner mac cóem“ in der sogenannten ‚zweiten‘ Fassung von Compert Con Culainn ist Abschnitt II unten der Beziehung zwischen den zwei vorhandenen Hauptversionen der Geschichte von der Geburt Cú Chulainns gewidmet, der in einer anderen Erzählung (Mesca Ulad) auch gormac genannt wird. Wie JASKI 1999 gezeigt hat, sprechen die Textbelege selbst gegen die manchmal verfochtene Auffassung von gormac als einem Schwestersohn, der die gewöhnlich seinem eigenen ‚pflichtbewussten Sohn‘ (mac gor) auferlegte Pflege (goire) eines alten Familienoberhaupts übernimmt, und deuten auf einen von der Sippe seiner Mutter erzogenen Sohn eines fremden Mannes hin. Abschnitt IV versucht, diese Einsicht in Einklang mit der herkömmlichen und (trotz SCHRIJVER 1996) wohl richtigen Etymologie von air. gor als einer Ableitung *g^uor-o- ‚erwärmend‘ von der gut bezeugten Wurzel *g^uer (uridg. *g^uher) ‚erwärmen‘ zu bringen. Zum Schluss (V und VI) wird das Augenmerk auf die Rolle und Stellung von mac cóem (bzw. mac-cóem) gelenkt und der Versuch unternommen, einen formell naheliegenden etymolgischen Zusammenhang von kelt. *koi-mo/ā- ‚lieb, schön‘ mit der uridg. Wurzel *kei₁ ‚liegen‘ auch semantisch als ‚(daneben) liegend(er)‘ und daher ‚geliebt(er)‘ zu begründen.

I. Fosterage and the mother's kin

In the early Irish tale *Immram Brain* ‚Bran's Voyage‘ (MEYER 1895), a strangely dressed woman appeared suddenly, regaled Bran and his guests with a poem urging him to seek *tír na mban* ‚the land of the women‘ among the marvellous islands in the western ocean, and then disappeared again (§§1–31). In response (§32), ‚Bran then put to sea on the morrow. Three nines his number (*trí nonbuir a lín*). One man over (each of) the three nines **of his foster-brothers and coevals** (*óinifer forsnaib tríb nonburaib dia chomaltaib ocus comáisib*). The

word order makes this translation of the last sentence preferable to Meyer's 'one of his foster-brothers and mates was set over each of the three companies of nine'. When Bran and his followers reached their destination, a woman drew their single currach to land and they entered a great house with a 'compartment for each couple there, i.e. thrice nine compartments (*imde ceche lánamne and .i. trí nói n-imdæ*)' to spend what seemed a year but was actually many years of implied conjugal bliss (§62). Finally, homesickness triggered their departure from the women and an unsuccessful attempt to return home (§§63–6).

Com-altai 'co-fosterlings, foster-brothers' would be an obvious source of reliable crew members in view of the bonds liable to be forged by the early Irish practice of fosterage: 'The laws distinguish two types of fosterage. One is fosterage for affection (*altramm serce*) for which no fee is paid. The other type of fosterage is for a fee and is dealt with in the law-text *Cáin Íarraith* ... The arrangement to place a child in fosterage is a legal contract ... Strong links remain between a fosterfather and his fostersons ... The sagas provide many instances of the enduring bonds of loyalty between fosterparents and fosterchildren ... It is clear that the fosterparents' own children were often reared along with their fosterchildren. The resulting emotional bonds between fosterbrothers (*comaltai*) are referred to in the sagas and annals and are given a monetary value in the laws. According to the *Díre*-text, if a man is killed a fine ... is paid to his fosterbrother. This fine is payable in full only where the victim was reared in close intimacy with his fosterbrother i.e. "a fosterbrother of the same blanket and of the same same cup and of the same bed"' (KELLY 1988: 87–90; the translation being of *CIH* 439.16 (*i*) *comaltu noenbruit 7 oenchoid 7 oenleib*).

The prominence of the organised fee-paying "public school" type in early Irish legal material presumably reflects its real-life predominance in the historical period over the type of primary concern here, namely 'fosterage for love/affection' still represented as the norm in narrative literature. This seems to have been provided free of charge as a rule by overlords, friends or relatives. This last category typically belonged to the child's maternal kin, to judge from a reference (*CIH* 411.25–7) in the Old Irish legal tract *Cethairslicht Athgabálae to selb máithre nó selb altrama* 'property of the maternal kin or property of fosterage' and evidently distinct from *selb fine athardae* 'property of the paternal kin'. In an essentially patrilineal system of kinship and inheritance, fostering a boy (or girl) with the head or some other suitably senior member of the mother's family would be a means of cementing a useful supplementary bond with the child's maternal kin. Unless her father was still not only alive but also in good health, a brother would be the obvious choice, and BREMMER (1976) has assembled an array of Indian, Iranian, Hittite, Greek, Latin, Slavic, Germanic and Celtic evidence for an Indo-European practice of sending a young boy to be brought up for a time by his maternal uncle or grandfather.

Fosterage by a mother's brother can be associated with an institution known as the avunculate, which has attracted considerable anthropological attention

‘because the relationship between nephew and maternal uncle appears to have been the focus of significant elaboration in a great many primitive societies’ (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1963: 35). A basic principle governing this is that ‘in groups where familiarity characterizes the relationship between father and son, the relationship between maternal uncle and nephew is one of respect; and where the father stands as the austere representative of family authority, it is the uncle who is treated with familiarity’ (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1963: 37).¹ According to Tacitus (*Germania* §20), among the ancient Celts’ Germanic neighbours ‘the same esteem (*honor*) is accorded to sisters’ sons (*sororum filiis*) with the maternal uncle (*apud avunculum*) as with the father (*apud patrem*) (and) some regard this connection by [the mother’s] blood (*hunc nexum sanguinis*) as holier and closer and require it by preference in accepting hostages ... but each man’s own children (*sui cuique liberi*) are his heirs and successors (*heredes ... successoresque*) and there is no will (*et nullum testamentum*)’. It would follow from Lévi-Strauss’ thesis that a boy’s close bond with his maternal uncle among the ancient Germani should be matched by a more distant one with his father. The latter is attested for their Celtic neighbours about a century before Tacitus by Julius Caesar (*De bello Gallico* vi, 18, 3), who claims that the Gauls ‘do not allow their children, unless they have reached the age for assuming military duty, to approach them openly, and they consider it shameful for a son of boyish age (*puerili aetate*) to be present in public in his father’s sight’. In the same vein, a king of the Germanic Lombards observes in Paul the Deacon’s *Historia Langobardorum* (i, 23), a work admittedly written some seven centuries after Tacitus, ‘that it is not customary among us that a king’s son dine with his father unless he have previously received arms from the king of an outside nation’. Similarly, the aforementioned bond of affection usually obtaining in early medieval Ireland between a foster-father and his foster-son contrasted with a son’s strict subordination to his own father, to judge from the definition of the normal category of *mac béo-athar* ‘son of a living father’ called a *mac tee* ‘hot son’ as ‘a son who is in warm-maintenance [*tes-gaire*; BINCHY 1956: 229, n. 3] of his father in his proper constraints so that he does not control [his own] feet or hands’ (*CIH*

¹ This inverse correlation was first proposed by Radcliffe-Brown along with a further claim summarised as follows by LÉVI-STRAUSS (1963: 37): ‘In the final analysis, it is descent that determines the choice of oppositions. In patrilineal societies, where the father and the father’s descent group represent traditional authority, the maternal uncle is considered a “male mother” ... In matrilineal societies, the opposite occurs. Here, authority is vested in the maternal uncle, while relationships of tenderness and familiarity revolve about the father and his descent group’. LÉVI-STRAUSS raises doubts about whether this distribution always holds and argues that inclusion of the additional parameters of brother/sister, husband/wife and father/son support ‘a law which can be formulated as follows: the relation between maternal uncle and nephew is to the relation between brother and sister as the relation to father and son is to that between husband and wife’ (1963: 39). However, these further ramifications go beyond the basic point at issue here.

593.30–1; cf. THURNEISEN 1928: 11, §36, n. 4)² in the legal tract *Berrad Airechta*. Indeed, the institution of fosterage would of itself be conducive to a relatively distanced relationship between a father and his son(s) insofar as it entailed the latter spending the second half of his or their childhood away from home.

A significant relationship between a sister's son and his maternal uncle (or grandfather) is indicated by the admittedly rather vestigial survival of specific words for both in Old Irish, namely *nio* or *nia* 'sister's son' and *amnair* 'mother's brother'. The latter was almost obsolete by the Old Irish period, to judge not only from a mere two examples but also from the clarification of both as *bráthair máthar* 'mother's brother'.³ The former is more frequent, but hardly common, and is similarly liable to be clarified as *mac sethar* 'sister's son'.⁴ It is the regular outcome of PIE **népot-* with reflexes basically meaning 'grandson' in Indo-Iranian⁵ and Latin, 'nephew' or specifically 'sister's son' in Celtic as well as Germanic, and either in Baltic (*NIL* 520–4).

BENVENISTE (1969: 224–5) discusses PIE **auos* (**h₂eu-h₂o-s* in modern laryngealised notation) underlying Hitt. *huhḫaš*, Lat. *avus* and Arm. *haw* (all meaning 'grandfather') and two derivatives, namely **au-ios* meaning 'uncle' in Balto-Slavic (OCS *ujb*, OPruss. *awis*; plus a further derivative in Lith. *avýnas* 'maternal uncle') but 'grandson' in Celtic (OIr. *aue*) and **au-en-* in Germanic (ONorse *afi* 'grandfather', supported by Goth. *awô* 'grandmother' and, assuming a derivation from **auun-haimaz*, OHG *oheim*, OEng. *ēam* 'uncle') and (with the further

² The following formal alternative has been suggested to me by Jürgen Uhlich: 'As Thurneysen points out, understanding *cos na lam* in *cona coimdether cos na lam* (*CIH* 593.31) as singular would require acc. *cois na lāim*, but even his suggestion of taking them as plural would need to assume a Slavonic-style negative object in the genitive. Instead, his comparison is *eiside nad comathar cos na lam* (*CIH* 1609.10–11; similarly 655.9 and 2325.20 and hence hardly "1. *coimdether*", THURNEISEN 1928: 11, §36, n. 4) suggests a passive verb: there is no contextual justification for taking *-comathar* as the (typically deponent) subjunctive of *con-oí* "preserves, keeps" – as there is in all other such cases listed erroneously as indicatives in *DIL* s.v. *con-oí* –, and the passage seems best rendered as "it is the latter by whom neither foot nor hand is preserved", with *cos na lām* as regular nominatives. Transferring this to *cona coimdether cos na lam* under consideration will yield an elliptic, but grammatically regular "so that neither foot nor hand is controlled [by him]".

³ *amnair bráthair máthar*, Sg. 61a21, glossing Lat. *auunculus* (STOKES & STRACHAN 1903: 114), and, in the Old Irish Life of Saint Brigit, in *druí 7 brathair a mathar ... amnair in druad ... avunculus magi* (Ó HAODHA 1978: ll. 15, 27, 31).

⁴ E.g. by Cormac mac Cuilennáin (†908, *AU*; MAC AIRT & MAC NIOCAILL 1983: 356) in his glossary (MEYER 1912: 81, no. 959): [*N*]ia.i. *mac sethar, ut dixit Cū Chulainn profetans de Christi aduentu ...: Nia duine tiucfae (.i. mac sethar duine tiucfae). Ipse est Iesus 'Nia* i.e. sister's son, as Cū Chulainn said when prophesying Christ's coming ...: "A *nia* of man will come, i.e. a sister's son of man will come". He is Jesus'.

⁵ And, surely, once also 'nephew' or even 'sister's son' on the evidence of Ved. *náptar-*, Av. *naptar-* 'nephew', a secondary derivative modelled on kinship terms in *-tar-* (cf. *NIL* 521 & 524, n. 29).

addition of *-tro-*) Welsh *ewyth(y)r*, Breton *eontr* ‘uncle’ (also OCorn. *euitar*⁶). This and a discussion of **nepot-* (BENVENISTE 1969: 231–4) lead him to conclude (1969: 269) that ‘just as **awos* had a dual value and represented two relationships located differently according to a patri- or matri-lineal standpoint, so the term attached to it, **nepōt-*, fluctuates between the sense “nephew” (sister’s son) and “grandson” (son’s son)’. The semantic priority of ‘grandson’ advocated by CHARLES-EDWARDS (1970–2) has been cogently criticised by Ó CATHASAIGH (1986: 137–9), who draws the following persuasive conclusion: ‘(1) Common Celtic **neüss* meant “grandson” or “sister’s son”. (2) A new word **awios* was coined for “grandson”. (3) *neüss* ceased to mean “grandson” and retained the meaning “sister’s son”, which was subsequently generalised to any sibling’s son in British (e.g. MW *nei* ‘nephew’).

LEIA (A-103–4 s.v. *aue*) posits a derivative **aṽon-* underlying Lat. *avunculus* ‘maternal uncle’ and the British as well as the OHG and OE forms above. However, OIr. *amnair* (A-67) ‘mother’s brother’ is ‘an old word fallen out of use, doubtless derived from an item of infant language (cf. *ammait*) by endowing it with the inflexion of a kinship term (cf. *athir*), but the detail of the formation is not clear’. Ó CATHASAIGH (1986: 135) reflected the state of play at the time when remarking that ‘Old Irish *amnair* “mother’s brother” is not normally brought into the discussion by the comparatists, and its etymology has not yet been established’. It has since been argued (McCONE 1992: 103–6) that **-īr* extrapolated from basic kinship terms segmented as **at-/*māt-/*brāt-īr* (> OIr. *athair* ‘father’, *máthair* ‘mother’, *bráthair* ‘brother’) had been added to *amn-* < **abn-* < **aṽn-* (cf. OIr. *úath* ‘terror’ < **ou̯-tu-* but *omun* ‘fear’ < **omno-* < **obno-* seen in Gaulish/Leponic ESOPNOS [LEJEUNE 1970: 406, 410] /εχς-obnos/ ‘fearless’ < **ou̯-no-*), whereas in British **aṽon-* had been augmented by **-tīr* through an equally viable alternative segmentation (e.g. **brā-tīr* ‘brother’ > OBret. *brotr*, MW *brawt*).⁷ These divergent extensions of different stems (“weak” **amn-* and “strong” **aṽon-*) in Goedelic and British point to an as yet unextended Insular Celtic *n*-stem sg. nom. **aṽ-ū*, acc. **aṽ-on-æ̃n* (see McCONE 1996: 78–9, on the ending), gen. **ab-n-os* (< **aṽ-n-os*) ‘maternal uncle’ which, like the other kinship terms just mentioned, had preserved an “amphikinetic” pattern of suffixal ablaut remarkably well.⁸ Latin *avunculus* “maternal uncle” < **awon-* ... plus diminutive **-tlo-* ... presumably once stood in the same relation to a [since lost]

⁶ Thus the reading reported by GRAVES (1962: 85) and CAMPANILE (1974: 44), as against ‘*euitar*’ in *IEW* I, 37, 89. The manuscript (see https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_vespasian_a_xiv_f007r, f. 7r34 = third line from bottom) reads *euitar* with the Latin *er* compendium.

⁷ On the obvious assumption that the regular reflex is seen in the OB form, MW *brawt* may be put down to analogical loss of *-r* through analysis of the *-er* of *brod-er* ‘brothers’ as a separate plural suffix in a relationship similar to that between, say, pl. *ych-en* ‘oxen’ and sg. *ych* ‘ox’.

⁸ Cf. the *n*-stems of Germanic, where ‘most masculines and a few inherited neuters seem to reflect a PIE amphikinetic type ..., with nom. sg. (and neuter acc. sg.) in **-ō*

base **avō*, gen. **avinis* as can still be seen in diminutive *homunculus* vis à vis *homō*, *hominis* “man”, and the aforementioned Germanic forms can be derived from the same underlying *n*-stem with a shift of meaning to ‘grandfather’ (McCONE 1992: 104).

The identification of British and Italic cognates of *amnair* provides additional linguistic corroboration of Ó CATHASAIGH’s (1986: 145) contention that ‘the very existence of the words *amnair* and *nia*’ implies ‘that the avunculate was an institution in early Ireland’. That said, the limited occurrence of both, especially *amnair*, suggests that by the 8th and 9th centuries the maternal uncle’s key role was past a prime apparently stretching back to the Proto-Celtic period and beyond (arguably as far as PIE itself; cf. Ó CATHASAIGH 1986: 135) and even on the way out.

