

Irish Kings and High-Kings

FRANCIS J. BYRNE

FOUR COURTS HISTORY CLASSICS

Irish Kings and High-Kings

FOUR COURTS HISTORY CLASSICS

A Paper Landscape: The Ordnance Survey in Nineteenth-century Ireland
J.H. Andrews

Irish Kings and High-Kings
F.J. Byrne

The Old English in Ireland, 1625-42
Aidan Clarke

Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1780-1845
S.J. Connolly

Civil War and Restoration in the Three Stuart Kingdoms: The Career of Randal MacDonnell, Marquis of Antrim
Jane H. Ohlmeyer

Kinsale: The Spanish Intervention in Ireland at the End of the Elizabethan Wars
John J. Silke

Jacobite Ireland, 1685-91
J.G. Simms

Songs of Irish Rebellion
Georges Denis Zimmermann

Irish Kings and High-Kings

Francis John Byrne



FOUR COURTS PRESS

Published by
FOUR COURTS PRESS
7 Malpas Street, Dublin 8, Ireland
email: info@four-courts-press.ie
http://www.four-courts-press.ie
and in North America by
FOUR COURTS PRESS
c/o ISBS, 920 N.E. 58th Avenue, Suite 300, Portland, OR 97213.

© Francis John Byrne 1973, 2001

First published 1973 by B.T. Batsford Ltd
First paperback edition 1987
Second edition 2001; reprinted 2004

ISBN 1-85182-552-5

A catalogue record for this title
is available from the British Library.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and publisher of this book.

The cover design incorporates a drawing of a grave-slab from Durrow, reading OR— DO AIGIDIU, 'A prayer for Aigide'.

Printed in Ireland
by Colour Books Ltd, Dublin.

Contents

List of Illustrations vii
Acknowledgements xiv
Additional Notes and Corrigenda xv
A Note on the Emergence of Irish Surnames xxxi
Preface to the Second Edition xlv
Preface 1

1 The Irish Concept of Kingship 7
2 King and People 28
3 Kings and High-Kings 40
4 The Kingship of Tara 48
5 Niall of the Nine Hostages 70
6 Diarmait mac Cerbaill and the Consolidation of Uí Néill Power 87
7 Ulster Kings 106
8 Kings of Leinster 130
9 Cashel 165
10 Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga 202
11 Connacht 230
12 The High-Kingship of Ireland 254

Appendix I: King Lists 275
Appendix II: Genealogical Tables 280
Appendix III: The Pronunciation of Old Irish Names 302

Bibliographical Note 308
Index 317

Illustrations

PLATES APPEAR BETWEEN PAGES 174 AND 175

1. Figure of king or warrior from White Island, county Fermanagh.
One of several statues from this site on Lough Erne. Probably ninth century. These figures have been thought to represent the seven deadly sins and this one has tentatively been identified with Pride in the person of a king or lord. Note the brooch on his left shoulder, the Viking-type sword and the small targe or shield, and compare the warrior on Plate 20.

2. Inauguration ceremony of an Irish king according to Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hiberniae*.
This illustration comes from an early thirteenth-century manuscript originally belonging to the abbey of St Augustine at Canterbury. H. F. McClintock, *Old Irish dress* (Dundalk, 1950), remarks: 'Unfortunately so far as costume is concerned these pictures are far from convincing and look like the work of an artist who was drawing from hearsay or description without having ever visited the country.'

3. Tulach Óc (Tullaghogue, county Tyrone).
This sketch of the inauguration site of the O'Neills was made by Bartelet in his map of 1602 and shows the stone chair before its destruction by Lord Mountjoy.

4. Ninth-century warrior from the Book of Kells. Note again the small targe. The trousers and the spear rather than sword suggest a common soldier rather than an aristocrat.

5. Description of a king's house in the eighth-century brehon law tract *Críth*

Gablach (see text on p. 33). From the Trinity College Dublin manuscript 1337 (H.3.18): this portion was written *c.*1510 by a member of the Mac Aodhagáin (Mac Egan) law school.

6. The seven ways in which a king may lose his honour. From the Heptads in the Trinity College Dublin manuscript 1316 (H.2.15A): this portion was written by Cairbre (Mac Aodhagáin?) in 1566.

7. Knowth: Neolithic passage grave and royal site of the Síl nÁedo Sláine kings of north Brega from the eighth to the tenth centuries. In 1172 it was converted into a Norman mote. This photograph shows the site in 1968. Since then continuous excavation by Professor George Eogan has contributed enormously to our knowledge of all phases of occupation from the Neolithic to the medieval. See his *Knowth and the passage-tombs of Ireland* (London, 1986). A comprehensive report on progress to 2000 is due for publication shortly.

8. Cruciform burial chamber with stone carved bowl; third millennium BC, Knowth.

9. Early medieval ring-fort at Knowth.

10. This pagan sculpture from the Cathedral Hill at Armagh might represent the Irish ancestor-god Nuadu 'of the silver hand' holding his severed arm.

11. Tara, looking south along the *cursus* towards the main complex of Ráith na Ríg with the *Clóenferta* or sloping trenches at bottom right. For recent work on the site see Conor Newman (ed.) *Tara: an archaeological survey* (Dublin, 1997).

12, 13, 14. Objects from Lagore crannogue, near Dunshaughlin, county Meath, seat of the Síl nÁedo Sláine kings of south Brega from the eighth to the tenth centuries. 12. Decorated belt buckle. 13. Iron collar and chain (for hostages?). 14. Engraved bone trial-piece for artist or craftsman.

15. Celtic human sacrifice as depicted on the Gundestrup Cauldron (Copenhagen). Probably an import into Denmark from the Danube region, this famous silver cauldron of the second or first century BC appears to depict figures and motifs from Celtic mythology. The ritual procession of warriors with shields, helmets and trumpets here shown in conjunction with what seems to be the drowning of a victim in a vat suggests the form of sacrifice reflected in several Irish tales about the deaths of early kings of Tara. More recently, however, a case has been made for regarding it as a product of Thrace and Thraco-Phrygian mythology: see Kaul, Marazov, Best and de Vries, *Thracian tales on the Gundestrup Cauldron* (Amsterdam, 1991).

16. The Cross of the Scriptures, Clonmacnoise. Erected *c.*900 by the high-king Flann Sinna and the abbot Colmán mac Ailella. It is the first major work of art known to have been specifically commissioned by a king, although his father Máel Sechnaill appears to be commemorated by inscriptions on the high crosses at Kinnitty, county Offaly, and Killamery, county Kilkenny, probably marking the limits of his demonstration of authority over Munster in 858 (see p. 264). One panel on the Cross of the Scriptures records the association of Flann's ancestor Diarmait mac Cerbaill with the foundation of Clonmacnóise by St Ciarán (see p. 91) and of his own association with Abbot Colmán in the building of the great church on the site.

17. Grave-slab from Durrow, reading OR— DO AIGIDIU. 'A prayer for Aigide'. Aigide's son Áed was king of Tethba and fell together with his lord the high-king Congalach mac Máel Mithig at the hands of the Dublin Norse in 956. The Cenél Maine kings of Tethba claimed that their ancestor Áed mac Brénainn (†588) granted the site of Durrow to Colum Cille.

18. Clonmacnoise from the air.

19. Pedigrees of the kings of Ulster, Dál nAraide and Uí Echach Cobo from the Oxford Bodleian manuscript Rawlinson B 502, written *c.*1130. This is the earliest manuscript of the Irish genealogical corpus, and was written in Leinster, probably (in my opinion) at Killeshin, county Laois, although Professor Pádraig Ó Riain believes that it is the (lost?) Book of Glendalough.

20. Figure of a warrior from a slab at Carndonagh, county Donegal, in the territory of Cenél nEógain. The Viking-type sword shows that it cannot be as early as the seventh century, as stated in the original caption, though the cross-slab beside which this figure is now placed probably does.

21. Grave-slab from Clonmacnoise, reading ARTTRI. Artrí mac Muirgiusa, king of Tethba, was slain in 826.

22. The Grianán of Ailech in the Inishowen peninsula, county Donegal, is an impressive stone fortress which was the original seat of the Uí Néill dynasty of Cenél nEógain and apparently occupied until the tenth century or later.

23. High Cross at Moone, county Kildare. Late eighth century. Moone (Máen Coluim Chille) was a church of the Columban community.

24. High Cross at Castledermot, county Kildare. Ninth century. Castledermot (Dísert Diarmata) was a Céle Dé church founded by the Ulster prince Diarmait ua Áeda Róin (†825) in 812.

25. Ogham stone at Burnham, county Kerry. Sixth century. R. A. S. Macalister, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum*, i (Dublin, 1945; reprinted, Dublin, 1996), No. 175. Reads MAQQI ERCCIA MAQQI MUCOI DOVINIA, commemorating Mac Ercae mocu Duibne (i.e., of the Corco Duibne).

26. Ogham stone at Dunloe, county Kerry. Sixth century. Macalister, No. 197. Reads DEGOS MAQI MOCOI TOICAKI, commemorating Daig mocu Tóeca (i.e., of the Tóecraige). This is one of seven which had been used later to build a souterrain. Two of these commemorate MAQI-RITEAS MAQI MAQI-DDUMILEAS MUCOI TOICACI (Mac Reithe mac Maic Doimle mocu Thóeca) and MAQI-TTAL MAQI VORGOS MAQI MUCOI TOICAC (Mac Táil mac Forgo mocu Thóeca). According to the manuscript genealogies Mac Reithe and Mac Doimle were grandson and son of Daig mac Cairpre of the Glasraige Arad, named after their matrilineal ancestor Dercu Glasfhiled, and Cairpre had extended his rule west of Luachair, which would agree with the present location of the stones. The Tóecraige were associated with the Dál Cairpre Arad of east Limerick and west Tipperary.

27. Tenth-century grave-slab from Clonmacnoise, reading OR — DO TUATHAL SAER 'A prayer (*oróit*) for Tuathal the wright'.

28. Shrine of St Laichtíne's arm from Donaghmore parish, East Muskerry. Made for the kings of Desmond *c.*1120. St Laichtíne was founder of the church of Urlingford (Achad Úr), county Kilkenny, but was also linked to Belach Febrat (Ballyhoura townland, parish of Imphrick, barony of Fermoy, county Cork). The inscription mentions Cormac Mac Carthaig, '*rígdamna Muman*', and his brother and predecessor Tadg 'king of Munster' (†1124), as well as Máel Sechnaill Ua Cellacháin, 'high-king of the Féni', who died in Cork in 1121 and who is given the title 'king of the south of Ireland' at his obit in the Annals of Inisfallen.

29. The rock of Cashel. This acropolis, the ancient capital of Munster with its strong ecclesiastical associations, is perhaps the most picturesque of Irish monuments. The larger buildings, including the thirteenth-century Gothic cathedral, date from the later middle ages, but 'Cormac's Chapel', the original Romanesque cathedral, was built by Cormac Mac Carthaig, king of Munster, in 1134. The round tower predates this, but may not be older than 1101, the date of the grant of Cashel to the church by the high-king Muirchertach Ua Briain.

30. King and abbot: ninth-century sculptures from White Island, county Fermanagh. See note to the Plate 1.

31. Horsemen and chariot from base of cross at Ahenny, county Tipperary. Probably tenth century. Ahenny is not a recorded ecclesiastical site, but marked the border between the Déise Muman and Osraige. Perhaps the funeral procession here commemorates the death in battle of Cormac mac Cuilennáin, king and bishop of Cashel, who fell at the battle of Belach Mugna in Leinster in 908, or the assassination in this area (Uí Fhothaid) of another royal cleric, Cormac mac Mothla, king of the Déise, bishop of Lismore and abbot of Kilmolash in 920.

32. Cleric on horseback from the Book of Kells. Early ninth century. The Roman tonsure (here depicted) was accepted by the Columban community of Iona in 718. But perhaps this is a caricature of the Romanised clergy: the seventh-century Iona bishop of Lindisfarne, St Aidan, notoriously refused to ride horses.

33. Stag caught in a trap from an eighth-century cross-shaft at Banagher, county Offaly. Cf p. 246.

34. Romanesque doorway at Killeshin, county Laois. This elaborate doorway, made for the rebuilding of the ancient monastery of Glenn Uissen, has a fragmentary inscription possibly commemorating Diarmait Mac Murchada, king of Leinster. It exemplifies the new trends in ecclesiastical architecture and the royal interest in church reform in the twelfth century.

35. Inscription on an arm of the Cross of Cong, made in 1123 to enshrine a relic of the True Cross by Máel Ísu mac Brattáin Ua hEcháin for Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair (†1156) 'king of Ireland', Muiredach Ua Dubthaig, archbishop of Tuam (†1153) and Domnall mac Flannacáin Ua Dubthaig, abbot and bishop of Roscommon and Cloncmacnoise (†1136).

36. Synchronisms of the Roman emperors, popes and high-kings of Ireland, AD 199-432. From Laud Misc. 610 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, written for Edmund mac Richard Butler of Cahir in 1453 and 1454, which contains many important Munster texts of the eighth century.

37. Shrine of the Stowe Missal, made *c.*1026 x 1033 by Dúnchad Ua Taccáin of the community of Clonmacnoise for Donnchad mac Briain 'king of Ireland' and Mac Raith Ua Donnchada 'king of Cashel', who died in 1052. The manuscript of the Stowe Missal was written in the early ninth century during the lifetime of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, whose great-grandfather was abbot of Lorrha. The shrine was refurbished in the fourteenth century by Domhnall Ó Tólaire for Pilip Ó Cinnéidigh 'king of Ormond' (†1381), his wife Áine and Gilla Ruadáin Ó Maccáin, coarb of Lorrha.

END-PIECES

All of these grave-slabs are from Clonmacnoise, county Offaly, apart from two which are from Seirkieran and Durrow in the same county. The numbers are as in R. A. S. Macalister, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum*, ii (Dublin, 1949).

p. 27: No. 674. Clonmacnoise. OR—DO UADA. Uadu mac Diarmata, king of Tethba, was slain in 828.

pp. 39 and 253: No. 846. Clonmacnoise. SECHNASACH. This seems to be the earliest identifiable royal inscription and is curious since the monument consists of a disused quern-stone. It is thought to commemorated the king of Uí Maine, Sechnussach mac Congaile, who died in 713.

p. 86: No. 714. Clonmacnoise. OR— DO TH[AD]GAN. 'A prayer for Tadgán'.

p. 105: No. 779. Clonmacnoise. O—R— DO CONAING M—C— CONGHAIL: OR— DO DUBCEN M— THADGGAN. 'A prayer for Conaing mac Congaile: A prayer for Dubcenn mac Tadgáin'.

The Dubcenn commemorated on No. 779 was son of the Tadgán of No. 714 (p. 86) who flourished *c.*920 and was ancestor of the Muinnter Thadgáin of Tethba. The medieval learned family of Ó Duibhgennáin (O'Duignenan) claimed Dubcenn as their eponymous ancestor. The annals record the death of Agda son of Dubcenn 'in the Bed of Ciarán [at Clonmacnoise] after penance and a good life' in 980. The prayer for Conaing mac Congaile on No. 779 is a secondary inscription (probably not earlier than the twelfth century, as seems shown by the writing of lenited *g* as *gh*): it records an ancestor of Dubcenn whose death as king of Tethba is recorded in 823.

pp. 129 and 274: No. 592. Durrow. See note to Plate 17.

p. 164: No. 590. Seirkieran. OR—DO CHERBALL. 'A prayer (*oróit*) for Cerball'. The style of this cross-slab belong to the ninth or tenth century and it probably commemorates Cerball mac Dúnlainge, the well-known king of Ossory who died in 888. Although by the twelfth century Seirkieran was in the north Munster kingdom of Éile which was incorporated into the O'Brien diocese of Killaloe, the 'pre-Patrician' saint Ciarán of Saigir remained (together with Cainnech of Aghaboe and Kilkenny) the patron of Ossory and the parish remained attached to that diocese.

p. 201: No. 643. Clonmacnoise. See note to Plate 21.

p. 229: No. 682. Clonmacnoise. OROIT AR MAELAN. This grave slab may commemorate Máelán mac Cathmoga, 'king of the Uí Briúin [but probably Uí Fiachrach] of southern Connacht', who was slain by Vikings in 850.

MAPS

Ireland	xliv
Southern Úi Néill Kingdoms	89
The North	120-1
Leinster	132
Munster	172-3
Connacht and Uí Maine	234-5

Acknowledgements

The author and publishers gratefully acknowledge permission from the following authors and publishers to reproduce material cited in this book:

To John J. O'Meara, for *Topography of Ireland* (Dundalk, 1951), on p. 17. To Proinsias Mac Cana for *Etudes celtiques*, vii, (Paris, 1955) on pp. 204-5. To the publishers for A. M. & M. O. Anderson, *Adomnan's Life of Columba* (Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd, London, 1961) on pp. 96, 99. To the Modern Language Association of America for Vernam Hull, 'Conall Corc and the Corco Luigde', *PMLA*, 62 (1947) on pp. 184–5 and for Vernam Hull, 'The Exile of Conall Corc', *PMLA*, 56, (1941) on p. 186. To Mrs Elizabeth Dillon for Myles Dillon, 'The archaism of the Irish tradition', *Brit. Acad. Proc.*, xxxiii (1947) on pp. 23–4. To the Officers of the Royal Irish Academy for Mairin O Daly, *Eriu*, xvi (1952) on pp. 115–16; for Myles Dillon, *Eriu* xvi (1952) on pp. 187–8 and for Tadhg Ó Donnchada, *Eriu*, ix, (1923) on p. 211. To the University of Chicago Press for Myles Dillon, *Early Irish Literature* (1948) on pp. 60, 135–6. To the National University of Ireland for Anne O'Sullivan, *Eigse*, x, (Dublin, 1962) on p. 228. To Thames & Hudson Ltd and Alwyn and Brinley Rees for *Celtic Heritage* (London, 1961) on pp. 100–101. To Paul Walsh and Three Candles Ltd for material from *The place-names of Westmeath* (Dublin, 1957) on p. 143. To James Carney and the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies for *Studies in Irish literature and history* (Dublin, 1955) on pp. 18–19; to James Carney and the Dolmen Press Ltd for material from Medieval Irish Lyrics (Dublin, 1967) on p. 167 and to James Carney for *The poems of Blathmac mac Con Brettan* (Dublin, 1964) on p. 29.

The publishers gratefully acknowledge the permission of the following to reproduce photographs:

1. Ulster Museum; 2, 3, National Library of Ireland; 4–6, 32, Board of Trinity College, Dublin; 7, 9, 11, 18, Department of Aerial Photography, Cambridge; 8, 16–17, 20–21, 23–7, 31, 34, Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland; 12–14, 28, 33, 35, 37, National Museum of Ireland; 15, Danish National Museum; 19, Bodleian Library; 22 Aerofilms Ltd; 29, Fógra Fáilte; 30, Northern Ireland Tourist Board; 36, University Press, Oxford.

Additional Notes and Corrigenda

ADDITIONAL NOTES

The name **Briún** at pp. 17, 74-5, 80, 84, 102, 232, 245-6, 248, 280, 298-9 and 320 should be spelled **Brion** or **Brïon** as in O'Brien, *Corpus geneal. Hib.*, i. It was disyllabic with a short final vowel. After a period of disuse it reappeared in the tenth century as the monosyllabic **Brían**, though the genitive ***Brioin** (later monosyllabic **Briúin**) had survived in the sept-name **Uí Briúin**. Note the poem cited on p. 248, where Murphy prints **Brïuin** in accordance with the disyllabic **brëo** and **aue**. If we read monosyllabic **Briúin** we would obtain a regular pentasyllabic sequence throughout, but the poem is not in syllabic metre.

p. 42, second last sentence of second paragraph: <The title *ard-rí*, 'high-king' is not very old ...> add: But Liam Breatnach in *Ériu*, xxxvii (1986), pp. 191-3. has shown that there existed an earlier form, a close compound *airdri*, with genitive *airdrech*, and that the context (in the legal tract *Córus Béscnai*) implies suzerainty over all Ireland.

pp. 44-5: As Binchy, 'Irish history and Irish law', in *Studia Hibernica*, xv (1975), pp. 7-36; xvi (1976), pp. 7-45, has pointed out, *cobfolaid* (earlier *cobfolad*) means 'mutual obligations' and *frithfholaid* (earlier *frithfholad*) 'counter-obligations'.

pp. 46-7 and 58-9 *Cóiced* may be a technical term referring to a 'portion' of a patrimony rather than to an arithmetical 'fifth part'; thus the search for actual 'Five Fifths' may be chimerical.

p. 62: For Buchet see Kim McCone, 'The inflection of OIr. *bó* "cow" and the etymology of *Buchet*.' in *Ériu*, xlii (1991), pp. 37-44, where he suggests that

the name means 'rich in cattle'; however, his theory does not explain the parallel name *Muchet*, 'swineherd'.

p. 63: John Carey in *Ériu*, I (1999), pp. 165-8 has suggested the *ferp cluiche* does not mean 'stone penis' but 'word of contest'. He refers to Tomás Ó Broin's article 'Lia Fáil: fact and fiction in the tradition' in *Celtica*, xxi (1990), pp. 393-401, which propounds the view that the Lia Fáil was not a standing stone but a flagstone which has since disappeared. Carey points out that the word here translated 'axle' normally means 'wheel-rim'. Hence the phallic standing stone was not the Lia Fáil.

pp. 65-6: The date 366 assigned to Cormac in the *Annals of Ulster* is most probably an error for 266, the date implied in the *Chronicum Scottorum*.

p. 66: The name Olc probably means 'wolf'.

pp. 73-4: I do not now believe that the Three Collas were doublets of Conall, Eógan and Énda. The legend of the Three Collas may not antedate the ninth century. There is no evidence of a dynastic family descended from Énda existing in the North before the eleventh century: all earlier references associate the Cenél nÉnda with the Cenél Fiachach and the Lóegaire in Mide and also in Connacht.

p. 83: The *Liber Angueli* was composed in the seventh century, probably *c.*640.

p. 84, second last sentence of first paragraph: for <In this very area we find a kingdom of Cairpre, which then expanded right across Leitrim and the midlands to the barony of Carbury in county Kildare.> read <In this very area we find a kingdom of Cairpre, which then expanded right across Leitrim as far as Granard in county Longford.>

Accordingly on the map, p. 89 the area marked <CAIRPRE> to the south-east of <Clonard> should probably be assigned within the borders of Leinster: it appears that the Uí Néill kingdom in this area did not come into existence before the twelfth century, when pressure from Ua Ruairc of Bréifne pushed Ua Ciarda of Cairpre from north-east Longford into Leinster.

Similarly the reference to *three* kingdoms of Cairpre in the first paragraph of p. 91 is to be amended to *two*: one in Longford and the other in Sligo.

p. 87: Ráith Airthir is most probably not Oristown, but the large triple-ramparted fort to the east of Donaghpatrick. See Catherine Swift, '*Óenach Tailten*, the Blackwater Valley and the Uí Néill kings of Tara', in Alfred P. Smyth, ed., *Seanchas: studies in early and medieval Irish archaeology, history and literature in honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin 2000), pp. 109-20.

p. 88: The Cummascach who died in 828 was most probably not son of the Síl nÁedo Sláine king of Knowth, but a member of the original Ciannacht dynasty.

p. 90: Colmán Bec was probably originally identical with Colmán Már, and Conall Cremthainne with Conall Gulban, the distinction between the two pairs being a reflection of eighth-century politics.

Domnach Mór Pátraic is Donaghpatrick, not Donaghmore (Domnach Mór Mac Laithbe), which was a chief church of the Mugdorna Breg.

p. 92, third paragraph: add sentence or footnote after <Uí Maine Connacht.> <However, it is more likely that the battle of Clóenloch took place at Clea Lake near Keady in south Armagh and not in Connacht at all. Maine's uncle Ardgal, eponym of the dynasty which was later settled west of Tara in the barony of Lune, county Meath, was killed in 520 at Druimne Breg on the Louth-Meath border by the king of the Airthir. These and other considerations point to an origin of the Southern Uí Néill families descended from Diarmait mac Cerbaill having their origin in the territory north of the Boyne and Blackwater>.

pp. 111-12: The first Gaelic prince to bear the name Conaing was in fact a son of Áedán mac Gabráin of Dál Riata.

p. 115: The Mugdorna, alone of the Airgialla, escaped domination by the Cenél nEógain and remained loyal to the Síl nÁedo Sláine of Brega, their fortunes rising and falling with those of the latter.

p. 117: Buaigne is the name of an area, not that of a river.

Áed Airdd was the last king of Dál nAraide to come from the Uí Derco Chéin. It is not certain that he was allied with Conchobar Macha: a verse cited in the Fragmentary Annals implies that they were enemies and may have killed each other.

pp. 122-3: This scheme of the branches of the *fine* has not been accepted by the most expert scholars, though it does represent the view of a late brehon lawyer. Binchy and Charles-Edwards (the latter with important modifications) follow MacNeill's reconstruction: the *gelfhine* comprised the agnatic descendants of a common grandfather, and the *derbfhine* those of a common great-grandfather.

p. 125: The bishop Artrí mac Conchobair was not son of the high-king, but a member of the Uí Chremthainn of Airgialla: he was grandson of Colcu mac Cellaig, the king of Uí Chremthainn who died in 781 after having defeated the Airthir in the previous year.

p. 127: I now think it most likely that Ua Mathgamna was an intruder from Airgialla, imposed on the Ulaid by the Cenél nEógain.

p. 135: I do not now think that the Leinster poems (or any other text in Irish) can be much earlier than the seventh century.

pp. 138–42: The *Timna Cathaír Máir* may be as late as the eleventh century. The very regularity of its syllable count shows that it is not really old but an exercise in archaising style.

p. 141: Crích na Cétach probably did not fall into Uí Néill hands until the twelfth century, when it became the refuge of the Caille Follomain: see the remarks on Cairpre above in the note to p. 84.Osraige did not become incorporated into Leinster until the tenth century.

The site of Carman was most probably beside Carlow town at the confluence of the rivers Burren and Barrow.

p. 160, third line from end: Muiredach was not great-grandson of Fínsnechta but of Fínsnechta's father Cellach.

p. 169: The references to Cumméne Fota as 'abbot of Clonfert' here and on p. 241 should rather read 'bishop of Clonfert'.

p. 174, beginning of second paragraph: The statement about the *Annals of Inisfallen* is too negative: they contain a great deal of unique information about Munster events prior to the tenth century; compared to the northern annals they are jejune, but they are much fuller than the Welsh annals for the same period.

p. 176: To the list of kings mentioned in the *Cáin Fuithirbe* should be added the name of Rechtabra, king of Ciarraige.

p. 190, last paragraph: The *Vita Tripartita* was probably composed *c.*830 in the interests of Feidilmid mac Crimthainn, king of Munster, and Artrí mac Conchobair, bishop of Armagh, though its present form may reflect an edition made in the tenth century. Apart from a digression dealing with the legend of Diarmait mac Cerbaill, St Ciarán and the foundation of Clonmacnoise, it does not recognise a high-king of all Ireland, but a dyarchy of Tara and Cashel, just as in the tract on Mac Arddae's Synod cited on p. 217.

p. 196: The Cenél nAngse were named after their maternal ancestor Angas: they may have been the Eóganacht Áine, but an obscure verse in the *Vita Tripartita* suggests that they were the Eóganacht Locha Léin.

pp. 199-201: I think that the tract *De bunad imthechta Eóganachta* probably dates back to the eighth century.

p. 207, last paragraph: for <and succeeded Eterscél mac Máele Umai of the Eóganacht Áine in 721.> read <and succeeded Cormac mac Ailello of the Eóganacht Caisil in 713.> with footnote: <The regnal lists show that Eterscél mac Máele Umai of the Eóganacht Áine who died in 721 must have abdicated *c.*702.>

p. 208, last paragraph: Professor Pádraig Ó Riain has shown in his edition of the Old Irish saga *Cath Almaine* (Dublin, 1978), pp. xii-xiii that the events of 733 did not involve Cathal mac Finguine but Cathal mac Áeda of the Síl nÁedo Sláine and were part of the ongoing struggle between that dynasty and the rising Clann Cholmáin.

pp. 214 and 219: Ólchobar mac Cináeda has been almost certainly misidentified as of the Eóganacht Locha Léin: he was most probably of the Eóganacht Áine (see Corrigenda).

pp. 214 and 227: The theory propounded in the *Leabhar Muimhneach* that the Uí Thairdelbaig did not enjoy the kingship of Dál Cais in the early centuries is not supported by any contemporary evidence.

p. 222, line 6: There were only two Munster abbots of Clonmacnoise, both from the Corco Loígde: Crónán mocu Loígde (628-38) and Luccreth or Lucraid (740-53).

pp. 222-3: Forindán was abbot of Armagh and Diarmait bishop: the ninth and tenth centuries witnessed an intermittent struggle between abbot and bishop to claim the title of coarb of Patrick.

p. 227, second paragraph: This text is in verse. The reference to Daire Eidnech is significant in that this is the place later known as Daire na Flann (Derrynavlan), where the magnificent ninth-century altar service, including a chalice inferior only to the Ardagh chalice of a century earlier, a large paten and a spoon, were discovered in the early 1980s. It is tempting to associate this treasure with Feidlimid mac Crimthainn. The saints named Flann after whom Daire na Flann was named were Feidlimid's ally Flann mac Fairchellaig, abbot of Lismore and later also of Emly and Cork (†825), Flann mac Duib Chonna (or mac Duib Thuinne) and Flannán mac Tairdelbaig of Killaloe, royal saint of the Dál Cais. The site is described in detail in a remarkable passage in the ninth-century Latin Life of St Ruadán of Lorrha. Feidlimid's great-grandfather was abbot of Lorrha.

p. 229: Feidlimid mac Crimthainn is also celebrated in the much earlier *Martyrology of Tallaght*.

p. 243, second paragraph: Guaire's alleged son and grandson Airmedach and Écomras mac Congaile in fact were not of his line but of the Airgialla.

p. 249: Dub Dothra (†743) was, as the Four Masters say, and as his epithet 'of the Dodder' indicates, king of the Uí Briúin Cualann of south county Dublin and not of the Connachta: his adoption as ancestor by the Ua Ruairc genealogists is a fabrication.

p. 255: Muirchú may not have been writing primarily in favour of Armagh, whose position was already secure. His loyalties were to Saul and Down and to the Ulaid, and he did not hold kings in high esteem. I do not now believe that his account of Lóeguire and Tara was meant to flatter the Uí Néill. The sentence describing Lóeguire as *imperator* and Tara as *caput Scottorum* has almost certainly been taken from an earlier hymn or metrical Life of Patrick, which seems also to be cited by Tírechán.

p. 263, second paragraph: Suairlech may not have become abbot (or rather bishop) of Clonard until the death of the bishop and anchorite Comsud in 858.

p. 278 and p. [292] Table 12: Note that the identity of <Lorcán mac Coinlígáin> is doubtful: he is not mentioned in the annals except at the notice of his accession in AFM 920 [=922] and might actually have been identical with Lorcán mac Lachtna, father and predecessor of Cennétig mac Lorcáin (†951) according to *An Leabhar Muimhneach*, p. 323, which makes him succeed Rechtabra mac Mothla, abbot of Tomgraney (†934) as king of Dál Cais.

p. 287, Table 7: For an alternative descent of 11. **Congal Cláen** from Scandal (VIII a) †646 and a discussion of the implications see Thomas Charles-Edwards and Fergus Kelly, *Bechbretha* (Dublin, 1983), pp. 123-6.

p. 288 Table 8: The Uí Garrchon are also given a descent even more remote from the main dynastic line, tracing them to Coirpre Nia Fer, brother of the Find Fili who was allegedly great-grandfather of Cú Chorb. See Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh kinship*, pp. 120-2; but the statement on p. 121 (with footnote 89) that a member of the Uí Garrchon is commemorated by an ogham inscription in Brega is mistaken: this is that referred to on p. 137 of the present work and belongs to Mac Caírthinn of the Uí Enechglais.

