

Kevin MURRAY: *The early Fenian corpus* (Cork Studies in Celtic Literatures, 5). Cork: CSCL, 2021. 78 pp. ISBN 987-0-9955469-5-0. € 12.

In this attractive addition to the steadily growing series Cork Studies in Celtic Literatures, Kevin Murray provides a comprehensive catalogue and chronology of the early constituent parts of the Fenian Cycle, mostly dating from before A.D. 1200, with a focus on their dates of composition, the manuscripts in which they are transmitted, and the available editions and translations. It is a companion piece to his valuable study of the early Finn Cycle (MURRAY 2017), to which it was originally intended as an appendix, but then it 'became too long and unwieldy for inclusion' (p. vi). It updates earlier surveys of MEYER 1910 [1993]: xvi–xxxi, [1993: *115], MURPHY 1953: LV–LXI, and MURRAY 2012. The format of the Cork series is highly suitable for its separate publication and makes it easy to use for quick reference on a scholar's desk.

The booklet opens with a list of text titles and initial lines of poems mentioned (pp. i–iii), lists of abbreviations (pp. iv–v), and an introduction (pp. vi–x), which lays out its structure and the reasons for the omission of some texts, as, for example, poems attributed to members of the *fian* which have no other connection to the Finn Cycle. Its five main sections are organised by sub-categories of the corpus, namely (and I here quote Murray's headings as they reflect subtle degrees of certainty with regard to dating and classification): (A) 'a chronology of pre-1200 composition concerning Finn and his *fian*' (pp. 1–37, 30 entries), (B) 'a tentative chronology of pre-1200 poems concerning Finn and his *fian* found in *Duanaire Finn*' (pp. 38–41, 14 entries), (C) 'a list of compositions concerning Finn and his *fian* preserved in the *dindsenchas* corpus' (pp. 42–46, 16 entries), (D) 'a chronology of mainly pre-1200 references to Finn and his *fian* in literature which is neither primarily *Fianaigecht* in focus nor part of the *dindsenchas* corpus' (47–55, 24 entries), and finally, (E) 'a chronology of mainly pre-1200 *fianaigecht* episodes and compositions primarily concerning *fénidí* other than Finn and his *fian*' (pp. 56–63, 15 entries). It closes with a bibliography (pp. 64–73) and an index (pp. 74–78). Post-1200 texts listed understandably include *Acallam na Senórach* (#A29), the central text of the Finn Cycle, and *Acallam Bec* (#A30) as well as some texts in section D (#D19 – #D24).

The entries are ordered chronologically and individually numbered for each section. In their introductory parts, the texts are briefly characterised and related texts are noted; where available, references are given to information provided in Ó CORRÁIN 2017 (= *CLH*), CORTHALS 2017 (= *MsOMIT*), MURRAY 2017 (= *EFC*), or FLAHIVE 2017 (= *FC*); in section B, references are given to the number of poems in *Duanaire Finn*. In section A only, this introduction is followed by a list of manuscript sources. All entries feature ample information on dating, with the exception of those in section C, and on available editions and translations respectively.

Dating is the central concern of Murray's presentation, and its discussion proceeds in two steps. The first is a consideration of the evidence for the dating

that Murray favours, with different degrees of precision and certainty, ranging, for example, from ‘early twelfth century’ (#A19, p. 27) to ‘c. 1100?’ (#A18a, p. 25) and to ‘late tenth / eleventh century?’ (#A9, p. 12). His preferred dating criteria are linguistic, and Murray is well aware of the problems with these (pp. vii): ‘Though linguistic analysis is a powerful tool, its limitations must be acknowledged at the outset’. He also comments on the shortness of some texts which therefore provide only a small number of diagnostic linguistic forms (e.g., #A20, p. 28) and shows himself aware of criticism levelled for similar reasons against Ó CATHÁIN’s 1931–33 study, which he nonetheless considers to be useful (pp. 15–16). In order to support his linguistic dating, he helpfully lists the forms he considers to be significant with brief comments. In a few instances, he refers to extra-linguistic criteria (e.g., #A8, p. 10, #A14, p. 19). In a further paragraph, he then summarizes previous scholarship on dating. Murray’s most prominent revision of a conventional date is the one for *Macgnímrada Finn*, (#A13, pp. 17–19), whose currently accepted dating to the twelfth century (excepting its constituent earlier poem beginning *Cētte-main*) he considers to be too late. Instead, he opts for a date ‘no later than the eleventh century’ (p. 17), on the basis of Middle Irish forms already in use by this time.

The Early Fenian Corpus provides a comprehensive survey of the early, predominantly pre-1200 Fenian material, organised chronologically and by its five sub-classes established by Murray. Its focus is on the thorny issue of dating, complemented by rich bibliographical information on sources, editions, and translations. The mainly linguistic criteria employed for dating are concisely set forth and balanced, so that readers can evaluate them. With this new addition to his series of important publications on *fíanaigeacht*, Kevin Murray has provided a well-organised and indispensable reference tool for all scholars working on, or interested in, this body of texts.

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MEYER, Kuno, 1910: *Fíanaigeacht, being a collection of hitherto unedited Irish poems and tales relating to Finn and his Fiana* (Todd Lecture Series, 16). Dublin: Royal Irish Academy (reprinted Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1993 [with further Addenda and Corrigenda])

MURPHY, Gerard, 1953: *Duanaire Finn. The Book of the Lays of Fionn*. Part III: *Introduction, Notes, Appendices and Glossary* [...] (Irish Texts Society, 43). Dublin: Irish Texts Society.

MURRAY, Kevin, 2012: ‘Interpreting the evidence: problems with dating the early *fíanaigeacht* corpus’. In: Sharon J. ARBUTHNOT, & Geraldine PARSONS (ed.), *The Gaelic Finn Tradition*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 31–49.

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- Ó CATHÁIN, Séan, 1931–33: ‘Some studies in the development from Middle to Modern Irish, based on the Annals of Ulster’, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 19, 1–47.
- Ó CORRÁIN, Donnchadh, 2017: *Clavis litterarum Hibernensium: Medieval Irish books & texts (c. 400–c. 1600)*. Turnhout: Brepols.

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