II. Two early accounts of the birth of the mac-cóem and gor-mac Cú Chulainn

As far as textual evidence is concerned, ‘the bond between Cú Chulainn and his maternal uncle Conchobor, as it is depicted in the Ulster sagas, offers a case in point ... There were, however, two traditions regarding Cú Chulainn’s relationship to Conchobor, each of them being represented in a version of *Com-pert Con Culainn* (Cú Chulainn’s Birth-tale). In both versions, Cú Chulainn’s mother is Dechtine (or Dechtire), but in Version I she is Conchobor’s daughter, in Version II his sister ... It has been suggested that the relationship between Conchobor and Dechtine was changed by the redactor of Version II because he was confused by the kinship terminology of Version I, but the argument does not stand up, since the passage which is said to have occasioned the confusion does not actually occur in Version I’ (Ó CATHASAIGH 1986: 135–6).

Since both versions of *Com-pert Con Culainn* (CCC) are plausibly dated to the 8th century AD and ‘II’ in particular contains features of relevance to the present study’s concern with a nexus involving *altram* ‘fosterage’, *nia* (also *gor-mac*, discussed below) ‘sister’s son’ and *mac(-)cóem* (literally ‘dear son’), a closer look seems to be called for. In brief prefaces to his summaries of CCC I and II, THURNEYSEN (1921: 268 and 271) notes (a) that the former has six main manuscript witnesses, although the “H-interpolator” has replaced I’s brief concluding reference to the boy’s fosterage with II’s quite different longer account

< PIE **ō*, a suffix alternant **-in-* in the gen. and dat. sg. that can only reflect PIE loc. sg. **-én*, and suffix alternants **-n-* and **-an-* (reflecting PIE **-on-*) generalized in most other forms’ (RINGE 2006: 196–7, cf. 2017: 221). McCONE (1994) reconstructs Insular Celtic suffixal ablaut nom. sg. **-tīr*, acc. sg. / nom. pl. **-ter-* and otherwise **-tr-* (subsequently spread to the nom. pl. in Goedlic) directly continuing similarly distributed PIE **-tēr*, **-ter-* and **-tr-* on the basis of the British ‘brother’ forms in the preceding note and, with the help of refinements to the rules of palatalisation (McCONE 1996: 115–18), the paradigms of OIr. *ath(a)ir* ‘father’, *máth(a)ir* ‘mother’ and *bráth(a)ir* ‘brother’.

in the earliest of these (LU, albeit with subsequent loss of the page containing much of the finale added by H), but (b) that the sole significant witness to the latter is Egerton 1782, where it directly follows a considerably reworded text of I. WINDISCH (1880: 134–45, 324–5) published LU's interpolated text with the corresponding parts of the texts of CCC I and II (namely its conclusion, including the second half lost in LU) in Eg. 1782 placed underneath (136–42) and then (143–5) the first part of the latter's text of II up to the final fosterage episode. THURNEYSSEN (1912: 31–41 = DE BERNARDO STEMPEL & KÖDDERITZSCH 1991: 616–26) presented his restoration of the original text of I from the available manuscript versions, while VAN HAMEL (1933: 1–8) basically gave LU's text with its missing ends of I and II supplied from the former's other ms. witnesses and Eg. 1782 / D. 4. 2 respectively.

THURNEYSSEN (1921: 268) deemed CCC I 'one of our earliest documents because it has been taken from the Book of Druim Snechta' (an early 8th-century MS or at least directly copied from one according to THURNEYSSEN 1921: 16). However, he also (1921: 271) ascribed CCC II to the Old Irish period (8th or 9th century AD) and did not express a clear opinion about its relationship with I. By contrast, VAN HAMEL (1933: 1) opted firmly for dependence: 'Version II ... represents an enlarged form of version I and must be later (perhaps later eighth or ninth century)', a claim hardly applicable to the body of their narratives and so presumably based upon the marked difference in length as well as content between their concluding accounts of Cú Chulainn's fostering. The two extant versions seem to be more or less contemporary chronologically and there are no obvious thematic grounds for regarding CCC II as the somewhat later reworking of I envisaged by van Hamel. In view of the significant clerical manipulation implied by the observation that the outlandish triple 'genesis of the Ulster hero *par excellence* [in I] can hardly be understood except as an orthodox allegory and "native" typology of Christ's mysterious incarnation as set forth in the New Testament' (McCONE 1990: 199), it seems reasonable to frame a working hypothesis that CCC II is closer than I to a traditional account of Cú Chulainn's origins. The next step is to test it, references below being to van Hamel's text of I and Windisch's of II.

At the beginning of CCC II (143, ll. 1–3), 'Conchobor's sister Dechtire eloped in a company of fifty maidens without asking leave of the Ulaid and Conchobor (*luid Deictair siur Concubuir coecait ingen for aithed dichmaircc hUlaid ocus Concobuir*)' and they were sought in vain for three years. They then visited the plain of Emain as a flock of birds (*i rict enlaithe*) and grazed it bare. CCC I starts with a similarly destructive visit by birds, and both versions go on in broad agreement, notwithstanding substantial differences in wording and other details, to describe how the warriors of Ulster⁹ (rather remarkably including Dechtine as her father Conchobor's *arae* 'charioteer' in I, §1) chased after them,

⁹ A large group in I, §1 but, apart from Conchobor himself, only Conall (Cernach), Lóegaire and Bricriu are mentioned by name (Eg. 1782 adding Fergus mac Roich and

found a humble dwelling and were entertained by a couple there for the night, although it had disappeared the following morning (I, §§2–4; II, 143, l. 6 – 145, l. 14). In I, the woman of the house bore a son (*birt mac*), Dechtine fostered the boy (*alt Deichtine in mac*, §3) and brought him back to Emain, where he is fostered (*alair*) until prematurely succumbing to a fatal disease, Dechtine being duly distressed at the demise of her foster-son (*díth a daltai*, §4). She then became pregnant after ingesting a small creature in a drink and saw a man in her sleep that night. He said that she would be pregnant from him and had been led by him to his dwelling, identified himself as the father of her fosterling, who had returned¹⁰ to her womb and would be called Sétantae, and named himself as Lug mac Ethnenn (§5). When her subsequent pregnancy gave rise to suspicion that she had been impregnated by her father Conchobor, the latter betrothed her to Sualdaim mac Roich. She, however, was ashamed of her condition and aborted the child on her way to her husband-to-be, became pregnant again and bore a son (*birt mac*). Culann the smith took him and was his foster-father (*aite*). The lad (*gillae*) later killed the smith's hound while playing (*oc cluichiu*) and undertook to serve as his hound (*cú*), thereby earning the name Cú Chulainn (§6).

In CCC II, by contrast, Bricriu went out of the small house where the Ulstermen were lodged and found a fine house containing a fair young man (*oglach ... coem*), who revealed that the fifty missing maidens, including Dechtine, were within and that it was they who had visited Emain as a flock of birds to lure the Ulstermen into a visit (144, ll. 10–27). Bricriu returned to the first dwelling and told Conchobor of the glorious queen (*rigon*) and band of women whom he had found, while mischievously failing to mention that the former was Conchobor's own sister (*a síur-sium*) (144, l. 28 – 145, l. 6). Conchobor then claimed the right to sleep with her and sent Fergus to deliver this message. She came

Celtchair mac Uithechair; WINDISCH 1880: 136, ll. 24–5) and the only further specific reference is to Conall and Bricriu going to seek lodging (§3). In II (143, ll. 6–9) nine chariots are mentioned and six Ulstermen are specified, namely Conchobor, Bricriu and the quartet of Senchae mac Ailella, Blai Briugu, Fergus mac Roig and Amorgin who later compete to foster the child. Only Fergus (144, ll. 4–10, and 145, ll. 8–12), Bricriu (144, l. 10 – 145, l. 6) and Conchobor (145, ll. 6–14) figure in the rest of the action prior to the final competition over fosterage.

¹⁰ The verbal form *totharlæ* is analysed as follows by VAN HAMEL (1933: 170): ‘**do-tarlæ**, *he came*, lit. *It threw him*. **Tarlæ**, from **do-ralæ**, **do-rala** is the perf. of **do-cuiriu** ... In **do-tharlæ** another **do-**is prefixed’. While replication of *to-* is a well-known Middle Irish development (McCONE 1997: 194–7), it seems unlikely in so old a text, particularly in combination with “archaic” pretonic *to-* for *do-*. The form is rather to be analysed as *tatharlæ*, the perfect of *do:ath-chuirethar* ‘puts back’ or (trans./intrans.) ‘returns’ displaying an independent prototonic form common in Old Irish with verbs with a first preverb *to-*, *ro-* or *fo-* followed by a vowel (McCONE 1979: 4–10 and 1997: 3–4). This is of some significance, since it explicitly makes the second child a reincarnation of the first and thereby raises a similar possibility for the third (Sétantae, later Cú Chulainn) in relation to the second (due to be named Sétantae).

with him, but pleaded pregnancy (? : *galar noited* = *galar n-oíted*, lit. ‘youthful ailment’) and was granted respite (*dal*) (145, ll. 10–12). After a night’s sleep, the party awoke ‘and saw something: the little dear-son (*in maccoem m-becc*) in Conchobor’s bosom’ (145, ll. 13–14 = 140, ll. 18–20). The king instructed his sister Findchóem to take the boy (*in mac*). When she declared her affection for him to be as strong as that for her own son Conall, Bricriu finally came clean by stating ‘there is little between them for you – that is the son of your full sister (*do derbsethur*)’ and Conchobor repeated his instruction (140, l. 20 – 141, l. 17). Senchae, Blái, Fergus and Amorgin then in turn staked their claims to foster the boy (141, l. 18 – 142, l. 10). There was general consent to Senchae’s suggestion that Findchóem take the lad (*in mac*) to Emain for Morann’s judgment (142, ll. 11–13). Morann’s decision was that Conchobor should be his disposer since Findchóem was the first fosterer (*cét-aicce*), Senchae should teach him eloquence, Blái Briugu should feed him, he should be borne to Fergus’ knee, [Findchóem’s husband] Amorgin should be his foster-father (*aite*), [his and Findchóem’s son] Conall his foster-brother (*comaltae*) and Findchóem’s breast ‘his mother’s two breasts (*dí chích a máthar*)’. He would thus be a man of many parts and friends, and a great avenger and protector. This was agreed and ‘Amorgin and Findchóem take him so that he was fostered/brought up (*co n-alt*) in Dún Imbrith in Mag Muirthemne’ (142, ll. 14–24; Irish forms cited from §7 of van Hamel’s somewhat normalised text).

Notwithstanding a rather abrupt shift from the infant Cú Chulainn’s emergence, itself quite sudden, to the issue of fosterage,¹¹ CCC II’s narrative is generally coherent and the birds are not only well integrated into it but also reflect a motif (perhaps inherited from PIE) of interchangeability between avian and human form attested in a number of other tales (McCONE 2020: 150–2 and 157). It clearly implies that Dechtire had been made pregnant by a denizen of the supernatural dwelling in which she was staying, presumably the *óclach*, thereby giving the infant Sétantae (later Cú Chulainn) a typical half-mortal and half-immortal heroic pedigree¹² and making him a sister’s son to King Conchobor

¹¹ Although the dwellings’ disappearance on the morrow is not explicitly mentioned in II unlike I, it is at least implied. That said, Findchóem’s sudden introduction in II is distinctly awkward since her participation in the expedition would be strange and, indeed, has not been mentioned hitherto. H’s addition (§7 in van Hamel’s edition) to the LU text begins with an erasure after *birt mac* beginning with ‘and he is called Sétantae (7 *doberar Setanta fair*; LU 10611–12) and then referring to a gathering in Emain when the boy was born that engendered a dispute about who should foster the lad (*in mac*) and submission of the matter to Conchobor’s judgment (LU 10613–15). It is not clear whether this was H’s own transition between the original LU text and his addition or had been dropped from II on the way to the version in Eg. 1782. Thereafter LU and Eg. 1782 join at Conchobor’s instruction to Findchóem to take the boy and then continue in tandem until LU’s text runs out owing to damage to one leaf and loss of another.

¹² E.g. Heracles (McCONE 2022: 207–8 and 223), Romulus and Remus (WISEMAN 1995: 1–2, 56–61, 165), Asdiwal and Conaire (McCONE 1990: 187, 192).

and, by extension, his Ulaid subjects. The new-born child is quite neutrally and conventionally designated *mac* ‘son, boy’ throughout I, and also in II after his dramatic first appearance there in his maternal uncle Conchobor’s bosom as a foundling strikingly referred to as ‘the little *mac-cóem*’, of which more anon. Because of his mother’s disappearance immediately after his birth, his fosterage in II was unusual insofar as it called for a wet-nurse as well as a foster-mother. These roles were performed at his maternal uncle’s behest by another member of the child’s maternal kin, namely Findchóem in her capacity as sister to Dechtire and Conchobor. Although several other claimants were awarded responsibility for specific aspects of Sétantae’s upbringing, the text makes it quite clear that Findchóem’s husband Amorgin and son Conall Cernach were to be his *aite* ‘foster-father’ and *comaltae* ‘foster-brother’ and it was to the home of Amorgin and Findchóem that he was duly taken to be reared.

It is hard to see how or why the bulk of CCC I’s account, the attestation of which in several manuscripts indicates recognition as the standard version, would or should have been deliberately remodelled to the first half of CCC II’s narrative, which ultimately survives in Eg. 1782 only and even there as an alternative appended with the following heading to a text of I: *Coimpert Conculaind dana innisi síos secundum alios i. Feis tigi Becfoltaig* (WINDISCH 1880: 143) ‘Compert Con Culainn narrated below according to others, i.e. the overnight stay of/in Becfoltach’s house’ (THURNEYSSEN 1921: 271) or rather, in the absence of anyone called Becfoltach in the tale, ‘of/in a poor man’s house’ or more likely ‘of/in a poorly appointed house’ (*bec-foltach* ‘having little wealth/substance [*folud*]’). Since II’s concluding episode revolving around the issue of fosterage conformed to what was, or at least became, a standard view that Cú Chulainn and Conall Cernach were *comaltai* ‘foster-brothers’ (e.g. THURNEYSSEN 1921: 93, KIMPTON 2009: l. 436), there was an obvious reason to substitute it for I’s aberrant and perfunctory designation of Culann as his foster-father (*aite*). That said, the possibility of doing this without significant changes to the preceding narrative is well exemplified by the H-interpolator’s alteration to the LU text of CCC I. Given the abrupt nature of the transition to the issue of fosterage in the sole surviving full version of II, one could argue that it originally lacked that concluding episode and simply ended on the dramatic climax of the disappearance of Dechtire and her companions after depositing the new-born *mac-cóem* in her brother Conchobor’s bosom as a precious supernatural gift, namely a sister’s son destined to become a mighty hero and save the Ulaid from the assaults of their enemies. That would imply that the dispute about fosterage originated as an independent narrative beginning similarly to H’s intro in LU with an assembly at Emain Machae when Dechtire’s son was born and a contention about who should foster him, which was referred to Conchobor’s judgment.¹³ If so, it will have been incorporated into II by simply adding Blaí, Senchae and Amor-

¹³ In effect, LU 10613–15 (or the opening lines of §7 in van Hamel’s edition) with omission of introductory *is and sin* and specification of *in mac*.

gin to the participants in the bird-chase, locating the rivalry over fostering the child *in situ* by omitting the short intro and including Findchóem among the group without explanation,¹⁴ and motivating their subsequent return to Emain by Conchobor's desire for Morann's adjudication of the dispute. Alternatively, all of these characters and features could have been present from the start, or at least most of them on the assumption that some may have found their way into CCC II between its initial composition along with the final fosterage episode and the surviving Eg. 1782 version.

It remains to consider the viability of deriving CCC I from an older narrative basically similar to II, chiefly by elaborating its relatively straightforward but rather allusively handled single conception and birth into a more specific three-stage process, thereby inviting comparison with and contemplation of Christ's progress from full divinity through divine impregnation of his human mother to a fully human incarnation. As pointed out by Ó CATHASAIGH (1986: 131–3 and 142–3), Christ's status as the divinely sired son of a human mother gave rise to a conceit that he was related to her people, the Jews, or more generally to all mankind as a sister's son. This is expressed straightforwardly in an 8th-century poem¹⁵ foretelling Christ's coming put into Cú Chulainn's mouth in his death-tale: *nia doíne ticfa* (KIMPTON 2009: l. 543; cf. note 4 above) 'a sister's son of mankind will come'. Whether by accident or design, CCC II's narrative made it possible to view the mysteriously sired Cú Chulainn as a sister's son of the Ulaid in much the same way that Christ had been cast as the sister's son of the Jews or of mankind as a whole. This would constitute a plausible but hardly indispensable trigger for CCC I's more ambitious analogy with Christ, which was itself a symptom, or perhaps even the cause, of a broader tendency to draw parallels between the lives of the saviour of the Ulaid and the saviour of mankind (cf. McCONE 1990: 197–9).