CORRIGENDA

p. 15, first line of Greek: for φρὲνεc read φρὲνεc

p. 26: close parenthesis after *Instructio principis*

p. 39, second paragraph: for <has a very odd system> read <had a very odd system>

p. 41, line 6: for *rui ri* read *ruiri*

p. 44, line seven: for δῶρα α νομίζεται read δῶρα ἃ νομίζεται

p. 45, line two: for <obligat ons> read <obligations>

p. 57, line six: for <1172-3> read <1171-2> (this correction is in the 1987 paperback reprint)

p. 59, last line of first paragraph: for <historic> read <ahistoric>

p. 97: for <Cocaire> read <Conaire>

p. 136: for <St Fintan or Munnu of Taghmon> read <St Fintan of Clonenagh>

p. 137: for <MAQI CAIRATINI AVI INEQAGLASI> read <MAQI CAIRATINI AVI INEQAGLAS>

p. 171: for <638> read <753> and similarly on p. 217

p. 174: for <*Frithfholaid ríg Caisil fria thuathaib*, the mutual obligations> *read* <*Frithfholad ríg Caisil fria thuathaib*, the counter-obligations>

p. 180: for <Déis Deisairt> read <Déis Deisceirt>

p. 188, 9th line from end: for <(721-742)> read <(713-742)>

p. 196: for <The *Frithfholaid* texts on the mutual obligations of the king of Cashel and his sub-kings> read <The *Frithfholaid* texts on the counter-obligations of the king of Cashel to his sub-kings >

p. 203: for <Cathal mac Finguine (723-742)> read <Cathal mac Finguine (713-742)>

p. 216: for <There came the oath of warranty of Brendán and of Mo-Chutu> read <The vicarious oath of Brendán and of Mo-Chutu came> and read

<vicarious oath> for <oath> in all the subsequent occurrences in this paragraph.

p. 217: for the passage <And Brénaind moccu Altai said: 'No king of Iarmumu shall rule over the Ciarraige from the days of the king whose name shall be Máel Dúin, but Irmumu (West Munster) will be free by choice whatever king may be in Cashel of the progeny of Óengus mac Nad Froích, and it should be he that should place a king over every *tuath* in Munster, and there should be no king in the North but the king of Tara, and it is he that should place a king over every *tuath* in Leth Cuinn.'> read <And Brénaind moccu Altai said: 'No king of Iarmumu shall rule over the Ciarraige from the days of the king whose name shall be Máel Dúin, but Irmumu (West Munster) shall be free by choice whatever king may be in Cashel of the progeny of Óengus mac Nad Froích, and it is the Testament of Patrick that there should be no king in Cashel but of the progeny of Nad Froích, and that it should be he that should place a king over every *tuath* in Munster, and that there should be no king in the North but the king of Tara, and that it is he that should place a king over every *tuath* in Leth Cuinn.'>

The next paragraph should now read:
<It is then indeed that Mac Ardae and Furudrán gave their hostage to Crimthann son of Derco Maicnath and of Feidelmid king of Cashel. And Mo Chutu of Rahen said: 'Whoever may be king from Munster of the Arai we shall be loyal to him, since they are brothers to us.' Crimthann mac Fedlimthe said to the Ciarraige: 'You shall be free in my regard, and nothing shall be taken on your behalf but as I myself would choose'.>

Furudrán is no doubt to be identified with Áed Find (Fururán or Foirinn), brother of the kings of Iarmumu, Áed Bennán (†619/621) and Áed Damán (†633), who features in the Life of Mac Creiche. See Seán Ó Coileáin, 'The saint and the king' in de Brún, Ó Coileáin and Ó Riain, *Folia Gadelica* (Cork, 1983) 36-46.

The text is not corrupt: Crimthann's mother was probably of the Arai or Arada Cliach and her name means 'female descendant of Macnia', *derco* being the feminine of the archaic gentilic formula *moccu*.

p. 222: for <Since 638> read <Since 753>. And for <dating to 835 (the correct year is probably 837)> read <dating to 834 (the correct year is probably 835)>.

p. 239, footnote †: for <Above, p. 92.> read <Above, p. 92; but note the doubtful historicity of this account.>

p. 242: for <Cáimmín> read <Caimmín> Also at the entry in the Index, p. 321.

p. 255: for <*a deo ordinatum*> read <*deo auctore ordinatum*> and for <*monarchaie*> read <*monarchiae*>.

p. 275, last line: for <XXII Cenn Fáelad mac Blathmaic (ob. 674)> read <XXII Cenn Fáelad mac Blathmaic (ob. 675)>

p. 276: for <XXVI Fergal mac Máele Dúin (ob. 772)> read <XXVI Fergal mac Máele Dúin (ob. 722)> and for <XXIX Flaithbertach mac Loingsig (ob. 734)> read <XXIX Flaithbertach mac Loingsig (abd. 734; ob. 765)> and for <XXXII Niall Frossach mac Fergaile (ob. 770)> read <XXXII Niall Frossach mac Fergaile (abd. 770; ob. 778)> (these corrections are in the 1987 paperback reprint).

p. 278: for <17 Eterscél mac Máele Umai (ob. 721) [Á]> read <Eterscél mac Máele Umai (abd. 702; ob. 721) [Á]> and for <21a Tuathal mac Artroig [G] [and] 22 Tnúthgal mac Donngaile [C]> read <22 Tnúthgal mac Artrach [G]*> with footnote:

*Tnúthgal mac Artrach is not mentioned in the annals, but if Artrí had been 'ordained' on the model of Offa of Mercia, then he may have had his son 'ordained' as his successor as Offa did Ecgferth, and Tnúthgal may have died *c.*807.

Artrí must have been at least 78 at the time of his own death in 821, since his father Cathal mac Finguine had died in 742.

'Tnúthgal mac Donngaile' or 'mac Donngusa' here and at p. 292, Table 12, is a phantom derived from the list in *An Leabhar Muimhneach*, p. 404 ('Tnúthgal mac Donngaile m. Donngusa m. Fáelgusa' — BB with variants in EN) and the obit 820 assigned to him in NHI ix, Table 10 has no foundation in the annals (it was based on the accession of Fedlimid in that year).

Tnúthgal mac Donngusa m. Donngaile is given as the grandfather of Máel Gualai in R 150b 27 = O'Brien, *Corpus geneal. Hib.*, i, p. 217. The alternative pedigrees of the latter Tnúthgal and of his brother Crundmáel as sons of Fogartach mac Failbe Flaind given ibid., pp. 217, 218 (R 150b 37) are obviously wrong.

And for <32 Flaithbertach mac Inmainén (ob. 944) [and] 33 Lorcán mac Coinlígáin [C]> read <32 Flaithbertach mac Inmainén (abd. 922; ob. 944) [and] 33 Lorcán mac Coinlígáin [C] (ob. ?*c.*931)>

p. 279: for <42 Donnchad mac Briain (ob. 1064) [D]> read <42 Donnchad mac Briain (abd. 1063; ob. 1065) [D]>

p. 284 Table 5: add to footnote <The descent of Ardgar (44) †1064 is almost certainly from Lochlainn †1023 son of Máel Sechnaill.>

p. 289 Table 9: <25. **Bran** †838> (son of Fáelán) was not grandson of <22. **Fínsnechta Cetharderc** †808> but of Fínsnechta's father <19. **Cellach** †776>.

With reference to <Muiredach> (son of <21. **Bran Ardchenn** †795>) add <leth-rí †818>; his name should therefore appear **in bold face**.

Add footnote <the descent of Máel Brigte, father of 28. **Tuathal** †854 is unknown: the statement that he was son of Muiredach is only found as an alternative in the Book of Leinster regnal list: Tuathal son of Muiredach may have been one of the 'two grandsons of Bran' appointed as joint kings by Áed Oirdnide in 818 (see p. 161 above).>

p. 290 Table 10: Add <53. **Donnchad** †1089> as son of Domnall Remar (this correction is in the 1987 paperback reprint). Replace here the date <flor. 1003> with <†1006> for Donnchad Máel na mBó and add the date <†996> to his father Diarmait.

p. [292] Table 12: to <Colmán> son of Sechnussach and father of Dub-dá-Crích add <Abb Lothra †707/710>

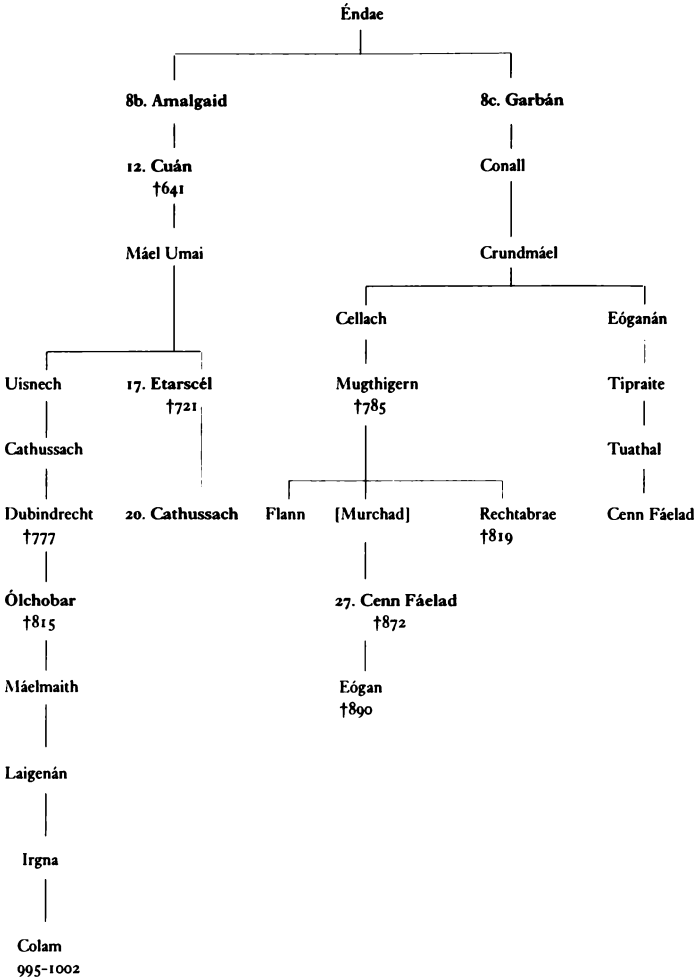
p. [293] Table 13: Here it seems best to quote in full Ó Corráin's important remarks in *Celtica*, xiii (1980), p. 164:

> The disarray of the Éoganacht in the ninth and tenth centuries was such that some of their kings were little more than nonentities. The provenance of Ólchobar mac Cináeda, king of Munster and abbot of Emly (†851), is something of a problem. As far as I can gather the king-lists and the Éoganacht Locha Léin genealogies are silent about his origins. The received descent is arrived at by tacking him onto Cináed (m. Áeda m. Congaile) who probably flourished towards the end of the eighth century (*Corp. Gen.* 389 = LL 327b6). However, another derivation of Uí Chináeda in the same text is at variance with this. His descent, as given by Professor Byrne (p. 295), is incorrect and I suspect that he has been misled by an erroneous note of Mac Airt (*Ann. Inisf.*, p. 113). The slip arises from a confusion between Máel Dúin (m. Áeda m. Conaic) who died in 786 and Máel Dúin (m. Áeda Bennáin) who died in 661. The correct descent of Cináed according to the genealogical tracts, is Cináed m. Áeda m. Congaile m. Maíle Dúin (†661). However, in the unedited genealogies of the Éoganacht Áine (Lec. 214Ra15 = BB 178d21) it is claimed that Ólchobar belonged to that group. The text is of Emly provenance since it preserves the descent

of Colum, abbot of Emly (†1002) and of his family, Uí Laigenáin of Éoganacht Áine. There is a further difficulty, also connected with Emly and this text, which involves Cend Faelad ua Mugthigirn, king of Munster and abbot of Emly (†872). His pedigree, says Professor Byrne who attaches him to the Éoganacht Airthir Chliach 'is evidently faulty and in fact the genealogy of his dynasty peters out in the early eighth century' (p. 178). The name Mugthigern certainly occurs in the Éoganacht Airthir Chliach genealogies but that of Cend Fáelad does not. On the other hand, the king-list in the Laud synchronisms (almost certainly of Emly provenance) says that he belonged to Uí Énna Áine (i.e., Éoganacht Áine). He was, after all, abbot of Emly as were his uncle, Rechtabra (†819) and his son, Éogan (†890). The chances are that he belonged to Éoganacht Áine rather than to Éoganacht Airthir Chliach whose genealogies cease to be recorded by about the end of the seventh century and who are effectively absent from the annals. And now for a long shot. *If* the genealogy of Flann mac Mugthigirn of Éoganacht Airthir Chliach is misplaced and correctly belongs to Éoganacht Áine where it is to be attached to the line of Garbán (? reading Conall for Cormac) and *if* Mugthigirn mac Cellaig, *sapiens* of Inis Celtra (†785) is to be identified with Mugthigirn father of Rechtabra (†819), then Cenn Fáelad ua Mugthgirn and his relatives fit comfortably into the Éoganacht Áine genealogies. These details are of some significance since I believe that we have seriously underestimated the role of Emly in the ninth-century kingship of Munster.

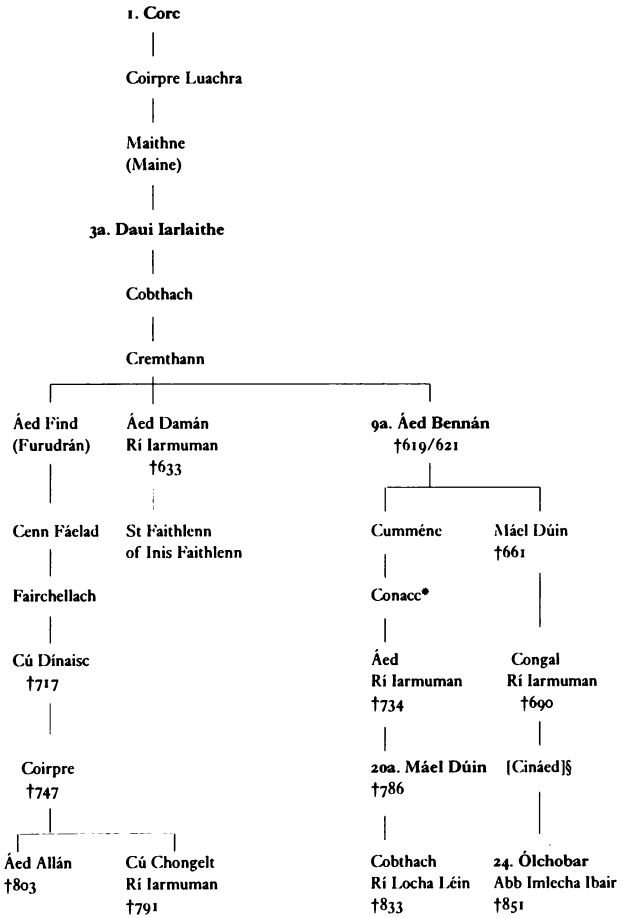
Ó Corráin is referring to R 150a 9: Flann m. Mugthigirn m. Cellaich m. Crunnmail m. Cormaic and LL 327c 30: Cend Faelad m. Tuathail m. Tipraite m. Eoganain m. Crundmail m. Conaill m. Garbain m. Énnae.

So perhaps we can reconstruct genealogy as follows: {I took the pedigree as given in IKHK Table 13: Cenn Fáelad mac Murchada m. Mugthigirn from the *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, p. 2 (which also gives Máel Gualae's patronymic as 'mac Dúngalaig" — not in LL version) — the annals all say Cenn Fáelad hua Mugthigirn and the other regnal lists all say Cenn Fáelad mac Mugthigirn.}


Éndae
8b. Amalgaid
8c. Garbán
12. Cuán
†641
Conall
Máel Umai
Crundmáel
Cellach
Eóganán
Uisnech
17. Etarscél
†721
Mugthigern
†785
Tipraite
Cathussach
Tuathal
Dubindrecht
†777
20. Cathussach
Flann
[Murchad]
Rechtabrae
†819
Cenn Fáelad
Ólchobar
†815
27. Cenn Fáelad
†872
Máelmaith
Eógan
†890
Laigenán
Irgna
Colam
995-1002

p. 294 Table 14: Delete footnote marked with asterisk* and add <†958> to <Domnall> father of <**36. Dub Dá Bairenn** †959>

p. 295 Table 15: for <Áed Find> read <Áed Find (= Furudrán)> and to <**24. Ólchobar** †851 Abb Imlecha Ibair> add footnote <* It is more likely that he belonged to the Eóganacht Áine of Table 13.>



* The *Life of Mac Creiche* gives Cumméne another son Máel Anfaid, who is counted as king while Conaing (Conacc) is not. See Seán Ó Coileáin, 'The saint and the king', in de Brún, Ó Coileáin and Ó Riain, *Folia Gadelica* (Cork, 1983) pp. 36-46.
§ None of the MSS used in CGH give Ólchobar a father Cináed: they have the pedigree of an Ólchobar mac Congaile m. Máele Dúin, but do not identify him as either king or abbot! The pedigree of Ólchobar is evidently too short, thus supporting Ó Corráin's suggestion that he belonged to the Eóganacht Áine.

p. 296 Table 16: for <Flann †762/3> read <Flann †760/2> <**20b. Ólchobar** †796/7 Abb Innse Cathaig>. Add footnote: <* It unlikely that he was ever king: his inclusion in some sources may be due to confusion with Ólchobar mac Duib Indrecht †805.>

p. 297 Table 17: <Conchobar †1142> should be <**46a. Conchobar** †1142>.

p. 298 Table 18: for <**13. Laidgnén (Loingsech)** †655> read <**13. Laidgnén (Loingsech)** †656> and for <**16. Dúnchad Muirisci**> read <**16. Dúnchad Muirisci** †683> while <Écomras †697> and his father <Congal †685> and uncle <Airmedach †675> do not belong here and should be deleted (they were of the Airgialla).

p. 299 Table 19: add footnote <The pedigree of Ua Ruairc is certainly fabricated: the origins of Tigernán †892 remain obscure. Furthermore Áed mac Airt Uallaig Ua Ruairc probably did not reign from 1067 — at most he merely interrupted the reign of Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair (see Table 21 on p. 301) briefly before he was killed in 1087: in fact only the Annals of Tigernach appear to recognise his kingship of the province.>

p. 300 Table 20: <**37. Fínsnechta** †848> Add footnote: <* Fínsnechta died as an anchorite in 848: the dates of his reign are unknown, but the prophecy of the kings of Connacht *Baile Findachta* edited by Kuno Meyer in *Z.C.P.* xiii (1919), pp. 25-27 alleges that his brother Muirgius (†815) approached him after his retirement into religious life, which would place his reign in the late 780s. However, this is probably merely a variant on the 'King and Hermit' theme found in the legends of Guaire Aidne and his brother Marbán. The Book of Leinster regnal list gives him a reign of 12 (*sic!*) years after that of Fergus mac Fothaid (†843).>

p. 304, footnote 1: for <Tairrdelbach Ua Briain> read <Tairrdelbach ua Briain>

p. 322 Index: under Cellachán Caisil: for <178> read <278>.

p. 329 Index: for <Fi͡ntan (Munnu), St, of Taghmon> read <Fintan, St, of Clonenagh>.

A Note on the Emergence of Irish Surnames

There was an increasing tendency in the eleventh century for the term 'Uí Néill' to be confined to the kings of the North, a usage reinforced by their descent from Niall Caille (†846) and by the posthumous prestige of Niall Glúndub (†919), grandfather of the last northern high-king, Domnall ua Néill, and eponym of the O'Neills: Domnall's son Áed Ua Néill (†1004) and the latter's nephew Flaithbertach were the first to make a surname of Domnall's papponymic. I coin this word as useful to distinguish named descent from a grandfather from the surname, just as we distinguish patronymics in *mac* from their phonetically equivalent surnames. The modern distinction of employing upper case *Mac* and *Ua* or *Ó* is unknown to the medieval sources, which therefore remain often ambiguous. Where clear genealogical information is unavailable it must always remain uncertain whether a given individual is rightly referred to under a surname, a papponymic or a patronymic.

The emergence of surnames among the ruling families in church and state is a phenomenon often noted but curiously uninvestigated: it is not paralleled in Wales or Scandinavia, nor apparently did it become common elsewhere in Europe until the twelfth or even the fourteenth century. It certainly affords the modern reader great advantages over the student of Welsh affairs in helping to identify more clearly the dynastic affiliations of major and minor characters on the stage of history, which becomes all the more necessary as the rich stock of nomenclature characteristic of the Old Irish period contracts in the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries to a much more limited pool of names. Later antiquarianism ascribed the practice (along with so much else that seemed admirable) to Brian Bóruma. This theory is found in one of Tadhg mac Dáire's poems in the early seventeenth-century 'Contention of the Bards', *Iomarbhágh na bhFileadh*, and is copied thence by Keating; it is refuted by Tadhg's antagonist Lughaidh Ó Cléirigh, who claims that like all addi-

tions to knowledge surnames came from the east. In spite of his partisanship for Brian Bóruma Conell Mageoghegan, translator of the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* in 1627, does not adopt the idea, although he ascribes to Brian the composition of the Psalter of Cashel, containing the genealogies of all the Irish families; and Roderick O'Flaherty in 1685, discussing surnames in his attack on Tadhg mac Dáire's grand-nephew Anthony Bruodin, while he mentions the 'Contention', does not refer to Brian.[1] To judge by the Dál Cais tract in Rawlinson B 502, the Psalter of Cashel must have been composed in the reign of Donnchad mac Briain. It says that only three of Brian's sons left progeny: Tadc and Donnchad and Domnall. But it does not give the names of their sons. Domnall died in 1011 and his son Tairdelbach is mentioned as killing Ua Donnacáin of Araid in 1031: no more is heard of him or of his descendants, if he had any.

In fact the earliest of Brian's descendants to be referred to by the surname Ua Briain are his great-grandsons, Conchobar (†1078) and Cennétig (†1084), sons of Lorcán mac Donnchada, who were in exile in the North, while the descendants of the most successful holder of the name, the high-king Muirchertach Ua Briain (†1119), having been excluded from the kingship of Thomond by the family of Muirchertach's brother Diarmait, were to take their surname of Mac Mathgamna from his son Mathgamain, of whom all that is known is that he died at Lismore in 1129. It may well have been the policy of the ruling O'Briens of Thomond to deny their surname to the descendants of Mathgamain. These became lords of Corco Baiscinn from which they displaced the native family of Ua Domnaill. The descendants of Donnchad's other son Murchad on their return to Munster acquired the lordship of Uí Chuanach and were O'Briens, with the style Mac Briain Ó gCuanach. The heads of other O'Brien families were Mac Í Bhriain Aradh and Mac Briain Eatharlach. Similarly in the North the head of the O'Neills of Clandeboye (the Clann Aodha Buidhe) was to be distinguished from the Great O'Neill by the title Mac Í Néill Bhuidhe in the fourteenth century.

In archaic Ireland from the period of the earliest ogham inscriptions in the fourth century a quasi-surname or more properly gentilic formula had existed in the word *mocu* followed by the name of a real or mythical ancestor, male or female, but after the beginning of the eighth century this had become extinct, to be misinterpreted by transcribers of early documents as *mac uí* 'son of the grandson of'; the corresponding feminine form *dercu* is more rarely attested. The *mocu* formula was never applied to members of the families using the *Síl*, *Clann* or *Cenél* collectives or sept-names denoting descent from an historical personage, and very rarely to those in *Uí*; thus members of such lineages had

1 *Ogygia*, III, cap. xxvii, pp. 207–12.

no convenient means of family identification beyond the patronymic or papponymic, though the omission of such would seem to have been impolite.

In poetic language an individual of the Cenél nEógain or the Uí Néill could of course be referred to as *ua hEógain* or *ua Néill*, and it is easy to see how the essential ambiguity of the word *ua* (earlier *aue*, in Latin texts *nepos*) meaning either 'grandson' or more remote descendant could lead to its adoption as a surname. However, it does not seem to have been generally so used before the eleventh century, though there are indications that even in the early period it may sometimes refer to remote rather than proximate ancestry. For instance the 718 obit of Fianamail mac Find 'nepos' or 'ua Bóguine', abbot of Inishmacsaint in Fermanagh, refers to a member of the Cenél Conaill sept of Cenél mBóguine, not an actual grandson of Bóguine (or Éndae Bóguine), allegedly son of Conall mac Néill. Similarly three members of the Airgialla, Derir 'nepos Colla' of Devenish, Cilléne 'nepos Colla', abbot of Fahan, and Flann 'aue Colla', abbot of Clonmacnoise, in their obits at 722, 725 and 732 or 733 are termed 'descendants' of their supposed ancestor Colla Uais. Fergil 'nepos Taidc', the scribe of Lusk who died in 800, may also be named after Tadc mac Céin, mythical ancestor of the Cianachta rather than from his actual grandfather. Adomnán too, writing around or before the year 700, seems to use *nepos* as a quasi-surname when he refers to a 'Columbanus nepos Briuni' and a 'Cormac nepos Leathain', alias 'Cormaccus nepos Lethani', evidently members of the Uí Briúin and Uí Liatháin dynasties of Connacht and Munster. Adomnán's contemporary, Cenn Fáelad nepos Áedo Bricc, the abbot of Bangor who died in 705, was a remote descendant of Áed Brecc, the king of Cruthin who was killed at the battle of Móin Dairi Lothair in 563. Thomas Charles-Edwards has drawn attention to the term *cosloinniud*, found in the eighth-century legal tract on marriage, the *Cáin Lánamna*, meaning a person of the same 'name', which he interprets as a person sharing the same great-grandfather. Such a 'name' would of course change from generation to generation, and so was not a permanent 'surname'.

Ecclesiastical families were the first to set the trend. The eponym of Ua Brolcháin of Derry and Armagh seems to have flourished in the eighth century, as did Selbach, ancestor of the hereditary abbots of Cork, and Sínach father of the abbot Dub dá Lethe of Armagh. We might also cite the appearance of the Uí Shuanaig of Rahen and the Uí Búirecháin of Cloyne in the eighth century; the Uí Lugadon of Clondalkin and the Uí Roichlig of Lismore and Inis Cathaig (Scattery Island) in the eighth and ninth centuries; the Uí Cholcan who ruled Lusk from the eighth century to the eleventh, descendants of the Cianacht abbot Colcu mac Móenaig (†702); the Ossory family of Uí Raithnén at Seirkieran and Leighlin in the tenth century; the Dál

Cais family of Uí Lígdae at Emly, and the Uí Rebacháin at Lismore and Mungret in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Other ecclesiastical families, as Ua Dúnáin and Ua Longáin, derive their surnames from early ancestors. The Uí Fhorannáin of Ardstraw claimed descent from Guaire mac Forannáin, the king of Uí mocu Uais who died in 629, whereas their cousins, the Ua Crícháin and Ua hÁeda kings of Uí Fhiachrach took their surnames from the two sons of Máel Maire mac Maíle Ruanaid, who lived in the ninth century. Ua Forréid and Ua hEódusa, however, are named from two brothers who lived in the tenth century: incidentally, this fact betrays the spurious descent of the Cenél Tigernaig from Muiredach son of Eógan.

Most royal surnames derive from a tenth-century ancestor. That of Ua Maíl Shechnaill may be earlier: it is already used in the tenth century to refer to both the sons and the grandsons of Flann Sinna son of Máel Sechnaill mac Maíle Ruanaid, the first of the Uí Néill to have established his authority over the whole of Ireland. In fact, whether by accident or design, few if any of Máel Sechnaill's progeny survived who were not descended from Flann. There were, however, families named Ua hÁeda and Ua Cerbaill, though it is uncertain whether the latter descended from Cerball son of Flann or from his like-named nephew, the son of Áed. A representative of the former, Cerball, is called *sinnser Clainne Colmáin* or senior member of the Clann Cholmáin, in 1090 and Gallbrat Ua Cerbaill, styled *rígdamna* of Tara, was killed by Conchobar Ua Maíl Shechnaill in 1058. They were lords (*flaithe*) of the territory of Uí Beccon around Rathbeggan in the barony of Fore. Donnchad Find, son of Áed, had been king of Mide from 960 to 974, and his sons gave some trouble to Máel Sechnaill in 997 and 1003, though one was in his household retinue when he was killed in 1013.

Sometimes it was necessary to search further back to find a suitable eponym: thus the unimportant dynasty of Colmán Bec ('Colmán the Little' in distinction to his alleged brother Colmán Már, ancestor of the Clann Cholmáin and Ua Maíl Shechnaill) took their surname Ua Fallomain from the latest of their ancestors to have attained the kingship of Mide as far back as the eighth century. In Connacht the surname Ua Conchobair may derive from the Conchobar mac Taidc Móir who died in 882, who was ancestor of several families of the Síl Muiredaig, but it was from his like-named great-grandson Conchobar mac Taidc who died in 973 that the family of Ua Conchobair alone descend. The surname Ua Cléirig of Uí Fhiachrach Aidne is attested already in the tenth century.