A necessary first step towards making Cú Chulainn's conception and birth resonate with Christ's incarnation was to introduce an entirely supernatural first phase. This took the form of a son born to the couple encountered by the Ulaid as a result of chasing nine score otherworldly birds paired by silver chains (a number perhaps suggested by the nine chariots pursuing them in II with its implicit fifty birds) or, in the case of their two leaders (presumably the couple in disguise), a silver yoke (§2). Dechtine/Dechtire, of course, could not be the boy's mother at this stage as in CCC II and instead acted as his foster-mother (§§3–4; Findchóem thus being otiose and absent from CCC I), having been rather improbably brought on the expedition as Conchobor's *arae* or chariot-driver (§1). In both versions the couple's dwelling in which the Ulaid passed the

¹⁴ If II had been developed directly from I, the obvious solution would have been to make Findchóem Conchobor's charioteer instead of his daughter or other sister Dechtire.

¹⁵ The citation in Cormac's Glossary (note 4 above) gives a 9th-century *terminus post quem non* and KIMPTON (2009: 8) dates the text (*Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne*) containing it to 'the early eighth century'.

night was at first sight modest: a small house near a grand one accommodating Dechtire's household and visited only by Bricriu in II, and in I (§3) a house that appeared confined (*cumung*) and lacking in the basic necessities (*cen brat cen biad* 'without clothing, without food'; MCMANUS 2020: 23–6) when visited by Bricriu and Conall only but subsequently proved to have more than enough room and provisions for the whole company of Ulaid when they turned up (see now MCMANUS 2020: 5–8). In II Dechtire came to the small house while pregnant, while in I the woman entered labour in a rear storeroom (*cuile*), was joined there by Dechtine and bore a son (§3). Whereas in II Bricriu plays a significant role in keeping with his characteristically malicious nature in the Ulster Cycle (THURNEYSSEN 1921: 93–4), his specific presence in I is less well motivated¹⁶ and so might plausibly be regarded as a vestige of II.

The supernaturally sired boy's premature death (CCCI, §4) paved the way for an intermediate half-supernatural and half-human conception analogous to Mary's conception of a son named Jesus through the Holy Spirit in accordance with an angel's announcement to her (Luke 1:26–38). A man appeared in a dream to Dechtire and announced that she would be pregnant from him, that he had sired her foster-son, now 'restored' to her womb (note 10 above) as her own, and that the child's name would be Sétantae and his own was Lug mac Ethnenn (§5). The otherworldly father's identity was thus eventually revealed in I, unlike II. In CCC II, Conchobor almost committed incest with his sister inadvertently but was prevented by her indisposition, while in CCC I the issue of incest arose as a widespread suspicion that Dechtire's pregnancy had been Conchobor's doing since it was his habit to lie with her (§6). This provided the motive for Conchobor's decision to betroth her to Sualdaim mac Roich (§6), who was thus cast in the role of apparent human father (§6) like Joseph in the New Testament. However, Dechtire's decision to abort the child before marrying him at least implied that the son finally born to her (§6) was Sualdaim's too and hence a full-blooded Ulsterman in I instead of being related to the Ulaid through his mother only as in II. It is worth noting that the latter relationship would account quite straightforwardly for Cú Chulainn's exemption from the debility known as *ces* (*noíden* or *noínden*) (THURNEYSSEN 1921: 97) that periodically befell all men of the Ulaid, whereas Sualdaim's involvement makes his and his son's immunity to this a good deal harder to explain (JASKI 1999: 9–10).

The child is referred to as *in mac* (or *in mac-cóem* just once) throughout CCC II, including the final episode concerning his fosterage, and is never mentioned by name, presumably because this was felt to be obvious from the context, not least his mother's identification as Conchobor's sister Dechtire. In I,

¹⁶ Since it was Bricriu who declared the house unsuitable in I, this action might be interpreted as a maliciously mendacious attempt to discourage the Ulaid from seeking hospitality there. However, this possibility may be safely discounted because Bricriu not only shared their general urgent need for lodging but had also been accompanied on the first visit by Conall, who could have gainsaid any misrepresentation of the house's prospects.

by contrast, her otherworldly visitor announced that her son would be called Sétantae (*bid Setantae a ainm*, §5; cf. the angel Gabriel's instruction to Mary *et vocabis nomen eius Iesum*, Luke 1:31) and (except in *LU* owing to H's new ending) its very last words are his subsequent name, Cú Chulainn, after a brief reference to his acquisition of it as a result of killing Culann the smith's hound (*cú*). Luke's Gospel records that, when it was time for his circumcision eight days after birth, Mary's child was duly given the angelically imposed name Jesus (*vocatum est nomen eius Iesus*, 2:21), but only two ms. witnesses of *CCCI* mention the actual bestowal of the name Sétantae upon Dechtire's child (*LU* 10611–12, and Eg. 1782 at WINDISCH 1880: 140, l. 15).

The same two manuscripts' texts of *CCCI* agree with II in making Dechtine/Dechtire Conchobor's sister, whereas she was his daughter according to the other four witnesses. THURNEYSSEN (1921: 268) regarded the latter feature as 'perhaps old' in relation to Dechtire's status as Conchobor's sister elsewhere and certainly the original in *CCCI*, where 'LU and Eg. 1782 change that to "sister" (following the later view), the result being the absurdity that Conchobor sleeps with his sister (§3) (268–9, n. 8, on 'Tochter', i.e. 'daughter', in the plot summary). It seems far from clear why sleeping with a sister rather than a daughter should be absurd as such, but VAN HAMEL (1933: 3, §1, n. 5 on *a ingen*) shared the opinion that 'from version II [L]U has adopted the notion that D. is the king's sister, not his daughter'.

While 'sister' in the Eg. 1782 text of I might be put down to an accommodation to the text of *CCC II* appended to it in that ms., II is far from obvious as a source¹⁷ for its occurrence as nom. *a fiur* (*LU* 10563), acc. *a fiair* 'his sister' (*LU* 10608) in the earliest ms. version of *CCCI*. The inherited lenition of *s* < **sy* to *f* < **hy* (OIr. *siur* < PC **suesür*; *GOI* 84–5 and *NIL* 680–3) was synchronically anomalous and hence liable to be replaced later by normal *s* /*h*/ (e.g. *a siur-sium* in *CCC II*/Eg. 1782 above from WINDISCH 1880: 144, l. 32; cf. *a síl* 'his offspring' corresponding to *síl* 'seed, offspring' < PC **sílom*). Indeed, a spelling like *a fiur* 'his sister' in the same text (*LU* 10607) may be ascribed to a compromise on the part of the main scribe (M) between *a fiur* in his source and *a siur* in normal current usage.¹⁸ That being so, even if *a fiur* had replaced original *a ingen*, it seems unlikely that M himself was responsible. According to the opening of I §6 (van Hamel's text, ignoring a certain amount of trivial variation between the different MSS), *ba torrach didiu ind ingen* (all MSS) ... *domét ba ó Chonchubur tre mesci, ar ba leis no foed ind ingen* (*LU* / Eg. 1782 *a fiur/fiur*). *Arrenaisc iarom*

¹⁷ Admittedly, in the first of his *macnámra*, the infant Cú Chulainn describes himself to Conchobor as *Setanta mac Sualtaim ... mac Dechtere do phetharsu* (*LU* 4892–3), but that would hardly constitute an overwhelming reason to change forms of *ingen* 'daughter' to corresponding ones of *siur* 'sister' in the *LU*-text of *CCC* or, for that matter, the reverse substitution of *ingine* for *phethar* here on the model of *CCCI*.

¹⁸ Cf. acc. *a fiair* 'his sister' (*LU* 10626) referring to Findchóem in the concluding H-interpolated fosterage episode and corresponding *a fiair* in Eg. 1782 (WINDISCH 1880: 141, l. 17).

Conchubur a ingen (LU *a fiair*, Eg. 1782 *in ingen*) *do Súaldaim mac Róich* ‘the girl, then, was pregnant ... it was thought that this was from Conchobor through drunkenness, for it was with him that the girl (/his sister) used to sleep. Conchobor then betrothed his daughter (/his sister/the girl) to Súaldaim mac Roig’. The original reading here was obviously *ind ingen* ‘the girl, maiden’ in the first sentence. If *a fiur* was the original reading in the second, it would be natural enough for *ind ingen* to spread from the first to the second sentence in a group of later mss. The same group would then have replaced original *a fiair* by *a ingen* in the third sentence, this time with a retained possessive entailing ‘his daughter’ for the first time. If so, *in ingen* ‘the girl’ will have replaced *a fiair* independently in or on the way to Eg. 1782. Alternatively, this could be taken as evidence for original *in(n) ingen* ‘the girl’, subsequently replaced by *a fiair* ‘his sister’ in LU and *a ingen* ‘his daughter’ in the other group. However, the latter’s possessive is then harder to motivate and there are good linguistic reasons for ascribing *a fiair* to the original Old Irish text of CCC I. Where *a ingen* had established itself in §6, consistency would call for *a ingen* and *dia hathair* in §1, where Conchobor was seated in his chariot with Dechtine *a fiur* (LU; Eg. 1782 *a siur*; other MSS *a ingen*) in her capacity as chariot-driver (*arae*) ‘to her brother’ (LU *dia bráthair*; omitted in Eg. 1782; *dia hathair* ‘to her father’ in other MSS). Although a detailed stemma of the extant MS versions would need to be established for a definite answer, it seems most likely on the available evidence that Dechtine was originally Conchobor’s sister in CCC I as well as CCC II but, in the former, became his daughter in a group of four rather late MSS as a result of understandable contamination within a small stretch of text and in conformity with a well-attested alternative pattern of legendary incest (McCONE 1990: 192–3).

After discussing Cú Chulainn’s mother, THURNEYSSEN (1921: 90–1) turns to the hero’s paternity: ‘His father is, in the first instance, a supernatural being, the elf Lug mac Ethnenn or Ethlenn. Besides this, Cú Chulainn is also called *mac Sualdaim* or *Sualtaim*, because his mother has an Ulsterman as her human husband ... Since the form *mac Soa(i)lte*, *Soalta* also occurs for this on occasion and Cú Chulainn is addressed as *a gein Loga soalta* “o well-fostered offspring of Lug” in Aided Con Culainn (ch. 63), K. Meyer suggests that his father’s name derives from this epithet. This would need to have happened very early as the very old text ch. 13 I [CCC I] already knows of his father Sualdaim’. Whether or not CCC I first identified the supernatural father as Lug, the human father lacking in CCC II was indispensable to the scheme of three successive conceptions along a supernatural → human axis elaborated by the author of CCC I. That being so, there is something to be said for Meyer’s suggestion that his name was extrapolated from an expression such as *mac soaltae* ‘well-fostered boy’ by interpreting it as *mac Soaltai* and then removing ambiguity by slightly modifying it to *mac Sualtaim* ‘son of S’. Since the application of a stock epithet *soaltae* to Cú Chulainn would imply unusually comprehensive fosterage arrangements of the type envisaged in H’s addition to the LU text of CCC I and

the conclusion of CCC II in its extant form in Eg. 1782, it would seem to follow from Meyer's proposal that a narrative centring upon Findchóem and others was already in existence, most likely as the final part of CCC II, when CCC I was composed.

If so, its content was ignored by its author in favour of a brief conclusion making the smith Culann foster-father (*aite*) to the boy and mentioning the slaughter of the former's hound (*cú*) as the reason for the latter's renaming as Cú Chulainn. THURNEYSSEN (1921: 268) regarded this unique version as an archaism: 'Cú Chulainn does not come to the smith by chance, as the Táin ... represents it, but the latter is the young hero's foster-father, as is the case ... in the Germanic saga of Siegfried-Sigurð, [and this is] certainly the original [arrangement]'. Although reasonable at first sight, this view is not without difficulty: in the extant account (uncontradicted by the bare notice in CCC I) in the last but one of Cú Chulainn's *mac-gnímrada* in TBC I (ll. 540–607), the motive for the hound's attack was the lad's delayed arrival at Culann's homestead as a stranger without prior warning, surely an inconceivable situation if he was Culann's own foster-son. It seems more likely that the main aim of following the boy's birth (and naming as Sétantae, perhaps; see note 10 above) with a perfunctory mention of Culann taking him into fosterage was to provide a neat transition to a notice of the hound's death as the key to bestowal of the name Cú Chulainn borne by him thereafter. As a result, CCC I ended on a fitting climax with that resoundingly heroic name. Culann's fostering role thus looks more like a well motivated innovation on the part of CCC I's author than an archaism.

There are, then, grounds for regarding Thurneysen's CCC I as a slightly later but quite major remodelling of his CCC II. The latter would then be the earliest extant account of Cú Chulainn's conception and birth, the mystery of which was enhanced by an allusive approach to certain key aspects such as the father's identity, the child's name, the birth itself and the disappearance of the houses and their inhabitants, including the boy's mother Dechtire. This narrative, which was understandably characterised as *etwas verschwommen* 'somewhat vague' by THURNEYSSEN (1921: 271), had probably already been endowed with certain Christian resonances. Its representation of the child abandoned by its mother as, in effect, a sister's son of Conchobor and the Ulaid would not only make the issue of his fostering a pressing concern but may also have deliberately echoed an early medieval Irish concept of Christ as a sister's son of the Jews specifically and mankind generally. Although the supernatural dwelling that was there one day and gone on the morrow seems to have been a traditional motif (cf. MCCONE 2020: 146), the juxtaposition of a virtual palace and the humble house (*tech mbec(fóltach)*) visited by the pregnant Dechtire was liable to recall the circumstances of Christ's birth¹⁹ (cf. MCMANUS 2020: 6). If, as deemed possible above, a party of just three leading Ulstermen (Conchobor,

¹⁹ In a manger because there was no room at the inn according to Luke (2:7), a scenario

Fergus and Bricriu) were originally led by birds to an encounter with the newly born Cú Chulainn in CCC II, a further biblical parallel may have been envisaged, namely the *magi* with their three gifts led by a star to the baby Jesus (Matthew 2: 1–12).

Whether or not he was responding to such hints, the author of CCC I seems to have decided to give the narrative a sharper focus (e.g. by naming the boy and his fathers) and elaborate the conception and birth into an ambitious three-level analogy of Christ's incarnation while retaining features of CCC II with varying degrees of modification. The birds behaved similarly in both versions but were not identified with Dechtine and other women of Ulster in CCC I. As far as *dramatis personae* were concerned, Conchobor and Bricriu figured in both but Fergus was replaced by Conall, who could appear as an adult warrior in CCC I since he was not regarded as Cú Chulainn's *comaltae* there, and Dechtine was a participant in rather than an object of the Ulstermen's quest as well as being the foster-mother of the boy born in the supernatural dwelling instead of his mother. The rest of the company was lodged in the small house and Bricriu alone went on to visit its grand neighbour in CCC II, whereas in CCC I only Bricriu (and Conall) visited a mean dwelling and thereafter the company as a whole was more than amply provided for in it. Incest between Conchobor and Dechtire was an element in both II and I, but was narrowly avoided in the former and wrongly suspected in the latter. Arrangements for nurturing and fostering the foundling son of Conchobor's sister were almost certainly dealt with at some length in CCC II from the start, whereas the author of CCC I seems to have arbitrarily and laconically made Culann the foster-father of the boy finally born to Dechtine as a means of introducing his change of name to Cú Chulainn as a final flourish. This recasting of the tale as an obvious allegory of Christ's incarnation, while retaining earlier features in suitably modified form, apparently exerted considerable appeal and CCC I seems to have eclipsed CCC II as the standard version quite quickly, to judge from their respective manuscript transmissions.

Ó CATHASAIGH's view above that Dechtine/Dechtire basically figured as Conchobor's sister, thus making Cú Chulainn the quintessential sister's son of early Irish tradition, is corroborated by the foregoing case for CCC II's priority over CCC I and for the likelihood that, even in the latter, she was originally represented as the king's sister, not his daughter. She is also referred to as Conchobor's sister (see note 17 above) in the first of Cú Chulainn's "boyhood deeds" in *TBC I* (ll. 399–456). Whereas in CCC II the mother's disappearance immediately after giving birth obliged her brother to find her child a wet-nurse forthwith and so hand him over to their sister Findchóem (along with her husband) for fosterage, in *TBC I* Dechtire initially brought her and Súaltaim's son up in

arguably echoed by the birth in a rear storeroom in CCC I. In Matthew (2:1–12) the star-led *magi* first seek news of the child from King Herod and so implicitly in a palace, but they actually find him in a normal house.

Ulster (as in CCC I). When only in his fifth year (*TBC I*, ll. 376–7), he went to Emain Machae to join its *mac-rad* or troop of boys, one hundred and fifty strong and observed daily at play by King Conchobor (*TBC I*, ll. 400–3) but assigned to various foster-parents (ll. 455–6, referring to *a mummi 7 a n-aiti*),²⁰ although it is not clear whether this was envisaged as a one-to-one or (as seems more likely) a group arrangement. This version, then, implies fosterage of *Sétanta mac Súaltaim ... 7 mac Dechtere* (*TBC I*, ll. 444–5) with his maternal uncle in accordance with what seems, on the strength of BREMMER's (1976) aforementioned study, to have been an inherited Indo-European pattern. Nevertheless, this took place within a set-up involving a number of different foster-fathers who were hardly all the maternal uncles of their charges, one of whom was Conchobor's own son Follomon as, apparently, the leader of the *macrad* (*TBC I*, ll. 421–2).

III. Com-altai and com-aís

Even in the sagas, fosterage with a maternal uncle seems to be unusual. For instance, no maternal kin were involved in Cormac mac Airt's fostering with Lugne (McCONE 1990: 214 and 254) or in the triple fostering of the king of Tara's son Conaire and the three sons of the *fian*-member Dond Désa with Conaire's own mother, the royal cowherds who had reared her, and the two Maine Milsothachs in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (KNOTT 1936: §§8–9 and, on the mother's rearing, §§5–6). In view of the already mentioned bonds typically forged by fosterage, more than one set of foster-parents might well be deemed dynastically advantageous, as implied by the question 'whether many fostered his [God's] son (*si filium eius nutrierunt multi*)' (BIELER 1979: 142, B 26 (5)) addressed by one of King Lóegaire of Tara's daughters to Patrick in Tírechán's 7th-century account of that saint's life (JASKI 1999: 25, including n. 100). *Esnada Tige Buchet* claims that the fosterage of King Cormac of Tara's son, Cairpre Lifechair, was shared between his maternal (Laigin) and paternal (Síl Cuinn) kin (*ro halt etir a māithre 7 a athre*; GREENE 1955: ll. 537–8), but this probably reflects the child's alleged birth as a result of his mother's abduction (JASKI 1999: 6–9).

Unless the fosterer had a large number of fecund married sisters (or daughters), fosterage with a maternal uncle (or grandfather) was unlikely to involve many simultaneous or overlapping *com-altai*. Considerations of space and expense presumably also tended to impose limits upon the number of fosterlings accepted and maintained by an individual for this or other modes of *altram serce* or 'fosterage of love', a home upbringing provided free of charge to the children of relatives and other connections as noted at the beginning of this

²⁰ Cf. examples suggesting 'that a foster-son could have a principal foster-father or *ardoide* (Patrick or Fiachra), into whose care he was given and who was in the main responsible for him, but who could give his protégé into the care of a sub-fosterer or *frithoide*' (JASKI 1999: 25).

article. The number of a boy's *comaltai* may have been increased somewhat by fostering him with more than one group or household in the manner envisaged for Conaire, Cairpre and others. However, the main impetus towards higher numbers seems likely to have come from introduction of the system noted above with reference to early Irish legal material: the payment of professional foster-parents for a well-born child's strictly regulated training between the ages of seven and fourteen or seventeen²¹ in an establishment set up for that purpose. Regardless of whether the whole troop of one hundred and fifty boys or only those attached to the same *aite* and *muimme* were counted as *com-altai* (cf. JASKI 1999: 27–8, including n. 115), the at least partially collectivised but apparently non-mercenary setup envisaged for the *mac-rad* fostered at Emain Machae in Conchobor's day may be viewed as more or less a halfway house, whether real or imaginary, between the two basic types of *altram*. A similar, if rather more modest, setup appears in *Vita Sancti Ruadani* in an account of King Díarmait's violation of sanctuary provided to a fugitive by St. Rúadán: as a result of the saint's protest 'twelve sons of twelve leaders of Ireland (*duodecim filii duodecim ducum Hybernie*), who were fostered (*nutriti*) with the king in Tara and whom the king loved greatly (*quos rex multum diligebat*), died', whereupon their foster-parents (*nutritores*) and parents (*parentes*) informed the king and on the morrow the fosterers (*nutritores*) appealed to the saint, whose prayers led to their miraculous restoration to life (PLUMMER 1910: 247, §16). The corresponding episode in the Salamanca version of St. Rúadán's Life also revolves around twelve high-ranking subordinates' sons in fosterage. However, in this case, these were 'twelve sons of the kings of Tara (*duodecim filii regum Temrach*)', presumably sub-kings not dissimilar to *duces* (the probable equivalent of OIr. *toisig* 'leaders'), under a single foster-father and, when 'those twelve kings (*reges illi .xii.*)' complained to Díarmait about their sons' deaths, 'the fosterer of those boys (*nutritor istorum puerorum*)' went to the saint and successfully besought him to restore them to life (HEIST 1965: 164).

Classical authors record comparable instances of collectivisation: mutually competitive groups of younger Cretan boys were allocated to different men's

²¹ *Bretha Crólige* (BINCHY 1934–8: 40–2) states clearly that the 'sick-maintenance of a child' (*mac-othrus*) applies 'until the end of seven years', being succeeded by the 'soft food of fosterage' (*máeth-biad altruma*) from seven to ten, and thereafter by 'a man's sick-maintenance' (*fer-othrus*) (§52). Icelandic law specifies the period of legal fosterage as from eight years or less to sixteen years, and a literary example of fosterage beginning at the age of seven is found in *Laxdoelasaga* 16 (KÜHLMANN 2017: 46–7). *Críth Gablach* explicitly makes fourteen the age of transition from fosterage to status as a *fer midbad*. The alternative of seventeen in *Cáin Íarraith* (KELLY 1988: 88) seems most likely to be an innovatory encroachment upon the period spent in a *fian* in line with clerical hostility to that institution (KÜHLMANN 2017: 62–3), perhaps simply by treating the three-year phase of lower *fer midbad* or similar *flescach* 'whipster' (KELLY 1988: 82, n. 107; KÜHLMANN 2017: 58 and 60) as an extension to fosterage.

messes (τὰ συσσίτια ... τὰ ἀνδρεῖα), in each of which they served themselves and the men under the supervision of a boy-organiser (παιδο-νόμος) (Strabo x, 4, 20); in ancient Persia, one quarter of a public place divided between four main age-groups had been reserved for the common education, training and feeding of upper-class boys (παῖδες) up to the age of sixteen or seventeen under the guidance of twelve prefects (ἄρχοντες) drawn from the elders (ἐκ τῶν γεραιτέρων) according to Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* i, 2, 3–8); finally, Plutarch (*Lycurgus* 16, 4–17, 2) records the ancient Spartan custom of distributing boys, as soon as they reached the age of seven, into bands (εἰς ἀγέλας) as co-foragers and co-fosterlings (συν-νόμους ... καὶ συν-τρόφους) accustomed to play, learn and endure increasing hardships together for several years under a suitable prefect of the band (ἄρχοντα ... τῆς ἀγέλης).

These considerations finally bring Bran's maritime expedition with twenty-seven *com-altai* and *com-aís* back into view. This seems a rather high number to be available on the basis of the *altram serce* envisaged, in one form or another, as the source of *comaltai* in early Irish sagas, particularly since the wording implies selection from a still larger group of his foster-brothers and coevals. That raises the question of whether the two components of this alliterating pair were little more than synonyms²² or referred to basically different categories, notwithstanding the likelihood of some overlap. Not only is it unlikely that boys drawn at the age of seven from a restricted circle of close connections for free fosterage typically lasting for seven to ten years would all have been born in the same year as a rule, but there also appears to be no insistence in early Irish sources upon coevality as a normal or even an ideal attribute of *comaltai*: for instance, neither Dond Désa's three sons nor Lugne's two are called triplets or twins and there is no indication that Conaire or Cormac had been born in the same year as even one of them. Since the two terms seem not to have been necessarily or even usually identical, some of Bran's crew may have been envisaged as *com-altai* and others as *com-aís*. It is now time to turn to the latter.

A basic structure of one leader, three subalterns and three companies of nine characterises not only Bran's maritime expedition but also Creidne's seaborne raiding party in a short tale (MEYER 1910: xi–xii; O'BRIEN 1962: 154) linked to the Conaille Muirthemne (Ulaid genealogically but a buffer between them and the Uí Néill politically; see McCONE 1990: 248) with their three main divisions of Dál Runtair, Glasraigi and Dál nImda: 'Glass and Runtar and Imda (were) three sons of Conall Costamail or Cosdub ["blackfoot"]'. It is a daughter who bore them to her father, i.e. Creidne the female *fíán*-warrior (*ban-féinnid*) was

²² In the Tripartite Life of Patrick a slightly different formation, *com-áestae* 'equally aged/old' (*com-* + adj. *áes-tae* 'ag-ed/old'), is glossed by *comaltae*: 'Another time when Patrick was playing among his coevals, i.e. his foster-brothers (*itir a chomaistiu* [*i. a chomaltu*])' (MULCHRONE 1939: 6, l. 124). Since this gloss was not part of the ninth-century original (MULCHRONE 1939: vi), it constitutes no more than a later conjecture in a part of the text suggestively featuring Patrick's foster-mother (*muime*), albeit without implying that she was also responsible for his playmates of the same age.

their mother, she being the daughter of Conall Costamail. Conall belonged to Conchobor's province, and was ashamed that his daughter should bear him sons. They were put from him, then, into the edge of his territory. For Conall was forced to separate these sons from him on account of his queen, whose name was Aífe, since the conflict between Aífe and Creidne was great. Thereafter Creidne entered upon the *fian*-life (*fiannas*) in order to plunder her father and her stepmother on account of her sons (being put) outside their ancestral kindred. She had three nines on *fiannas*, wore her hair plaited behind, and used to attack (by) sea and land alike. Hence she was called Creidne who was a *fian*-warrior (*ba féinnid*). Seven years she spent in exile (*for longais*), i.e. between Ireland and Britain, until she made peace with her father. The aforementioned Conall said through prophecy and divination to his daughter: "There will be destruction on the Ulstermen", said Conall "and they will be moved out of their land and your three sons, Creidne, will have the lands into which they went forever and they shall not be shifted and they will have wealth and abundance of valour".

On an island such as Ireland, seafaring was a natural option for the raiding activities of the typically unmarried and youthful members of *fianna*, as *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* also testifies (KNOTT 1936: §§21–3 and 41–7). Greece with its numerous islands and heavily indented coastline was even more suited geographically to naval activity, including seaborne raiding. For instance, in the last book of the *Odyssey*, Agamemnon's ghost spies the hundred or so wraiths of Penelope's recently slaughtered young suitors descending to Hades, recognises one of them and asks (xxiv, 106–13): 'Amphimedon, what mishap has brought you, all chosen and same-aged (πάντες κεκριμένοι καὶ ὁμήλικες /homēlikes/, 107), down to the dark earth? Nor would one have selected otherwise in picking the best men (ἄνδρας ἀρίστους, 108) throughout a city. Did Poseidon overcome you in ships after stirring up irresistible winds and long waves? Or did, perhaps, hostile men destroy you on land as you were cutting off cattle or fine flocks of sheep or as they were fighting for their city and women?' The third and fourth books of the *Odyssey* are largely taken up with the young bachelor Telemachus' peaceful voyage to Pylos in a ship manned by 'twenty companions' (εἴκοσ' ἑταίρους, *Od.* ii, 212, cf. 391, 402 etc.) to seek tidings of his father Odysseus. Telemachus was also accompanied by the goddess Athene in the guise of Odysseus' coeval Mentor,²³ and (s)he took her/his leave of him and the Pylians as follows (*Od.* iii, 360–4): 'I shall go to the black ship so that I may encourage the companions (ἑταίρους, 361) and tell them everything. For I alone among them claim to be older (γεραίτερος, 362), while the others are younger men (νεώτεροι ἄνδρες) following through affection (φιλότητι), all the same-own-age-group (ὁμηλικίη /homēlikīē/) of great-hearted Telemachus'. Not only is Homeric Greek *hom-ēlikes*, collective *hom-ēlikīē* ('same' + 'own-age-group')

²³ Odysseus tells Mentor 'you are (a member of) my same-own-age-group (ὁμηλικίη δέ μοί ἐσσι)' (*Od.* xxii, 208–9).

quite similar to Old Irish *com-aís* ‘co-evals’ (‘(having) joint-age’) in semantics and structure but women were also represented as central to Bran’s quest with his *com-aís* and as a plausible objective of the putative raid by a recently slain band of young bachelor Greek *hom-élikes*.

There is no explicit mention of coevals in connection with what may be viewed as a warlike counterpart of Bran’s peaceful expedition, namely the maritime raiding of the *fían* led by Creidne and her three sons before they finally settled down (, married) and produced offspring. Indeed, full-scale coevality seems to be ruled out by the lack of any indication that the three brothers were triplets. Possibly each of them was envisaged as one of nine coevals, and a similar interpretation might be advanced of ‘one man (*oín-fer*) over (each of) the three nines of his foster-brothers and coevals’ in the passage from *Immram Brain* in the opening paragraph of this article by taking ‘his’ to refer to *oínfer* rather than Bran. The two aforementioned expeditions of coeval young bachelors in the *Odyssey* present a similar contrast between a peaceful and a warlike purpose, although the former involved Telemachus and his crew in a quest for information rather than women. The resonance between the crew of coevals on Telemachus’ peaceful outing and the same-aged participants in youthful raiding activity may well have been deliberate as an indication of the former’s equivalence to the latter as a phase leading to attainment of manhood (cf. McCONE 2020: 96–7). In view of clerical disapproval of *fianna* devoted to raiding and hunting, the resemblance of Bran’s crew to that of a *fían*-raider like Creidne may be viewed as an enhancement of *Immram Brain*’s function as a cautionary tale in relation to the quest for eternal life (McCONE 2000: 109–14).

The early Irish saga *Táin Bó Froích* introduces its eponymous hero Fróech as follows: ‘There was a good household with him until the end of eight years without taking a wife to himself. Fifty kings’ sons (*coíca mac ríge*) was the number of his household, all of the same age (*com-aís*) and of equal (social) weight (*com-chutrumma*) with him. Findabair, the daughter of Ailill and Medb, loves him on account of great reports of him. This is related to him at his house. Ireland and Scotland were full of her fame and tidings. After that he resolved to go and address the girl’ (MEID 1967: §§1–2). Allowing for typical clerical reticence regarding the institutional role of *fían*-sodalities (e.g. McCONE 2022: 221), Fróech’s band is implicitly presented as a *fían* in all but name: not only did it consist of fifty unmarried sons of kings (McCONE 2020: 145–6) but these same ‘young warriors’ (*ind oic*; cf. McCONE 2020: 147) also put on a spectacular display of hunting prowess as they approached the fort of Fróech’s prospective royal in-laws (MEID 1967: §5). Like Bran and a crew including at least some of his *com-aís*, Fróech and his *com-aís* set out on a quest for a woman.

Whereas the aims of the expeditions undertaken by Telemachus, Bran and Fróech were peaceful, the slain *hom-élikes* in the last book of the *Odyssey* were thought by Agamemnon’s ghost to have met their end in a raid with the potential to secure women, among other things. In a Russian folk-poem (*bylina*) concerning Volx Vseslav’evič (JAKOBSON 1966: 301–68), ‘when Volx

was twelve years old, he started to pick a retinue (*družina*) for himself; he picked the retinue for three years, he picked a retinue of seven thousand; Volx himself is fifteen years old, and each man in his retinue is also fifteen' (ll. 52–7). Volx bids his seven thousand young followers 'keep hacking old ones and young ones, leave none in the realm for breeding, leave only by selection – not many nor a few, seven thousand – darling beautiful maidens', whom they duly marry after their victory (JAKOBSON 1966: 334–8; ll. 170–4, 176–8 and 195–9). After successfully leading his men on an expedition against a distant realm, 'Volx enthroned himself as Tsar, wedding the Tsarina ... and the valiants of the retinue all took unto them those maidens as wives and ... became townfolk' (ll. 195–201). A historical example is provided by the central Italian Mamertini, coevals who had been sent forth from Samnium *en masse* at the age of twenty in the wake of a pestilence (Festus 150L, on the authority of Alfius' no longer extant history of the First Punic War written in the 1st century BC). Having entered the service of the Sicilian city Messina, they eventually expelled or slew its male citizens and took over their wives, children and control of the city in 289 BC (Polybius i, 7, 2–4). This was a rather obvious instance of 'an ancient custom that I understand was practised by many barbarians and Greeks. For when ... their own resources were no longer sufficient for everybody ... and [this] necessitated a reduction in population, they used to dedicate men's offspring of the year to some god, equip them with arms and send them forth from their land ... Those who had set out ... used to take as their home the land that had either received them in friendship or been conquered ... Following this custom ... [they] devoted the offspring of that year (ἐνιαυσίους γονάς) to some god and sent the lads away from home when they had reached manhood (ἀνδρωθέντας)' (Dion. Hal., *Roman antiquities* i, 16, 1–4).