Understandably, therefore, *Ua* precedes *Mac* as a surname indicator: the ancestors of Mac Carthaig of Desmond, Mac Duinn Shlébe of Ulster and Mac Murchada of Leinster all lived in the eleventh century. *Mac* in surnames

is a contraction of *mac meic*, 'son of the son of', used as an alternative to *ua* 'grandson' in the eleventh century. The family whom we, following the usage of the thirteenth century, call Mac Lochlainn is referred to in contemporary records of the eleventh and twelfth centuries as Ua Lochlainn or Mac meic Lochlainn. The eponymous ancestor, like Mathgamain son of Muirchertach Ua Briain, was not particularly notable, and it was the success of Lochlainn's grandson Domnall that ensured the consolidation of the surname as Mac Lochlainn. Similarly, it was the fame of Fergal ua Ruairc, king of Connacht and ancestor of the kings of Bréifne, rather than that of his grandfather, that gave rise to the surname Ua Ruairc. The Donnchad after whom the royal family of Cashel in the eleventh century named themselves Ua Donnchada was apparently a person of no importance: he is not mentioned in the annals. Again, the surname was used to denote descent from the last king of this dynasty to claim the kingship of all Munster, the Dúngal Ua Donnchada who opposed Donnchad mac Briain until 1024 and died in 1025. Another branch of the Eóganacht Caisil understandably named itself Ua Cellacháin, after the tenth-century king Cellachán Caisil, and had assumed the prerogative of so designating themselves; but the most successful descendants of Cellachán and the propagators of his later legend were the MacCarthys. The eleventh-century progenitors of this family are all referred to by patronymics in the annals: Sáerbrethach mac Donnchada, Carthach mac Sáerbrethaig, and Muiredaig mac Carthaig; Muiredach's sons Cormac and Tadc in the twelfth century are the first to use the surname Mac Carthaig. However, Muiredach's brother Donnchad, who was killed by Cellachán Ua Cellacháin in 1092, is himself referred to as Ua Cellacháin, *rí Caisil na ríg* 'king of Cashel of the kings', in the guarantor list to the second of the Kells charters a decade or so earlier.

Diarmait Mac Murchada and his brother and predecessor Énda (†1126) are likewise the first of their name: that their grandfather rather than their illustrious great-grandfather Diarmait mac Maíl na mBó should be chosen as eponym may be due to two factors. The style Mac Murchada distinguished them from their second cousin rivals: already in 1098 the death of one of these, Diarmait mac Énda, king of Leinster, is attributed to the Clann Murchada. Their third cousins descended from Diarmait's brother Domnall Remar already had the surname Ua Domnaill. Perhaps more importantly, the choice of surname drew attention to the fact that both Énda and Diarmait, like their father Donnchad, claimed to be kings of Dublin as well as of Leinster, kings of Gall and Gael, and thus the true successors of Murchad, the first Irish king to achieve that distinction.

The O'Donnells, who won permanent lordship of Tír Conaill by 1208 after seventy years of obscurity, first appear with this surname in the persons

of Máel Ruanaid (†1011), of Gilla Críst mac Cathbairr (†1038) and of his son Cathbarr Ua Domnaill (†1106), who enshrined the Cathach of Colum Cille at Kells about the year 1090. It was perhaps because of the appearance of Cathbarr's name on the talismanic shrine, as well as the fact that his name heads the pedigree of Cenél Lugdech in the twelfth-century genealogical manuscripts, that the fourteenth-century O'Donnells claimed descent from him: they are more likely to have been descended from his like-named grandfather, through the Tadc mac Cuinn who slew Gilla Críst in 1038. The Cenél Lugdech occupied the area around Kilmacrenan and Glenveigh and had briefly gained the kingship of all Tír Conaill in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. But the eponym Domnall was forgotten, even by the Four Masters, who are notoriously partisan in favour of that family. His obit occurs in the Annals of Ulster at the year 965, and that of his son Conchobar, 'king of Loch Beithech', at 1005 (also omitted by the Four Masters). The O'Donnells, however, are collectively known as Clann Dálaigh, and into modern times individually as 'an Dálach', not 'an Domhnallach', after Dálach mac Muirchertaig (†870), the first of the dynasty to be king of Tír Conaill. Conversely the Cenél nEógain family of Ua Murchada in south Tyrone, representatives of the Muinter Birn, descended from Bern great-grandson of Murchad mac Maíle Dúin, the king of Cenél nEógain who was deposed in 823, took their surname from Murchad, but into the present century were known as 'na Beirnigh'.

Much ink has been spilled on whether the high-kings Domnall Mac Lochlainn and his grandson Muirchertach mac Néill (†1165) were 'O'Neills' descended from Niall Glúndub. Part of the confusion derives from the fact that surnames had by no means become stabilised and that most Cenél nEógain dynasts of the period could claim descent from some ancestor named Niall, even if it involved tracing the pedigree back to Niall Caille (†846) or Niall Frossach (†777). Áed and Flaithbertach 'ua Fergail', the kings of Tullaghogue killed in 1054 and 1068, could have been called 'Ua Néill', since their ancestor Conaing was a son of Niall Glúndub. Is there any significance to be attached to the fact that they are not so styled? Similarly Ua hÁeda and Ua Cerbaill of Mide could have been entitled to the surname Ua Maíl Shechnaill. But Domnall's claim to descent from Niall Glúndub ultimately rests on one source, the pedigree in Rawlinson B 502 written *c.*1130: later genealogical manuscripts derive from this and have no independent value. The contemporary annals, the only other twelfth-century pedigree in the Book of Leinster, and the circumstantial historical and topographical evidence all point clearly to descent from Niall's brother Domnall. The bardic apologues of the anonymous author of the *Circuit of Ireland* and of Gilla Mo Dutu Ua Casaide need not imply direct descent of the twelfth-century high-king from the

tenth-century Muirchertach mac Néill. A strictly contemporary source in the Annals of Inisfallen gives Domnall's descent explicitly in an entry for 1093: the second scribe of the manuscript took up his pen in 1092. While a Munster annalist might be regarded as a hostile witness, the pedigree is perfectly respectable: Domnall's father Ardgar had been king of Cenél nEógain and his great-grandfather Máel Sechnaill was the father of one and the grandfather of three kings, and the line descended from Domnall, who had acted as king during the high-kingship of his brother Niall Glúndub. Furthermore, Domnall styles himself U LACHLAIND on the inscription on the Bell of Patrick, which he had enshrined in the 1090s. None of the annalistic sources ever call him or his descendants by the surname Ua Néill: they refer to Domnall as 'mac meic Lochlainn' or 'Ua Lochlainn', and to his sons and grandsons as Ua or Mac Lochlainn. An apparent exception only is a poem cited in the Annals of Ulster, probably composed on or shortly after his victory over Ulster in 1099, which calls him Domnall Ua Néill, but this simply denotes his ultimate descent from Niall Noígiallach or perhaps from Niall Caille: the same poem calls him also Domnall Ua Flainn, which actually confirms his descent, not from Niall Glúndub, but from his brother Domnall through the latter's son Flann (†906), the grandfather of Lochlainn. Another exception is the obit of Ardgar mac Lochlainn in the annals of Tigernach at 1064: *Ardgal mac Lochlaind .H. Neill mortuus est.* But the text of these annals has undergone editing in the thirteenth century, and its characteristic genealogical glosses are not always reliable.

The true descendants of Niall Glúndub seem to have disappeared from history with the death of Muirchertach Ua Néill, king of Tullaghogue, at the hands of the Uí Chrimthainn in 1064, though Rawlinson B 502 apparently records the pedigree of his brother or cousin, an otherwise unknown Áed mac Néill, grandson of Flaithbertach Ua Néill (but the corresponding pedigree in H.2.7 is that of the Áed son of Flaithbertach who died in 1033). A Muirchertach Ua Néill was killed in 1160 at the battle of Mag Lugad by Lochlainn Mac Lochlainn, and avenged shortly afterwards by an unnamed son; the battle was won by the Cenél nEógain of Tullaghogue against Ua Gairmledaig and Domnall Ua Crícháin, king of the Uí Fhiachrach of Ardstraw, and the annals say that Muirchertach fell *co neimchintach*, which is ambiguous as to whether it was he or his killer who was innocent. The claims made by genealogists of the fourteenth century for the descent of Áed Ua Néill, who was set up as the puppet king of a partitioned Cenél nEógain by the high-king Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair in 1167, and whose descendants finally wrested power from the Mac Lochlainn dynasty at the battle of Cameirge in 1241, are not merely suspect but utterly implausible: in view of the impor-

tance attached by the twelfth-century genealogists to the Cenél mBinnig, it is tempting to suggest that it was from among them that Áed arose: his adoption of the name Ua Néill might then have been a deliberate ploy to gain support. Áed Ua Néill is placed in the fifth generation from Áed Athlam (†1033) son of Flaithbertach Ua Néill, and as his son Áed Méith died in 1230 this is not unreasonable: the suspicion of modern historians is aroused by the fact that none of the four alleged ancestors connecting Áed Athlam with Muirchertach of Mag Lugad attracted the notice of the annalists.

In a poem composed for the inauguration of Aodh Óg Ó Domhnaill in 1258 Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe asserts that Áed Ua Néill was born posthumously, his father having been killed in battle; if this is true he would have been only six years old when raised to the kingship by Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair in 1167 (an event recorded only by the Four Masters, but not to be denied on that account). Neither Giolla Brighde nor the annals give the name of Áed's father or grandfather, either in their notices of his accession or of his death in 1176. The annals say that Muirchertach was killed at Mag Lugad (Mag Luadat according to the Four Masters, which have a more circumstantial account of the battle) — both forms of the place-name are unidentified, but it was probably in Tyrone (AU 1219 implies that Mag Lugad was in Uí Thuirtri territory). Giolla Brighde says that Áed's father was killed at Mag Macha, i.e., near Armagh, though this may be for reasons of metrical exigency. Giolla Brighde was a bardic poet, but his information is not to be treated lightly. He did not pander to the pride of false ancestry either here or in his numerous poems to the O'Donnells: he does not mention the immediate ancestors of Éicnechán Ua Domnaill, father and grandfather of his own patrons. Giolla Brighde was a member of the Cenél nEógain sept of Cenél Moén, and his most famous composition is his lament for Áed's grandson Brian Ua Néill, who fell at the battle of Down in 1260. He could have had no reason to introduce Áed into his list of famous posthumous sons who won their patrimony unless it were true. If his father was in fact unknown, a story of posthumous birth was a polite way of asserting his legitimacy.

It is tempting to read into the introduction of surnames some indication of change in the style of lordship or of succession thereto, or indeed of a wider transformation of Irish society in the eleventh century. However, the nature of such change, if it happened, is not obvious. The 'laws', if such they can be called, that governed royal succession hardly changed throughout the time that the Gaelic polity existed in Ireland, though from time to time and from place to place some attempts to secure patrilinear succession were successful, dynastic segmentation remained a constant feature. Occasionally such divi-

sions could be manipulated to their own advantage by the more powerful rulers, but more often they worked to their detriment.

The doubts that have been cast on the operation of the *derbfhine* succession to kingship are not sufficient to discredit the fact that it did exist in practice, if not in strict law. Most Irish kings were the sons of kings, though few succeeded their fathers directly. The great majority were grandsons of kings, and few who were not great-grandsons had any chance. Whether this was a 'law' or a fact of political life can be a matter of debate, and whether such a rule should inhibit a 'legitimate' petty king from achieving higher status was no doubt questionable. Diarmait mac Maíl na mBó's father had been king of Uí Chennselaig, but no-one from that dynasty had been king of Leinster since the first half of the eighth century, and none of those were among Diarmait's direct ancestors. Dál Cais propagandists felt it incumbent upon them to invent a spurious ancestral and quasi-legal claim to justify that dynasty's seizure of the kingship of Cashel, yet as early as 951 Brian's father Cennétig was regarded by the Munster annalists as *rígdamna* or 'king-material'. The annals show that this title was not restricted to members of the *derbfhine* of the current or even recent kings.

The term *derbfhine* does not occur in the early annals, though it is occasionally to be found in the Four Masters, who use it to render Latin phrases in their exemplars, such as when someone is said to have been slain *a suis* 'by his own men' or *a genere suo* 'by his own race'. Such usage may be disregarded as antiquarian and inaccurate. Significantly, however, it does appear in the Annals of Ulster for 1241 when they record the virtual extirpation of the Mac Lochlainn dynasty by Brian Ua Néill:

> *Cath Cameirghe tuc Brian O Neill 7 Mael Sechlainn O Domnaill rí Ceniuil Conaill do Domnall Mag Lachlainn do righ Tire Eoghain gur marbadh Domnall Mág Lachlainn ann 7 deichnebur da derbfhine fein ime 7 taisigh Ceniuil Eogain uile 7 daine maithi imda aili fós 7 righi do gabail do Brian O Neill da eis.*
>
> The battle of Cameirge that Brian Ó Néill and Maol Seachlainn Ó Domhnaill, king of Cenél gConaill, waged against Domhnall Mág Lochlainn, the king of Tír Eoghain: and Domhnall Mág Lochlainn was killed there, and ten of his own *derbfhine* around him, and the leaders of all Cenél Eoghain, and many other noble men also; and the kingship taken by Brian Ó Néill in succession to him.

According to the law tracts the *derbfhine* extended 'to nine men'. MacNeill astutely pointed out that this meant 'nine categories', not 'nine individuals',

and in discussing this entry remarked that Domnall's *derbfhine* must have included more than the ten who were killed along with him. However, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that in choosing both to use the term and in giving such a number, one above the legal definition, the annalist was making a point: the whole family was politically annihilated.

I am not totally convinced by the argument that even within the Old Irish period the *derbfhine* 'certain kindred' had been replaced by the narrower *gelfhine* 'obvious kindred' (i.e., the descendants of a common grandfather as opposed to those of a great-grandfather). This seems to be without foundation: the two co-existed. The *gelfhine* was the normal group for inheritance: a man's land was divided by his sons and passed on through them to his grandsons. But for the purposes of blood feud and succession to office the *derbfhine* was the legal kindred. Binchy and MacNeill were misled by the false analogy of the Irish words *derbráthair* and *derbshiur* 'certain brother' and 'certain sister' meaning 'brother' and 'sister'; quite naturally, and in the light of the Welsh cognate *derw* as found in *cefnderw* 'first cousin', they drew the conclusion that *derbráthair* meant 'a member of the *derbfhine*', i.e., a cousin. On the contrary, whatever the remote prehistoric meaning, the Old Irish sources, both annals and genealogies, make it quite clear that this was not the case: in fact the definition is even narrower than in modern usage. In these early texts *derbráthair* means not merely 'brother', but 'brother-german', i.e., a son of the same father and the same mother. This was a relationship that was particularly worthy of notice in a polygamous society.

Binchy's opinion that such legal definitions of kinship as the *fine* were in the later middle ages replaced by 'the amorphous *sliocht*' seems equally unfounded. The *sliocht* was a quite precise definition of a sept, one that avoided the necessity of adopting a new surname and so maintained membership of the dominant family. Thus in north Leitrim Mág Raghnaill segmented in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries into the Sliocht Mhaoilsheachlainn, descended from Maolsheachlainn mac Íomhair (†1366), the Sliocht Ír, descended from Maolsheachlainn's great-nephew Ír mac Cathail Ruaidh (†1464) whose father was also known as Mág Raghnaill Ruadh, and the Sliocht Chathail mheic Aodha, a branch of the Clann Mhatha: these last were descended from Cathal mac Aodha's grandfather Matha, himself grandson of the common ancestor of the dynasty, Cathal Mór (†1265) grandfather of Maolsheachlainn. The Sliocht Mhaoilsheachlainn and the Sliocht Ír were rivals for the lordship for a century and a half. The Clann Mhatha were the ecclesiastical branch of the family, priors of Mohill, and the Sliocht Chathail were so called to distinguish them from the grandsons of Matha's son Tomás (alias Tomaltach). In no sense were these septs 'amorphous'. The

word 'sept', unlike 'clan', has a good Hiberno-Irish ancestry dating from the sixteenth century, and the Gaelic gentleman scholar Conell Mageoghegan had no qualms in using it in the seventeenth. There is no particular merit in replacing it with the speciously scientific 'segment'.

Of course at the time of their introduction surnames may have fulfilled the function of denoting eligibility to kingship within the agnatic *derbfhine*. This might explain why the unsuccessful descendants of Muirchertach Ua Briain were unable to assume his name; it certainly lies behind the adoption in the twelfth century of the new surname Mac Duinn Shléibe by the dominant branch of the Ulster house of Ua hEochada. However it must be said that no source describes so deliberate a policy, which, had it been systematically pursued, would have aborted the naming process altogether, or at least restricted continued use of the surnames to the actual holders of office. Such a custom did, as is well known, come into force for the use of 'the name' *tout court*: 'The O'Neill' was referred to and signed himself 'Ó Néill' without any prefix. But the humblest member of the family could append the surname to his or her own personal appellation.

It has been suggested with some plausibility that a reason for the overwhelming predominance of surnames in *Mac* in Scotland may be due to an anxiety on the part of the Gaelic rulers to ensure agnatic succession; the element *Ua* could equally imply descent from a maternal grandfather.[2] That such fears were not out of place in the crucial period of surname formation is amply illustrated by the events surrounding the reign of MacBeth. His own name was not a patronymic but a personal name in its own right: 'Son of Life', like Mac Raith 'Son of Grace' and many other more pagan names—Mac Caírthenn, Mac Dara, Mac Ercae, which had female analogues in *Der* 'daughter'—Dar Ercae, Der Forgaill and others. His full appellation was Mac Bethad mac Findlaích, son of Findláech mac Ruaidrí the *mormáer* of Moray who was killed by his own nephews in 1020 and is called *rí Alban* 'king of Scotland' in the Irish annals. Reversion to the Pictish matrilineal system was still a possibility. Malcolm II (Máel Coluim mac Cináeda) had no sons and placed his daughter's son Duncan (Donnchad mac Crínáin, whose father was abbot of Dunkeld and survived his son to lead a revolt against MacBeth in 1042) on the throne — he was also instrumental in securing the position of another grandson, Thorfinn the Mighty, as jarl of Orkney. MacBeth was succeeded briefly by his stepson Lulach son of Gruoch ('Lady MacBeth'), grand-daughter of Kenneth III (Cináed mac Duib). Lulach too fell victim to Malcolm Canmore in 1058, but his claims were pursued well into the twelfth century by his

2 Personal communication from Dr N. J. A. Williams.

daughter's son Óengus 'king of the Men of Moray', defeated and killed by David I in 1130. Pictish *Mutterrecht* is sufficiently well attested and its reality confirmed by its recurrence on several occasions even after the unification of the kingdoms of Picts and Scots under the Dál Riata dynasty.

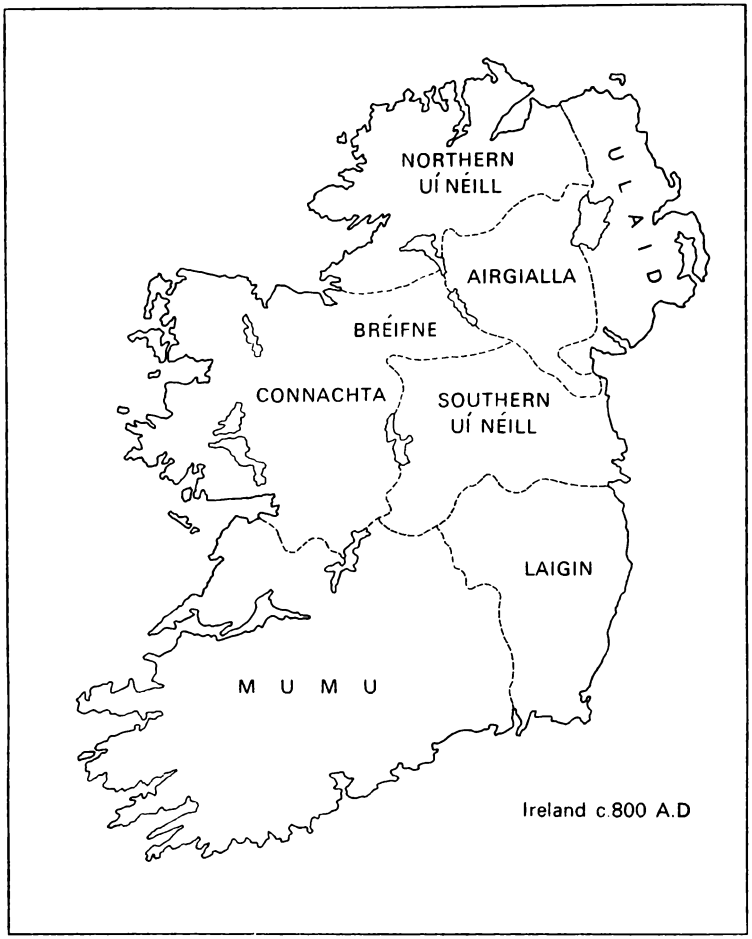
Although the Welsh laws limit succession to royal office to a small circle of agnatic kinsmen, corresponding to the Old Irish *derbfhine* or more exactly to the narrower *gelfhine*; in practice we find that from the eighth century princes could acquire territory by right of their wives, if not of their mothers, and in the tenth century Owain son of Hywel Dda took care to record his mother's pedigree along with that of his father in order to highlight his claims to rule both in North and South Wales. A king who was held in high esteem by the Welsh annalists of St David's was Llywelyn ap Seisyll (1005-23), father of the even more successful Gruffudd ap Llywelyn. Yet Llywelyn's father was a person of no consequence, and Llywelyn's best claim, apart from his ability to defeat his enemies, was through his marriage to Angharad, daughter of Maredudd, king of Deheubarth, son of Owain son of Hywel Dda. Even the Normans were to gain some benefit from their connections, both marital and irregular, with Nest daughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr. It has been argued that J. E. Lloyd's bias in favour of the 'legitimacy' of the line of Rhodri Mawr has distorted the picture of Welsh history in the eleventh century, and that it was not so anarchic as he has made it appear. It may simply be the case that the Welsh preferred a strong ruler to one with a perfect pedigree. On the other hand we may be the victims of our lack of information. The Welsh sources are much more meagre than the Irish for this period, but they do give the impression that the inviolability of the ancient kingdoms as territories was a stronger principle in the polity of Wales than the dominance of dynasties. A powerful king might start off from his home base and then accumulate other units, which then in turn could be redistributed, either by bequest or conquest, to form a new pattern. The territories themselves remained the same: the hegemony of a king of Gwynedd over Arwystli, Seisyllwg or even Deheubarth did not result in any expansion of the borders of Gwynedd. But it would be rash to aver that such relative freedom made Welsh rulers less conformable to the notion of surnames. Another difference between Irish and Welsh usage is that the latter kept to patronymics: *map*, contracted to *ap*, was the regular designation of a man's lineage. The word for grandson, *wyr*, is rarely used: that the Welsh annals do so designate Gruffudd ap Cynan as *Gruffudd wyr Iago* and *Grifud nepos Iacob* on the occasion of his first attempt on Anglesey (and even again in 1081) evoked special comment from Lloyd: 'A few years later, no one would have dreamt of calling him anything but Gruffudd ap Cynan; in 1075,

however, nothing was known in Wales of Cynan, and it was as Iago's grandson that this young man of twenty claimed the Venedotian crown'.[3]

The Irish paid some attention to the rank of a prince's mother, and in 1147 Gilla Mo Dutu broke new ground in composing an elaborate poem on the subject, *Ádam óenathair na ndóene*, the so-called 'Verse Banshenchas', which was soon expanded in a prose version. The Leinster genealogies also devote considerable space to the topic: but it seems to have been of minor moment in a man's chance of succession to kingship. Diarmait Mac Murchada's son Domnall Cáemánach may have been 'illegitimate (*nothus*)' as Giraldus Cambrensis claims (and his statement gains some support from the fact that the genealogists do not record the name of his mother, although they do those of Diarmait's other children) but that did not prevent him from being an eligible *rígdamna*, and the later Mac Murchadha kings of Leinster were descended from him: the surnames Kavanagh and Kinsella (derived from Diarmait's brother and immediate successor Muirchertach Cennselach Mac Murchada), are only apparent exceptions to the formation of Irish surnames, for they are but abbreviations of the full names Mac Murchadha Caomhánach and Mac Murchadha Cennselach. Among the Scandinavians too the name and success of Svein Estridson as king of Denmark (1042–74) in defending his claims against Harald Hardrada of Norway attest to the fact that the royal birth of a man's mother might outweigh the legitimacy of his father's marriage. Apparently such prejudice in favour of a queen's son was quite common among the Norse.

Nevertheless in Irish history (as distinct from legend), right to rule could never result from either marriage or matrilineal descent. Diarmait was certainly innovating when he promised the kingship of Leinster to Strongbow as the marriage-portion of his daughter Aífe. Diarmait was reserving the high-kingship of Ireland for himself and his sons, of whom at least two of undoubted legitimacy were alive at the time he made his promise. An explanation for Strongbow's delay in availing himself of the offer may be found in Aífe's age at the time: Diarmait's marriage to her mother most probably took place in 1152 when his reconciliation with her father Muirchertach Ua Tuathail was cemented by the appointment of her half-brother Lorcán (St Laurence O'Toole) to the abbacy of Glendalough.

3 Quoted by Thomas Jones, *Brut y Tywysogion ... Peniarth MS. 20 version* (Cardiff, 1952), p. 153. See also D. Simon Evans, *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan* (Cardiff, 1977), p. cxxvi.


NORTHERN
UÍ NÉILL
CLAID
AIRGIALLA
BRÉIFNE
CONNACHTA
SOUTHERN
UÍ NÉILL
LAIGIN
M U M U
Ireland c.800 A.D

Preface to the Second Edition

In the thirty years since this book was written there has been a veritable explosion of activity in all fields of early Irish history, language, literature and archaeology. For the development of Gaelic kingship in the later middle ages see Katharine Simms, *From kings to warlords: the changing political structure of Gaelic Ireland in the later middle ages* (Woodbridge, 1987), and for early Leinster Alfred P. Smyth, *Celtic Leinster* (Dublin, 1982). Coincidentally with the appearance of *Irish kings and high-kings* two important works on cognate subjects were published: Marjorie O. Anderson, *Kings and kingship in early Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1973) and John Bannerman, *Studies in the history of Dál Riada* (Edinburgh, 1974). A comprehensive bibliography would be as large as the volume itself. Only the most recent works that are immediately relevant can be mentioned here: Edel Bhreathnach, *Tara: a select bibliography*, Discovery Programme Reports 3 (Dublin, 1995); T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000); T. O. Clancy and Gilbert Márkus, *Iona: the earliest poetry of a Celtic monastery* (Edinburgh, 1995); H. B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Raghnall Ó Floinn (ed.), *Ireland and Scandinavia in the early Viking age* (Dublin, 1998); Liam de Paor, *St Patrick's world: the Christian culture of Ireland's apostolic age* (Dublin, 1993) and *Ireland and early Europe* (Dublin, 1997); S. T. Driscoll and M. R. Nieke (ed.), *Power and politics in early medieval Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh 1988); David Dumville (ed.), *Saint Patrick, AD 493–1993* (Woodbridge, 1993); D. R. Edel (ed.), *Cultural identity and cultural integration: Ireland and Europe in the early middle ages* (Dublin, 1995); Nancy Edwards, *The archaeology of early medieval Ireland* (London, 1990); Michael J. Enright, *Iona, Tara, and Soissons* (Berlin, 1985); George Eogan, *Knowth and the passage-tombs of Ireland* (London, 1986); Colmán Etchingham, *Church organisation in Ireland, AD 650 to 1000* (Maynooth, 1999); Kathryn Grabowski and David Dumville, *Chronicles and*

annals of medieval Ireland and Wales (Woodbridge, 1984); Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry: the history and hagiography of the monastic* familia *of Columba* (Oxford, 1988; reprinted, Dublin, 1996); Bart Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession* (Dublin, 2000); Brian Lacey, *Colum Cille and the Columban tradition* (Dublin, 1997); Kim McCone, *Pagan past and Christian present* (Maynooth, 1990); A. S. Mac Shamhráin, *Church and polity in pre-Norman Ireland* (Maynooth, 1996); Harold Mytum, *The origins of early Christian Ireland* (London, 1992); J. F. Nagy, *Conversing with angels and ancients: literary myths of medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1997); Conor Newman, *Tara: an archaeological survey*, Discovery Programme Monograph 2 (Dublin, 1997); Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland, 400–1200* (London and New York, 1995); Tadhg O'Keeffe, *Medieval Ireland: an archaeology* (Stroud, 2000); Barry Raftery, *The La Tène in Ireland: its origins and chronology* (Marburg, 1984) and *Pagan Celtic Ireland* (London and New York, 1994); Michael Richter, *Irland im Mittelalter: Kultur und Geschichte* (Stuttgart, 1983) [English edition *Medieval Ireland: the enduring tradition*, translated by Brian Stone and Adrian Keogh (London and Dublin, 1988)] and *Ireland and her neighbours in the seventh century* (Dublin, 1999); Michael Ryan (ed.), *The illustrated archaeology of Ireland* (Dublin, 1991); Richard Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba* (London, 1995); Brendan Smith (ed.), *Britain and Ireland, 900–1300: insular responses to medieval European change* (Cambridge, 1999); Matthew Stout, *The Irish ringfort*, Irish settlement studies, No. 5 (Dublin, 1997); Catherine Swift, *Ogam stones and the earliest Irish Christians* (Maynooth, 1997); Simon Taylor (ed.), *Kings, clerics and chronicles in Scotland: essays in honour of Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson on the occasion of her ninetieth birthday* (Dublin, 2000).

In addition to these books many important articles have appeared, notably from the prolific pen of Donnchadh Ó Corráin, as well as those by Charles Doherty with original ideas relating to hagiography, economic history and settlement patterns. It is with profound gratitude that I acknowledge the many contributions to my Festschrift edited by Alfred P. Smyth, *Seanchas: studies in early and medieval Irish archaeology, history and literature in honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin, 2000).