The RigVeda depicts the Maruts, the divine prototype of a *marya*-sodality, as a biologically unrealistic number of coeval youthful siblings. MACDONELL (1917: 21) notes that 'they form a troop (**ganá, śárdhas**) ... Their number is thrice sixty or thrice seven. They are the sons of Rudra (ii. 33) ... They are brothers equal in age ... having the same birthplace and the same abode'. For instance, the RigVeda calls them *Rudrásya máryāḥ* 'Rudra's young men' (i, 64, 2), *Rudrásya sūnávaḥ* 'R's sons' (i, 85, 1), *sá-vayasah* 'co-eval' (i, 165, 1), *yúvānaḥ* 'young' (i, 165, 2), *ajyeṣṭhāso ákaniṣṭhāsaḥ ... bhrátar-aḥ* 'brothers without oldest (or) youngest' (v, 60, 5).

In Rome's struggle against Lars Porsenna, Mucius Scaevola's co-conspirators were 'three hundred leaders of the Roman youth (*iuventutis Romanae*)' according to Livy (ii, 12, 15), and 'three hundred men of the same age (τῆν αὐτὴν ἔχοντες ἡλικίαν)' according to Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Roman antiquities* v, 29, 3). To turn from a legendary to an apparently historical instance, Herodotus (v, 71) tells how the Olympic victor Cylon attached to himself 'a sodality of his coevals (ἑταιρήην τῶν ἡλικιωτέων)' and seized the Acropolis in an unsuccessful attempt to become tyrant of Athens in the later 7th century BC.

It thus appears that, whereas the status of *comaltai* was conferred by shared fosterage, that of *comaís* was forged primarily by joint membership of a *fían*. Although this connection will naturally have tended to be obscured and the role of coevality reduced along with the *fían*'s increasing social marginalisation as a result of clerical hostility (e.g. McCONE 2021: 240–1), the meagre but suggestive references gleaned from medieval Irish sources can be corroborated and clarified by comparative evidence such as that just presented. Coeval membership is depicted as an attribute of sodalities in the literatures of a number of Indo-European peoples and the basic reason for this is also given in some cases: a practice of inaugurating youths into sodalities or similar bands on attaining a particular age (for a fuller treatment in a broader IE context, see McCONE *forthcoming*).

IV. Gormac, mac gor and the etymology of gor

It is now time to return to the sister's son, one Old Irish term for whom has been delineated as follows by Ó CATHASAIGH (1986: 137): '*Gormac* is a compound of *mac* "son, boy", and the modifier *gor*. The meaning of *gor* has been elucidated by Binchy [1956: 228–31]. The *mac gor* is the "dutiful son", who carries out the duty of filial obedience, particularly support of his parents in old age. Such duty is denoted by the abstract *goire*. The compound *gormac* denotes an adopted son, a son, that is, who has been adopted for the purpose of maintaining the adopter; as well as "adopted son" it means "sister's son", and this is taken as an indication that a sister's son would normally be adopted for this purpose ... The use of *gormac* for "sister's son" is an innovation in Old Irish; the inherited word, as we have seen, is *nia*'.

In the first of Cú Chulainn's *mac-gnímrada*, Sétantae approached the boys of Emain 'without binding his protection on them (*cen naidm a fõesama forru*)' as required by custom (*TBC I*, ll. 418–20). When their attack upon him had provoked a devastatingly frenzied response, Conchobar intervened and, on learning that the new arrival was his sister Dechtire's son, asked 'why has your protection (*do fõesam-su*), then, not been bound on the boys?' (ll. 421–46). This was duly done by Sétantae saying 'take into your hand my protection against them, then (*gaib it láim mo fõesom airtho didiu*)' and Conchobar replying 'I acknowledge (*atmu*)' (ll. 447–9), but the ceremony had to be repeated in order to bind the boys' protection (*fõesom*) on Sétantae after he had forthwith resumed his assault upon them (ll. 450–4). Ó CATHASAIGH (1986: 153–4) interprets this process as 'the adoption of a sister's son by his mother's brother': 'the expression *mac fõesma* is used of the adopted son, and that is precisely what Sétantae has become as a result of his exchange with Conchobar. Sétantae will henceforth be obliged to show *goire* to his mother's brother'. However, JASKI (1999: 4) has raised cogent objections: 'It may be doubted that Cú Chulainn's appeal for *fõesam* is a plea for adoption. Ó CATHASAIGH (1986: 153–4) considers the request "Gaib it láim mo fõesom airtho didiu" and the reply "Atmu" to mark the

conclusion of a solemn contract of reciprocal obligation, but in legal material it rather signals the appointment of a guarantor ... Cú Chulainn's first request for *fóesam* is linked to the statement that no one was allowed to enter the boys' playing-field before his *fóesam* was guaranteed. An offer of *fóesam* functions as a safe-conduct ... The additional meaning of *fóesam* in the sense of "adoption" does not seem to be present in this passage'.

JASKI (1991: 1–2) anticipates a key finding of his substantial study as follows: 'Modern scholarship usually regards a *gormac* as a sister's son who is adopted by his maternal kinsmen to maintain them, but the combined evidence in narrative and legal sources suggests that he is the son of an alien who is maintained by his maternal kin because his own father and his paternal kin are unable to do so. In this way, a *gormac* automatically becomes a *dalta* (foster-son) of his maternal relatives. This is the position Cú Chulainn takes up in the narrative of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.' Although his status as the son of a male outsider is somewhat compromised by a human father Súaltain in *TBCI* and *CCCI* as already noted, there has been discussion above of the more straightforward version in *CCCII*, where the child's appearance and his parents' disappearance make his fosterage a pressing issue but there is no mention of adoption. Moreover, Cú Chulainn is explicitly called a *gor-mac* with reference to the Ulaid as a whole in the saga *Mesca Ulad* (WATSON 1941: ll. 323–4), where Celtchair responds to a proposal of Cú Chulainn's by exclaiming 'Woe to the Ulstermen when the *gormac* who gives the advice was born! (*mairg Ultu arro génair ... in gormac do-beir in comairli*)'.

JASKI (1999: 5) notes with reference to an undutiful son (*mac ingor*) that 'a father had the right to disinherit him and in order to secure his maintenance he could adopt a person from external kin, who is called *mac fóesma*, *fine thacair* ("kin by summons"), or *mac cor mbél* ("son by contracts")', terms perhaps reflecting different modes of adoption, and draws the following conclusion: 'Cú Chulainn does not fit the legal description of the *mac fóesma* as the son adopted from external kin ... nor is adoption referred to ... Ó Cathasaigh's definition of *gormac* as a sister's son who has been adopted for the purpose of maintaining the adopter actually defines the *mac fóesma*, except that a *mac fóesma* was not necessarily a sister's son'.

It would seem that the conventional view of the *gor-mac* is based, above all, on a combination of clear evidence that he was typically a sister's (or other kinswoman's) son with the term's composition from the same two elements as *mac gor*, the 'dutiful son' who undertakes maintenance (*goire*) of an aged father unlike the *mac in-gor* 'un-dutiful son' who evades it (BINCHY 1941: 98). Although a word's prehistory is a questionable indicator of its actual meaning, the etymology of *gor* may repay some scrutiny. In a significant contribution to the case for PIE *g^{uh}* > PC *g^u* (see McCONE 1996: 38–42), BINCHY (1956: 228–31) has pointed to formally precise and semantically recognisable British cognates, notably MW *mab anwar* who breaks his father's testament (OIr. *mac ingor*), *gwar* 'obedient, kind' (OIr. *gor*) and *gward* 'kindness' (OIr. *goire*). He argues

(1956: 228–9) that the various meanings of *gor* ‘all go back to the primary notion of “warming, keeping warm”, alluding to the parallel semantics of Latin *foveo* ‘warm, cherish’ in a footnote (229, n. 1), and that ‘striking confirmation of this is furnished in one of the oldest Irish legal tracts, where instead of the usual *macc gor* and *m. ingor* we find *macc uar* “a cold son” contrasted with *macc te* “a warm(ing) son”. This equation has been challenged by SCHRIJVER (1996: 193–8) on the basis of a discrepancy between the *mac té*’s legal subordination to his father according to the passage from *Berrad Airechta* cited near the beginning of this article and the *mac gor*’s greater degree of independence.²⁴ According to BINCHY (1956: 229), ‘*gor* represents the *o*-grade of the well-known root **g^wher-*; the *e*-grade is found in *fo-geir* “heats” and perhaps in *gert* “milk and dung” (of cattle)’ (229). This would imply I/PC²⁵ **g^uor-o-* (already as a legal term; see KELLY 1988: 232, n. 19), as well as its opposite **an-g^uor-o-* and (McCONE 1996: 41) an abstract **g^uar-(i)ĩā* (< **g^uhr-ĩah₂*).²⁶ However, SCHRIJVER (1996: 198–202) prefers **g^uar-o-* based upon a hitherto unrecognised root with a sense ‘repay’ or the like and reaches the following conclusion (202): ‘The PC and PGerm. forms can be combined by reconstructing a northwest IE root **g^whVr-*. Since the etymon is geographically limited and in some forms shows an unexplained *a*-vocalism, it may not be of PIE origin’.²⁷

A derivation of OIr. *gor*, MW *gwar* from I/PC **g^uor-o-* ‘warming, cherisher’ exemplifying a well-attested PIE *CoC-ó-* agentive formation (e.g. McCONE 1995: 4–5; *C* = any PIE consonant or permitted cluster) is not only morphologically straightforward but also based upon the securely reconstructed PIE root **g^uher* ‘become warm’ (*LIV* 196–7/*LIV*² 219–20). That being so, a clear demonstration of its phonological and/or semantic inadequacy must surely be insisted upon as a prerequisite for rejecting this explanation in favour of a perforce opaque derivation from an unknown non-IE substratum language – one which must, moreover, be supposed to have possessed a phoneme close enough to a

²⁴ The problem it poses for his case obliges SCHRIJVER (1996: 194, n. 5) to cast doubt upon Binchy’s compelling interpretation of *tes-gaire* as a nonce compound of *tes* ‘heat, warmth’ and *goire* ‘duty’ (see section I above) characterising the *mac tee* ‘hot/warm son’ and obviously corresponding to (*h*)*ócht* ‘cold(ness)’ as a characterisation of the position of the *mac úar* ‘cold son’.

²⁵ See McCONE (1996: 67–104 and 2008: 37–8) on the view of the Celtic family tree underlying the terms “Insular” and “Proto-”Celtic.

²⁶ Intended to illustrate its basic structure as a primary derivative with zero-grade root rather than to posit a PIE form as such.

²⁷ As SCHRIJVER (1996: 200–1) concedes, British Celtic MW *gwerth* ‘worth, value, price’, B *gwerzh* ‘sale, worth’ and Germanic cognates such as OHG *wert*, OE *weorth*, ON *verðr* ‘worth, price’ are formally and, and on the basis of potential connotations of exchange or reciprocity, semantically compatible with PIE **uert* ‘turn’ (*LIV* 632–3/*LIV*² 691–2). Underlying **g^uert-* only becomes necessary if OIr. *gor*, MW *gwar* etc. are associated with these and divorced from PIE **g^uher* ‘become warm’ (*LIV* 196–7/*LIV*² 219–20), as SCHRIJVER (1996: 201–2) goes on to suggest.

typologically unusual voiced aspirate labiovelar to be rendered by *g^{uh} in the target language(s). To begin with, 'PC g^w and w (< PIE g^{wh} and w) fell together in initial position in British either through a relatively early simplification of g^w to w ... or because of the considerably later strengthening of w to gw in unlenited contexts at least' (McCONE 1996: 40). Consequently, the reflexes of both are typically unlenited gw (simplified to g before o) versus lenited w.

As SCHRIJVER's (1995: 116–23) comprehensive collection of relevant forms shows, there are plentiful examples of (g)wa < (g)wo such as (119) 'hair' MW *gwallt* but OCorn. *gols*, OBret. *guolt* < *gwolt- < I/PC *uolto- (OIr. *fol* 'hair'). Even in the absence of a satisfactory explanation for divergences of this type between and within the various British languages, it would be reasonable to posit a similar derivation of MW *gwar* 'kind', Bret. *gor* < *guor- (< *uoro-?) < I/PC *g^uoro- (OIr. *gor* 'dutiful'). The following proposal has been made (McCONE 1991: 39, n. 8) regarding 'apparently random British fluctuations between **go-** and **gwa-**': 'Since these cannot be accounted for by a regular sound law, one might speculate along the lines of **gwo-** > **go-** but (in leniting contexts) **wo-** > **wa-**. A subsequent skew tending to generate the synchronically regular alternates **go-/o-** and **gwa-/wa-** would naturally lead to confusion of this type. However it is to be explained, the phenomenon's existence is not open to doubt'. SCHRIJVER's evaluation (1995: 123–8) of the evidence presented by him leads him to essentially the same conclusion 'that lenited *uo became wa and unlenited *uo yielded *Wo' with the result that 'every word which in PBr. had word-initial *uo would in LPBr. show an allomorphy (unlenited) *Wo- vs. (lenited) *wa-' (126). Moreover, 'it seems that the favoured way of eliminating the LPBr. alternation *Wo-/wa- was to replace it by *Wa-/wa-', not least because 'a type *Wa-/wa- already existed, viz. as a reflex of PCl. *ua', e.g. MW *gwan-u/ wan-u* 'wound' (OIr. *gonaid* 'slays, wounds' < IC *g^uan-e-ti; McCONE 1996: 41). Although SCHRIJVER initially (1995: 119 and 127) voiced unexplained doubts about the applicability of his explanation to MW *gwar* and subsequently (1996: 198–9) ignored it altogether, it would surely have resulted in Late Proto-British *guor vs. len. *uar < *g^uor-o-, its opposite *an-uar, and an associated abstract *g^uar-eð vs. len. *uar-eð (< *g^uar-iġā). The synchronically regular relation between the unlenited and lenited forms of the abstract would then have furnished a closely related model for the homogenisation of *gwor/*war to *gwar/war*.

That leaves a single OIr. attestation of *gor*'s comparative, namely *goiriu* (Sg. 40b10, glossing Lat. *magis pius*). Since *guiriu would be the regular outcome of *g^uor-iġūs, SCHRIJVER (1996: 198) posits a preform '*g^wariūs' and dismisses the notion that the comparative's vocalism had simply been influenced by its base *gor* as 'implausible ... because OIr. generally tolerates the alternation o/u without any difficulty'. While it is true that replacement of *guiriu by *goiriu* under the influence of *gor* was far from inevitable, it is hardly implausible in view of the latter's phonotactic acceptability (e.g. abstract *goire*). Sg. *goiriu*, then, is by no means conclusive evidence for *g^uar-o- rather than *g^uor-o-.

To turn from the formal to the semantic side, Schrijver's above objection to Binchy's claim that *mac tee/úar* 'hot/cold son' were mere equivalents of *mac gor/ingor* is valid. In essence, the former terms relate to sons of a living father in general, according as they duly accept or improperly reject his *patria potestas*, but the latter apply specifically to the acceptance or rejection of the duty to look after an aged parent. That said, both sets concern a son's performance/neglect of obligations towards his father and the first pair (*tee/úar*) unambiguously expresses the two types of relationship metaphorically in terms of heat versus cold. This makes it likely enough that the second pair was also based upon a metaphor of warm versus non-warm relations.

SCHRIJVER (1996: 199) claims that 'the undisputed descendants of PIE $*g^{wh}er-$ "warm" in Celtic are semantically far removed from the connotation "warming, cherishing, caring" that would be required for *gor* ... [e.g.] causative-iterative Ir. *guirid* < $*g^{wh}or-eie-$ refers to the physical process of heating, burning, by fire or the sun'. Even if this were true, the semantics of attestations in individual Celtic languages like Irish would be quite inconclusive since $*(an)g^{u}or-o-$ must be of at least Insular Celtic date and may well be of Proto-Celtic provenance as the reflex of a PIE formation that was no longer productive in (Insular) Celtic, to judge from its limited attestation there (McCONE 1995: 4–5). That being so, the issue is whether the original meaning 'warm' inferred for PIE $*g^{u}her$ from a range of cognates was still prominent in derivatives of its I/PC reflex $*g^{u}er$ when $*(an)g^{u}or-o-$ was created. Moreover, if Latin *fovē-re* < $*d^{h}og^{u}h-eje-$, a causative derived from PIE $*d^{h}eg^{u}h$ 'burn (by fire)' (MEISER 1998: 104; LIV 115–16/LIV² 133–4; e.g. OIr. *daig* 'fire, flame' < $*deg^{u}-i-$), could develop its attested sense 'warm, cherish, support', something similar could presumably have happened in the case of $*(an)g^{u}or-o-$ even if I/PC $*g^{u}er$ had primarily denoted powerful heat or burning as claimed by Schrijver. However, gentle warming rather than vigorous heating is surely presupposed by a meaning 'brood, hatch (eggs)' attested for Ir. *guirid* and the associated noun *gor* 'heating, hatching, inflammation' (DIL s.vv. *guirid* and *1 gor*; cf. *scurid* 'releases, unyokes' and its verbal noun *scor* < $*skor-o-s$) and MW *gori* (SCHRIJVER 1996: 199). This is the equally obvious implication of *guirit* 'they cherish' (Ml. 39c24, glossing Lat. *fovent* with reference to birds and their young) or the mention of 'a fair sun that warms thousands (*cáingrian guires míli*), Stephen's luminous name' in *Félire Óengusso* (Dec. 16; STOKES 1905: 254). In short, there are no remotely serious semantic objections to the phonologically and morphologically viable derivation of OIr. *gor* and MW *gwar* from I/PC $*g^{u}or-o-$ 'warming, cherisher'.

The foregoing points to a set of at least Insular, and probably Proto-, Celtic terms, namely an *o*-grade thematic agentive $*g^{u}or-o-$ 'warming, cherishing', its privative opposite $*an-g^{u}or-o-$ 'non-warming, neglecting' and an originally zero-grade *iā*-stem abstract $*g^{u}ar-(i)iā$ 'warm-ness, warmth, warming, cherishing' applicable to a son's legal duty to look after an ageing father. Indeed, it seems quite likely that OIr. *mac (in)gor* continued an I/PC expression $*mak^{u}os$ ²⁸

²⁸ See SCHUMACHER (2004: 468) for a convincing etymology, and note that reflexes are

(*an*)*g^uoros* ‘(non-)warming/cherishing son’ relating to the treatment of an aged father. On the other hand, the I/PC causative verb **g^uor-ī-* ‘makes warm’ underlying OIr. *guirid* and MW *gori* does not seem to have acquired connotations of parental warming or cherishing going beyond a bird’s brooding of its eggs until they hatched. The formally identical I/PC preform **g^uor-o-s* underlying OIr. *gor* (m.) ‘heating, hatching, inflammation, pus’ can be referred to another well-attested PIE type, namely *CóC-o-* (denoted for convenience with arguably original accented root as opposed to the accented suffix of agentive *CoC-ó-*) used to form abstract/action and resultative²⁹ nouns: e.g. Greek ὄλκος ‘furrow’ and Latin *sulcus* ‘furrow’ < **sólkos*, a/the result of drawing (a plough) (PIE **selk* ‘draw’: LIV 481/LIV² 530–1); Gk. γόνος /*gónos*/ ‘begetting, birth’ and (resultant) ‘offspring’ (PIE **ġenh₁* ‘beget, bear’: LIV 144–6/LIV² 163–5); Gk. τομός /*tomós*/ ‘cutting, sharp’ vs. τόμος /*tómos*/ ‘slice, piece’ (resulting from cutting: PIE **temh₁* ‘cut’: LIV 567–8/LIV² 625); Lat. *sonus* ‘sound’ (resulting from sounding: PIE **sueh₂* ‘(make) sound’: LIV 555–6/LIV² 611). The OIr. *gor* in question can thus be derived from I/PC **g^uoros* ‘heat(ing)’ sometimes resulting in ‘inflammation’, certain types of which were liable to exude ‘pus’.

It has been seen that equation of the first element of OIr. *gor-mac* ‘sister’s son’ with the epithet found in *mac gor* ‘cherishing son’ was the reason for the otherwise unsubstantiated view that both provided an aged or otherwise incapacitated person with *goire* ‘maintenance’, his own father in the case of a *mac gor* but a father by adoption belonging to his mother’s kin in that of a *gor-mac*: ‘Hence *gormac* “pious son” acquires the meaning “sister’s son”’ (CHARLES-EDWARDS 1993: 75, n. 120). If he was indeed a ‘cherishing son’ etymologically, such a view would be hard to gainsay. Each of the three literary *gor-maic* discussed by JASKI (1999: 5–7; cf. Ó CATHASAIGH 1986: 142 and 147) had an absent father, whose union with the mother had been transient and/or irregular. In *Esnada Tige Buchet* (GREENE 1955: ll. 534–40) Cairbre Lifechair was conceived in a one-night stand between Cormac mac Airt and the abducted Eithne but she then escaped back to her own people, the Laigin, who had to swear that the child subsequently born to her was his before Cormac would accept him as his son and Eithne as his lawful wife. Bres’ birth resulted from a similar brief encounter in *Cath Maige Tuired* (GRAY 1982: §§15–23): Ériu of the Irish Túatha Dé was gazing out to sea when she saw a handsome man approaching in a vessel, slept with him and learned that he was Elathu, king of the Fomorians, before they returned to their respective homes and she later bore a son. In what has been taken above to be the earliest extant version of Cú Chulainn’s

not confined to Goedelic and British but include Gaulish acc. *mapon* ‘boy, son’, even if this is unnecessarily regarded as an abbreviation of the theonym *Maponos* based upon *mapo-* (see LAMBERT 1994: 152/2003: 154).

²⁹ See, for instance, IRLINGER (2002: 180–2) on the frequent tendency for a more concrete resultative sense to develop from an abstract one, and note English examples such as abstract/action *speech*, *agreement* and a specific result thereof, namely *a/the speech*, *a/the agreement*.

birth-tale, Conchobor's sister had eloped and, after she gave birth, both she and her unspecified mate disappeared, leaving their child in the care of her brother and his followers.

Each of these three effectively fatherless (initially, at least, in Cairbre's case) progeny was referred to as 'the *gormac* of his mother's people' (JASKI 1999: 7): Cairbre was called *gormac Lagen* in verse 24 of a probably 9th-century poem (MEYER 1917: 110), while the women of Túath(a) Dé proposed giving the kingship of Ireland to Bres as 'their own *gormac*' in *CMT* (GRAY 1982: §14). As for Celtchair's already cited rebuke of Cú Chulainn in *Mesca Ulad*, 'the context would suggest that Cú Chulainn is being regarded as the *gormac* of the Ulaid as a whole' (Ó CATHASAIGH 1986: 142). This, as is confirmed by evidence regarding 'the son of an alien in Irish law' (JASKI 1999: 7–13), was 'because they are without legal supervision by their fathers, who are aliens and unable to take responsibility for them. This obligation automatically falls on their maternal kinsmen, who have to care for and protect them ... It is this duty to which the element *gor* in *gormac* refers ... The sources speak of a *gormac* of the Túatha Dé Danann, Leinstermen, or Ulstermen: in other words, the responsibility to care for a *gormac* was shared by the maternal kin as a whole; it was not restricted to one person' (JASKI 1999: 12–13).

This is corroborated by references in legal tracts and associated commentary³⁰ to the *cumal senorbai*, which PLUMMER (1926–8, 113–14) translated as 'the senior's estate' and defined as 'an additional portion to which the senior was entitled to enable him to discharge certain extra obligations which fell upon him as head of the family' while quoting a passage (also cited by JASKI 1999: 18) that further specifies it as 'a seventh of the land of inheritance, and this is to be in the hand of the chief of the *geilfine* for the support of "fuidirs" and "gor-meic"'. A law-tract on the divisions of kindred recognises 'grey kin (*glasfine*)',³¹ the son of a woman of your kindred whom she bears to a Briton (*Albanach*): he only gets the inheritance of a sister's son' (*orba niad*, glossed *.i. fearand gormheic* 'i.e. land of a *gor-mac*'; *CIH* 431.30–1 and 33). It thus appears that, like a *fuidir* or 'lower category of dependant' including 'persons who have been reduced to semi-free status through the severance of their connection with their kin' (KELLY 1988: 33 and 34), a *gor-mac* was supported on land allocated to the head of a kindred to be managed in its name. He was, then, hardly a foster-son (*daltae*) of the normal kind or an adoptive son (*mac fôesma*) as a rule and, indeed, is differentiated from both in the following glossed passage from the tract *Córus Fine* (*CIH* 734.20–3; JASKI 1999: 20–1): 'the avenging of a foster-son of the kindred (*daltadh na fine*), i.e. a common foster-son of the kindred (*.i. dalta coitcenn na fine*), and the avenging of a man whom a kindred acknowledges, i.e. the avenging of the man whom the kindred acknowledges for the maintenance

³⁰ See the passages cited by PLUMMER (1926–8: 113–14) and JASKI (1999: 13–14 and 17–19).

³¹ See CAMPANILE 1979 on the *cú glas*.

of the old man (*don ghaire inth seanórach*; presumably its aged head), i.e. the adoptive son (.i. in *mach fàosmadh*, literally ‘the son of acknowledgment’), and the avenging of a son of women (*mic ban*), i.e. a sister’s/kinswoman’s son (.i. *mac seathar*), i.e. the *gormac*. The foster-son (*in dalta*) and the *gormac* and the adoptive son (*in mac fàosam*), the kindred is entitled to compensation for their killing’.

It thus appears that (rather like *comaltai* and *comaís* above) *gormac*, *mac fòesma* (*vel sim.*) and *daltae* were quite distinct, but not mutually exclusive, categories. For instance, although he might presumably on occasion have been fostered by an individual as his *daltae* or adopted as *mac fòesma* for an elderly person’s maintenance, a *gormac*’s identity was independent of such eventualities. The function of maintenance seems unlikely to have devolved upon a *gormac* as a rule for the simple reason that responsibility for looking after aged parents typically fell upon their sons and a son’s failure to undertake or arrange for it had serious consequences, as the episode of the absconding Librán in Adomnán’s Life of Columba (ANDERSON 1961: 424–9/1991: 156–8, §§89a–90a) illustrates. In short, *nia* designated a basic biological relationship and *gormac* a legal status that could arise from it under certain circumstances. As JASKI (1999: 17) puts it, ‘*nia* means “sister’s son” in a general sense, whereas *gormac* refers to the *mac sethar* born to an alien or from a transitory union who has a special relationship with his maternal kin. The reason why *gormac* is glossed *mac sethar* is that he is always a kinswoman’s son, but not every kinswoman’s son is a *gormac*’. Jaski was surely right to conclude above from the available evidence that the *goire* ‘maintenance’ defining a *gor-mac* was granted to him by his maternal kin and not provided by him to an adoptive “father” belonging to his mother’s kindred. This obviously raises the question of how the term *gor-mac* is to be explained linguistically in view of the derivation of *gor* from agentive **g^uor-o-* ‘warming, cherishing’ proposed above with regard to the maintenance of his aged father required of a *mac gor* ‘dutiful son’.

Although they seem to be predominantly active in meaning, adjectival CoC-ó- formations are attested widely enough with a passive sense for this also to be recognised as a PIE type: e.g. Gk. σκοπός ‘watcher, spy’ (act.) or ‘(watched/looked at,) mark, target’ (pass.) (σκέπτομαι ‘observe, consider’ < **skēp-je/o-* < PIE **spek̑* ‘look at’ by metathesis; LIV 524/LIV² 575–6); Lat. *uncus* ‘bent, curved’ < **onk-o-* (PIE **h₂enk-* ‘bend’; LIV 239/LIV² 268); Germanic **arga-* ‘(mounted,) unmanly, bad’ (ON *argr*, OE *earg*, OHG *arg*) < **h₁org^h-ó-* (PIE **h₁erg^h* ‘mount (sexually)’; LIV 212/LIV² 238–9), **tama-* ‘tame(d)’ (ON *tamr*, OE *tam*, OHG *zam*) < **domh₂-ó-* (PIE **demh₂* ‘tame’; LIV 99–100/LIV² 116–17). The reconstruction of a passive as well as an active sense for PIE CoC-ó- makes ‘warmed, cherished, maintained’ a plausible semantic alternative to ‘warming, cherishing, maintaining’ in the case of PC **g^uor-o-*. The lack, so far at least, of other Celtic examples of the less common passive type is hardly a cogent objection, since it is attested in the other two major Western IE branches, namely Italic and Germanic, and even the commoner active type

is not well preserved in Celtic. The potentially inconvenient ambiguity inherent in a PC combination **mak^uos g^uoros* meaning ‘cherishing/maintaining son’ or ‘cherished/maintained son/boy’ could be resolved by creating a compound **g^uoro-mak^uos* with an inverted order of the constituents matched to a passive sense in contrast with the active sense of **mak^uos g^uoros*. The upshot would be PC **mak^uos (an)g^uoros* ‘(non-)cherishing/maintaining son’ in relation to his own aged or infirm father and **g^uoro-mak^uos* ‘cherished/maintained son’, who was dependent upon (the head of) his mother’s kindred for support because, as the offspring of a kinsman’s sister and a (resident or non-resident) outsider, he effectively lacked paternal kin.³²

Being unable to inherit *fintiu* ‘kindred-land’ through his mother and supported along with other tenants such as *fuidri* (see KELLY 1988: 33–5, and CHARLES-EDWARDS 1993: 307–36) on the *cumal senorbai* (the seventh of the *fintiu* allocated to the head of a kindred in addition to his regular inheritance and managed by him), a *gormac* would inevitably be of rather low legal status as a rule. On the other hand, his typical position as a sister’s son would have been conducive to affection for him on the part of his mother’s brother(s) and their spouses especially. The three *gormaic* of saga discussed earlier in this section may be viewed through this dual prism. Mutual affection is presumably implied by the description of the king of Tara, Cairpre Lifechair, as *gormac Lagen*. Fondness also seems to have motivated the desire of women of the Túath(a) Dé to bestow Ireland’s kingship upon ‘their own *gormac*’ Bres and the ultimate acquiescence of their men in this, but his disastrous reign then indicated the folly of allowing the heart to rule the head without due regard for legal propriety. Finally, the reference to Cú Chulainn as a *gormac* in Celtchair’s remonstrance seems to have a pejorative edge prompted by the legal aspect.

V. Mac cóem or mac-cóem

As noted in II above with reference to probably the oldest extant version of his birth-tale (Thurneysen’s CCC II), the baby Cú Chulainn found motherless and fatherless in his maternal uncle Conchobor’s bosom was called ‘the little *mac-cóem*’.

The main discussion of this term to date (MAC CANA 1991) was concerned less with its meaning (‘a boy between childhood and the age of bearing arms (DIL s.v.)’, MAC CANA 1991: 32) than with its status as an Old Irish compound

³² The following alternative has been suggested to me by Jürgen Uhlich: ‘On the other hand, there is the attested OIr. *gor* (m.) “heating, hatching, inflammation, pus” that has been referred above to the PIE type *CóC-o-*, and a putative “son of hatching” would have resulted in either **mac guir* or *gormac*. Also, the attested meaning itself could be argued to apply to a son who in the absence of a (functioning) father was in need of special “hatching”’.

mac-cóem borrowed into Welsh (MW *makwyf* ‘young retainer, squire, page’)³³ some time before the 12th and most likely around the 9th century AD (34–5). THURNEYSEN (1921: 80) claimed that ‘in the royal residence the sons of great nobles, the *maccoim* “youthful intimates” (or) roughly “squires, pages”, were brought up as the companions of the king’s children’ and that ‘otherwise the individual often gives his son as *dalta* “foster-son” to a foster-father (*aite*) and a foster-mother (*muimme*)’. NAGY (1985: 185) makes the following observation regarding *Acallam na Senórach*: ‘Finn spends the first ten years of his life reaving and pillaging ... finally comes to Tara and appears in the king’s court. From this point on, he is referred to throughout Caillte’s account as a *maccoim* (“youth”), a term frequently used in the *Colloquy* to refer to adolescent males. (The word overlaps in meaning with *mac* and *gilla*)’. He adds in a footnote (298, n. 39) that Thurneysen’s interpretation of ‘*maccoim* in general as referring to a youth under the protection of a king and in his service ... would suit Finn well in the present context’. MAC CANA (1991: 33–4) notes that ‘*maccoem* does not seem to be attested in the Irish law tracts, whereas *makwy(f)* is ‘well established in MW literature, including the law tracts’, one reason probably being that ‘the latter devote far more attention to the personnel and disposition of the royal court. In any event, the *makwy(f)* “page, squire” is a familiar feature of MW tales and of the law texts as a young retainer at the royal court’.

The following broad conclusions were drawn (MAC CANA 1991: 35–6), albeit without presenting tangible evidence: ‘once it had been borrowed [into Welsh], its semantic function as an indicator of social role, which is already present in the Irish sources, appears to have become more clearly defined or focussed ... *Maccóem* was evidently familiar as an element of the traditional terminology of social reference ... and its relative lack of definition in the extant texts as well as its exclusion from the legal corpus may owe something to the fact that it was intimately connected with the traditional structures of heroic belief and practice and in particular with the system of training and initiation ... [Moreover,] those who introduced *maccóem* to Welsh apparently had a very adequate idea of its semantic range in Irish’.

It seems worth stating at the outset that, even if the fusion of *mac* and *cóem* into a compound had taken place by the Old Irish period, retention of the diphthong shows clearly that this could not have happened before the roughly 5th-century AD shortening of vowels in most unstressed syllables (McCONE 1996: 110), which should have yielded OIr. **mac(c)om*. Consequently, if the expression did exist prior to that, it could only have been as a juxtaposition of a separate noun and adjective, e.g. P/IC **mak^uos koimos*.