As for original sources, two important sets of annals have been re-edited since 1973: *The Annals of Ulster (to 1131)* (Dublin, 1983) by Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill, and *Fragmentary annals of Ireland* (Dublin, 1978) by Joan Radner (the same text as that edited by O'Donovan under the title *Three fragments*). But by far the most important publication was D. A. Binchy's edition of the complete texts of all the brehon law manuscripts as *Corpus Iuris Hibernici* in 6 volumes (Dublin, 1978). This has led to a spate of

work on these texts and a lively debate, led by Liam Breatnach, Aidan Breen, Kim McCone and Donnchadh Ó Corráin as to the extent of ecclesiastical involvement in their composition. Apart from editions and translations of individual tracts the following books have appeared: Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh kinship* (Oxford, 1993); Fergus Kelly, *Audacht Morainn* (Dublin, 1976), *A guide to early Irish law* (Dublin, 1988) and *Early Irish farming* (Dublin, 1997); Nerys T. Patterson, *Cattle-lords and clansmen: the social structure of early Ireland* (New York and London, 1991); Robin Chapman Stacey, *The road to judgment: from custom to court in medieval Ireland and Wales* (Philadelphia, 1994).

Obviously then the present book can with some justification be described as out of date. I have done no re-writing, but have appended a list of Corrigenda covering some authorial blunders as well as simple misprints in the original. One or two of these were already corrected in the 1987 paperback reprint. The Additional Notes attempt to supplement the text without adding too much to the bulk of the book.

It is with a certain wry satisfaction that I note that most of the criticisms more recently expressed against the so-called 'nativist' interpretation of Irish tradition were already anticipated by me in 1971 (and indeed by Eoin MacNeill half a century before): acknowledgement of the clerical Latin influence on vernacular literary and historical sources and some scepticism towards the genealogies as being aetiological 'charters' subject to changes in political circumstances rather than ancient folk-memories. As to the annals, my continuing work on them has confirmed my belief in their essential veracity, subject to critical examination of the texts.

Irish kings and high-kings was originally dedicated to my father, Captain Mathew Byrne of the China Navigation Company and Harbour Master of Howth from 1951 until 1974. This was inadvertently omitted from the first edition, but my father did live to see the publication despite his not unreasonable doubts (he died in July 1975). My mother, Nellie Amelia Rathkey, gave me great help in compiling the index (she died in January 1980).

FRANCIS JOHN BYRNE
Dublin,
Easter 2001

Preface

Many Irishmen boast descent from kings. The claim is not always justified, but is not altogether preposterous, for Ireland had redundance of royal blood. In many parts of the country tribal sub-kings and provincial over-kings remained in power until the end of the sixteenth century, and by virtue of the Irish system of succession and of marriage laws which approximated to polygamy dynastic families proliferated at the expense of the commoner sort, so that Elizabethan officials complained that most Irishmen were bastards and claimed to be gentlemen.

Early Irish kingship offers a rich field of investigation not only to the historian but to all students of anthropology, mythology and comparative civilisation. The materials for study are abundant but somewhat baffling, for the early Irish had a literary and imaginative bias. The annals and genealogies provide a backbone of stricter documentation, but even they may be contaminated by myth and legend, and few scholars have as yet seriously examined the circumstances of their composition. On the other hand, the richness of Irish literature provides an extraordinary insight into the ethos of an early medieval society, not as interpreted by foreign observers nor even by native clergy working within international Latin moulds of thought, but as seen from the inside by vernacular authors writing in a literary tradition which was continuous from the sixth century to the twelfth, and indeed beyond to Keating, Mac Firbhisigh and O'Flaherty in the seventeenth.

In some respects therefore the question of historicity is irrelevant: the texts themselves, however legendary their content, stand as documents of the centuries in which they were written; and the labours of Celtic philologists over the last fifty years have enabled us to date

them with reasonable certainty. I would go further, and say that early Irish literature cannot be properly understood except as historical documentation.

This is not to deny the possibility of constructing an historical narrative in the orthodox sense—otherwise this book could not have been written. The best texts of the annals offer a contemporary record from the second half of the sixth century onwards. From these, together with the genealogies and regnal lists, we can trace with some confidence the history of the various dynasties and the successsion of their kings. Even when a pedigree or regnal list is suspect, the forgery and its motives are historical facts of considerable interest. By the eighth century Irish politics had taken their classical shape, which was to be but slowly modified in the course of centuries of Viking raids. A clear and even detailed picture emerges of a society compounded of Christian and pagan elements, barbarous indeed, and yet curiously sophisticated, self-sufficient and self-assured.

Much of the pseudo-history written at this time, whether by lay genealogists and story-tellers, or by the monks learned in Latin who composed for the Irish a monarchical tradition as old as that of Israel from fragments of oral pagan legend and exotic book-lore, was aetiological and didactic in its purpose: it explained the origins of the dominant dynasties and justified their current ambitions. This is the true reason for myth (and a myth may well be as historical as the battle of the Boyne): namely to show a people why things are 'just so', and why they should so remain for ever and ever. A myth which has lost its function in a community may survive as a mere fairy-tale, but a living myth is accompanied by ritual, and the ceremonies which attended the inauguration of Irish kings may have been as old as the tumuli on which they were performed.

Ireland was a country where archaic Indo-European institutions, and probably traditions even more primitive surviving among the descendants of the stone age megalith builders, have been untouched by the levelling bulldozers of Roman civilisation; where Latin Christianity had bestowed the gift of literacy in two tongues indeed, but had itself been adapted to Gaelic culture. We may thus find surviving here even into modern times features of that sacral kingship which has been traced over wide areas of the world in many periods of civilisation. A primitive Irish legend may throw light on a ritual survival in fifth-century Athens; the relations of Irish king and goddess complement Scandinavian accounts of the Uppsala kingship; the poet's reward for

his inauguration of the king can be explained by a Vedic hymn. The interpretation of mythological material is dangerous and must perhaps always be subjective. What I have written on these aspects I believe to be valid, but do not expect to convince the unbeliever. But a presentation of the data may provoke others into producing their own theories.

From the purely historical point of view the rise of dynastic polity in Ireland and the growth of concepts of high-kingship, if not of national monarchy, is our main theme; and though much room for conjecture remains, the broad course of events is clear enough. Irish tribalism, with its multitude of petty kingdoms, has the advantage of providing the historian with a mass of evidence on local history, perhaps more than is available for any country in Europe at this period. Irish kingship was rooted in the soil, and this particularism, this attachment to 'one dear perpetual place' has left its mark on Irish literature and has been carried over into English in the works of Yeats and Joyce. Hence the necessity for detailed maps, which it is hoped will be of value to the student of Irish history as well as a practical help to the reader.

So also are the genealogical tables an indispensable if cumbrous guide to the ramifications of dynastic succession. They have been compiled from the annals and genealogies, and in the process of writing I have had to correct them more than once: some errors no doubt remain. In some cases the information is so contradictory that only a tentative reconstruction can be made; in others the pedigree is almost certainly false, but needs to be shown, since the forgery itself had historical consequences. The elaboration of these tables will give some indication of the amount of information we have, most of which has been ignored by historians. Yet only the chief provincial dynasties have been shown: similar tables could be compiled of most of the petty tribal kings. Our two earliest genealogical manuscripts retail approximately 12,000 names of persons who lived between the fifth and twelfth centuries, and later medieval manuscripts contain even more relating to the same period.

But amid this plethora of names it is difficult to discern the features of an individual. The annalistic entries are terse, and both contemporary eulogy and later saga cast their heroes in a conventional mould, for the purpose of the poet was rather to exemplify ideal kingship than to portray an actual king. Even the motives of men so well documented as are Brian Bóruma and Diarmait Mac Murchada can only be surmised from their recorded actions. A short sketch of Diarmait has been

attempted in the final pages, in the belief that his place in Irish history needs reassessment, and a view has been adumbrated of Brian which runs counter to that most commonly expressed. But the only full-length study that will be found here is that of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn in the tenth chapter. Similar short biographies could be written of subsequent pretenders to the high-kingship, but the limits of this volume preclude them.

This book was originally planned as a study of the high-kings of Ireland from the fifth century to the twelfth, but the elusive nature of the high-kingship of Tara made it unhistorical to treat of it as the central focus of Irish politics in the archaic centuries. It could be so viewed from the ninth century onwards, but the character of Irish history changes at this point (as I have tried to indicate in the final chapter), and the unity which the book had already assumed would have suffered. An adequate treatment of Middle Irish kingship would demand equal space, and would also have to take into account the extraneous kingdoms of Dublin, Waterford and Limerick and their foreign connections.*

Nevertheless the full genealogical tables carried down to the twelfth century have been retained, so as to indicate the subsequent fortunes of the dynasties which rose to power between the fifth and eighth centuries, and also because the text contains many references forward to kings of the Middle Irish period. Together they present for the first time succession lists of the major Irish kingdoms in the pre-Norman period. The importance of even a falsified pedigree was such that the career of no Irish king can be understood apart from its genealogical context: his ambitions were coloured by the fame or obscurity of his ancestors, his reign clouded by the presence of collaterals with equally valid claims, and his posthumous reputation depended on the success of his descendants.

The sources have imposed their own shape on the book. The course of political history from the ninth century onwards is becoming increasingly clear, and a brief survey will be found in the final chapter. For the rest, the initial chapters set the social scene and are followed by discussions of the mythological importance of Tara and of the origin legends of the Uí Néill who claimed its title. The underlying concepts of kingship are often expressed in mythological terms, even when the kings are historical; thus some considerable space has been devoted to

* Important excavations are at present being conducted on the site of the Norse city of Dublin.

unravelling these tangled threads and weaving them into the tapestry of archaic Irish society. Next we are driven to make a circuit of Ireland, travelling *deiseal* or righthandwise with the sun in the approved Irish manner from the north right round to the west, for the most reliable early material deals with Ulster and the midlands and contemporary annalistic recording spreads more slowly to the south and west. The essential unity of Irish culture and institutions is a product of the learned caste who maintained a standard literary language and were not bound too strictly by tribal loyalties. Yet each province will be found to have its individual style of kingship, reflected in the nature of the literary and historical evidence which has survived.

I have let this evidence speak for itself as far as possible through the translations of various scholars. Occasionally a text here appears for the first time in English. Much will be familiar to those interested in Old Irish, but deserves to be made known to a wider circle of readers. Little of it, however, has before been studied as historical evidence for Irish politics or society.

There is no textbook on early Irish history, and it has been a challenge to write a book for the general reader where no learned work exists to be vulgarised. Many may think that I have fallen between two stools, but I have endeavoured to synthesise the specialist studies of many scholars and to offer some interpretations of my own, in the hope that some may be attracted to this neglected area of Irish history and that those who disagree with me may be stimulated into counter-publication. Elaborate footnotes have been avoided, in the belief that they would mean little to the general reader, and that the student who is interested in pursuing the originals will find adequate guidance in the bibliographical notes. In the nature of things, the index contains a formidable number of proper names, and I have added a rough guide to pronunciation and spelling.

Debts to scholars living and dead will be sufficiently obvious from the text and bibliography. With many I have disagreed: from all I have learnt. Of the older generation Eoin MacNeill, founder of early Irish history as an academic discipline, and T. F. O'Rahilly merit chiefest mention. MacNeill's successor and my own predecessor, Rev. John Ryan, SJ, inspired my interest in this area of history which he knows so intimately, and to the late Gerard Murphy and the late Fr. Francis Shaw, SJ, I owe my initiation into Celtic studies. Other modern scholars who have greatly influenced the making of this book in their various ways have been D. A. Binchy, Myles Dillon, James Carney, Alwyn and

Brinley Rees and my colleague at University College, Dublin, Proinsias Mac Cana. I wish to thank my colleagues in the History Departments of University College for their constant encouragement and my students for the stimulation they have given me. In particular I am grateful to Professor R. Dudley Edwards for the patience with which he has read my typescript during its long progress and for the perceptiveness of his comments.

University College, Dublin
24 August 1971

I

The Irish Concept of Kingship

The *chanson de geste* which celebrates the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland succinctly described the political position in the late twelfth century:

> *En yrland erent reis plusur*
> *cum alures erent les cunturs;*
> *mes qui tent mithe e leynistere*
> *e desmund e munestere*
> *e connoth e uluestere*
> *que ia dis tendrent le sis frere,*
> *qui celes tenent sunt chef reis*
> *de yrlande, solum les yrreis.*

> In Ireland there were many kings, as counts elsewhere; but those who hold Meath and Leinster, and Desmond and Munster, and Connacht and Ulster, which the six brothers once held—those who hold these are the principal kings of Ireland, according to the Irish.

In fact, there were probably no less than 150 kings in the country at any given date between the fifth and twelfth centuries. Since the total population was probably well under half a million, this multiplicity of royalty is all the more remarkable. Each king ruled over a *tuath* or tribal kingdom. The word *tuath* literally means 'a people', deriving from the Celtic root **teuto-* or **touto-*, and is often translated as 'tribe'. This term is somewhat unsatisfactory, partly because it has derogatory overtones in English, but more seriously because of its extreme vagueness and lack of definition. Thus 'tribe' tends to be interchanged

with such equally loose words as 'sept' or 'clan', which are more properly employed for the *fine* or family group, and the quite false impression may be given that this primary social unit somehow merged into the *tuath*. We may legitimately describe the *tuath* as tribal, in that it was a population group which formed a distinct political entity. But if by 'tribe' we mean a people with its own language, customs, and religion, there is no justification for using the term to describe any Irish kingdom in the historical period. Like ancient Greece, pre-Norman Ireland was able to combine political fragmentation with cultural unity.

Scholars have speculated on the various languages spoken in Ireland by the different groups of prehistoric settlers. Non-Celtic languages as well as Celtic dialects akin to Welsh have left their traces in Irish, but the earliest documents show a single literary language in use throughout the country from at least the sixth century onwards. No doubt at the colloquial level local variations existed, and the modern Irish dialects may possibly reflect ancient territorial divisions, but as long as the poets and other men of learning survived as a corporate and privileged caste—that is until the destruction of Gaelic Ireland in the seventeenth century—a uniform standard speech was the educated norm, not only in Ireland but also in Gaelic Scotland, where it did not entirely disappear until 1745.

Similarly, in the realm of law, the basic institutions were identical, although different schools may have taught varying interpretations of the tradition. Much the same situation obtained in the Hindu law schools, whose teachings offer many parallels to those of the Irish brehons. The usual word for the free population in the laws is *Féni*, and the traditional law itself is called *fénechas*. The normal word elsewhere for the Irish is *Goídil* 'the Gaels'—a borrowing from the Welsh *Gwyddyl*, suggesting that the Irish had no common word for themselves until they came into contact with foreigners. Occasionally in the law tracts we come across references to the *Ulaid*, the men of Ulster, and the *Gáileóin* or *Laigin*, the men of Leinster, as distinct from the *Féni*. The name *Féni*, then, may primarily have referred to the midland peoples, ruled in Christian times by the great Uí Néill dynasty, and possibly also to the dominant Eóganachta of Munster. Prominence is given in the genealogical tradition to other ancient racial groups with branches in various parts of Ireland, particularly the *Érainn* (the *Iverni* recorded by Ptolemy on his map in the second century) and the *Cruthin* or *Cruithni*, identical in name with the mysterious Picts of Scotland. Unlike the Picts, however, neither of these groups seem to have differed in language

or social structure from the rest of the Irish, though they retained their identity well into the early middle ages.

We must be on our guard against too glibly identifying either *Goídil* or *Féni* with the linguistic term 'Goidels' used by modern scholars to describe speakers of Gaelic or Q-Celtic as distinct from Brythonic or P-Celtic. At what date the Celts reached Britain and Ireland, and how the differentiation arose between the dialects which eventually emerged as Gaelic on the one hand and Welsh and Breton on the other, are questions for the linguist and prehistorian: they are not really relevant to the early medieval period. There is much evidence of movements in both directions across the Irish Sea in Roman times, and the fourth and fifth centuries saw considerable settlements of the Irish (whom the Romans called *Scotti*) in western Britain, which are attested by medieval Welsh tradition and by ogham inscriptions. The most famous Irish colony was established further north in Argyll by the Dál Riata of county Antrim.

The study of Irish prehistory fascinated the medieval Irish, and over the centuries they elaborated a detailed history of the successive invasions by Partholón, Nemed, the Fir Bolg, the Tuatha Dé Danann, and the sons of Míl. This account, preserved in the *Lebor Gabála* or 'Book of Invasions', which was being constantly brought out in new and revised editions until the end of the twelfth century, was a fantastic compound of genuine racial memories, exotic Latin learning and world history derived from Orosius and Isidore of Seville, euhemerised Celtic mythology, dynastic propaganda, folklore, and pure fiction. In the earliest version (already current in the eighth century) only the Connachta, together with their Uí Néill off-shoot, and the Eóganachta of Munster are descended from the two sons of Míl: the other peoples of Ireland are sharply distinguished from them and implicitly relegated to an inferior status. This reflects the widely held theory that the country was divided into two spheres of influence: Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga—the overlordships of Tara and Cashel. Soon, however, other dynasties of local importance were provided by the synthetic historians with a line of descent from other sons of Míl, whose family underwent an alarming, if posthumous, increase. Even the more prominent of the Cruthin and Érainn were brought into the Milesian scheme, until only a few insignificant tributary tribes were still reckoned as 'Fir Bolg'. The pretence that the Celtic gods were in fact an earlier race, the Tuatha Dé Danann or 'peoples of the goddess Danu', driven by the sons of Míl to take refuge in Otherworld *síde* in the hills

and under lakes, can have deceived no one. Such euhemerisation was a half-hearted device for salving the consciences of Christians interested in the pagan past.

Modern scholars, equipped with brand-new philological and archaeological techniques, have proved quite as excitable as their medieval forbears were when introduced to the Hieronymo-Eusebian world chronicle. Just as the monks of Bangor set about inserting the prehistoric kings or tutelary deities of Tara and of the Ulster capital Emain Macha into the synchronisms of the Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Greek, and Roman world kingdoms, so too the *Lebor Gabála* has been interpreted in terms of various waves of Celts and pre-Celts, megalith builders, Beaker Folk, Hallstatt, and La Tène invasions. The most impressive monument to this type of activity is T. F. O'Rahilly's great work, *Early Irish history and mythology*. The Goidels, according to O'Rahilly, were the last Celtic invaders of Ireland, and arrived in the first century BC. He uses the term very tendentiously, in effect restricting it to the Connachta and Uí Néill and the Eóganachta: Érainn and Ulaid, Laigin and Cruthin were all P-Celts. But the documentary evidence does not permit the historian to push back the origins of the Uí Néill and Eóganacht dynasties beyond the fifth century AD; and, however great their power, they were never in a position to impose their language on the rest of the population. Furthermore, the theory is contradicted by the earliest written examples of the Irish language—the ogham stones, which are clustered thickest in the allegedly non-Goidelic areas. Gaelic, too, was introduced to Scotland by the Dál Riata, who were Érainn.

How little trust can be placed in medieval ideas of prehistory is illustrated by the astonishing fact that neither the Irish nor the Welsh, though in frequent contact and sharing very similar forms of society, law and literature, ever showed any awareness of a common Celtic origin. The Anglo-Saxons, on the contrary, though far less committed to the study of genealogy, always remained conscious of their links with the Old Saxons of Germany. The races of the known world were descended from the sons of Noah; but while the Welsh (acting on a hint from Isidore of Seville) traced their origins to Brutus and Troy, the Irish brought the sons of Míl from Scythia via Egypt and Spain. Even in ecclesiastical affairs, where Welsh, Bretons and Irish shared a monastic organisation and traditions which appeared eccentric if not worse to the apostles of Roman uniformity, there seems to have been little sense of a common cause. The 'Celtic church' is a term coined by modern

historians, and it has its uses: but the Irish were quite unaware that they belonged to it.

The genealogists can be trusted insofar as they show us that the Érainn, Cruthin and Laigin had distinct origin legends and ancestral traditions; but when they claim that any particular people belonged to one or other of these groups, or were connected with the Connachta or Eóganachta, we have to treat their statements with some caution. Pedigrees were often remodelled for political ends. Perhaps the most blatant example is the fiction that the Dál Cais, rulers of a petty state in east Clare, were a collateral branch of the Eóganacht, entitled from remote antiquity to share in the over-kingship of Munster. So deeply rooted were the claims of aristocratic descent that the spectacular rise to power of Brian Bóruma, and the consolidation of that power by the O'Briens, were not sufficient to promote the Dál Cais in the political hierarchy without the spurious lustre of ancestral prestige.

The origin legends of many dynasties describe them as having conquered their territory after having invaded Ireland from abroad. The Laigin and the Eóganachta had such legends, which were quite independent of the Milesian scheme. Later, when the pseudo-historical fabric had been completed, and when it was generally accepted that the sons of Míl had landed in the far distant past, such earlier, more authentic legends of Eógan's invasion of Munster and Labraid Loingsech's conquest of Leinster seemed anachronistic, for Eógan and Labraid were allegedly descended from Míl. The stories, however, were preserved in a modified form, representing these ancestral figures as exiled princes who recovered their patrimony with the aid of foreign troops. So tenacious was Irish tradition, and so potent the conservatism of Irish society, that it is not too fanciful to suppose that Diarmait Mac Murchada in the twelfth century may have been inspired by the example of his mythical ancestor.

A similar story was told of Tuathal Techtmar, grandfather of Conn Cétchathach ('of the Hundred Battles'), the eponymous ancestor of the Connachta. Indeed, few of the Irish claimed to be autochthonous. It would be hypersceptical then to deny that some memories of Celtic invasions and settlements existed, however distorted by the procrustean schemes of medieval scholars. Linguistic evidence, and to a lesser extent, that of archaeology, shows Ireland to have been a Celtic country; untouched by Roman conquest it retained Celtic culture and polity, and classical accounts of the continental Celts are reflected to a remarkable degree in Irish literature and historical documents. Almost

every chapter in Caesar's narrative of the Gallic war could be illustrated by Irish parallels, although the Gauls of Caesar's day had begun to make a radical change by abolishing monarchy—a revolution unthinkable to the Irish.

Recent scholarly preoccupation with proto-historical questions of linguistics and archaeology, and attempts to unravel the Gordian knot of the Patrician problem which bars the very portals of Irish history, have tended to distract attention from the well-documented centuries preceding the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169. Early Irish history is a rich and relatively unexplored field, and one of unusual interest to the historian of civilisation. The records offer a detailed picture of a self-absorbed society, at the same time archaic and sophisticated—a backwater undisturbed by the mainstream of the Latin middle ages, to which it paradoxically contributed a refreshing current of intellectual liveliness and religious idealism. The primitive characteristics of Irish society, and in particular the archaic features of Irish kingship, find their nearest European parallels in pre-Christian Scandinavia. Toynbee indeed has classed both Ireland and Scandinavia as 'abortive civilisations', independent of Rome and the western culture which was heir to Rome, but he tends to exaggerate the eccentricity of the Irish church, which was after all Latin.

Christianity came to Ireland from Roman Britain and Gaul, but it did not follow the legions. No alien pattern was imposed on the nascent Irish church: the collapse of the empire left it free to develop on its own, adopting indeed various elements from eastern and western Christianity, but adapting them to the needs of the society in which it was planted. This eclecticism, which blended many foreign materials into a uniquely Irish design, may be observed in the liturgy of the Stowe Missal, in the evolution of Irish script, and more generally in manuscript illumination and the other arts. The characteristic organisational unit of the Irish church, the monastic *familia*, reflects the basic unit of society, the *fine* or joint-family, in which all legal rights were vested. It is no accident that the twelfth-century reform of the church, brought to completion by St Malachy, which introduced the diocesan system normal in western Europe, should have taken place at the very time when Irish society was becoming recognisably feudal, nor that the reform was supported by those princes who were intent on creating a new model of monarchy to supersede the old intensely local tribal kingships.

Both Irish and Welsh seem to have developed a vernacular literature

as early as the sixth century. Both inherited from the old Celtic world a highly privileged caste of learned men, poets, druids, bards, genealogists, and jurists, who survived the advent of Christianity by surrendering their more overtly pagan functions. Thus the Christian clergy had no monopoly of learning; and in Ireland the *áes dána* or 'men of art' preserved the vernacular lore, enriching it with the new Latin learning of the monasteries. It would be wrong to suggest that the medieval Irish poets and brehons were crypto-pagans, but by virtue of their very office, which was to transmit the *senchas* or tradition, they consciously or unconsciously retained many druidical traits.

We learn from classical authors, notably the Stoic philosopher and traveller Poseidonios of Apamea, that the Gauls had a caste of prophetic poets, bards, and druids—*vates*, *bardoi*, and *druides*; and Julius Caesar's account of the teaching in druidic schools is well known. The word *vates* survives in Irish as *fáith* 'a prophet,' but the normal word for 'poet' is *fili* (plural *filid*)—literally 'seer', and medieval sources make it clear that divination was included among the poet's functions. In Welsh, *bardd* means 'poet', but in Ireland, as in ancient Gaul, the *bard* was an inferior grade of versifier who specialised in satire and panegyric: he normally accompanied the *fili* as part of the latter's retinue. The Irish word *druí* (plural *druíd*), is usually rendered *magus* in Hiberno-Latin texts, where druids often figure as opponents of Patrick and other saints. In Irish law the *áes dána* formed a distinct social class, equal in status to the nobility (Caesar divided Gallic society into *druides*, *equites*, and *plebs*). The Christian clergy were, on the same analogy, incorporated into this hierarchical scheme with its elaborate distinctions of wergild and honour-price. In fact, their assimilation provided the jurists with material on which to exercise their pedantic passion for classification and sub-division. Just as there were seven orders of clergy from bishop down to lector, so too there must be seven grades among the *áes dána*, and seven ranks of nobility, and eventually even seven classes of ordinary freemen. The *ollam* or highest degree among the learned caste, was equal in legal status to a king or a bishop. The *ollam* inherited the mantle of the ancient druid, but the *druí* as such, the practitioner of magic, was degraded under the new dispensation to unfree status.

The compromise arrived at between the church and the *filid* is mirrored in the legends surrounding the Convention of Druim Cett in AD 575. The *filid* were threatened with banishment by the kings of Ireland, who found their maintenance burdensome, their arrogance intolerable, and their powers of satire unsettling. They were unexpec-

tedly saved from disestablishment by the intercession of Colum Cille of Iona, the greatest of Irish saints. Though the story is unhistorical, it is now generally accepted that the oldest piece of Irish literature, the obscure elegy known as the *Amra Coluim Cille*, was in fact composed by a professional poet on the occasion of the saint's death in 597. Old Irish literature derives its richness and originality from the fruitful collaboration of monk and *fili*, and the early growth of a vernacular tradition in Anglo-Saxon may owe something to the sympathetic attitude of the Irish missionaries.

Tradition claims that the laws were originally the preserve of the *filid*, and the earliest fragments, dating from the seventh and perhaps even the sixth century, are in archaic verse. But the jurists in historical times were a separate branch of the *des dána*—the *brithemain* (plural of *brithem*: the English 'brehon' derives from the Modern Irish form *breitheamhain*). Distinct also, though he might write in verse, was the *senchaid*, the official genealogist and historian: today the *seanchaí* or 'shanachie' is a repository of folklore, a teller of tales and singer of songs. It was this mandarin class of poets and pedants who were largely responsible for the cultural unity of the country. They alone, together with the Christian clergy who were accorded their privileges, enjoyed legal status outside the confines of their own *tuath*. In the greatest of the epic sagas, the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*, we meet Conall Cernach guarding the Ulster border in the Fews mountains of south Armagh: 'for each of the heroes of Ulster used to spend a day on Sliab Fuait ready to protect anyone who might come with a poetical composition, or to combat a warrior, so that it would be there he would be met, so that no one should go to Emain unnoticed.'

In some ways it could be argued that the *filid* wielded more power than did the kings. They moulded public opinion, which is the ultimate arbiter of acceptable forms of polity and policy. The opinion which they represented, however, could hardly be termed popular: in an aristocratic society they were aristocratic to a degree, and intensely conservative. In the sixteenth century they were the voice of the old Gaelic order which refused to adapt itself to changing conditions and paid a heavy penalty. At that time many princes and chieftains, whom the poets persisted in affecting to regard as independent kings, each worthy to be king of Tara and of all Ireland, were willing enough to accept the Tudor terms of surrender and regrant. For this reason the 'men of art' were vilified by the Elizabethan pamphleteers and persecuted by the authorities. The ultimate degradation came at the

end of the seventeenth century when, their patrons lost, they were obliged to abandon their artificial diction and stately syllabic metres, and write or sing in the language and tunes of the peasantry whom they despised but amongst whom their lot was henceforth cast.

There can be little doubt that the influence which they exerted so effectively for over a thousand years was rooted in ancient belief in the power of the word. The quasi-magical virtue in the chanted formulaic utterance of a true poet is given expression in the Indian Vedas, in the semantic range of the Latin words *carmen* and *canere* (as in the reference in the Twelve Tables to *qui malum carmen incantassit*), and seems to lie behind Alkinoos' polite but curious expression of reluctant belief in the marvellous narrative of Odysseus' adventures: the earth breeds many liars and cheats, he says,

> σοι δ'ἔπι μὲν μορφὴ ἐπέων, ἔνι δὲ φρένες ἔσθλαι.
> μῦθον δ'ὡς ὅτ' ἀοιδὸς ἐπισταμένως κατέλεξας . . .
>
> But beauty crowns thy words, and wisdom is within thee; and thy tale, as when a minstrel sings, thou hast told with skill . . . (*Odyssey*, xi. 367 f.; Butcher and Lang's translation)

The poetic formula (μορφὴ ἐπέων) of the *fili* was by its very nature a truth. Such at least seems to have been the dogma which lingered in the sub-conscious of the Christian Irish until modern times, and which redeemed the flattery of bardic panegyrics. Conversely, this was the terrible sanction which gave venom to the *áer* or poetic satire. Satire could raise blisters on the face, and comparative anthropology gives us no reason to doubt that in pre-Christian times the effect could be literally deadly. A person who was justifiably satirised forfeited his honour-price and therewith his franchise, and kings were not exempt. A startling illustration of the force attributed to this weapon is afforded by a treaty entered into by O'Donnell of Tyrconnell and O'Connor of Sligo in 1539. As guarantors appear the archbishop of Tuam and other ecclesiastics, who promise to excommunicate O'Connor should he break the treaty; and three members of the poetic families of Ward and O'Clery—Conchobhar Ruadh Mac an Bháird, Ó Cléirigh, and Fearghal mac Domhnaill Ruaidh Mac an Bháird—who undertake on behalf of the poets of Ireland to satirise him at O'Donnell's behest.