KERLOUÉGAN (1968: 115) offers a French version of Thurneysen’s just cited remarks on *maccoim*, suggests a parallel with the Merovingian court and continues as follows: ‘In the Táin it is a question of children raised at Emain

³³ See VI below on the native British reflex *cu(m/f)* ‘dear, fair’, which clearly exposes *-kwy(f)* as non-native.

Machae, young nobles probably. Having been attacked by Cú Chulaind, they are tended by persons called *aiti* and *muimmi*. Is it a case of tutors or of adoptive parents? The editor of the text translates as *foster-fathers* and *foster-mothers*; one may suppose that the children brought up at the court were generally accompanied by their adoptive parents'. 'Foster-father/mother' (rendering Thurneysen's *Ziehvater/mutter*) is the obvious translation of *aite/muimme* (cf. the discussion of this passage in II above). The identification of Conchobor's *macrad* as *maccoím* is neither discussed further by Kerlouégan nor made in the earliest extant "first" recension of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. The latter simply refers to a *mac-rad* 'boy-troop' in Emain (e.g. *adfessa dó airscéla na macraide i nEmain ... oc déscin na macraide* at TBC I, ll. 400–3: 'great reports of the boy-troop in Emain were told to him [Cú Chulainn]' and Conchobor spends a third of the day 'looking at the boy-troop') consisting of thrice fifty boys (*trí chóecait mac*; TBC I, l. 401) approached by Cú Chulainn (*téit cosna maccu*; TBC I, l. 418), without performing the required brief initiatory ceremony.

However, the identification is made quite explicitly in the later "second" recension surviving in the 12th–13th-century AD *Book of Leinster*, where the first two phrases are rendered as *adféta dó scéla na maccáem i nEmain ... ic fégad na maccáem* (TBC II, ll. 740–4) and the boy-troop (*in macrad*) consists of *trí coícait maccáem* (TBC II, ll. 767–8). Clearly, then, the probably 11th-century author of the second recension felt justified in specifying the *maic* 'boys' constituting the Ulster king's *mac-rad* as *maccoím*. Further support for this view of Emain's *macrad* is forthcoming from *Tochmarc Emire* §21, where Emer delivers the disparaging verdict *it maithi na comrama móethmacáim* 'good are the combats of a tender *maccóem*/of tender *maccóems*' on the deeds of prowess vaunted by her young wooer Cú Chulainn (§20), who proceeds to extol the benefits of his multiple fostering (§§21–6; VAN HAMEL 1933: 28–30) along essentially the same lines as CCC II (see section II above). Moreover, an obvious parallel for the thrice fifty boys including and apparently led by King Conchobor of Ulster's son Follomon (TBC I, ll. 421–2) is provided by the following reference in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* §106 (KNOTT 1936: 34) to the companions of King Conaire of Tara's son, the *mac breccderg* 'red-freckled boy' Lé Fer/fri Flaith (l. 1118), in Da Derga's hostel: *is é a saintglachsom sin na trí .lll. maccaem fil immi* 'the thrice fifty *maccoím* who are around him are his particular household' (ll. 1142–3). It would follow that the twelve sons of twelve leaders (*duces*) fostered with King Diarmait of Tara by several foster-parents mentioned towards the end of II above (cf. the foster-fathers/mothers of Emain's *mac-rad* also mentioned there) were also *maccoím* like the eight *maccoím* of Crúachu implied by *Tochmarc Ferbe*: *Otchuala Fiannamail mac Fergus[a] Fordeirg sin, .i. mac rechtaire na Cruachna, ... luid remi i n-iarmoracht Mani, ar bá comalta dósom Mani, arrop é in t-ochtmad maccóem na Cruachna Fiannamail* (WINDISCH & STOKES 1897: 490, ll. 380–3) 'when Fiannamail son of Fergus Fordeirg heard that, i.e. the son of the steward of Crúachain/Crúachu, ... he went forth after Maine, for Maine was a foster-brother of his, for Fiannamail was the eighth *maccóem* of Crúachu'. An-

other late Middle Irish text, *Caithréim Cellaig*, features two sons of King Éogan Bél of Connacht, namely Cellach himself and his younger brother Muiredach, who is described as *in maccáem óc ... a tig a oite .i. ríg Luígne* ‘the young *mac-cóem* ... in the house of his foster-father, i.e. the king of Luigni’ (MULCHRONE 1971: 5, l. 160) and had a foster-brother (*comalta*) called Conall (15, ll. 467–8). *Mesca Ulad* (WATSON 1941) refers to Cú Chulainn as the ‘(dear) foster-father’ ((*cáem*-)aiti, ll. 171 and 175) of Conchobor’s son (and hence his own maternal cousin) Furbaide, who is called a *maccáem* (l. 176).

The foregoing indicates that a *mac-cóem* was typically a fosterling, the basic O/MÍr. term for which was *daltae*, and frequently belonged to a group of *mac-coím* (presumably a dozen or so rather than three fifties under normal circumstances), i.e. nobly born boys fostered by various couples (their *aiti* and *muimmi*) under the king’s aegis and, sometimes at least, led by a son of his. King Conchobor’s *macrad* is represented as being regularly engaged in sporting activities on their *cluiche-mag* ‘playing-field’ at Emain (e.g. *TBC I*, ll. 401–27, 471–5, 550–60). *Mac-coím* may also appear at feasts in the company of their leader (e.g. *Lé Fer/fri Flaith* above) or royal patron, as when two baleful figures appear in the vicinity of Da Derga’s hostel *oc admilliud ind ríg 7 na maccoem ro bátar immi sin tig* (KNOTT 1936: ll. 543–4 and similarly ll. 642–3) ‘hexing the king [Conaire] and the *maccoím* who were around him in the house’. In *Fled Bricrenn* §12 (HENDERSON 1899: 12, ll. 7–9), ‘everyone took his place/couch (*lepaid*) there in the royal house, including king, heir apparent, noble, young lord and *maccóemu*’, one half of the house being occupied by Conchobor at the head of Ulster’s warriors and the other by his queen Mugain along with the women of Ulster. A list of named warriors present concludes with (12, ll. 26–8) ‘Bricriu himself, the pick of Ulster’s warriors besides and of their *maccæms* and men of art’. They are clearly distinguished from biological sons in the protest of Cú Chulainn’s (human) father Súaltaim to the still inactive Ulaid in *TBC II*: *tuctha far mná 7 far meic 7 far maccáemi* (ll. 4021–2) ‘your women and your sons and your *maccóems* have been taken’. When it was time for Conchobor and the Ulaid to move from Fintan’s to Cú Chulainn’s feast in *Mesca Ulad*, Cú Chulainn agreed to leave *ar faind 7 ar mná 7 ar maccaimi* ‘our weak ones and our women and our *maccóems*’ behind as long as the warriors and men of art accompanied him to his own celebration (WATSON 1941: ll. 240–5). In *TBC I* Fergus enumerates the fighters in Ailill and Medb’s army *cenmothá ar ndáescorslúag 7 ar mná – ar itá a rígan la cach ríg sund i comaitecht Medba – 7 cenmothá ar maccáemu* (l. 178–80) ‘apart from our camp-followers and our women – for his queen is with every king here in Medb’s company – and apart from our *maccóems*’. This suggests the possibility of taking *maccoím* along on a campaign, albeit only in the company of other evident non-combatants.

The earliest available example of *mac-cóem* in a narrative text, the so-called “second” version of *Compert Con Culainn* (probably early 8th century AD according to section II above), is unusual in that it designates the new-born Cú Chulainn found in his maternal uncle King Conchobor’s bosom when he awoke

after his and his followers' overnight lodgings had disappeared along with its inhabitants, including the mother of the 'little *mac-cóem*'. Use of *mac-cóem* here would be significant even if it was only intended to foreshadow Cú Chulainn's future membership of the *macrad* in Emain. Nevertheless, its main relevance was probably to the situation actually depicted in CCC II insofar as this entailed two key aspects of the *mac-cóem*'s position identified above, namely his entrusting by his parent(s) to the king's care and the provision of foster-parents for his upbringing under royal patronage. As for the other (still more certainly) 8th-century attestation, Wb. 27b16, this

'appears in the printed edition as *gaibid immib anetach macc cóimsa amal no ndad maicc cóima* 'put on this raiment of dear sons, as ye are dear sons', glossing the Latin *Induite uos ergo sicut electi Dei, sancti, et dilecti per uiscera misericordiae*, where *maicc cóima* seems to refer specifically to *electi Dei, sancti, et dilecti*; but, as my colleague Rolf Baumgarten has suggested to me, in the main clause we should almost certainly read *macc(c)óimsa*, which is then explained by the etymological gloss *maicc cóima*. Where precisely this use of the adjective *cóem* is to be located within its normal range – 'dear, precious, beloved; belonging to the family' (*DIL* s.v. *cáem*) – is not immediately clear, but the equation with *electi* indicates that the compound *maccóem* had already developed the sense of pertaining to a group or class, whether as initiand or initiate, which it has in later narrative and verse texts.' (MAC CANA 1991: 27–8)

Whether *maicc cóima* is taken as, in effect, an etymological gloss on the term's more technical institutional sense in the main clause or quite simply as the reason for wearing *a n-étach macc cóim-sa*, the proposal to read the latter as compound *macc(c)óim* /makoiɲ/ cannot be accepted since two separate words *macc cóim* /mak goiɲ/ (gen. pl.) are unambiguously indicated not only by the third *c* but also by a rather obvious space between *macc* and *cóim* in the facsimile (STERN 1910). It would thus seem that uncompounded *mac(c) cóem* could still be used to designate a certain type of fosterling in the 8th century AD. Notwithstanding the late date of the manuscripts concerned, Old Irish acc. pl. *maccu cáema* at the end of stanza 9 of the probably 9th-century 'lament of the old woman of Beare' (MURPHY 1956: 74–83 and 206–8; Ó HAODHA 1989)³⁴ is metrically guaranteed as two separate stressed words by rhymes with *taccu* and *cáela* at the end of the preceding lines 3 and 2 respectively. This would only be relevant if *mac cóem* were being used here in the institutional sense

³⁴ Cited as the most readily available and recent editions respectively. See Ó HAODHA (1989: 308) on previous editions and translations. MURPHY (1956: 207) suggests that its language indicates 'that the poem was composed in the eighth or early ninth century', while Ó HAODHA (1989: 310) 'would be inclined to set down AD 900 as the approximate date of composition'. Translations are my own and the text given is Ó HAODHA's with additions of Murphy's in brackets.

indicated above rather than a more general one implied by translations such as ‘comely youths’ (MURPHY 1956: 77) or ‘handsome boys’ (Ó HAODHA 1989: 315). Stanzas 8 and 9 are uniquely interlinked by identical first halves (apart from metrically motivated inversion of lines 1 and 2) referring to the woman’s ‘bony, thin’ hands. However, whereas these ‘used to be around glorious kings’ (*bítis im ríga (r)ána*) according to the final line of stanza 8, the second half of 9 declares that (now) ‘they are not worth raising, forsooth, up over the dear/fair boys’ (*súas tar(s)na maccu cáema*). This contrast between past pomp and present decay reflects a recurring theme of the poem. Two mss. point to *tar* and the other three to *t/dar-na* with ‘the article, which is required metrically’ (Ó HAODHA 1989: 322) and is duly included in both editors’ texts. However, that same article is then ignored in their translations as if these were based upon the metrically impossible *tar maccu cáema* introduced in two mss., apparently under the structural influence of *im ríga (r)ána*. Nevertheless, the point seems weak since, if the old woman was no longer an object of kings’ desire, it should go without saying that she would not be attractive to ‘handsome boys’. Rather, the article implies specific ‘the dear/fair boys’, the obvious candidates then being the troops of *maic cóim* liable to be fostered (at least indirectly) by kings. The point would then be that, whereas she had previously been deemed worthy of exalted kings’ embrace, now it was not even worth her while to try and vie with his under-age wards for attention. Probably, then, *maccu cáema* is used here in its more usual technical sense and is a further piece of evidence for normally uncompounded *mac cóem* in Old Irish. As for *maccoem* /makoiɲ/ in the rather late sole independent manuscript witness of CCC II, there is no obvious objection to positing acc. sg. *mac coem* /mak goiɲ/ in its Old Irish original.

The meagre but uncontradicted Old Irish evidence thus suggests a roughly tenth-century date for the creation of the type *mac-cáem* with single main stress and unvarying first element (e.g. acc. pl. *maccáemu* at TBC I, l. 180 above and dat. pl. *maccáemaib* at TBC II, l. 1324) normally encountered in later sources and borrowed into Welsh by the twelfth as *makwyf*. On the assumption that it represented /makaiɲə/ based upon O/Mlr. *maic cóema*, Middle Irish nom. pl. *mac-cáemi* (TBC II l. 2936, and 4022 cited above) points in the same direction insofar as Wb. 27b16 *maicc cóima* etc. is one of only three examples of innovatory adjectival masc. nom. pl. *-a* in the Glosses (GOI §351 (2)). Nom. pl. *mac-cáemi* also indicates that *mac-cáem* started life as a single-stressed juxtaposition of noun and adjective rather than a normal compound /makaiɲ/. If so, it could be analysed as /makaiɲ/ and an example of a phenomenon recently examined by UHLICH (2019: 20–7), namely ‘an early Irish tendency, in syntactic groups of two stressed words in which the second basically bears the main stress, to pronounce the first with complete proclisis instead of a secondary stress’ (UHLICH 2019: 26). The first element’s generalisation as *mac* without inflection or following mutation may well have arisen regularly in most of the paradigm by homorganic delentition and devoicing (GOI §137; gen. sg./nom. pl. *maic *choím*

> *maic cóim*, acc. sg./gen. pl. *mac cóem* /mak goiμ/ > /mak (k)oiμ/) and assimilation of quality (*GOI* §159 (b); *maic cóim* > *ma(c) cóim*), thereby creating pressure towards the replacement of acc. pl. *maccu* and dat. pl. *maccaib* by *mac*.

Whatever about these purely formal aspects, the main Wb. glossator made apposite use of *maicc cóima* to render Paul's *electi Dei ... et dilecti* 'God's chosen ... and beloved (ones)', since it was typically applied to a select band of fosterlings held in affection by their royal patron (e.g. the *macrad* regularly watched at play by Conchobor above or Diarmait's *nutriti ... quos rex multum diligebat* in II earlier) and God/Christ was naturally envisaged as king (repeatedly, for instance, in ll. 1–32 of the prologue to *Félire Óengusso*; STOKES 1905: 17–18). It thus appears that the basic contours of the *mac-cóem* seen in later texts had been firmly established by the 8th century AD.

Commentary on the fragmentary tract on fee-paying fosterage, *Cáin Íarraith* (KELLY 1988: 270, no. 19), prescribes the proper clothing and colours for foster-sons according to their parents' rank (*CIH* 1759.11–36).³⁵ As for what was presumably fosterage for affection, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* emphasises that, despite a difference in rank, relations between between the king's son Conaire and the three sons of the doubtless aristocratic *féindid* Donn Désa were so close that all four had the same clothes and weapons as well as identically coloured horses while being fostered together (KNOTT 1936: ll. 120–1). Fosterlings thus seem, in effect, to have worn uniforms and it seems likely that *ma(i)c cóim/cóema*, or at least individual troops of them and possibly with differences reflecting rank, also dressed alike as a means of asserting their solidarity as a group marked out from others. The glossator's use of *a n-étach macc cóem-sa* would then be alluding to the distinctive costume typically shared by such a group as a metaphor of the similarly distinctive virtues (*benignitatem, humilitatem, modestiam, patientiam*, Col. 3:12) that Paul was urging a group of Christians to 'put on'

³⁵ When the six-year-old Cú Chulainn (a *mac-cóem*, as already noted) had been successively immersed in three vats to cool excessive martial ardour after his first expedition, Conchobor's queen put *bratt ngorm n-imbi 7 delg n-argit 7 léne chulpatach* (*TBC* 1, l. 819) 'a blue mantle around him and a silver brooch and hooded tunic', and he took his regular place (*lepaid*) thereafter below the king's knee (*fo glún*). In §24 of the Salamanca Life of St. Fintan or Munnu, a visiting king was pleased to see one of his two sons in fosterage with a hermit dressed *in cuculo iacint<in>o, cum sagittis porporeis, habens in umeris suis ceraculum cum capitibus ereis* 'in a blue hooded mantle with purple arrows, having on his shoulders a brooch with bronze heads' and displeased to see the other son in fosterage with St. Fintan dressed *in cuculo nigro ... et in tunica, brevis et alba, cum ora nigra* 'in a black hooded mantle ... and in a short and white tunic with a black edge' (HEIST 1965: 204, §24). The reason is clear from the just mentioned commentary on *Cáin Íarraith*, which prescribes deep blue (*gorm*) and purple for king's sons but grey and yellow and black and white for commoners' sons (and red and grey-blue [*glas*] and brown for nobles' sons). Clothing and its colours thus marked a foster-son's status, and the raiment bestowed upon Cú Chulainn after his great success was obviously intended as a mark of distinction.

together.