The *fili* played an important part in the inauguration of a king. An inaugural ode addressed by Torna Ó Maol Chonaire (+1468) to Féilim Ó Conchobhair is accompanied by a description of the ceremony

as carried out at the immemorial site, the prehistoric mound of Carn Fraoich (Carnfree in county Roscommon). Although bishops and coarbs and all the Gaelic sub-kings of Connacht are in attendance, we are told: '. . . it is Ó Maol Chonaire who is entitled to give the rod of kingship into his hand at his inauguration, and none of the nobles of Connacht has a right to be with him on the mound save Ó Maol Chonaire who inaugurates him and Ó Connachtáin who keeps the gate of the mound.'

A feature of the extravagant praise characteristic of bardic poetry is that the patron, whose descent from kings and heroes is elaborated, is not only credited with martial vigour, wisdom, generosity, and deeds of valour, but that there often appears a fulsome, if conventional, catalogue of his physical beauty. A late medieval poet with a puritan cast of mind attacked his colleagues for their patent dishonesty in such matters:

Cuirthí urla cruthach caomh
ar éadan mhaol, mór an oil;
cumthaoi d'fhior chriothshúileach cham
go mbí a rosg mall mar an ngloin . . .

Don duine chartbhuidhe chrón
cumaidh sibhse, gidh glór truagh:
'Cneas mar eala nó mar aol
atá 'gan ghéis is caomh snuadh.'

Curling locks on a bald pate
you're not ashamed to fabricate;
a blinking eye, asquint and blear,
you make 'steady' and 'crystal-clear'.

Though yellow as leather and tanned with grime,
he's praised in wheedling tones by you:
'Skin like the swan's wing, bright as lime,
has our swan-king of handsome hue'.

Certainly by his time the convention had become outworn and its true purpose forgotten. In fact these are the qualities of a bridegroom. The inaugural ode was in origin an epithalamium celebrating the wedding of king and country, a ἱερὸς γάμος between the sacred king and the goddess. This is no far-fetched fancy of modern scholars, for the *Annals of Connacht* describe the inauguration of an earlier Féilim Ó Conchobhair in 1310 in the following terms:

> Fedhlimidh son of Aedh son of Eoghan was proclaimed in a style as royal, as lordly and as public as any of his race from the time of Brión son of Eochu Mugmedón till that day. And when Fedhlimidh son of Aedh son of Eoghan had married the province of Connacht, his foster-father* waited upon him in the manner remembered by old men and recorded in old books; and this was the most splendid kingship-marriage ever celebrated in Connacht down to that day.

The words used here for marriage are *feis* and *banais*. The latter (the normal word for marriage) is a compound of the former with the feminine prefix *ban-*. *Feis* is usually translated 'feast', but etymologically it is the verbal noun from Old Irish *fo-aid* 'to spend the night, to sleep with'. Professor James Carney has pointed out that this too was probably the true meaning of the famous *Feis Temro* or 'Feast of Tara'.

That the 'wedding' was once acted out in cruder form than at the decorous fifteenth-century assembly at Carnfree seems attested by the notorious account given by Giraldus Cambrensis in the late twelfth century of a grotesque ceremony allegedly performed in Donegal:

> There is in the northern and farther part of Ulster, namely in Kenelcunill (Tyrconnell), a certain people which is accustomed to consecrate its king with a rite altogether outlandish and abominable. When the whole people of that land has been gathered together in one place, a white mare is brought forward into the middle of the assembly. He who is to be inaugurated, not as a chief, but as a beast, not as a king, but as an outlaw, embraces the animal before all, professing himself to be a beast also. The mare is then killed immediately, cut up in pieces, and boiled in water. A bath is prepared for the man afterwards in the same water. He sits in the bath surrounded by all his people, and all, he and they, eat of the meat of the mare which is brought to them. He quaffs and drinks of the broth in which he is bathed, not in any cup, or using his hand, but just dipping his mouth into it round about him. When this unrighteous rite has been carried out, his kingship and dominion has been conferred.†

* Mac Diarmada, who was in fact responsible for the election of Féilim on this occasion. According to *Ann. Conn.*, 1461, this sub-king had the task of putting the shoe on the foot of the newly proclaimed O'Connor.

† *Topographia Hiberniae*, III. xxv; O'Meara's translation.

Now Giraldus had more than a normal interest in the success of the Anglo-Norman invasion. His own relatives played a prominent part in that enterprise, the declared purpose of which was to bring the barbarous and semi-pagan Irish back into the fold of Christendom. Obviously, therefore, he is not to be trusted implicitly. It is significant that he does not claim to have witnessed this rite, but places it in a remote corner of the country where no conquistador had yet penetrated. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Giraldus could have invented the whole story, for we find the horse sacrifice associated with kingship rituals among many of the Indo-European peoples. The *asvamedha* of ancient India and the eating of horse-flesh by king and people in Norway, to which even the Christian Hákon the Good had to submit, are obvious parallels. On the other hand Adomnán, himself a member of the Tír Conaill dynasty, regarded the eating of mare's flesh with particular abhorrence five centuries before Giraldus. In the later middle ages at any rate Ó Domhnaill was inaugurated at the church of Kilmacrenan by his sub-king Ó Gallchobhair and the erenagh Ó Frighil, hereditary successor to the abbots of the old Columban monastery. And in the sixteenth century Sidney says of Conn Ó Domhnaill (+1583), 'This Chon looked to be the captain of the country, but the bishops and other landlords of the same elected Sir Hugh to be O'Donnell'. At this date of course the church had long since given a Christian veneer to the ceremony, and the Cenél Conaill were proud of the family connection with saints of the stature of Colum Cille and Adomnán.

A curative bath of broth for a wounded hero is a common motif in the sagas, but it is curious that the earliest example should be found in the eighth-century *Táin Bó Froích*, the basis of which is an aetiological legend to explain the name of Carn Froích, the very place where we have seen the O'Connors inaugurated, some three miles distant from Cruachu, the ancient capital of Connacht. According to the saga, Fróech, the human son of an Otherworld woman who was sister to Boand, the eponymous goddess of the Boyne, wooed Findabair daughter of Ailill and Medb, king and queen of Connacht. These treacherously induced him to enter a pool, where he was attacked by a water-monster.

> 'A terrible deed we have done,' said Medb.
>
> 'We regret,' said Ailill, 'what we did to the man. . . . Let a bath be made for this man, broth of fresh bacon, and the flesh of a heifer chopped under adze and axe. And put him in the bath.' This was all done as he said.

His horn-players then went before him to the fort. They play so that thirty of Ailill's dearest friends died of rapture. Then he comes into the fort and goes into the bath. The women gather around him at the tub to rub him and to wash his head. He was taken out of it then and a bed was made. They heard a strange thing, a sound of weeping over Cruachain, and three times fifty women were seen with purple tunics and green head-dresses, and silver bracelets on their wrists. Messengers go to them to have tidings, to know what they keened. 'Fróech son of Idath,' said one of the women, 'the young darling of the kings of the Otherworld mounds of Ireland.'

Then Fróech hears the weeping. 'Take me away,' he says to his people, 'This is the lament of my mother and of the women of Boand.'

Then he is lifted out and carried to them. The women gather around him and bear him away into the Otherworld mound of Cruachain.

In the evening of the next day they saw a strange thing: he comes quite healed, without defect or blemish, surrounded by fifty women. The women were all alike in age and form and beauty, all equally fair, comely and graceful, the garb of women of the Otherworld about them, so that there was no knowing one of them from the other. The people pressing around them were almost suffocated. They departed in front of the enclosure. They utter their lament as they leave him so that it threw the people in the enclosure into faintness. Hence comes 'The Lament of the Otherworld Women' of the musicians of Ireland.

He goes then into the fort. All the hosts rise up to meet him and welcome him as if it were from another world he had come. Ailill and Medb rise and express regret to him for the ill-deed they had done to him, and they make peace.*

Fróech has in fact been resuscitated artificially by the story-teller in order to link the original legend with the central epic of the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*: Fróech joins Medb's expedition against Ulster, is slain again by Cú Chulainn, and is once more taken by the Otherworld women into the *síd* or mound which bears his name. Professor Carney has recently drawn attention to an ogham inscription from Cruachu itself which reads VRAICCI MAQI MEDVVI, 'of Fróech son of Medb'—Medb appearing here as a masculine name.

Thus in the eighth century there seems to have been a confused tradition connecting a broth-bath with a royal inauguration site. It is

* Carney's translation.

reasonable to suppose that in the twelfth century Giraldus picked up from the Irish or Norse of the south-east a more primitive account of the obsolete pagan rite, which was libellously asserted to be still in force among a distant tribe in the north-west: it is not asserted unambiguously that the *gens quaedam* were the Cenél Conaill themselves. But there is evidence to suggest that even at this late date a symbolic bath may have formed part of the ceremonies, as it did in the contemporary feudal conferring of knighthood.

The close association of Celtic royal sites with neolithic burial mounds is a feature which we shall meet again, and it argues for a strong continuity within the native Irish tradition. Such megalithic monuments, and many natural hills as well, were regarded as *síde* or Otherworld dwellings (the word is cognate with Latin *sedes*); and the Irish banshee is the Otherworld woman (*ben síde*)—an ancestral goddess keening her princely but mortal descendants.

The central role of the *fili* in the inauguration ceremony is curiously paralleled by the prerogatives claimed into relatively modern times by Irish poets at weddings. In the sixteenth century the bard demanded the bride's trousseau or its equivalent value, while in the Hebrides in the seventeenth century he claimed the bridegroom's plaid and bonnet as payment for his epithalamium. The Welsh law tracts mention a fee of twenty-four pence due to the chief poet of the country from every virgin when she marries—evidently a commutation of the original gift. In Vedic India the magical and ritual origin of the custom is made explicit: here the brahman who recited the Sūryā hymn at the wedding was given the bride's shift on the following morning.

According to the O'Connor tract just mentioned Ó Maol Chonaire was given Ó Conchobair's clothing and arms after the inauguration, and the account is echoed by Martin's seventeenth-century narrative of the 'ceremony of proclaiming the Lord of the Isles':

> At this the Bishop of Argyle, the Bishop of the Isles, and seven priests, were sometimes present; but a bishop was always present, with the chieftains of all the principal families, and a *Ruler of the Isles*. There was a square stone, seven or eight feet long, upon which he stood, denoting that he should walk in the footsteps and uprightness of his predecessors, and that he was installed by right in his possessions. He was clothed in a white habit, to show his innocence and integrity of heart. . . . The white apparel did afterwards belong to the poet by right. Then he was to receive a white rod in his hand, intimating

that he had power to rule not with tyranny and partiality, but with discretion and sincerity. . . .

The phrase most often used in connection with inauguration is *do gairm rig*—the 'proclaiming' of the king; the calling aloud of his name and title was the essential part of the ceremony. It would seem that kings could thus be legally proclaimed without the elaborate apparatus of the inauguration site, and thus the poet, as master of the power of the Word, was the true king-maker.

In the later middle ages he was sometimes displaced from his prime officiating role, but he could never be entirely dispensed with. Often the most influential of an overlord's sub-kings, or the representative of the original dynasty which, though fallen in status, still owned the inauguration site, claimed the right to inaugurate. Thus in the sixteenth century both Ó Catháin (O'Kane) and Ó hÁgáin (O'Hagan) of Tulach Óg were essential partners in the legal installation of the O'Neill. A tract on the Uí Fiachrach says that at the inauguration of Ó Dubhda (O'Dowd of Tireragh), his arms, apparel and horse were given to Ó Caomháin, representative of an ousted dynasty, who in turn gave his accoutrements to the *fili* Mac Firbhisigh.

In some areas the clergy, themselves members of hereditary coarbial families not unakin to the bardic septs, took over the poet's functions and their perquisites. The most elaborate account of such claims is made in the late Irish *Life* of St Máedóc of Ferns. He was patron both of the south Leinster Uí Cheinnselaig and of Ua Ruairc of Bréifne. The *Life* is written in the interests of the county Leitrim churches of Drumlane and Rossinver:

> The horse and robes of the king of Bréifne on the day he is made king, or else ten horses or twenty kine. The *Brecc Máedóc** to be carried round the king, to pledge him thereby to do right between man and man, whether weak or powerful. It is to be carried, moreover, in front of the men of Bréifne, in every battle and in every contest, and it is to go round them right-handwise, and they shall return safe. A covering of silk or a gold noble for the *Brecc* to protect it when necessary to be given by the sons of kings and chiefs (*ó maccaibh ríogh 7 taoisech*). The king himself to go the day after he is made king to Drumlane or Rossinver with an offering, and he need not fear sickness or disease until the last sickness. . . .
>
> This is the manner of the enkinging of the king of Bréifne: twelve

* The 'variegated' shrine of Máedóc, now in the National Museum, Dublin.

coarbs of Máedóc to go round him in procession, to wit, O'Farrelly, O'Fergus, O'Shallow, O'Connaghty, Magauran, O'Duffey, O'Duigenan, O'Cassidy; the coarbs of Caillín, of Presbyter Fráech and of Bishop Finnchad;* and these are to march round him. This assembly should jointly do honour to O'Duffey and his successor after him, for he is Máedóc's fosterer, and let O'Duffey give the wand to the king of Bréifne in honour of Máedóc. And this wand (*slat*) must be cut from the hazel of Máedóc in Sescenn Uairbeóil in Leinster, which place is Dísert Máedóc. The king should give his horse and robes to the family (*muinntir*)† of Máedóc, or else the commutation which we mentioned just now. A third of this equipment to go to O'Duffey in honour of his nurture and fosterage of Máedóc, or to his successor, and the other two-thirds to this assembly that we have mentioned. He is no king or chief who is not ordained on this wise. . . .

This is the enumeration of Máedóc's dues from Leinster; the suit of the king of Leinster the day he is made king, except his silk shirt and his one spear, and one of his shoes full of silver; and the successor of Áed son of Sétnae‡ to go three times round about him. And if he or his successor shall place the wand in the hand of the king, he will be pre-eminent in strength and valour. . . .§

The word 'coronation' used by Plummer in his translation has here been avoided. The Latin *corona* was borrowed into Irish as *corann* with the restricted meaning of 'monastic tonsure'; *coróin* '(royal) crown' is a borrowing made in the later middle ages. Irish kings are sometimes referred to as being distinguished by the wearing of a *mind* 'diadem' or of a *cathbarr* 'helmet', but neither of these seem to have been the sole prerogative of the king. The word *mind* is a vague one, and can mean 'treasure; halidom'; it is frequently used of the elaborate shrines and reliquaries of saints, and as oaths were often sworn on these, *mionn* in Modern Irish normally means 'oath'. In general the concepts of 'crown' and 'throne' were foreign to archaic Irish kingship. Kings were seen to be royal by their avoidance of certain *gessa* and their performance of *buada*. The office of kingship was formally transferred to them by means of the wand, and the mention of the poetic hazel in the *Life* of St Máedóc betrays the true origin of the rites it describes.

* Patrons of the churches of Fenagh, Cloone and Killarga, all in county Leitrim.
† The *familia* or monastic community.
‡ i.e., of St Máedóc, whose name is hypocoristic, 'my little Áed'.
§ Based on Plummer's translation.

Whether the Celtic druids held priestly functions has been a matter of some controversy. It is probable that, strictly speaking, they did not, and that the king was the priest of his people. The tribal king had indeed but few governmental duties, apart from acting as war-leader and presiding over the *óenach* or popular assembly. As befitted a sacral king, the Irish *rí* was literally hedged about with divinity in the form of taboos or *gessa*. In the early eleventh century, when a conscious attempt was made to revive ancient customs which had fallen into abeyance during the Viking wars, the poet Cúán ua Lothcháin composed a poem relating the taboos and prerogatives (*gessa* and *buada*) proper to the kings of the five prehistoric provinces. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* drew the attention of anthropologists to these Irish manifestations of the sacred kingship many years ago. The king of Tara might not let the sun rise on him in Tara, break a journey in Mag Breg on a Wednesday, travel over Mag Cuilinn after sunset, strike his horses in Fán Commair, enter north Tethba on a Tuesday, have a scout at Bethra on the Monday after Beltaine (Mayday) nor the track of his army at Áth Maigne on the Tuesday after Samuin (1 November). His prerogatives were: the fish of the Boyne, the deer of Luibnech, the mast of Mana, the bilberries of Brí Léith, the cress of the Brosnach, water from the well of Tlachtga, the hares of Naas. 'All of these used to be brought to the king of Tara on the first of August. And the year in which he used to consume them did not count against him as life spent, and he used to be victorious in battle on every side.'

The *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*, the most sombrely impressive of Irish sagas, tells how Conaire, legendary prototype of the just and beneficent king of Tara, unwittingly broke his *gessa* one by one as he was driven inexorably to his doom in Dá Derga's hostel. Conaire was the ancestor of many of the Érainn peoples who in historical times were reduced to subject status. Cormac mac Airt, legendary ancestor of the great dynasties of the Uí Néill and Connachta, was assigned by medieval historians a similar role as an exemplary king. As we might expect, he had a more prosperous career than Conaire, though he too was to meet his death by maleficent magic at the house of Cleitech on the Boyne (allegedly slain by the druids for having accepted Christianity).

> It was well with Ireland in the time of that king. It was not possible to drink the waters of her rivers on account of the spawn of her fish; it was not possible to travel her forests easily on account of the amount of their fruit; it was not easy to travel her plains on account of the

amount of her honey, all of which had been granted him from heaven through the truth of his princedom.

Fír flathemon or *fírinne flatho*, the prince's truth, is a constantly recurring theme, and is related to the equally archaic concept of the power of the word that we have already met. An archaic tract, dating from the seventh century, expresses this idea very forcefully. It consists of instructions to a prince, put in the mouth of a prehistoric jurist, Morand, and is perhaps the earliest example of the *Fürstenspiegel* or 'Mirror for Magistrates' in medieval literature. The oldest recension of this 'Testament of Morand' (*Audacht Moraind*) is purely pagan in outlook, but it was not long before Christian moralists took up the theme.

Morand sends a messenger to Feradach Find Fechtnach, king of Tara:

Announce the word to him before all men. Bring the word to him before all men. Tell the word to him before all men. Reveal the word to him before all men.

Let him magnify Truth, it will magnify him.

Let him strengthen Truth, it will strengthen him.

Let him preserve Truth, it will preserve him.

Let him exalt Truth, it will exalt him.

For so long as he preserves Truth, good will not be lacking to him, and his reign will not fail.

For by the Prince's Truth great kingdoms are ruled.

By the Prince's Truth great mortality is warded off from men.

By the Prince's Truth the great armies are driven off into the enemies' country.

By the Prince's Truth every right prevails and every vessel is full in his reign . . .

By the Prince's Truth fair weather comes in each fitting season, winter fine and frosty, spring dry and windy, summer warm, with showers of rain, autumn with heavy dews, and fruitful. For it is the prince's falsehood that brings perverse weather upon wicked peoples and dries up the fruit of the earth.

In his paper 'The archaism of Irish tradition', from which the translation just cited is taken, Myles Dillon shows that these concepts find many parallels in Sanskrit literature. From the cognate civilisation of Persia the Behistun inscription reveals Darius triumphing over the usurper in terms which reflect the Irish idea of the unjust prince ruling by a lie (*gó flatho*):

When Cambyses had passed to Egypt, then the state became wicked. Then the lie became abounding in the land, both in Persia, and in Media, and in the other provinces.
Says Darius the king—These are the provinces which rebelled. The god Ormazd created lies that they should deceive the people. Afterwards the god Ormazd gave the people into my hand . . .
Says Darius the king—Thou who mayest be king hereafter, keep thyself entirely from lies. The man who may be a liar, him destroy utterly. If thou shalt thus observe, my country shall remain in its integrity.

The *Audacht Moraind* has a passage on the different types of king, not in relation to their rank but to their character:

There are only four princes in the world.

The prince who takes power with the help of troops from outside (*flaith congbála co sluagaib anechtair*): a weak and fleeting lordship is usual for him. As soon as his troops leave him his dignity and the terror he inspires decline.

The prudent prince (*ciallfhlaith*): he obtains possession of his territories without victories, without triumphs; he deprives no one and no one deprives him. He voyages through his reign in days and nights, for the whole world is spent in days and nights.

But the true prince (*firfhlaith*): he and Truth increase each other, strengthen each other, strive for each other, build each other up.

The bull-prince (*tarbfhlaith*) is not a well-liked man. He strikes and is struck, he injures and is injured, he tosses and is tossed. Against him horns are constantly shaken. Rough and difficult the beginning of his lordship, hateful and unprincely its middle, unstable and fleeting its end. Against his sons his crimes will be retained, men's faces will be turned, men's hearts will be closed. 'Not welcome' all will say, 'are the sons of that prince: evil was your father's lordship before'.

Already by the seventh century the Irish religious treatise *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* has a chapter on the *rex iniquus* which was quoted with approval (and attributed to St Patrick) in a collection of canons compiled in the following century, as well as in a letter to Charlemagne written about 775 by a certain Cathuulfus, who was probably an Englishman. During the ninth century it passed under the names of

Augustine, Cyprian and Isidore and was cited at various Frankish synods and church councils. In Kenney's opinion, it may be said to have made a real contribution to the development of European political theory.

The clerical author has given the concept a twist of his own by forbidding the just king to patronise druids and satirists, among whom he probably meant to include all the 'men of art':

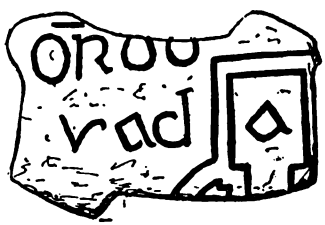
> The Justice of the King consists in oppressing no one wrongfully through his might . . . in not supporting vain men and declaimers (*impudicos et histriones*) . . . in having elders, wise men and sober, as counsellors, in not heeding the superstitions of druids, diviners and prophetesses (*magorum, ariolum pythonissarumque*).
>
> It is clear to those who consider well, how profitable to the world is the Justice of the King. For it is the peace of peoples, the security of the country, the safety of the common folk, the defence of the tribe, the cure of illnesses, the joy of men, the clemency of the weather, the calm of the sea, the fruitfulness of the earth, the consolation of the poor, the inheritance of children, and for the king himself the hope of future bliss.
>
> However, let the king know that, just as on his throne he is established as the first among men, so too shall he hold the primacy in torments, should he fail to do Justice.

A more sophisticated work is the *De rectoribus christianis*, written in the second half of the ninth century by Sedulius Scottus, the Irish poet and scholar who was one of the luminaries of the Carolingian renaissance. It seems to have been addressed to either Louis II or Lothair II, and in form it is modelled on the alternating chapters of prose and verse of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae*. It is much more fundamentally Christian in inspiration, but it is perhaps no accident that so influential a work, which found many imitators in the middle ages (including Giraldus Cambrensis, who wrote an *Instructio principis*, should have been written by an Irishman. Gnomic 'Instructions' of this sort (*tecosca*) in the native tradition continued to be popular in Ireland, and seem to have emanated from the legal schools. The best-known is 'The instructions of King Cormac' addressed by Cormac mac Airt to his son Cairpre Lifechar. Extracts from this were published by Kuno Meyer in his *Ancient Irish poetry*, but the portions which correspond most closely to the texts we have quoted must be sought for in his original edition.

Although the great regal centres such as Tara, Cruachu and Emain Macha were famous throughout Ireland, each little *tuath* had its own sacred site where the tribal king was inaugurated. The kings of Dál Cais were enthroned at Mag Adair in south county Clare, and the Dál Fiatach kings of Ulaid at Cráeb Tulcha in the north of county Down. From the eleventh century until the end of the sixteenth the kings of Cenél nÉógain were proclaimed at Tulach Óc—Tullahogue near Dungannon, and after the defeat of the last and greatest O'Neill at Kinsale, Mountjoy destroyed the primitive throne of stone slabs which stood on the slope of the mound outside the rath.

A slab or flagstone (*lecc*) was an essential item of the inaugural furniture: the Stone of Scone is only the most celebrated of many such. It is not, as is often claimed, the Lia Fáil from Tara, which is still *in situ*, and was of quite a different nature. Strabo tells us that the centre of the Galatian tetrarchy in Anatolia was called *Drunemeton*, 'the oak grove', and the term *nemeton* was commonly applied to such groves by the Celts; it is related to the Irish *nemed*, 'sacred', and to the Latin *nemus*. Certainly a sacred tree (*bile*) or group of trees was a normal feature of the Irish inauguration site. Often they crowned a mound—usually a neolithic or bronze age burial cairn. For a hostile army to burn or fell these trees was the most deadly insult to tribal feelings.

The intense local patriotism symbolised by these emblems is a leitmotif of early Irish history. As long as the Gaelic polity survived, such particularism—tribalism if one will—was never eradicated. Nor was it always detrimental. It stood well the test of the Viking invasions, when the premature unity of the unwieldy Carolingian empire dissolved into the particularism of the feudal system. Some centuries later its disadvantages were to become more obvious.



2

King and People

Early Irish society has been described by Professor D. A. Binchy as 'tribal, rural, hierarchical, and familiar'—a definition which, while its first term may be controversial, bids fair to becoming classical. It was 'familiar' in that every free man belonged to a *fine*, an agnatic kindred group, in which were vested most property rights, and upon membership of which his legal standing was contingent. It was hierarchical in that the rights, privileges and responsibilities of the individual varied in accordance with his social status.

In practice, every freeman was either a lord (*flaith*) or the client (*céle*) of a lord, and was thus involved in a nexus of mutual responsibilities extending beyond the confines of his *fine*. The man who lacked such ties of kinship and clientship was an outlaw, or at best an exile (*déorad*). The support given to a man by his kin and his lord, and the sanctions which that entailed, ensured a reasonable rule of law in the small rural community of the *tuath*. Freemen, and not merely nobles, were land-owners: the client received a loan of stock from his lord. Cattle were apparently more valuable than land. The *céle giallnai* (later called *dóer-chéle* or unfree client) paid a food-rent and performed certain menial services. He also provided the lord and his retinue with free hospitality at stated seasons. The *sóer-chéle*—the 'free' or 'noble' client—paid a higher rate of interest on his stock and gave the lord political support, becoming a member of his retinue (*dám*); for the word *céle*, like the feudal Latin *comes*, means 'companion'.

This institution recalls the Germanic *comitatus*, but in Ireland—at least in the law-tracts which describe the society of the seventh and eighth centuries—the war-band as such is not obtrusive: the picture given is rather that of a simple farming economy in which even the noble is only on occasion a warrior. Furthermore, in Irish literature we

hear less of the theme of loyalty to one's lord or of the plight of the lordless man than we do in Anglo-Saxon. In Germanic society the bond between lord and retainer seems to overshadow the ties of kindred. The Old English *Dream of the Rood* portrays Christ as a young warrior mounting the cross to give his life in battle. The Old Irish poem on the Passion by Blathmac mac Con Brettan (his father, incidentally, was king of the Fir Rois on the Monaghan-Louth border and died in 740) describes Christ as

ferr fáith, fisidiu cech druí,
rí ba hepscop, ba lánsuí.

> Better he than prophet, more knowledgeable than any druid, a king who was bishop and full sage.
>
> More excellent his form than that of any human being, more vigorous his stout vigour than that of any wright; wiser than any breast under heaven, more just than any judge.

Blathmac describes the crucifixion in terms of *fingal*—the crime of kin-slaying:

> . . . the Jews became envious of him: the reward that used to be given to him was not a fitting thing in blood-relationship. . . .
>
> Your people seized your son, Mary, they flogged him. . . .
>
> It was a hideous deed that was done to him: that his very mother-kin should crucify the man who had come to save them.

It is true that the apostles are described momentarily as a war-band, but the metaphor immediately changes to a monastic one: 'He called to him a stout band of people whose warrior qualities were renowned: twelve apostles to whom he was abbot, seventy-two disciples.' The Lord's hospitality is extolled in legal phraseology; this was a virtue held in high esteem by poets: 'He used to go about for the good of all; he was affable, gentle in manner; in the face of any affliction he did not inflict abusive rejection (*etech n-aire*) or repulse (*essáin*).'

The history of Irish and Anglo-Saxon kingship offers an instructive study in contrast, since the two societies were on the surface so similar. But despite Bede's neat classification of the English into Angles, Jutes and Saxons, it seems clear that their so-called heptarchy was not based primarily on tribal groupings. The Anglo-Saxon king was the leader of a successful war-band and betrayed his origin in his boasted descent

from Woden, the god of the outsider, the poet and the *Männerbund*. The fertility god Frey was the normal ancestor of tribal kings in the Germanic homelands. As the English war-bands prospered and the territory conquered from the Britons grew ever more expansive, distinct tendencies towards feudalism were to become apparent in this uprooted tribal society. The kings had not to contend with sub-kings entrenched in regional loyalties. The acceptance of Christianity put more power into their hands and hastened the process of detribalisation. In the seventh century King Ine of Wessex promulgated his legal code, as Aethelbert of Kent had done after Augustine's mission. The code was Germanic and tribal, but was subjected to continuous modification under royal and ecclesiastical influence. The king was in a position to impose Christianity on his subjects, and later (as at Whitby) to impose his decisions on the Church, to organise dioceses, and to have some say in the election of bishops. By the end of the eighth century he was being anointed in an ecclesiastical coronation ceremony, and regicide was denounced by the Church as sacrilege. But when new barbarian war-leaders appeared at York in 867 the overgrown kingdom of Northumbria fell into their hands after a single battle. The death of the king entailed the collapse of the kingdom. The genius of Alfred the Great saved Wessex, and his able successors reaped full benefit from the fact that his was the only kingdom to survive. The Danish conquests had made a clean sweep of all rivals and enabled the kings of Wessex to become kings of England.

But the Irish kings and the peoples they ruled were rooted in the soil. They were strengthened by all the forces of a powerful and ancient tradition. They were also hamstrung: it was not only divinity that hedged them round. Tribal law and custom was no vague body of lore dependent on the memory of the oldest men. It was jealously preserved in druidical schools by a professional class who quickly profited by the new learning of the monasteries to become literate in their own language and commit the tradition to writing. The king was never to become the fountain of justice, although he did preside at the annual assembly of the people.