There is nothing in the foregoing to suggest that the basic role of a *mac cóem* or *mac-cóem* was to perform the types of service associated with the likes of royal pages or squires, although they may have done so on occasion and something of that nature may be implied by the listing of *Coeman Cilli Ríada, a maccoem* as one of the twenty-four members of St. Patrick's household charged with various functions in the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick (MULCHRONE 1939: l. 3128). What the bulk of the evidence presented does indicate is that a *mac-cóem* was a king's foster-son as a rule, sometimes directly but more often than not as one of a number of *mac-coím* assigned individually to various foster-parents but also forming a group under the overall patronage and oversight of the king, whose characteristic affection for them is presumably reflected in the element *cóem* 'dear, beloved'. This practice would obviously tend to cement good relations with sub-kings and other nobles whose sons were being brought up in the king's close proximity. Moreover, although *mac-coím* were hardly hostages in the normal sense, the latter too 'were usually the sons of kings or lords' (KELLY 1988: 174) and some potential overlap is suggested by the encounter with *teora maccoemu batar aneterius oc Loegaire* (STOKES 1887: 462, ll. 5–6) 'three *maccoím* who were in suretyship with Lóegaire', the king of Tara, in the *Lebar Brecc* homily on St. Patrick. The regular plying of javelins and playing of ball games etc. by Conchobor's *macrad* in *TBC I* (e.g. ll. 423–7, 471–5, 550–60) may be linked to the central role of physical pursuits and militarily useful training in upper-class fosterage: 'The fosterchild must also be educated according to his or her rank. According to glosses and commentary on *Cáin Íarraith* the son of a king or noble must be taught the board-games *fidchell* and *brannuigecht*, horsemanship, swimming, and marksmanship' (KELLY 1988: 87).

Allowing for an emphasis upon morals or manners and letters rather than physical pursuits, the English bishop Asser's roughly contemporary account of King Alfred's career explicitly identifies education of and affection for the boys concerned along with good relations with their fathers as the main aim and effect of fosterage or upbringing in the royal household. *Episcopus quoque suos et omnem ecclesiasticum ordinem, comites ac nobiles suos, ministeriales etiam et omnes familiares admirabili amore diligebat. Filios quoque eorum, qui in regali familia nutriebantur, non minus propriis diligens, omnibus bonis moribus instituere et literis imbuere solus die noctuque inter cetera non desinebat* (STEVENSON 1904: 60, §76). 'He also loved with notable affection his bishops and the whole ecclesiastical order, his companions and nobles as well as officials and all domestics. Nor did he cease, among other things, to instil on his own by day and night all good manners/morals and literacy into their sons, who were brought up in the royal family and whom he loved no less than his own'.

A comparable rationale seems to underlie the Irish system of bringing up the sons of other kings, nobles and even senior royal officials such as the *rechtaire* (KELLY 1988: 65; see the citation from *Tochmarc Ferbe* above) under a king's affectionate but watchful eye. The available evidence indicates that, in the

earlier medieval period, these *maic cóema* or (increasingly) *mac-coím/-cóema* ‘dear boys’ constituted elite companies of fosterlings under the king’s overall aegis rather than a corps of pages or the like in his service. Their position apparently evolved into a role of the latter type in medieval Wales especially, whereas the later Irish tendency seems to have been towards a rather non-specific application of *mac-cóem* to (presumably well-born) youths: ‘in *Acallam na Senórach* ... the term occurs frequently without clear definition though in the general sense of “young man/warrior” (it is explicitly equated with *óclach* “(young) warrior” in l. 4080), but *maccáim* (pl.) are referred to at least once as serving food and drink at a feast (4609) ... [and there is] the occasional equation of *maccóem* and *dalta* “foster-son” (e.g. *Acallam na Senórach* ll 4685 and 4689)’ (MAC CANA 1991: 32).

VI. The etymology of (mac) cóem and a possible pederastic dimension

In the likely event that a boy’s fosterage was once the preserve of the mother’s kin as a rule (I above; cf. IV on *gor-mac*), the term *mac(c) cóem* or *mac-cóem* could have originated as a reflex of the characteristically close bond between a boy (*mac*) and a maternal uncle who was both a king and his foster-father. Some support for this hypothesis is arguably forthcoming from the term’s probably earliest attested use with reference to the baby Cú Chulainn’s first appearance in his maternal uncle King Conchobor’s bosom in what looks like the oldest version of his birth-tale (II above). If this was the term’s starting point, by the Old Irish period at the latest it had clearly come to designate a wider range of fosterlings under royal oversight such as Conchobor’s *mac-rad* of 150 boys in Emain Machae or the dozen sons of leaders fostered with Diarmait mac Cerrbéoil at Tara.

The question of origins naturally brings into play the etymology of OIr. *cóem* ‘dear, beloved; fair, beautiful’ and its British cognates OW *-cum* (*Guin-cum* = OIr. *Find-chóem* ‘white/bright (and) beautiful’; UHLICH 1993: 253 and 89), MW *cu* ‘dear, beloved, fair, beautiful’, MCorn. *cuf*, MBret. *cuff*.³⁶ All of these derive quite straightforwardly from Insular (and very likely Proto-)Celtic **koimo/ā-*

³⁶ Use of this (chiefly in Southern Welsh) with the words for ‘father’ (*tad*) and ‘mother’ (*mam*) to denote the corresponding grandparents as *tad-cu* and *mam-gu* seems natural enough in view of their tendency to be less strict with their grandchildren than their own children and does not appear to be especially old. If it is old, *tad/mam (y) c/gu*, ‘grand-father/mother’ and poorly attested *mab (y) cu* ‘beloved son, ?grandson’ (GPC 2293, col. 3, s.v. *mab* (d)) could perhaps have originated in a special bond of affection with the mother’s kin, given the possibility of a shift from ‘sister’s son’ to (paternal or maternal) ‘grandson’ seen in *gar-mhac* ‘grandson’, the ModIr. outcome of O/MIr. *gor-mac* (cf. Ó CATHASAIGH 1986: 137 and the range of meanings attested in the reflexes of PIE **nepot-* noted in section I above).

with the same basic meanings ‘dear’ and ‘fair’ found in its attested descendants. *IEW* (I, 539–40) associates this with the PIE root **kēi* ‘lie’ (*LIV* 284/*LIV*² 320) seen in Hitt. *ki-tta(ri)*, Ved. *śáy-e*, Gk. κεί-ται (all meaning ‘lies’) and more specifically, by deriving a meaning ‘dear’ from membership ‘of the same settlement’, with **koi-mo/ā-* (> PGmc. **haima/ō-*) underlying words for various types of settlement in Germanic especially: OEng. *hām* ‘village, home’, OHG *heim* ‘house, home’, ONorse *heimr* ‘dwelling, home, earth’ < PGmc. **haimaz*³⁷ (remodelled in Gothic to fem. *i-ō*-stem [sing./plur.] *haims* usually translating κώμη ‘village’ in the Greek original; RINGE 2006: 95). The problem is that not only is there no reflex of **koimo-* meaning ‘settlement’ in Celtic but also, even if PC **koimo-* ‘settlement’ is taken as a starting point, the notion of belonging to the same settlement (and hence ‘dear’) would hardly be expressed by that base alone but rather by a derivative such as **koim-īo/-ati-* (> OIr. **coime/cóemaid*) with a “pertinative” suffix or by a “possessive” compound such as **kon-koimo-* (> OIr. **cocum*) ‘having joint settlement’.

As a primary suffix attached directly to roots in the full (*e-* or *o-*) or zero grade, PIE **-mo-* seems to be used to form action and result nouns as well as adjectives with a passive or active/agentive sense (DEBRUNNER 1954: 749–51; cf. BRUGMANN 1889: 156–66 and SCHWYZER 1953: 491–2). To that extent, *CoC-mo-* may be said to have at least partial functional equivalence with plain thematic *CoC-o-* discussed in IV above: e.g. Skt. *ghar-má-* ‘warmth, glow’ (noun; result of heating), Av. *gar^ama-* and OP *garma-* ‘warm(th)’ (noun or adj.), OEng. *wearm*, ON *varmr* etc. (< PGmc. adj. **uar-ma-z* ‘[heating/heated,] warm’), OLat. *formus* ‘warm’ (< **g^{uh}or-mo-* with a similar formal and semantic range to **g^{uh}or-o-* in IV above); Skt. *só-ma-* ‘(product of) pressing’ or ‘(pressed) juice’ (*su-* ‘press (out)’), *stó-ma-* ‘(song of) praise’ (*stu-* ‘praise’), *kṣé-ma-* ‘rest, stay, security’ (as a result of settling; *kṣi* ‘live, settle’), *dar-má-* ‘destroyer’ (*dṛ-* ‘split/tear [apart]’; cf. zero-grade *yudh-má-* ‘fighter, warrior’); Gk. φορμός ‘(carrier,) basket’ (φερ- ‘bear, carry’), ὄρ-μο-ς ‘cord, chain, necklace’ (strung together, or the result of stringing together; εἶρ-ε- ‘string/fasten together’ < **ser-īe-*; *LIV* 484/*LIV*² 534–5), τὸρ-μο-ς ‘hole, socket’ (rubbed, or the result of rubbing) or ‘tenon, peg’ (rubbing, rubber; τείρ-ε- < **ter-īe-* ‘rub’).

These considerations would indicate for **koi-mo-(-/meh₂-)* the potential basic meanings ‘lying, settlement’ (act/result of lying/settling) as a noun or ‘lying, settling, settled’ as an adjective (active/passive being largely irrelevant in the case of intransitive **kēi* ‘lie/settle [down], rest’). In that case, a sense ‘dear’ could be plausibly derived from an adjective **koimo/ā(-)* originally meaning ‘settled, resident’, and **mak^uos koimos* ‘resident boy’ would have been apt enough as a designation of a boy fostered or boarding under a king’s patronage and naturally ‘dear’ to those responsible for his upbringing. However, a semantic development from ‘resident’ to the other main early meaning ‘fair,

³⁷ *LEIA* C-6/7 accepts a link with the Germanic forms but is strangely hesitant about the further connection with PIE **kēi*.

beautiful' of **koimo/ā(-)* seems less obvious. Whereas the sense of 'lying, settling' seems to have been applied to a place as 'home' in Germanic, 'bed' and 'sleep' constitute an at least equally natural point of reference in Greek derivatives denoting a spouse as 'bedmate', notably Homeric fem. *παρα-/ἄ-κοιτις* 'wife' and masc. *παρα-/ἄ-κοίτης* 'husband' (literally 'beside/co-lying (one)'). As pointed out by FRISK (1960: 809), the evidently denominative Greek verb *κοιμά-ω* (active) 'put to bed/sleep' or *κοιμά-ομαι* (middle) 'go to bed/sleep' presupposes a no longer extant base **koi-mā* or **koi-mo-*. Presumably, this would have been a resultative noun meaning 'bed' or 'rest, sleep' like the actually attested Homeric *κοίτη* 'bed' and *κοῖτος* 'bed, rest, sleep' with **-tā/*-to-* instead of **-mā/-mo-*, perhaps under the influence of a dental suffix appearing in the aforementioned words for 'bedmate'.

The semantics of the Greek forms raise the possibility of a Proto-Celtic "agentive" adjective **koi-mo/ā(-)* meaning 'lying' (typically in a bed) and hence 'bedmate', whose appeal to his or her partner could then give rise to a meaning 'dear, beloved' or 'fair, beautiful' from a primarily emotional or physical standpoint respectively. A basic sense 'lying, bedmate' would open up a further potential perspective on the arguably PC term **mak^uos koimos* underlying OIr. *mac cóem*. While understandably focussing upon relatively abundant Ancient Greek evidence, SERGENT's (1996) major study of 'homosexuality and initiation among Indo-European peoples' precedes his concluding consideration of Indo-European origins (543–63) with a review of much sparser evidence pertaining to early Germanic (477–504), Celtic (505–19) and some other non-Greek Indo-European peoples (519–42). His treatment of the Celts (Gauls in current terminology; McCONE 2008: 1–8 and 25–8) begins with their esteem for intercourse (social and/or sexual *συνουσία*) between males and inclination sometimes towards love between men and sometimes towards love of women according to Aristotle (*Politics* ii, 97–8, or 1269b), a credible contemporary witness on account of nine or ten years (342–33 BC) spent in Macedonia at a time when Celtic peoples had already begun to penetrate the Balkans (SERGENT 1996: 505–7).

SERGENT (1996: 507–12) then turns to a pederastic aspect deduced from the statements of three ancient Greek authors³⁸ known to have drawn upon the Celtic ethnography (see TIERNEY 1960) contained in a no longer extant continuation of Polybius' history by Posidonius (c. 135–51 BC), whose lost work may thus be inferred to have mentioned Gaulish homosexuality involving young males and whose testimony should be taken seriously on account of his known sojourn among the Gauls. The longest of the three is made by Diodorus Siculus (v, 32, 7) without explicit reference to the age of those involved: 'Despite having good-looking women/wives (*γυναικάς*), they pay these very little attention but are perversely crazy for involvements with males (*πρὸς τὰς τῶν ἀρρένων*

³⁸ AS SERGENT (1996: 511–12) points out, Caesar's silence on the subject is hardly a serious counter-argument, not least because of his alleged youthful involvement with King Nicodemus III of Bithynia.

ἐπιπλοκάς ἐκτόπως λυσσῶσιν), and they are wont, lying down on the ground on animal skins, to rollick with male bedmates (παρακοίτους) on both sides. Most extraordinary of all, disregarding their own decorum, they blithely surrender their physical beauty to others, and they do not consider this disgraceful but rather think it a dishonour when someone of them is made the offer and does not accept the favour being bestowed'. The second point is made more obliquely by Strabo (iv, 4, 6), who specifies youths in recording the view 'that all Celts are contentious and it is not considered a disgrace among them for young men to be unsparing of their prime (τὸ τῆς ἀκμῆς ἀφειδεῖν ... τοὺς νέους)'. Di-odoros' first point recurs in Athenaeus (xiii, 603a), not only after a discussion of Greek pederasty but also with explicit mention of boys: 'And of the barbarians the Celts, despite having most beautiful women/wives (γυναικάς), rather take pleasure in boys (παιδικοῖς μᾶλλον χαίρουσιν), so that some frequently take their rest on skins with two boyfriends (μετὰ δύο ἐρωμένων)'. SERGENT (1996: 510) goes on to make the plausible suggestion that this grouping of a senior lover with two junior objects of his passion (*erastēs* and *erōmenoi* in Greek terminology) may underlie the Gaulish military practice known in their native tongue, where *marka* means 'horse' (as do OIr. *marc*, MW *march*), as *tri-markisia* 'three-horseness' according to Pausanias' (x, 19, 10–11), who describes how a horseman is supported and, if necessary, replaced by one or the other of two assistants (οικέται).

PC **mak^uos koimos* (Gaulish **mapos koimos*) would have been an apposite term for an aristocratic knight's (cf. McCONE 2020: 118–24) young male acolyte and, at least when on campaign (as perhaps implied by the skins on the ground), bedmate. Moreover, connotations of 'fair/beautiful boy' and 'dear/beloved boy' could easily have arisen from the good looks and emotional attachment involved. It is not difficult to imagine an institution of this type developing into a *mac-rad* or group of boys attached to a man of particularly high rank such as a king, its members still being known as *maic coim/cóema* or *mac-coim/cóema*. Since it could be understood merely as a term of affection approximating to 'dear boy', the term *mac(-)cóem* could easily have outlived the bed-sharing custom on which it had originally been based. That said, 'the circumstances in which a wife may divorce her husband and retain her *coibche* "bride price"' include 'practising homosexuality ...: a wife may divorce her husband if he spurns the marriage bed and prefers to lie with boys' (KELLY 1988: 73–4). One of the seven categories of woman listed by the relevant Old Irish legal heptad in this regard is *ben do-gáetar (a) cáemdae co-mbi ferr lais feis la gillu ma-ni-bé deithbir dó* 'a woman whose conjugal bed is cheated so that he prefers sleeping with boys, unless it be proper for him' (CIH 48.5–6 and 11; text normalised), glossed (48.7–8) .i. *bean is dithoghaige leis cáemda cona ferr beth a nænleabaid risna gilliu* 'i.e. a woman (whose) conjugal bed is considered undesirable by him so that it is preferable to be in one bed with the boys'. The nature of such sharing of a bed with boys is indicated not only by the frequent sexual connotations of *feis* (e.g. CARNEY 1955: 334) but also by the representation of this practice as a

substitute for conjugal relations with a wife. The condemnation implicit in its recognition by clerical jurists as a ground for divorce is unsurprising. However, the same can hardly be said of the rider 'unless it be proper for him', amounting as it does to an acknowledgment that sleeping with boys was legally permissible under certain circumstances. If so, one likely mitigating factor that springs to mind would be a man's absence from his home and wife, e.g. on a military expedition.

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