This gathering—the *óenach*—was an important event in the calendar of a rural society, and was at once political assembly, market-fair (which is the sense of Modern Irish *aonach*), and an occasion for general jollification. In fact, it corresponded very closely to the Scandinavian and Icelandic *thing*. Games and horse-racing were an essential element of the *óenach*. There is little doubt that these were funerary in origin,

and that the 'fair' was held on the site of an ancient tribal cemetery. The most famous of all was the *Óenach Tailten* or 'Fair of Teltown' in county Meath, which survived in attenuated form down to the last century. Presidency over the *Óenach Tailten* was a jealously guarded prerogative of the king of Tara.

At the *óenach* the king could promulgate certain specific emergency measures and ordinances, for instance in time of plague, defeat or foreign invasion. But the customary law was adopted by the people and merely confirmed by the king, who 'pledged' his subjects to its observance. He could also 'pledge' the people to observe a treaty or alliance made by him with another *tuath*, as well as to attend his military hosting on occasions strictly defined by law. The pledge (*gell*) and the hostage (*giall* or *aitire*) played an important part in all aspects of public life. 'He is no king that has not hostages in chains', say the laws. Nearly all legal contracts indeed were confirmed by pledges and guarantees. The jurists had elaborated a very interesting system of suretyship, and one type of surety seems peculiar to Irish law. This was the *naidm* (literally 'binding')—a third party of high rank who guaranteed the fulfilment of a contract, not with his own person as a hostage, but with his 'honour-price'—the very material assessment which Irish law made of a person's status. The armed posse of such a lord would recover debts or damages by distraining after due legal form upon the chattels of the defaulting party, from whom he would also recoup the full value of his lost 'honour'. It was clearly to the advantage of an ordinary freeman to be the *céle* of a powerful lord, nor did this place him in complete feudal dependence. His land remained his own, and the contract of clientship was terminable at will. It was to the lord's advantage to have many clients, since they increased his 'honour' and with it his legal status and political influence. If he were a member of the royal dynasty, this could be vital for his chances of succession to the kingship.

Such a system left very little room for the king to become involved in the enforcement of the law, unless he himself or one of his clients had a personal interest in a case. The limited area of the *tuath* and the intimate nature of the relationships which bound it together forbade its evolution into even the embryo of a state. It was indeed by definition a kingdom: 'that is no *tuath* that has no king', ran another legal maxim; but the king had no army—merely a bodyguard of mercenaries and his retinue of noble clients—and he had no officials besides his *rechtaire* or steward who collected his personal revenues. His main functions were to

act as leader in war, and to represent the *tuath* in its external relations, which were carried out again on a personal basis between the kings.

A schematic description of the king's day in the heroic age of pagan Ireland is given by the exiled Fergus to Queen Medb in the section of the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* devoted to the boyhood deeds of Cú Chulainn. At the age of seven Cú Chulainn wished to visit the court of the king of Ulster at Emain Macha, where 150 noble boys are being fostered and play hurley.

> 'This is how Conchobar spends his kingship: a third of the day watching the boys, another third playing chess, and another third drinking ale until sleep overtakes him. Although we be in exile before him, there is not in Ireland a champion more wonderful', said Fergus.

The irony is surely intentional. A more elaborate but equally unreal account of royal routine comes from the eighth-century law tract *Críth Gablach.*

> There is moreover a weekly order proper for a king, i.e., Sunday for drinking ale, for he is no rightful prince who does not promise ale for every Sunday; Monday for legal business, for adjudicating between *tuatha*; Tuesday for chess; Wednesday for watching greyhounds hunting; Thursday for marital intercourse; Friday for horse-racing; Saturday for judgements.

The same tract describes the king's *dún* or fortress, the size of whose ramparts was visible expression of the number of base clients who had built it.

> What is the proper fortress for a king who is in constant residence at the head of his *tuath*? Seven score feet of full measure the size of his fortress in every direction. Seven feet [the width of] its ditch; twelve feet its depth. It is then that he is king when ramparts of base clientship surround him. What is the rampart of base clientship? Twelve feet the width of its opening and its base and its distance from the fortress. Thirty feet its length on the outside. Clerics to perform his domestic orisons: a wagonload of firewood and a wagonload of rushes for each of them. If the prince takes the pilgrim's staff he is not entitled to have a fortress made for him but only his house. Thirty-seven feet his house; twelve bed-cubicles in a royal house.

Certain other 'public works', similar to the Anglo-Saxon *trimoda*

necessitas, could be imposed on his people by the king. The seventh-century *Life* of St Brigit by Cogitosus has an interesting account of how an over-king sent out an order *per plebes et provincias* for a road or causeway to be built over boggy ground, constructed of logs laid over a stone foundation and suitable for the passage of horses, wagons and chariots. The labour was distributed among the kindred groups (*cognationes et familias*) through whose land the road should pass.

To return to our law tract, we find that it gives a detailed arrangement of the seating in the royal banquet hall. The long rectangular building faces east, and the king sits near the far end on the north side.

> How is a king's house arranged? The king's mercenaries on the south. Question: who are the mercenaries that are fitting for a king? A man whom he saves from violent death; a man whom he saves from capture; a man whom he saves from captivity; a man whom he saves from servitude, from serfdom, from unfree tenantry. He does not have a man whom he saves from the field of battle, lest he betray him or slay him on account of private grievances or family loyalties. How many mercenaries are proper for a king? Four: a front guardsman, a rear guardsman, and two flankers; those are their names. It is they that are proper to be in the south of a king's house to accompany him going out from the house and coming from outside into the house. The personal surety for base clients to the west of these. What is his worth? He is a man who owns land worth seven *cumala*:* he is responsible for their chattels to the ruler and the church and the law of the Féni. Envoys to the west of him. Guest companies after them. Poets after them. Harpers after them. Pipers, horn-players, jugglers to the south-east. In the other half, on the north, a warrior, a champion guarding the door: his spear in front of each of them to prevent a disturbance of the banqueting hall. The king's noble clients west of these—they are the company who are in attendance on the king. Hostages after them. A judge after them. The king's wife west of him, and then the king. Forfeited hostages in chains in the north-west.

The passing of paganism must have meant a decline in royal power, since, however much of the sacred aura may have remained, the king

* The *cumal* (literally 'bond-woman', in Hiberno-Latin, *ancilla*) was the highest unit of value in the pre-monetary Irish economy. It was worth three milch-cows, or sometimes rather more. It was also used as a land-measurement. Seven *cumala* is a common figure for higher values.

was deprived of his priestly functions. Christianity triumphed in Ireland without the active support of the kings, though without meeting violent hostility from many of them. St Patrick says in his *Confession* that he secured with gifts the protection of kings and judges. Though he daily expected death there were in fact no martyrs.

The church added its sanctions to those of the poets. The legendary cursing of Tara by St Ruadán reflects the power of the saints, but more authentic evidence is provided by an unspectacular entry in the annals for the year 811. The *termonn* or sanctuary of Tallaght had been violated by the high-king Áed mac Néill during an invasion of Leinster, whereupon the community boycotted the Óenach Tailten so effectively 'that neither horse nor chariot arrived there'. It was a hagiographical commonplace to ascribe the rise and fall of dynasties to the blessing or malediction of a saint. The church arrived at a satisfactory *modus vivendi* with the men of learning: the bishop was accepted by the jurists as equal in status to king or *ollam* (although in practice the abbots of the great monastic confederations came to wield more authority). Many princes and nobles adopted the monastic life with enthusiasm, and the monastic *familiae* became the active cells of Irish Christianity, as befitted a country in which the *fine* was the strongest social force. Irish monasticism, unlike the Egyptian from which it was ultimately derived, cultivated learning and so ensured respect in a society where scholarship was held in high regard.

The church, in a word, fitted so well into Irish society that it was hardly tempted to change it. It owed little to the princes of this world, and was not inclined to help enhance their prestige or prerogatives. When the paschal controversy was discussed at the synods of Mag Léna and Mag nAilbe in or about the year 630, no king presided over their deliberations. That Colmán should have withdrawn in dudgeon from Northumbria after the 'Synod' of Whitby in 664, almost certainly reflected his distaste for the settlement of an ecclesiastical dispute by an earthly ruler. St Wilfred was indeed soon to be made aware of the political effects of his victory.

Nevertheless a movement towards increasing the royal power did begin to make itself felt within the Irish church. It may possibly have originated among the Romanising party in the seventh century, since these must have wished to abolish the more unedifying provisions of the brehon laws. The late Middle Irish introduction to the *Senchas Már* ascribes to St Patrick himself an unsuccessful attempt to establish capital punishment for manslaughter instead of composition by pay-

ment of *éraic* to the victim's kin. More significantly, when the church of Armagh asserted its primacy it began to favour the idea of a national monarchy, a high-kingship of Ireland, which could support its position and guarantee its privileges throughout the country. But it was not until the twelfth century, by which time Irish society had moved a long way along the road to feudalism, that powerful provincial kings and pretenders to the high-kingship lent active support to the pioneers of church reform and helped to set up the new territorial dioceses.

Irish kings were originally believed to be of divine descent, and clear traces of Celtic deity names are to be seen even in the medieval pedigrees. The kingship was thus confined to a particular family within the *tuath*. This family, like any other *fine*, was a large agnatic kindred group which included second and third cousins. Primogeniture was not recognised in Irish law, although seniority in the male line was the normal criterion for headship of the kindred. For succession to the kingship, however, other qualities had to be taken into consideration. As the seventeenth-century scholar and genealogist Dubhaltach Mac Firbhisigh said, quoting a maxim from the early law tracts:

> Understand also, O reader, that it is lawful in Ireland to give a junior precedence of a senior in sovereignty, as this rule of law from the *Seanchas Már* and from the *fénechas* in common avers, thus:
>
> *Sinsior la fine, feabhta la flaith, eagna la heaglais.*
> Elder for kin, worth for rulership, wisdom for the church.
>
> That is, to put the eldest of a kin in the headship of that kin, and to put the person who possesses most clients and power, if he is as noble as his elder, into the sovereignty or lordship, and to put the person who is wisest in a position of authority in the church.

The Irish *fine* was very similar to the Hindu 'joint-family'. Hereditary land could not be alienated: on a man's death it was normally divided up equally among his sons, and if he had none, it was distributed among his next of kin in fixed proportions. For most practical purposes the real kindred were the *derbfhine* (literally, the 'certain' *fine*)—a group which included first cousins and extended over five generations. More distant branches of the *fine* would only be taken into account when a man's nearest kin had died out. For succession to the kingship too the *derbfhine* formed the magic circle within which all were technically *rígdamnai*, 'king-material'—a term often translated as 'royal heir', which lends a false air of certainty to the right of succession. In effect, this

meant that anyone whose great-grandfather had been king was theoretically eligible for election.* Unlike the Merovingians, the Irish did not extend to the kingship the equal division among heirs which applied in the law of property: the small size of the *tuatha* would have rendered this quite impractical. Relatively rarely, however, the kingdom was divided between two claimants to avoid feuds and their consequent *fingal* or kin-slaying, and so we hear of personages with the title of *leth-rí* ('half-king', but the Irish idiom denotes one of a pair: thus, 'joint-king').

The actual process of election is nowhere fully described. We have seen that in the late sixteenth century Sidney ascribes it to the bishops and landlords, but by that date most of the land had passed into the hands, not merely of the nobility, but of the ruling dynasties and their numerous side-branches. In early times the decision probably lay with the Féni, the land-holding freemen as a whole—the classes designated in the laws as *nemed*, 'holy', and who were entitled to participate in the *óenach*. Hogan says that 'there is no evidence that a definite procedure of election was followed, with the result that in practice the dynasty frequently resolved itself on such occasions into factions, and the election of a ruler thus became a faction fight, in which the rival candidates frequently invoked the aid of princes of neighbouring kingdoms. In this way to the miseries of dynastic discord were added the horrors of invasion from without.' He cites a provision from a law tract requiring the *bóaire* to accommodate the sept or septs (*cenél*) with their proper retinues for three nights on the occasion of a royal election. It is not clear whether the word *cenél* is here singular or plural, and thus whether it refers only to the royal dynasty or to other septs as well. The *cenél* seems to have been a rather larger group than the *fine*, and probably usually refers to the great aristocratic families, particularly those of royal blood, who were careful to preserve their genealogies and were conscious of kinship even beyond the wide bounds of the legal *fine*. The word is cognate with Welsh *cenedl*, which was in fact wider than the Irish *fine*. The *bóaire* was the type of the prosperous farmer, the highest grade of churl or freeman. The later commentary assigns this duty of hospitality to the *briugu*, the official hospitaller of the *tuath*—who

* For an illustration of the practical working of this system, see chapter 7 below, pp. 122–3, and the accompanying diagram. But note that it has recently been argued that the *rígdamnae* was in fact the heir presumptive and that doubt has been cast on the existence of any regular 'law' of succession to kingship. See bibliographical notes p. 312.

would normally be drawn from the *bóaire* class. It further states that if there are several candidates for the kingship the whole *tuath* is to assemble at his hostel and hold council for three days and three nights; but this, in common with so much of the commentaries, is probably a fanciful elaboration of the later medieval law schools.

In fact, as has been implied by Mac Firbhisigh, the election must usually have been a foregone conclusion, being dependent on the number of clients controlled by the candidates. Those who had entered into the contract of 'base clientship' had in any case forfeited their franchise, and the 'free clients' who formed the retinue of a prince can hardly have been free agents. If ever in the dim past a free democratic election by the Féni had ever existed (and we do not know how large a proportion of the whole population these represented), it had long ceased to be more than a formality, except insofar as the clients retained the legal right to transfer their allegiance to another lord. MacNeill was the first to point out the parallel to Caesar's account of the Helvetian assembly which met to try Orgetorix on the charge of attempting a *coup d'état*, but was reduced to impotence when he appeared surrounded by a host of his clients and debtors (*clientes obaeratosque*).

The principle of primogeniture came in the tenth and eleventh centuries to be accepted as the normal form of succession to a fief in feudal Europe, but it was only very slowly recognised as the proper method to replace election to the crown in France and England, and was never recognised at all in Germany. Besides depriving the 'people' (in effect the nobles) of a decisive influence, it had the practical disadvantage that it might mean entrusting the kingdom to the care of a child or an imbecile. In the course of time, however, it became clear that by and large it was less disturbing to the peace of the realm than any other system, in a society which regarded monarchy as the only possible form of government. When the Gaelic polity was brought into contact with Anglo-Norman feudalism in the later middle ages, the Irish kings do seem to have attempted to introduce primogeniture, but they were consistently foiled by the insistence of the *derbfhine* on their traditional rights. This was the rock on which Henry VIII's scheme to bring the native Irish lords to 'civility' by the process of surrender and regrant was to founder.

It used to be thought that the institution of 'tanistry', whereby the successor to an Irish king, his *tánaise*, was appointed during his reign, was a deliberate counter-move by the Irish to the certainty of Anglo-Norman succession. But it is now clear that the office of *tánaise* is very

much older. The eighth-century tract, *Críth Gablach*, from which we have already quoted, says of it: '*Tánaise* of a king, why is he so called? Because the whole *tuath* looks to him for kingship without strife.' The word *tánaise* means 'second', but originally was a past participle 'expected'. The verb in this text, *fris-aicci* 'looks forward to', is paralleled in Welsh, where a cognate word *gwrthrychiad* occurs as the title of the heir-apparent, though it was later displaced by *edlyng*, a borrowing from the Anglo-Saxon *aetheling*. In Irish monasteries the prior was called *tánaise abb*, translated as *secundus abbas*, which in turn gave a new Irish word *secnap*, and the Welshman Asser refers to Alfred the Great as having in his youth acted as *secundarius* to his brother, Ethelred king of Wessex.

Spenser in the late sixteenth century describes the whole Irish system of succession to land and office as 'Tanistrie', but gives an account of the functions of the *tánaise* proper and of the royal inauguration in the following terms:

> It is a custome amongst all the Irish, that presently after the death of any of their chiefe Lords or Captaines, they doe presently assemble themselves to a place generally appointed and knowne unto them to choose another in his steed, where they doe nominate and elect for the most part, not the eldest sonne, nor any of the children of the Lord deceased, but the next to him of blood, that is the eldest and worthiest, as commonly the next brother unto him if he have any, or the next cousin, or so forth, as any is elder in that kindred or sept, and then next to him doe they choose the next of the blood to be Tanist, who shall next succeed him in the said Captainry, if he live thereunto. . . .
>
> They use to place him that shalbe their Captaine, upon a stone always reserved for that purpose, and placed commonly upon a hill: In some of which I have seen formed and engraven a foot, which they say was the measure of their first Captaines foot, whereon hee standing, receives an oath to preserve all the auncient former customes of the countrey inviolable, and to deliver up the succession peaceably to his Tanist, and then hath a wand delivered unto him by some whose proper office that is: after which, descending from the stone, he turneth himselfe round, thrice forward, and thrice backward.
>
> But how is the Tanist chosen?
>
> They say he setteth but one foot upon the stone, and receiveth the like oath that the Captaine did. . . . And to this end the Tanist is

> alwayes ready knowne, if it should happen the Captaine suddenly to dye, or to be slaine in battell, or to be out of the countrey, to defend and keepe it from all such doubts and dangers. For which cause the Tanist hath also a share of the countrey allotted unto him, and certaine cuttings and spendings upon all the inhabitants under the Lord.

These peculiar institutions were found throughout Ireland and seem to have applied to every *tuath*. For most of them we have sufficient genealogical and annalistic evidence to demonstrate the unity of *politeia* underlying the apparent fragmentation of the country. Bede tells us, and his information is confirmed by other sources, that the Picts of Scotland (whom the Irish called Cruithni) has a very odd system whereby succession to the kingship was dependent on heredity through the female line—matrilinear succession. There is no trace of this in historical documents relating to Ireland—not even in the case of those Irish tribes and kingdoms who were known as Cruithni, such as the Dál nAraidi of Antrim, the Uí Echach of Down or the Loígis of Leinster. That the roots of Irish kingship were tribal is undeniable. The law too was tribal in that no man, with the important exception of the men of learning, had legal standing outside his own *tuath*. But insofar as tribalism may imply difference of language and custom, it is an inappropriate and inadequate description of Irish society. Furthermore, no *tuath* was an island: all were linked together into federations, just as the tribes of Caesar's Gaul were grouped under the hegemony of the Aedui, Sequani or Remi. All kings were either in allegiance to over-kings or themselves exercised suzerainty over sub-kings.



3
Kings and High-Kings

During the first seven centuries of her history, and probably for several centuries before, Ireland suffered no foreign conquest. Agricola's dream of subduing the country with a single legion remained unfulfilled, and the Norse, for all the disturbance they caused, made no territorial gains of any consequence. The towns they established along the coasts introduced an important new element into Irish life which considerably affected the economy and eventually the structure of society, but they remained an extraneous feature. There are only one or at most two examples of even a petty kingdom disappearing under the impact of their raids. The Irish polity remained intact. Changes did of course occur, but they came about insensibly from century to century and were obscured from the view both of contemporaries and of later generations by deliberate archaising on the part of the learned classes. Medieval Irish scholars interpreted the past in the light of the ideals of the present; and these same ideals were largely inspired by myths from the past. With the decline of Latin learning after the ninth century, the monastic schools turned ever more to secular and vernacular studies, and their scholarship grew introspective, pedantic and involved. It resembled a beast from the Book of Kells, eating its own tail and contorted into an admirable pattern which bore but a tenuous relationship to the original model in nature. The Irish were confirmed in their conservatism and could see no valid reason to change their way of life or their system of government.

It was a system which had a surface appearance of extreme fragmentation, but which was nevertheless linked into a coherent pattern. This scheme, moreover, dates from the very beginnings of Irish history. At no period for which we have sufficient information (and contemporary documentation becomes relatively abundant during the seventh century) do we find any one of the numerous and seemingly autonomous *tuatha* existing in splendid isolation.

Críth Gablach, *Uraicecht Becc* and other law tracts agree on a hierarchy of kings, although they sometimes differ in the precise titles given to the over-kings and high kings. The *rí* (corresponding to Gaulish *rīx*, *rīgos*, and cognate with Latin *rēx*) was in essence the king of a single *tuath*—*rí tuaithe*. The *rí tuath* or king of several *tuatha* was also called a *rui ri*, 'great king'. In some records the confederation of three or four *tuatha* under such an over-king is termed a *mór-thuath* or 'great *tuath*'. Such *mór-thuatha* formed the territorial basis of most of the ecclesiastical dioceses set up in the twelfth century—a settlement which reflects the relative loss of status which the petty kings had suffered by that date.

In the Old Irish period, however, the *rí tuaithe*, however insignificant on the national scale, was the true king. Even the most powerful of high-kings was basically ruler of a single *tuath*, and exercised no direct authority outside it. In later ages this multiplication of monarchies caused some embarrassment to patriotic Irishmen who had been brought up to believe in the glories of the high-kingship of Ireland centred in Tara. So in the early seventeenth century the Four Masters, in their great compilation *The annals of the kingdom of Ireland* (*Annála Ríoghachta Éireann*), consistently downgrade the kings of petty *tuatha* to the status of 'lord' or 'chieftain'—*tighearna* or *taoiseach* (in Old Irish *toísech* denoted the head of an aristocratic *cenél* in his capacity as leader of a war-band). Later in the century the learned Roderick O'Flaherty took a more historical view and vindicated the claim of the least of these rulers to his title by citing respectable precedents: Odysseus king of Ithaca and Nestor king of Pylos and the 30 kings of Canaan slain by Joshua. He was as firmly committed as the Four Masters to the theory of the high-kingship of Ireland, and put up a spirited defence of its reality as against the shadowy bretwaldaship alleged to have existed during the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy.

A very ancient legal tract entitled *Miadslechta* asserts that the over-king (whom it styles *rí rig*, 'king of kings') should have seven sub-kings—which is certainly a fanciful schematisation—and that he is entitled to a fine of one *cumal* from each of them who fails to attend his house of ale-feasting, his *óenach*, or his *dál*. The precise difference between *óenach* and *dál* is not quite clear, but the latter seems to have been a conference concerned mainly with political and legal business. Another type of assembly was the *airecht* or public assembly of freemen which often took on the functions of a court of law. In later times, with the feudalisation of Gaelic society, attendance at this was confined to the greater nobility and particularly to the sub-kings and chieftains

(*ur-ríg*) in council with their overlord, so that the Elizabethans confused the terms *airecht* and *ur-ríg* (in the Modern Irish of the period *oireacht* and *oirríogh*), transliterating both as 'urraght'.

The laws agree in recognising a third and highest grade of king, variously called *triath*, *réthe*, *ollam ríg* ('greatest of kings'), *rí ruirech* ('king of over-kings'), or *rí cóicid* ('King of a Fifth', i.e., of one of the provinces into which Ireland was traditionally divided). It is customary to refer to these as provincial kings: such as the king of Leinster, of Munster or of Connacht. But it must be borne in mind that the term *cóiced*, 'fifth' had none of the disparaging overtones of the English words 'province' or 'provincial'. To the *rí cóicid* all the kings, either directly or through the mesne kings who were their overlords, were subject if not tributary. But the final coping stone to this ordered hierarchical structure, the High-King of all Ireland, is, as Binchy stresses, conspicuous by his absence from the law tracts, although he appears frequently enough in the later commentaries. The title *ard-rí*, 'high-king', is not very old, nor is it found in the legal texts. It has no precise significance, and does not necessarily imply sovereignty of Ireland: there are frequent references to the high-king of Ulster, of Connacht, or of Leinster, for example (*ard-rí Ulad*, *ard-rí Connacht*, *ard-rí Laigen*), and in poetry the term could be used of any over-king.

The tract *Críth Gablach* has rather fanciful names for the three grades of king; *rí benn* 'king of peaks (or horns)', *rí buiden* 'king of bands', and *rí bunaid cach cinn* 'the ultimate king of every individual':

> The king of peaks first, why is he so called? He is the king of a *tuath* (*rí tuaithe*) who has the seven grades of the Féni with their sub-divisions in clientship, for they are the peaks of lordship which we have enumerated. Seven *cumala* his honour-price, a *cumal* for every principal grade that is under his authority. . . .
>
> The king of bands, why is he so called? Because he is the leader of two bands or of three, seven hundred in each band. He is the king of three *tuatha* or of four. Eight *cumala* his honour-price, since he carries away a plurality of hostages, two or three or four. . . .
>
> The ultimate king of every individual, why is he so called? Because every individual who is not restrained by his own lord comes under his coercive authority, for every one who is stronger helps him who is weaker. He is the king of over-kings (*rí ruirech*). Twice seven *cumala* his honour-price, since kings and *tuatha* are under his authority and his control. . . .

Relations between kings were conducted along personal lines very much according to the pattern of society within the *tuath*. The kings were in effect in the position of *céli* or clients to their overlord. It is thus somewhat difficult to speak of politics or of the state as such. Just as Irish law, in common with most primitive systems, did not distinguish between civil and criminal cases, so there was little differentiation between public and private affairs. The king entered into a contract with other kings, and this was formally ratified by his *tuath*, on whose behalf he had acted. He would engage to pay a certain amount of tribute to his overlord, attend his *óenach*, and lead the forces of his own *tuath* on a lawful hosting called by the overlord. Hostages—usually members of his own family—guaranteed that he would fulfil his obligations. It is easy to see how the people's loyalty was thus concentrated on the person of their own king. If they were a traditionally subordinate vassal-state, they might accept it as right and proper that their king should pay tribute to the king of Cashel or of Tara and support him in battle, but it was hardly to be expected that they would feel a personal bond with the latter, particularly if a mesne king intervened between him and their own ruler. If the suzerain attempted to assert his direct authority over them, or even to exert his influence in matters of dynastic succession, he was sure to meet with their hostility. Thus even provincial patriotism was slow to develop.

As in all medieval cultures, emphasis was laid on the concrete rather than the abstract. Every transaction was conceived of in personal terms. In the feudal ceremonies of investiture the legality of the act of homage depended on the public acting out of a symbolic mime: the placing of the vassal's hands within those of his lord, the handing over of a sod of earth, a banner, or the episcopal staff and ring. So too in Ireland, the very act of entering a king's house became a formal recognition of suzerainty, and the exchange of gifts had become formalised in a sense similar to that described in M. I. Finley's *The World of Odysseus*.

In fact the gifts ceremoniously given by the overlord to his sub-king were even more important as a token of suzerainty than was the tribute paid by the latter. Tributes and the reciprocal gifts are described in detail in the *Book of rights*—a composition whose relatively late date has now been established: it was hardly written much before the twelfth century. To a large extent it gives a very idealised picture of the mutual relations between the kings of Ireland and the high-king, but the account of the gifts given by the high-king and the provincial kings to their subordinates cannot be dismissed as wholly unreal. We have an

earlier description, probably dating from the ninth or tenth century, of the mutual responsibilities of the king of Cashel and his sub-kings which agrees with the *Book of rights* in broad principle, although the details are less elaborate.* Xenophon's *Anabasis* provides another parallel from Persia. The pretender Cyrus, having reduced the local ruler of Tarsus to submission, bestows on him gifts which it was the King's prerogative to give—δῶρα ἃ νομίζεται παρὰ βασιλεῖ τίμια—a horse with a golden bridle, a golden chain, armlets, a golden dagger and a Persian costume, together with protection against further plundering of his country; all in exchange for a heavy contribution towards the expenses of his expedition against the King his brother. These gifts are reminiscent of the horses, hounds, corselets, swords, garments and other presents enumerated in the *Book of rights* and there termed *tuarastal*, 'wages' or 'stipends'. In the earlier documents the payment made every seven years by the king of Cashel to his sub-kings is reckoned in *cumala* without any description of individual gifts. Significantly it is called *rath*. This was the legal term for the gift or fief of stock granted by a lord to his client and which established the contractual nexus between them. As in private contracts, pledges and guarantees were necessary to cement the relationship. Hostages would forfeit their lives to the over-king in case of defection or rebellion. It is interesting to find the poet Blathmac in the eighth century taking a very legalistic attitude with regard to the relations between Christ and the Jews:

Tuidecht fri Crist, mac Dé bí,
doïb ba rind fri giallnai;
ressa na ríginse se:
ba sénae iar n-aitite.
Cach feb tecomnacht in rí
do Iudib ara célsini,
batar moíni do mogaib;
ro-coillset a cobfolaid.

Opposing Christ, the son of the living God, was for them the opposing of a spear-point to (justly imposed) subjection; in the sayings of this kingly island: it was 'denial after recognition'. . . .

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

The last word in this verse is that used in the title of the Old Irish tract

* See below, pp. 196–9.

on the king of Cashel and the sub-kings of Munster—though here it has a different prefix: *frithfolaid*, 'mutual obligat ons'. Although Blathmac does not actually use the legal term *rath*, he illuminates for us the mode of thought which determined that even at the present day the theological concept of the grace of God is expressed in Irish as *rath Dé*.

So loose a system of tribal federations left little room for government or direct control by the highest of over-kings. But it did ensure a certain amount of cohesion over a relatively wide area. The *cóiceda* or Fifths seem to have been recognisable political entities from the very beginning —their existence, as MacNeill said, is the earliest and best-attested fact in Irish history. Of course tribute was sometimes refused, and many of the 'wars' which occupy so much space in the annals are merely expeditions by an over-king to levy it by force (and no doubt to exact a little more to compensate him for his pains). Some peoples with legendary traditions of prehistoric glory seem to have regarded it as a point of honour not to give their allegiance until a king had demonstrated his ability to collect their tribute in person. In general, however, the tributary peoples were more prone to offer their support to a rival over-king than to attempt to demand complete autonomy. Some of them, indeed, such as the Múscraige in Munster and the Fothairt and Loígis in Leinster, seem to have enjoyed a 'most favoured nation' relationship with the dominant dynasty as vassals who were particularly reliable. It has often been asserted that these vassal tribes were remnants of the pre-Celtic or at any rate pre-Goedelic inhabitants of Ireland, but as there is a gap of many centuries between the hypothetical Celtic invasions of prehistory and the period of full historical documentation such theories remain incapable of proof.

The dominant tribe or dynasty of a province was normally itself split into several kingdoms. Under the developed dynastic polity of the Old Irish period kings who belonged to the same dynasty as the high king of a province acknowledged his suzerainty indeed by accepting *rath* or *tuarastal*, but paid no tribute. In the *Book of rights* such kingdoms are termed *sáer-thuatha*, as opposed to the tribute-paying *dáer-thuatha*. In the genealogies kingdoms not ruled directly by members of the dominant dynasty of a province are commonly called *fortuatha* 'extern tribes'. It is difficult to distinguish these from the *aithech-thuatha* or 'unfree tribes'. While the word *aithech-thuatha* could be a derogatory term for tributary kingdoms, its more precise definition seems to relate to population groups which had lost real political status and were mere rent-paying communities without a king of their own. The word *aithech* means 'a rent-payer',

'a churl',' a farmer', and also 'a neighbour'. But the broad distinction between 'free' kingdoms and those subject to tribute is yet another reflection of the social order in the political sphere, for there is an obvious analogy between these two grades of sub-kingdoms and the 'free' and 'base' clients in the internal structure of the *tuath* itself. As tribute was usually reckoned in cattle, the 'wars' tended to be primarily cattle-raids. The expression *táin bó*, 'driving of cows', is a common title for sagas. Once more this merely represents on a larger scale the legal process of *athgabáil* or distraint of a debtor's chattels. And just as the nobles billetted themselves on their base clients between New Year and Shrovetide, so a prerogative of the over-king was the right to make a circuit of his vassal *tuatha* and be entertained by his sub-kings.

It is one of the paradoxes of Irish history that although the division of the country into five Fifths was regarded as dating from immemorial antiquity, and although *cóiced* remained the universally accepted name for a province, at no time was it quite clear how many Fifths in fact existed. This confusion was due to the destruction at the dawn of history of the Fifth of Ulster (*cóiced nUlad*) with its ceremonial capital at Emain Macha near Armagh, the ancient glories of which were the favourite theme of saga literature down to the twelfth century. The expansion of the Tara dynasty of the Uí Néill had broken up the ancient Fifth, and by the end of the seventh century the Ulaid or Ulstermen were confined to the area east of the Bann, although still retaining their status as a *cóiced*.

The original Fifths were in all probability Ulaid (Ulster), Laigin (Leinster), Mumu (Munster), Connachta (Connacht), and Mide. The last-named possibly included Tara, although Mide proper (the name simply means 'the middle') comprised Westmeath, Longford and part of Offaly, whereas the modern county Meath with the adjoining portions of Louth and north Dublin was known in the Old Irish period as Brega ('the heights'). *Mumu* is a geographical name of unknown origin, but *Ulaid*, *Laigin* and *Connachta* are tribal or population names. *Ulaid* and *Laigin* are grammatically speaking nominative plurals like the Gaulish *Aedui*, *Sequani*, or the German *Bayern*, *Sachsen*, *Schwaben*. *Connachta* is a name of somewhat later formation: it is the plural of a collective noun denoting the descendants of Conn, and originally applied to the ruling dynasty and its sub-divisions, and only in a secondary sense to the whole province over which they held sway. Similarly, the terms *Laigin* and *Ulaid* have both a narrow and a wider sense: the first tribal, and the second political and geographical.

When the Uí Néill had made good their claim to be high-kings of all Ireland—and this seems to have become the accepted doctrine of the schools by the tenth century—it was felt that the king of Tara could no longer be classed as ruler of a mere *cóiced*. To find a fifth 'Fifth' the theory was evolved that Munster, the largest of the provinces, contained two Fifths. At first the division was into east and west, which reflected to some extent a real political and geographical polarisation; but in the twelfth century an actual partition of the province had taken place between the O'Brien kingdom of Thomond (*Tuadmuma* = North Munster) and the MacCarthy kingdom of Desmond (*Desmuma* = South Munster). If Mide were once again counted as a Fifth, a six-fold division was obtained, which is a scheme reflected in many Irish texts as well as in Giraldus Cambrensis' *Topographia Hiberniae* and in the anonymous *Song of Dermot and the Earl* quoted as the beginning of this book. Due to his amateur interest in Irish antiquity Giraldus made the mistake of treating the old Fifth of Ulster extending over the whole north as a living political reality, which it did not become again until the O'Neills assumed the title 'king of Ulster' at the end of the thirteenth century.

Yet another division is found in the *Book of rights*—a heptarchy consisting of Ailech (the capital of the Northern Uí Néill of Donegal, Derry and Tyrone), Airgialla (originally a satellite state of the Uí Néill centred in Armagh, Fermanagh and Monaghan), Ulaid, Temair (Tara, i.e. the Southern Uí Néill), Laigin, Caisel (Cashel or Munster), and Connachta. This composition is largely concerned with putting across the view that Cashel, rather than Tara, had the better claim to be the seat of the high-kingship of Ireland: it reflects the success of Brian Bóruma and his descendents, the O'Brien kings of the late eleventh century. Hence the independent status accorded to Airgialla, which is not supported by other sources. It does correspond to contemporary reality, however, in that the northern and southern branches of the great Uí Néill dynasty had by then lost any sense of common purpose.

That in spite of these complications the term *cóiced* survived (even today the word *cúige* is used in Irish to denote the provinces, now four in number), testifies to the strength of ancient tradition, and shows that although the high-kingship does not date back to prehistoric times, yet the country was not a mere jigsaw of mutually hostile tribes. As Alwyn and Brinley Rees have said, a Fifth implies a whole.

4
The Kingship of Tara

The earliest reliable historical traditions in Ireland concern the warfare between the Ulaid and the Connachta. These traditions are, it is true, enshrined in legend and saga rather than historically documented. Furthermore, the sagas were written in the eighth and ninth centuries by men acquainted with the new learning of the monasteries, and they continued to be retold and embellished in each succeeding generation as much for literary enjoyment as for antiquarian interest. The twelfth-century scribe who laboriously filled 50 pages of the Book of Leinster with the latest version of the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* commented sourly:

> But I who have written this history or rather fable, do not give credit to much of it. For some things in it are the tricks of demons and others the figments of poets; some things are plausible, others not; and some are there for the entertainment of fools.

A ninth-century scholar in the preface to his collection of genealogical tracts uttered a similar lament over the *imprudens Scottorum gens* and their deplorable habit of preferring fiction to true history—though he rather spoils his case by proceeding to retail the whole gallimaufry of pseudo-historical pedigrees and learned fabrications which trace the princely families of Ireland back to the sons of Míl and ultimately to Adam.

Bearing all these reservations in mind, it is nevertheless true that these Old Irish sagas do afford us, as Kenneth Jackson says, a window on to the Iron Age. Comparative studies in epic literature have shown that legends of an heroic age usually embody a kernel of historical fact. But where we have no contemporary documentation to guide us and to reveal the extent of poetical distortion (as we have for the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Nibelungenlied*) it is impossible to reconstruct the actual course of history from the saga material. The sagas portray a way of life

largely obsolete at the time of their composition. They show us the north of Ireland under the domination of a warlord caste, the Ulaid who gave their name to Ulster, whose king reigns from Emain Macha near Armagh. The Ulster heroes fight from chariots as did those of Homer and the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. They are a barbarian aristocracy who spend their lives fighting and feasting, and their women are as fierce and passionate as themselves. The heroic code of honour is paramount and not incompatible with the savagery of headhunting. The courtly, even urbane, atmosphere, in the midst of much that is barbaric, is in contrast to the predominately magical milieu of the other great Irish story-cycle—that of Finn and the Fianna, who lead a romantic existence as hunters and foot-soldiers in the woods and waste-lands of Ireland.

In short, the Irish epic, although its chosen form is prose rather than verse, presents us with a classical picture of the Heroic Age. Even more significant are the close parallels which can be drawn between episodes in these medieval stories and early descriptions of the La Tène Celts by Greek and Latin authors. Poseidonios' account of the Gauls a generation before Caesar's conquest cannot possibly have been known to the eighth-century Irish authors, yet the tales they wrote echo his observations in astonishing detail. Poseidonios himself noted the Homeric character of the Gaulish chariot-fighters: chariots had gone out of fashion in Gaul when Caesar campaigned there, but he came across them in Britain as Septimius Severus was to some centuries later in his Caledonian campaigns. In Homer's own day, just as in early Christian Ireland, war-chariots had disappeared. The Old Irish sagas *Fled Bricrenn* ('Bricriu's Feast') and *Scéla Mucce Maic Dá Thó* ('Mac Dá Thó's Pig')—of which the former is a prototype of *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight*—deal with a theme specifically mentioned by Poseidonios: warriors fighting to the death at a feast for the right to carve the 'champion's portion'.

Such turbulent days were over when the sagas were being written in the monasteries of Christian Ireland. Not of course that Irish kings of the period were particularly peaceful. But they had ceased to be great military potentates. The great heroic centres of Tara, Cruachu, Ailenn and Emain Macha—whether designed originally as ritual sites or as fortresses and encampments—were deserted and overgrown with grass. Wars were usually mere cattle-raids to enforce tribute from a recalcitrant vassal: where actual fighting took place it cannot have lasted very long. The brehon laws may depict a peculiarly archaic society, but it is not primarily a warlike one. Even the highest grades of the aristocracy are essentially farmers: their wealth is counted in cattle and sheep and in

acres under the plough, and their prestige reckoned by the size of their retinue and the food-rents provided by their clients. All freemen, noble or plebeian, have the right and duty to attend the king's hosting on certain specified occasions, but there is no warrior caste. Glamour and initiative have passed to the saints of the great new monastic families. Life may have seemed rather drab, even to the kings, and this probably accounts for the popularity of the sagas.

The general truth of the Ulster traditions is to some extent corroborated by archaeology, since the rather scanty La Tène remains in Ireland tend to be concentrated in the north. The Ulaid are mentioned in the early second century AD by Ptolemy of Alexandria in his map of Ireland—though they appear as *Ouolountioi* (*Voluntii*) in the corrupt spelling of the manuscripts—and their capital Emain is recorded there in its old Celtic form *Isamnion*. The archaeological evidence would point to a connection with north Britain, and although we shall never know if or when Conchobar mac Nessa ruled in Emain or whether Cú Chulainn was a human or divine hero, the latter's un-Irish boyhood name Sétantae is identical with that of a Lancashire tribe, the Setantii, who are also mentioned by Ptolemy.

There is no definite evidence against the medieval Irish belief that Conchobar and his court flourished around the time of Christ, but such synchronisms are the work of learned monks: the genuine saga tradition knows nothing of chronology. The wars between the Ulaid and the Connachta may have taken place at any time before the fifth century. All that is certain is that by the time that documentary history begins the glory of Emain was a thing of the past. It is a fair inference that the foundation of Armagh, traditionally attributed to St Patrick in 444 or 457, implies that the neighbouring site of Emain Macha was still in existence, and if Armagh's later claims to primacy have any basis in fact Emain was probably the most powerful over-kingdom in Ireland. It has been plausibly suggested that Patrick's death at Saul and the confused seventh-century traditions about his burial there or at Downpatrick may reflect the historical fact that when Emain Macha was finally destroyed the Ulaid withdrew to county Down, where Downpatrick was to become their chief centre. But in the interests of Armagh's primatial ambitions the seventh-century hagiographers Muirchú and Tírechán wished to attach Patrick to the new Uí Néill high-kingship and developed the impressive but probably quite artificial legend of his confrontation with Lóeguire son of Niall and his druids at Tara. The vexed and still unresolved problem as to whether the saint's mission

lasted from 432 to 461 or from about 457 to 492 or 493 seems inextricably bound up with the official history of the Uí Néill dynasty and the chronological distortions which this entailed.

The sagas concentrate on the warfare between the Ulaid and the Connachta led by Ailill and his forceful consort Medb from their stronghold at Cruachu in Roscommon. But the Fifth of Ulster was finally broken up in the course of the fifth century by Niall Noígiallach and his sons, and the Uí Néill dynasty took their title from Tara. The semantic ambiguity involved in the name Connachta, which originally was tribal or dynastic and denoted descent from Conn of the Hundred Battles, but which later came to mean the province west of the Shannon, makes it difficult to decide whether the original saga placed the enemies of Ulster at Cruachu or at Tara. In spite of the evidence for the existence of masterful Celtic queens afforded by Boudicca and Cartismandua in Britain, there is good reason to believe that Queen Medb is a euhemerised goddess, identical with the shadowy Medb Lethderg ('Redside') of Tara, of whom it was said that she allowed no one to be king in Tara who would not marry her. Just as Medb of Cruachu divided the Gáileóin (the Leinster contingent in the Connacht army against Ulster) into separate groups throughout the host, lest by their prowess they conquer both Ulster and Connacht, so Medb Lethderg is said to have poisoned Lugaid Laígse, a prehistoric king of the Loígis, and thereafter divided the Loígis and Fothairt into seven groups scattered throughout Leinster so as to weaken their power.

The name Medb means 'the drunken' or perhaps 'she who makes drunk', and there can be little doubt that she was the goddess of the sovereignty of Tara, with whom the king was to be united after she had proffered him the drink of ale or wine which in Irish tradition symbolised sovereignty. In her malevolent aspect the goddess would offer the king his death-drink, and the legend mythologises the political situation whereby the Loígis were not eligible for the over-kingship of Leinster. According to the genealogists too Ailill was a Leinsterman, although this need not tell against his association with Cruachu, since there are vague traditions of a prehistoric domination of Connacht by the Laigin. The promiscuous character attributed to Medb in the *Táin* and other sagas is explained by her true nature as the goddess who slept with many kings. Her most notable lover is the Ulster exile in the Connacht army, Fergus mac Roích, who had been king of Emain until displaced by Conchobar. In the nineteenth century the Lia Fáil at Tara was known to local Irish speakers as the phallus of Fergus (*bod Fhearghusa*).

His name has the significant meaning 'virile vigour', and it may have been the cult name of the Ulster king or of his patron divinity. It was borne by several figures in the pseudo-historical regnal lists of Emain Macha, including Fergus mac Leite (who is demonstrably a doublet of Fergus mac Roích), Fergus Fogae, the last king of Emain, and each of a triad of joint kings who were defeated and slain at the battle of Crinna when Cormac mac Airt is supposed to have extended the sway of Tara north of the Boyne. Triadic gods occur frequently in Irish mythology and are represented by idols here and in Gaul. Emain too had its tutelary goddess, Macha, who also appears in triple guise and like many Celtic deities combines apparently disparate functions as mother-goddess and warrior queen; she also has the attributes of the well-known British and Gaulish Epona, the horse-goddess. In Wales she was known as Rhiannon 'the great queen'. Fergus' epithet *mac Roích* signifies 'the son of the great horse', and 'horse'-names such as Echu and Eochaid were much favoured by the later historical kings of Ulster.

Amid this plethora of shape-changing gods and goddesses, of myths euhemerised to suit Christian story-tellers and their audiences, and of legends distorted to fit a later political system, it is nearly impossible for the historian to see his way, and of course his task is made all the more difficult because his medieval predecessors expended such loving care on the construction of a coherent narrative of Irish prehistory revolving around the immemorial high-kingship at Tara and the success story of the Uí Néill. Fortunately the mythological material is so rich and varied that not even the most assiduous monkish synchroniser nor the most diplomatic fabricator of pedigrees could bring complete order into this chaos. The resultant inconsistencies and anachronisms give us valuable clues. But not all the intricacies of the labyrinth can be penetrated with the aid of these. In the absence of contemporary documents the political scene of the fifth century and *a fortiori* of the preceding centuries is lost to history. Niall and his sons were indeed historical personages, though it is possible that the genealogists have occasionally affiliated to them sons and grandsons whom they would not have recognised. But did their great ancestor Conn ever exist, or was he in the classic phrase 'only a god'? Did Cormac mac Airt ever rule in Tara, and what did that rule imply? The unimaginative Romans attributed practical achievements to their legendary kings, and their Greek historians were able to weave a speciously acceptable early history of Rome with such success that it is solemnly repeated (with greater or lesser modifications) in most modern text-books, in spite of

the complete absence of documentary evidence for the existence of these kings. But it would be a bold historian who today would introduce Conchobar, Conn or Cormac as real figures into his pages. Indeed there is a danger that we may too readily assume that all such prehistoric characters were purely mythological.

But we cannot evade the problems set by myth and legend about the prehistoric past, because it is to that past that we must look for an explanation of Tara and its kingship. It is now evident that Niall and his descendants for many centuries can in no real sense be described as high-kings of all Ireland. The claims made for them in the late seventh century by Adomnán and Muirchú, although important testimony to the development of a concept of high-kingship, must be discounted as partisan: few other contemporary documents show special deference being afforded to the Uí Néill outside their own sphere of influence, and the laws do not even envisage the office of high-king of Ireland.

The central paradox lies in the identification of the high-kingship with the kingship of Tara. The farther back we go in the study of recorded history in Ireland, the less evidence do we find of a centralised monarchy. Yet by the ninth century, when we encounter the first attempts to realise such a concept, Tara had long lain abandoned. About the year 800 Óengus the Céle Dé exulted over the triumph of the church in his versified Martyrology:

At-bath borg tromm Temra
le tairthim a flathe;
co llín corad sruthe
maraid Ard mór Machae.

'The strong fortress of Tara has perished with the death of her princes; with its quires of sages great Armagh lives on.

Valiant Lóeguire's pride in quenched—great the obstacle; the name of Patrick, glorious, famous, is still growing.

The Faith has grown and will live till the day of Doom; the guilty gentiles have been carried off and their raths are uninhabited.'

Throughout Irish history the glory of Tara has always lain in the past—in the reign of Conaire Mór, of Conn Cétchathach, of Cormac mac Airt, of Niall Noígiallach or of Lóeguire his son. Then, in the middle of the sixth century, in the shadowy border times between the saga world and annalistic record, legend has it that Tara was cursed by St Ruadán in the reign of Diarmait mac Cerbaill, the same whom Adomnán described as *totius Scotiae regnator*. The title, king of Tara, remained very

much alive, and eventually did come to mean 'king of Ireland', but there is no evidence that the site was used again except for some rare symbolic occasion.

This picture is partially confirmed by the archaeologists. The impressive complex of earthworks on the ridge at Tara apparently belongs to the Celtic Iron Age. Roman material from the second and third centuries of our era has been found at the 'Rath of the Synods'—a site traditionally associated with a synod supposed (on no very good authority) to have been held there by Adomnán in 695. More surprising was the discovery that Tara's importance extended far back into prehistory. In this at least the medieval historians were correct. Excavation of the 'Mound of the Hostages' showed it to be a neolithic passage grave which had been extensively re-used during the Bronze Age. Among the secondary burials was that of a boy wearing faience beads of Egyptian origin, while the passage grave itself has been dated to *c.* 2100 BC—some centuries younger than the great megalithic tombs of Newgrange and Knowth. Like these it was decorated with abstract carvings. The metamorphosis of Tara from tomb to royal residence is paralleled at Knowth. This site (known by the medieval Irish to have been a burial mound) was chosen as their centre by the local Uí Néill kings of northern Brega from the eighth century onwards. Two large ring-forts placed in line with the neolithic mound—one to the north and the other to the south on a strategic bluff overlooking the great bend of the Boyne—may well represent the actual dwelling places of the dynasty. A similar concentric arrangement of the earthworks at Tara in relation to the 'Mound of the Hostages' may be observed. The character of these earthworks, which are still for the most part unexcavated, suggests that they were erected for ritual rather than defensive purposes. The names by which they are now known derive from poems of the Middle Irish period—the *Dindshenchas* collection of topographical lore which was an essential part of every poet's repertoire. Near the Tara complex and evidently connected with it on the same ridge is a more conventional hill-fort known as Rath Meave.

Several hints in Irish mythological tales suggest that the ramparts at Tara were designed as a defence against a hostile Otherworld. The earliest regnal list of Tara is a seventh-century text *Baile Chuind*, 'The Vision of Conn'. In the ninth century it was reworked as *Baile in Scáil* 'The Phantom's Vision or Prophetic Ecstasy', and in it the god Lug foretells to Conn Cétchathach the names of his descendants who shall rule Ireland from Tara. The opening lines relate how Conn and

his druids made a circuit of the ramparts in the early morning to guard Tara against supernatural invaders, and we remember the taboo that forbade the king to let the sun rise on him in Tara. In another story Finn mac Cumaill, leader of the Fianna and himself an hypostasis of Lug, though euhemerised into a chieftain of warbands under Cormac mac Airt, defends Tara against the harper Ailén who comes to burn it with his fiery breath every Samain eve.

Lug figures as conqueror of Tara in one of the best-known versions of the basic Irish myth which tells how the divine Hero banishes the old Otherworld god and takes over his residence. Here Nuadu Argatlám ('of the Silver Hand') is king of the Tuatha Dé Danann in Tara. Lug approaches but is told by the watchman that no-one without an art or craft may be admitted. Lug lists his own accomplishments, but each time is told that another practitioner of the art is already in Tara. Finally Lug is recognised as *Samildánach* or master of all the arts and with a single leap passes over all the multiple ramparts. He is the great Celtic god whom Caesar identified with Mercury and called inventor of all the arts, the god most worshipped in Gaul where he is commemorated at Lyons, Laon, Leyden and every other *Lugudunum*. Nuadu here is the god Nuadu Necht, who as Nechtan, source of the river Boyne and husband of its goddess, is the Celtic counterpart of the old Roman water-god Neptunus. He is the ancestor of most of the Irish dynasties and was worshipped as the fisher-god Nodens in fourth-century Britain at an elaborate temple at Lydney in Gloucestershire. He is the Welsh Nudd or Lludd, just as Finn mac Cumaill (his grandson or great-grandson according to the genealogists) is the Welsh Gwynn ap Nudd. He is also the tutelary deity of London and his name is preserved in Ludgate. Most probably too he is the Celtic original of the maimed Fisher King in the Parzifal legend: though his lost hand was replaced by one of silver he had in the end to give place to Lug.

In this connection we may note that the Bleeding Lance of the Parzifal legend seems to have a prototype in Irish myth as the *gáe bolga* associated with Cú Chulainn, who was Lug's son, and with Óengus Bolg, ancestor deity of the Fir Bolg or Érainn. The latter, euhemerised as ancestor of the Déisi under the name Óengus Gaíbuaibthech ('of the poisonous spear'), attacks Cormac mac Airt in Tara, killing his son and his *rechtaire* or steward and blinding Cormac in one eye. Cormac then has to leave Tara and live at Achall, the nearby Hill of Skreen, 'for it was not lucky for a king with a blemish to reside in Tara'. The Waste Land of the Parzifal story represents the state of a country whose sacral

king has lost his power or virtue. Shortly afterwards Cormac meets his death at Cleittech on the Boyne in the house of the hospitaller Spelán. Later tradition had it that he was choked by a salmon bone through the maledictions of druids because he confessed belief in Christianity. In accordance with his new faith he refused to be buried at Brug na Bóinne, the necropolis of Newgrange and its sister sites, as was the custom for the kings of Tara.

Here as nearly always when dealing with Irish tradition we are faced with the problem of authenticity. Were kings of Tara in the late Celtic period really buried in a neolithic cemetery even then 3,000 years old? Or are these stories merely the product of learned speculation in the middle ages? At any rate there can be no doubt at all of the extraordinary continuity of tradition exemplified at sites such as Tara and Knowth. This is in itself a strong argument for the survival of large elements of the megalithic peoples and of their beliefs in Ireland under the later Celtic overlay. Place and tradition have always been of great significance in Ireland and we have evidence in the *Dindshenchas* of the importance attached to them by the poets.

Unlike the acropolis of Cashel in Munster, Tara is by no means an impressive site on its low ridge in the heart of Meath. The banks and mounds might even be overlooked by a careless visitor. But once the ridge has been climbed an astonishingly wide panorama is unfolded. Tara—in Irish *Temair*—means 'a place with a view', and Temair Breg in Meath is only one of several similarly named places in Ireland. From Tara one can see mountains or hills in each of the four provinces—Ulster, Leinster, Munster and Connacht—although the not very distant sea is invisible. Its commanding view would have delighted the Roman or Etruscan augurs who divided the sky into its quarters with the lituus once wielded by the Hittite kings. The king of Tara would truly be lord of the four quarters. Perhaps it is here that we should look for the true significance of Tara.

The names now given to the sites at Tara are derived from a remarkable Middle Irish description (probably dating from the tenth century) now contained in the Book of Leinster, but some have been misidentified. The names 'Cormac's House' and the 'Royal Seat' should be reversed. The Middle Irish antiquary misinterpreted the long *cursus* to the north as a house, describing it as 'the Women's Pavilion' or 'the big House for thousands of Mercenaries', but he did not call it 'the Banquet Hall': it is clear from the early descriptions that the latter was conceived of as a temporary structure, erected *ad hoc* for the purpose of a great feast

within the royal enclosure (we know that in the twelfth century Irish kings used to build a *Tech Césca* or Easter House for such feasts). Similar temporary halls seem envisaged in such sagas as *Fled Bricrenn* 'Bricriu's Feast', and Roger of Howden describes how the Irish kings built a wonderful palace of wattle-work for Henry II during his visit to Dublin in the winter of 1172–3. This tract on Tara mentions several sites now destroyed (though some can be discerned from aerial photographs), and is an unusually accurate survey of what was even then a long abandoned site. At the time of its composition the Lia Fáil was at the 'Mound of the Hostages', though in a recumbent position, so that the author, in common with other Irish pseudo-historians, misinterpreted it as a *lecc* or flagstone, upon which the king allegedly stood at his inauguration. It is impossible to determine the genuine nature of the traditions upon which the author drew for his naming of the various monuments, but local folklore was probably his main source. It is interesting that while he recognised the sepulchral character of the neolithic burial mounds he took the structures in the north-west (which modern archaeologists think to be Iron Age burial sites) to be normal ring-forts. Thus all the monuments must have been then, as now, grass-grown and their original purpose unrecognisable. Medieval Irish scholars, probably thinking in terms of the burial of contemporary kings in famous monasteries, alleged that the early high-kings of Tara were buried at Brug na Bóinne. But in spite of his misconception of the nature of the *cursus* our author was probably retailing genuine tradition when he connected it with the celebration of the *Feis Temro*.*

When we consider that the Boyne valley has been the centre of a flourishing culture from the beginnings of settled life in Ireland, it is not inconceivable that Tara may even in prehistoric times have enjoyed a paramount position in the country. Even when the medieval tradition has been stripped of the accretions and misinterpretations resulting from the later political achievements of the Uí Néill, it is clear that the kingship of Tara was something out of the ordinary. In no other way can we explain the tenacity with which the Uí Néill high-kings clung to the title even when they resided at Loch Ennell in Westmeath or in the distant northern regions of Tír Conaill or Cenél nEógain.

It is unlikely that prehistoric Ireland was politically united under the monarchy of Tara. That kingship was cultic and probably intermittent. The regnal succession of the Uí Néill kings of Tara in the sixth and seventh centuries shows frequent periods of interregnum, thus

* See below, p. 64.

demonstrating that the office was not a normal tribal or dynastic kingship—an office to be filled immediately on the death of the previous incumbent—but a distinction occasionally attained. Furthermore, although the Uí Néill, with or without historical justification, packed the prehistoric regnal lists of Tara with shadowy figures from their own pedigrees, they had to allow that representatives of the other provinces had shared in the kingship previous to the reign of Niall Noígiallach. There is unmistakable evidence in the garbled prehistoric traditions that the Laigin of Leinster had a special interest in it. It is odd that only once in the voluminous mass of Old Irish legal tracts is Tara mentioned, and then in terms which contradict the official history. An eighth-century law tract on bees asserts that Congal Cáech, the Cruthin over-king of Ulaid who fell at the battle of Moira in 637, had been king of Tara until (like Cormac mac Airt) he was deprived of the sovereignty through loss of an eye. Although it is not here explicitly stated that the king of Tara was king of Ireland, the position was obviously one of peculiar importance.

All Irish tribal kingships had a sacral character, but that of Tara was cultic or priestly in a special sense. It is not impossible that it had a 'national' significance. According to Caesar the otherwise disunited Gauls held a druidic assembly at or near Chartres in the territory of the Carnutes, which was considered the centre of Gaul. The professional cohesion of the Irish men of learning and the uniformity of the literary language suggests a similar druidic unity in prehistoric times. It is true that Uisnech rather than Tara was the umbilical centre of Ireland, and here too medieval tradition places a druidic fire ceremony. A five-cornered pillar-stone at Uisnech was said to mark the meeting-point of the five provinces. This theory implies the division of Munster into two Fifths: an alternative tradition claims Mide as the central Fifth which was carved out of the other four provinces by Tuathal Techtmar, grandfather of Conn Cétchathach, when he seized Uisnech. Uisnech and Tara are twin cultic centres, and one Middle Irish source describes their situation in Ireland as that of two kidneys in an animal. Linked with them are two other sites: Tlachtga (the Hill of Ward), and Tailtiu (Teltown) where the king of Tara held his *óenach* at Lugnasad, the feast of Lug at the beginning of August. Tailtiu is said formerly to have belonged to Ulster, Tara itself to Leinster, Tlachtga to Munster and Uisnech to Connacht.

These legends do not make coherent geographical or political sense, and may well be mere fabrications. But Alwyn and Brinley Rees in their

book *Celtic heritage* have made the interesting suggestion that they should be interpreted in a symbolic rather than a literal manner. From parallels in Sanskrit literature and even farther afield they elaborate a theory that the Five Fifths were not so much political or ethnic divisions as a cosmological scheme. This has certain attractions, insofar as, while the term *cóiced* is a deeply rooted concept, the search for the fifth Fifth in historic reality has been peculiarly frustrating. In the early centuries they were doubtless broadly defined regions—dominated perhaps by a certain tribe or tribal federation—but hardly yet fully-fledged political entities. According to this theory they also were a symbolic reflection of the caste functions of Indo-European society—functions which have been well brought out by Dumézil in his studies into Indian, Persian, Roman and Germanic mythology. Thus Connacht is to be associated with the colour white and the brahman or druidic caste, Ulster with red and the warrior caste, Leinster with blue or green and the farmers, and Munster with the colour black and the *sudra* caste—with slaves, women, musicians, witches and the dead. The centre is the fifth point from which the others are viewed and represents the essence of kingship which combines and sublimates the functions of all the castes. Munster itself is a microcosm within this scheme—a world on its own with its own five-fold sub-division. The thesis is illustrated with a wealth of fascinating detail drawn somewhat indiscriminately from Irish literature and tradition. It is easy to criticise it in detail and reduce it to absurdity, for its authors have deliberately discounted the element of medieval pseudo-learned invention and have not subjected their sources to rigid textual analysis. But it is fruitless to criticise it on historical grounds, for of its essence it is historic and mythological.

Two kings, Conaire Mór and Cormac mac Airt, exemplify in a special fashion the functions of the prehistoric king of Tara. Of the two, Conaire Mór mac Eterscélae is the more purely mythical. The medieval chronographers placed his reign roughly contemporary with the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* and the birth of Christ, and when this involved them in chronological difficulties owing to divergent traditions about the date of his sons, they divided him into two separate figures. He is in reality timeless: the primordial just king who unwittingly breaks his *gessa* or taboos and is hounded inexorably to his doom. Literary historians have remarked on the spirit of Greek tragedy which pervades the saga of Conaire—the 'Destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel' (*Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*). Since many scholars see in plots such as those of the *Oedipus* and *Agamemnon* developments of the Greek form of

the same basic kingly myth, the resemblance need not surprise us.

The early part of the *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga* describes Conaire's recognition and inauguration as king of Tara, and is of particular interest to us.

> Then the king, Etarscélae, died. A bull-feast (*tairbfheis*) is assembled by the men of Ireland: that is to say, a bull was killed by them, and one man would eat his fill of it and would drink its broth, and a spell of truth would be sung over him as he slept. The man that he should see in his sleep, it is he that would be king; and he would perish should he tell a lie. On that occasion the man of the bull-feast saw in his sleep a naked man after night-fall on the road to Tara with a stone in his sling.

Meanwhile the young Conaire, who was the son of the previous king but had been brought up in secret by his mother Mess Buachalla, was hunting on the Liffey plain. He followed a strange flock of birds as far as Áth Cliath (the site of Dublin), and when they flew over the sea he stripped to pursue them. They turned into armed men and attacked him, but their leader stepped forth and protected Conaire. He was the king of the bird-flock, one of whom had visited Mess Buachalla in the hut where the herdsmen had hidden her and had begotten Conaire upon her the night before she was married to Etarscélae. He told Conaire to go to Tara and there be made king, and enjoined upon him a long list of *gessa*.

> Birds shall be privileged, and this shall be your observance always: you shall not pass Tara on your right hand and Brega on your left; you shall not hunt the crooked beasts of Cernae;* and you shall not stay abroad from Tara for nine nights; and you shall not spend the night in a house from which firelight is visible outside after sunset and into which one can see from outside; and three red men shall not go before you into a red man's house; and plunder shall not be taken during your reign; the visit of one woman shall not come into your house after sunset; and you shall not settle a quarrel between two of your subjects.†

* Cernae was an ancient cemetery. According to one tradition the early Uí Néill kings of Brega, the Síl nÁedo Sláine, were buried there. The name is preserved at Carnes, county Meath, but it is tempting to identify the cemetery with the neolithic passage-graves at Fourknocks about four miles from Carnes. It was probably in the nearby townland of Clonalvy that the Lia Ailbe, described as the chief monument of Brega, stood until it was destroyed in 999 by Máelsechnaill the high-king.

† Myles Dillon's translation.

Conaire sets off for Tara naked as he is with the sling in his hand. Three kings are waiting on each of the four roads from Tara, and he is received as king.

The beginning of the saga, which relates to Conaire's mother Mess Buachalla, is linked to the tale of 'The Wooing of Étaín' (*Tochmarc Étaíne*). Here Eochaid Airem, an earlier king of Tara, marries Étaín, the human incarnation of an Otherworld woman, the beloved of the god Midir of Brí Léith in Longford. Étaín is a manifestation of the goddess of sovereignty, for we are told that the men of Ireland would not attend the Feast of Tara before Eochaid married her. Midir wins her back from Eochaid but is forced to restore her. However, he tricks the king by sending her daughter instead, who so resembled her mother that the substitution was not detected until it was noticed that she did not pour out drink in the manner of the true Étáin—a function, we have seen, of the goddess. Meanwhile, Eochaid had had a daughter by this unwittingly incestuous union, and the child was exposed. She was rescued by cowherds and reared by them secretly in a hut, until one day her beauty was espied by servants of the new king Etarscélae and she was married to him. Such at least seems to have been the outline of a story which has become thoroughly confused in the texts as transmitted.

Here we find several interesting mythological motifs. Conaire's apparent ignorance of his right to the kingship and his secret upbringing are not explained, and it is obvious that the Birth of the Hero myth—involving incestuous birth, exposure, rescue and eventual recognition—has been transferred to his mother. But the detail of the union between the divine birdman and his mother in the herdsman's hut is very significant, as is his mother name Mess Buachalla, 'the herdsman's fosterling'. This is a reminiscence of the sacred marriage, here treated not from the point of view of the king but of the queen as mother of the future king. In fifth-century Athens the spring month of Anthesterion was marked by an archaic civic festival. A *ἱερὸς γάμος* was enacted between the god Dionysus and the wife of the *basileus*—no longer a real king but one of the nine annually elected archons who held the honorary title in order to carry out religious rituals pertaining to the obsolete kingship. The official residence to which the *βασίλισσα* or titular 'queen' was brought in public procession, there to await the arrival of the god, was known as the *βουκολεῖον* (*boukoleion*), the 'herdsman's hut'. Some would regard the Hebrew Feast of Tabernacles as originating in a similar kingship-marriage ritual performed in a temporary booth of green branches at the autumnal New Year festival.

Now the association of a king with a herdsman's fosterling occurs also in the charming story of 'The Melodies of Buchet's House' (*Esnada Tige Buchet*), in which Cormac mac Airt falls in love with the humble Ethne who is gathering rushes and milking the cows of her impoverished foster-father Buchet. Buchet's name, though British rather than Irish in form, means 'cowherd', and like so many divine figures he has been euhemerised into a *briugu* or hospitaller of the king of Leinster. His possessions have been eaten up and wasted by the king's sons, Ethne's brothers, and he is forced to emigrate to Kells. When Cormac marries Ethne she is restored to her royal position. Cormac himself is represented as living at Kells, for the Leinster queen Medb, widow of his father Art, will not allow him to enter Tara. But once he has married Ethne—who is ultimately the same goddess in more beneficent mood—he settles in Tara and commences building the famous Ráith na Ríg and Banqueting Hall.

The divine cowherd is familiar from the Indian stories of Krishna and figures also in various Greek myths. In Irish myth the *briugu* or hospitaller in his hostel (*bruiden*—a word which frequently designates a *síd* or 'fairy' dwelling) is a common humanisation of the Otherworld god who presides over the eternal feast. In malevolent aspect, for instance as Dá Derga, the Red God, in whose hostel Conaire meets his doom, his feast undergoes an ominous change as it is realised to be that of the dead in the Otherworld. These mythological motifs can only with some difficulty be unravelled from the medieval sagas where the atmosphere has been humanised and the characters historicised. On the other hand, the failure of the saga writers to provide adequate motivation for their now human characters accounts for a good deal of the inconsequential nature of the narrative which prevents many of the Irish tales from achieving perfection of literary form. Paradoxically, the historian can only make use of the sagas when he realises that they are largely mythology; as such they illuminate deep-lying concepts of ancient Irish kingship.

The bull-feast of Tara is also referred to in one of the Ulster sagas, the 'Sick-bed of Cú Chulainn' (*Serglige Con Culainn*)—the original of Yeats's play *The only Jealousy of Emer*. Probably an interpolation from the Conaire saga, it gives Cú Chulainn an opportunity to deliver to the chosen candidate, his foster-son Lugaid Réoderg, a series of *tecosca* or Instructions similar to those ascribed to Cormac. Here the bull is stated to have been white, and four druids chant spells over the sleeper.

The *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga* was probably written in the ninth century, but an earlier version of Conaire's accession is contained in the genealogical tract *De Shíl Chonairi Móir*. For Conaire was the ancestor of many of the Érainn peoples in Munster and elsewhere—in particular of the Múscraige of Cork and Tipperary, the Corcu Duibne of the Kerry peninsulas, the Corcu Baiscinn of West Clare and the Dál Riata of Antrim whose kings later ruled in Scotland. As Conaire is so indissolubly associated with the kingship of Tara, this is one of the few early indications that that kingship had any significance for Munster. This tract says of Mess Buachalla: 'She was of great size and evil of aspect, and used to come and go in elf-mounds (*síde*) and seas, and that by sorcery.' She begot a child by Eterscél (who is here apparently her father) while herding his cattle, but kept its paternity secret. On Eterscél's death the men of Leinster and the race of Conn Cétchathach assembled at Tara to choose a new king.

> There was a king's chariot at Tara. To the chariot were yoked two steeds of the same colour which had never before been harnessed. It would tilt up before any man who was not destined to receive the kingship of Tara, so that he could not control it, and the horses would spring at him. And there was a king's mantle in the chariot; whoso might not receive Tara's sovereignty the mantle was ever too big for him. And there were two flag-stones in Tara: 'Blocc' and 'Bluigne'; when they accepted a man, they would open before him until the chariot went through. And Fál was there, the 'stone penis' at the head of the chariot-course; when a man should have the kingship of Tara, it screeched against his chariot-axle, so that all might hear.

Mess Buachalla tells Conaire of his parentage and raises up Otherworld hosts to accompany him to Tara.

> Then he comes across Breg Plain to Tara, and his mother went ahead of him out before the hosts. The armies in Tara saw the hosts come towards them across Mag Breg to Tara led by Conaire Mór with his mother out before him. From her head black tresses fell loose. A great black corslet she wore, and druids spell-venomous went before her and a shield-bearer and mockers and horn-blowers ahead of the mighty hosts.*

The hosts at Tara are terrified and leave the site deserted. Conaire

* Gwynn's translation.

mounts the chariot and dons the cloak, which fits him. He drives the chariot towards the stones, which open before him, and the Lia Fáil cries out. 'Fál has accepted him,' cry all the hosts. He is recognised as king and the Otherworld helpers disappear after leaving an ordinance upon him never to allow the sun to rise or set upon him in Tara.

This story, dating from the eighth century, is obviously more archaic than the saga account. The test with chariot and horses is reminiscent of the Greek myths of Hippolytus and of Pelops and of the man-eating horses of the Thracian Diomedes. The names Blocc and Bluigne appear in the ninth-century *Baile in Scáil* as those of the druids who accompany Conn Cétchathach on his circuit of the ramparts of Tara. Macalister interpreted the test of passing between these stones as a ceremony of rebirth. The Lia Fáil is at present set up in the middle of Ráith na Ríg, but was originally placed by the Mound of the Hostages in direct line with the so-called Banqueting Hall. This is a peculiar structure: a parallelogram 750 feet long, which has been wrongly identified with the Tech Midchuarta built by Cormac mac Airt. It is much more likely to have been a ritual enclosure than a banqueting hall. Similar structures have been found in England (near Stonehenge and at Dorchester-on-Thames), as well as on the continent. Sometimes they are associated with neolithic sites and sometimes with Celtic settlements of the Iron Age. Archaeologists have dubbed them with the Latin name *cursus*, and the Irish legend suggests that the term is apt. The word used in this text for the royal mantle is *cassal*, a borrowing from the Latin *casula*; but this is attested as a fully acclimatised Irish word as early as the seventh century. A more learned borrowing appears in the definition of the Lia Fáil as *ferp cluiche*, where *ferp* is the Latin *verpa*: it seems to occur only in this one text.

Whatever may be our doubts about the genuine nature of these legends, it does emerge very clearly from Irish testimony that Tara was surrounded by an aura of paganism and druidry. Its memory was cultivated by some as a focus of national glory, but the church regarded it with disfavour. Full use of this ambiguity was made by Muirchú in his narrative of St Patrick's confrontation with Lóeguire at Tara. The passage is openly modelled on the biblical accounts of Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal and of Daniel at the court of Nebuchadnezzar. For greater effect Muirchú has distorted genuine traditions of the Beltaine fire-ritual celebrated on the first of May by placing this feast at Tara rather than Uisnech and making it coincide with the Christian Easter, thus creating an impressive hagiographical symbolism when

Patrick lights his rival Paschal fire at Slane. Later hagiographers confused the tradition further when they identified this ritual with the Feast of Tara. Muirchú at one point describes Tara as the capital of the Irish—*caput Scotorum*—but he always stresses that its power was rooted in paganism:

> It came to pass in that year that on the same night as the holy Patrick was celebrating Easter, there was an idolatrous ceremony which the gentiles were accustomed to celebrate with manifold incantations and magical contrivances and with other idolatrous superstitions, when the kings, satraps, chieftains, princes and great ones of the people had assembled, and when the druids, singers, prophets, and the inventors and practitioners of every art and of every gift (*magis, incantatoribus, auruspicibus et omnis artis omnisque doni* inuentoribus doctoribusque*) had been summoned to Loígaire, as once to king Nabcodonossor, at Tara, their Babylon.

Muirchú brings his epic of Patrick's contest with the druids to a fitting climax by relating Lóeguire's conversion; but his near contemporary Tírechán records a more genuine tradition that Lóeguire refused baptism: Niall his father had forbidden him to become a Christian, for when he died he was to be buried upright and fully armed in the ramparts of Tara facing his hereditary enemy the son of Dúnlaing, king of Leinster, in his fortress at Mullaghmast.

Biblical reminiscences of a rather different character are drawn upon to embellish the reign of Cormac mac Airt. As befitted the ancestor of the victorious Uí Néill, he is presented in glowing colours and is even alleged to have become a Christian before his death. To him is ascribed the building of the 'Banqueting Hall', and the elaborate description of this edifice in the *Dindshenchas* clearly derives from that of Solomon's temple in the *Book of Kings*. In fact another text explicitly compares Cormac to Solomon and to Octavian Augustus. Cormac was renowned for his just judgments, and his alleged authorship of the most famous of the kingly 'Instruction' texts may have been inspired by the *Proverbs* of Solomon.

The chronographers gave Cormac a reign of forty-odd years in the third century AD, but a synchronism interpolated into the *Annals of Ulster* from an eighth-century source places his obit in AD 366. As the chronology of the fifth-century Uí Néill dynasts has almost certainly

* An hibernicism: the Irish word *dán* means both 'gift' and 'art, craft'—in particular 'the art of poetry'.

undergone a deliberate process of pre-dating, this probably represents a more accurate tradition. The mass of legend and myth which surrounds Cormac mac Airt signifies that his descendants the Connachta and Uí Néill looked back to him as the founder of the high-kingship they claimed for Tara. He is the only figure among their ancestry whose career one is tempted to regard as historical. O'Rahilly's objection—namely, that the story of his youth is plainly mythical—does not carry much weight: the world-wide Birth of the Hero myth has of course more often than not been attached to quite soberly historical personages. It is symptomatic of the relative importance of church and state that in Ireland the myth should be as frequently narrated of saints as of princes.

Cormac's birth-myth runs as follows. His father Art the son of Conn is on his way to the battle of Mag Muccrime in Connacht where he and his ally Eógan, ancestor of the Eóganacht kings of Munster, will meet their death at the hands of Lugaid Mac Con, banished representative of the older Érainn. Art spends the night with the smith Olc Aiche, a sinister figure who is fed daily by his daughter Achtán on the milk of a hundred cows. This night she gives her father's drink to Art and his men, and is advised by her father to sleep with the king. (We may note here once more the motif of distributing drink and the resemblance to the theme of the herdsman's daughter: a variant version gives the girl's name as Étaín. The oldest text states that Olc Aiche was also a druid, and we remember that the ninth-century rhythmical prayer, the 'Breastplate of St Patrick', asks for protection against 'the spells of women and smiths and druids'.) Art's death is prophesied by Olc Aiche, and he leaves his sword, his gold ring and his ceremonial *óenach* garb with Achtán for the son that she will bear him.

When Cormac is born he is carried off by a she-wolf who rears him with her cubs. A trapper, Lugnae Fer Trí, finds the boy and restores him to his mother. She then takes him north to Art's fosterfather Fiachrae Cassán son of Colla Dá Chrích of the Airgialla. On the way over the mountains they are attacked by wolves, but wild horses protect them. Fiachrae places Cormac in a milk-vessel of yew wood and covers it with a purple cloth, so that he might not be touched by the numerous hands of those who welcomed him. (This is an implausible detail: no doubt originally the vessel hid Cormac, like Cypselus, from his enemies.) After being fostered for thirty years by Fiachrae, Cormac, protected by his grandfather's magic, sets out for Tara on a well-omened day with his father's sword, ring and raiment. He finds a woman

complaining of a judgement given against her by the king Lugaid Mac Con. Her sheep had grazed on the queen's woad field and been declared forfeit. Cormac says that Lugaid had never before given a false judgement, but that now he was in the wrong, for the woad would grow again, and so the crop of the sheep (one shearing of their wool) was the proper fine for the crop they had destroyed. According to some accounts, when Lugaid delivered the false judgement one side of the house collapsed, whence the curious structure known as the *Clóenfherta* or 'crooked ramparts' at Tara; and Cormac was still a child in Lugaid's fosterage when he delivered this precocious judgement. Lugaid Mac Con now recognises that his thirty years of rule have come to an end, and he abdicates with reasonably good grace.

As with all Irish origin tales, this story is not intended primarily as a piece of literature. It has a politically didactic purpose. Eógan, like his ally Art, has an encounter the night before the battle with Monchae, daughter of the druid Treth moccu Creccai, who too bears him a posthumous son, Fiachu Muillethan from whom the kings of Munster descend. 'Hence it is a crime for any man of the Eóganacht to slay a man of the Crecraige' (a tribe among the Corco Mruad in north Clare and also at Beare Island in West Cork). The story of Cormac's human helpers serves similarly to illustrate the special relationship between the Uí Néill and the Airgialla (though in this respect it clashes with the chronology of the official genealogies) and between the Connachta and the Corco Fir Thrí, a tribe of the Luigni in the present baronies of Leyney and Corran, county Sligo. In the later versions (which may, however, preserve a more original Connacht account) Achtán takes the infant Cormac to be fostered on Art's instructions by Lugnae Fer Trí, but loses him on the way. He is later found in the wolf's den by Grec mac Arod who is rewarded by Lugnae with the territory later inhabited by his descendants the Grecraige ('the Gregories' in the barony of Coolavin in south Sligo). It seems likely that Crecraige and Grecraige are different branches of the same people: other tribes too, such as the Ciarraige, are found both in Connacht and Munster.

The saga thus expresses in mythological form the eighth-century theory of the division of Ireland into Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga, with the Connachta-Uí Néill in the north and the Eóganachta in the south dominating the Érainn and other peoples. There is some suspicion, however, as to whether the story was originally framed for the glorification of Cormac. Lugaid is treated sympathetically in all the accounts of his quarrel with Eógan and Art and in the event he behaves generously

to Cormac. His epithet Mac Con 'son of the hound' or 'hounds' ('wolf' is also a possible translation) suggests that he may have been the original hero. The names Lugaid and Mac Con are both aliases for the divine Lug: as Mac Con the god is ancestor of the Conmaicne who are scattered across Ireland from east to west and have given their name to Connemara (Conmaicne Mara, 'the hound-sons of the sea'). Furthermore Lugnae Fer Trí figures in a more narrowly local context in an obscure genealogical tract on the Luigni and Gailenga as rescuing and fostering a little-known prehistoric royal infant, Nia Noí nGráinne (Nia of the nine grains), also called Nia Novem Generum ('of the nine septs'), whose name oddly resembles that of Niall of the Nine Hostages. According to the seventeenth-century genealogist Mac Firbhisigh, Cormac deprived the Gamanrad tribes of the kingship of Connacht and bestowed it on a certain Nia mac Lugna, said to have been his half-brother. It is possible that the ascendant Connachta may have taken over ancient hero-myths from the traditions of their subject tribes. But Cormac is plainly regarded as much more than a local or tribal potentate: the mention of the Roman purple which veiled his hiding place suggests that the author of our saga was fully conscious of the parallel afforded by the tale of Romulus, while the thirty years' fosterage may even be intended to recall the traditional age of Christ.

The chief historical feature of Cormac's reign which can be gleaned from tradition is his constant warfare with the Ulaid. Although the fall of Emain Macha and the attendant collapse of Ulster overlordship occurred later, it is very probable that the beginning of the end was marked by Cormac's establishment of the Connachta dynasty as kings of Tara. Cormac is stated to have been deprived of the kingship on occasion and exiled by the Ulaid, and the eighth-century saga of the battle of Crinna tells how with the help of Tadc mac Céin he drove the Ulaid back from the Boyne and was restored to the throne. It is true that too much credence cannot be given to the historicity of this account. It is possibly no more than an origin-tale to explain the political situation of the eighth century, when the Southern Uí Néill were overlords of Brega, a kingdom extending over Meath, north Dublin and south Louth, and ruled over vassal states of the Luigni, Gailenga and Ciannachta, who all claimed descent from Tadc mac Céin—another alias of the familiar Lug. The tale particularly refers to the Ciannachta, named from Tadc's father Cian, who occupied territory on both banks of the lower Boyne. Cormac promised Tadc as much land as his chariot could encircle in a single day, but bribed the charioteer to exclude

Tara itself as Tadc lay unconscious from the wounds he had sustained.

The genealogists brought Tadc and his descendants from Éli in northern Munster, but since we find the Luigni and Gailenga closely associated as neighbours and allies in Connacht, and the Ciannachta also in county Londonderry among the Northern Uí Néill, there is reason to agree with MacNeill that they were vassal tribes of fighting men whom the Connachta and Uí Néill brought from the west and planted on the lands they had conquered, much as the MacSweeneys and other gallowglass clans from Scotland and the Isles were rewarded with Irish land by the Gaelic lords of the later middle ages. On the other hand, there are indications that the Ulaid, even after they had lost their ancient capital and forfeited their sway over central and western Ulster, still ruled as far south as the Boyne in the first half of the sixth century. The Ciannachta may thus have been planted here by the Uí Néill some centuries after Cormac's alleged reign, as the northern branch almost certainly were, and their connection with the Gailenga, Luigni and Saitne may be a genealogical fiction.

Whatever the explanation of the presence of the Gailenga and Luigni in Mayo and Sligo, the Brega peoples of that name, together with the Saitne, extending as they did in a group of tribal kingdoms from Glasnevin to Lough Ramor in Cavan, give the impression of a remarkably homogeneous body. They are so closely connected that in the later period before the Norman invasion we find that the kingship of the various tribes seems to have been interchangeable. They form a striking contrast to the population of Mide, the western portion of the Southern Uí Néill domains. In Westmeath, Longford and Offaly the subject tribes—Delbna, Corcu Roíde, Cuircne and others—are of obscure but disparate origins, and may reflect isolated and unconnected settlements made in territory which perhaps even in relatively recent prehistory was rendered difficult to both cultivator and pastoralist by expanses of bog, lake and thick woodland. But the Boyne valley had been an area of settled culture since neolithic times, so that it is likely that a basic unity persisted under the superstructures of succeeding conquests.

The original tribal character of the midlands and the relationship of the area to the ancient Fifths must remain a matter for learned speculation. Its real history begins with the rise of the Uí Néill. The establishment of dynastic kingdoms by the descendants of Niall of the Nine Hostages inaugurated a new development in political organisation: a slow transition from a purely tribal society to one which by the twelfth century can be termed a native Irish type of feudalism.

5
Niall of the Nine Hostages

For the moment we must perforce return to the realm of myth and legend. If the Greeks accounted no man happy until he were dead, the medieval Irish thought no man deserved a place in history until the durability of his achievements had been attested by the success of his great-grandchildren. Had the O'Briens not maintained themselves as kings at least of Thomond it is doubtful whether Brian Bóruma would figure so prominently in our history books.

Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona
multi; sed omnes illacrimabiles
urgentur ignotique longa
nocte, carent quia vate sacro . . .

. . . but bardic praise was itself unlikely to achieve permanent record unless scribes were patronised by the hero's princely descendants.

In the case of Niall Noígiallach we are in the peculiar position of having to measure his historical stature by the actual performance of his posterity and from the character of the legends with which they invested his memory. Apart from the writings of St Patrick, documentary sources for the fifth century are practically non-existent, while for the sixth they are very scanty. The annals for most of this period are hardly contemporary: they are a product of the great monastic flowering of the mid-sixth century, and the earlier entries were probably written up at a much later date, though the compilers may have had some meagre records on which to draw. Only in the seventh century do we emerge into the full light of history, and by then the Uí Néill dominance is assured.

Yet of Niall's own historicity there is little reason to doubt. His descendants quarrelled incessantly among themselves after the manner of most Irish dynastic families and had no cause to invent a common ancestry, since by unanimous testimony the high-kingship of Tara prior to Niall's days had not been the preserve of any one tribe or family. By the end of the fifth century, however, it was well on the way to becoming so. Niall's sons and grandsons proclaimed their intention of monopolising it to the exclusion of their western cousins by discarding the tribal appellation of Connachta and adopting the dynastic name Uí Néill, *nepotes Néill*. To be sure, once their star was in the ascendant, we may suspect that some local rulers of sufficient standing to avoid total subordination managed to have their pedigrees grafted onto Niall's stem. This is a phenomenon attested elsewhere in Ireland, and one to be expected in any society which attached paramount importance to purity of pedigree; but it presupposes the existence of a stock on which to graft. It is misleading to speak of the Uí Néill as a federation of tribes. The significance of their rise to power lies precisely in the fact that it marks an important step away from the ancient tribal polity. The Uí Néill were neither a tribe nor a group of tribes, but a dynasty, and by definition consisted even in the sixth century of a few dozen persons scattered over a wide area of northern and central Ireland.

The rise of a dynastic polity is paralleled in other parts of the country at the same time. The Eóganachta in Munster seem to have developed along similar lines, while in Leinster the Laigin, originally a dominant tribal group, gradually evolved into several dynasties, each of which had a theoretical right to the high-kingship of the province. The deeper economic and social roots of this change are necessarily obscure, but it must surely be related to the collapse of Roman Britain. Not that this event represented a simple triumph for the Irish: there was a somewhat similar disintegration in Ireland itself. The heroic age of the Iron Age Celts came to an end: most spectacularly of course in Ulster with the destruction of Emain Macha, but even the victorious Connachta eventually abandoned Cruachu, and the great hill-fort of Ailenn was to become a mere silent symbol of the high-kingship of Leinster. Heroic ages are always evanescent: they thrive briefly in time of turmoil, but when the source of plunder is exhausted the vainglorious parasites who lived on it are doomed.

In the north, the Ulaid most probably represented a warrior caste of La Tène Celts from Britain, wielding an overlordship over indigenous tribes. The Connachta and Laigin may in their turn have been war-

lords of a similar type though of different origins. In Munster the picture is darker, but we have no traditions of an heroic age in the true sense there, and the primeval tribal pattern seems to have been relatively undisturbed until the rise of the Eóganachta in the fifth century. Whether they really were, as they claimed, a distinct racial group from the ubiquitous Érainn is uncertain: there are certain slight hints in the ogham inscriptions from the Waterford area that they and their vassals the Déisi may have been of relatively recent Gaulish origin. But there can be little doubt that they owed their rise to power largely to prestige won from successful raids on Roman Britain: both the Déisi and the Uí Liatháin (who claimed to be congeners of the Eóganachta and bordered on the Déisi in eastern Cork) made permanent settlements in south Wales and Cornwall. The Munster saints, Declan of Ardmore, Ciarán of Saigir and Ailbe of Emly, were asserted to have been preaching the gospel before St Patrick's arrival. In contrast to the pagan associations of Tara, Cashel may have been Christian from its inception as capital of Munster: the Eóganachta claimed that it had been 'discovered' by their ancestor Corc in the fourth century by means of an angelic vision; its very name (*caisel*) is a borrowing from the *castella* which Theodosius had erected against the Irish raiders in Wales and western England.

The Homeric character of the Ulster sagas has already been remarked upon, and, just as the *Iliad* does not recount the fall of Troy, so too the *Táin* and its accompanying cycle of tales is silent concerning the final overthrow of Emain Macha, which supposedly took place many generations after the heroic exploits of Cú Chulainn. The genealogical tracts, however, afford us a brief outline of the alleged course of events. Emain is said to have been destroyed by the three Collas, cousins of Muiredach Tírech, king of Tara, and great-grandsons like him of Cormac mac Airt. They had slain their uncle Fiachu Sraibtine, who had voluntarily chosen defeat when a druid prophesied that only thus could he ensure the succession to his descendants. After many years of exile the Collas are reconciled to Fiachu's son Muiredach, and on his advice they turn their energies and those of their sons against the common foe in Ulster. After seven battles, and with the help of the men of Connacht, they slay Fergus Fogae, last king of Emain. The citadel is destroyed, the Ulaid retire across Glenn Rige (the Newry valley) to county Down, and the Collas found the kingdoms of Airgialla in the central portion of the old Fifth. Though descended from Conn of the Hundred Battles, the Collas by their original kin-slaying had

forfeited for ever their rights to the high-kingship of Ireland. Two generations later, Niall·Noíglallach grandson of Muiredach Tírech was high-king of Tara, and his three sons, Conall, Eógan and Énda, completed the conquest of Ulster by setting up the kingdoms of the Northern Uí Néill in county Donegal. The date fixed by the medieval Irish historians for the fall of Emain Macha was AD 327, although in the seventeenth century the Four Masters give the year as 331 and O'Flaherty arrived at 332 as the correct date. Nevertheless, as late as the eleventh century an alternative tradition survived which placed the fall of Emain in AD 450.

O'Rahilly has demonstrated the artificial character of the genealogical account given above. As MacNeill had already pointed out, the direct succession from father to son which it implies for the kingship of Tara from Cormac mac Airt to his great-great-grandson Niall is quite out of keeping with the Irish laws of dynastic succession and betrays the prehistoric regnal list as merely a converted pedigree. Furthermore, the name Airgialla simply means 'those who give hostages'. In historical times they were what might in modern terms be described as a satellite state of the Uí Néill. They eventually came under the domination of the northern Uí Néill dynasty of Cenél nEógain, who in the course of the seventh and eighth centuries gradually expanded from Inishowen (Inis Eógain—Eógan's peninsula in the north of Donegal) and took over Airgialla territory in counties Londonderry and Tyrone. The late Middle Irish *Book of rights* claims that the king of Tara honoured the Airgialla by placing their hostages in chains of gold, and it seems clear that the story of the three Collas is a piece of genealogical gilding designed to disguise their essential subordination. Their ineligibility for the kingship of Tara (which was still in force in the twelfth century when the high-kingship had become a prize for the strongest arm and when Donnchad Ua Cerbaill, king of Airgialla, was able to act on occasion as king-maker) gives the game away. If the slaying of an uncle had really entailed permanent disqualification for the kingship, Irish princes would have enjoyed a much more peaceful existence.

The three Collas are mere doublets of the three sons of Niall (who as descendants of Conn might have had the collective nickname of Conle). It was Niall and his sons in the fifth century who finally broke up the Fifth of Ulster, and the most plausible explanation of Niall's epithet derives it from the hostages received from the nine *tuatha* which originally made up the Airgiallan confederation. But O'Rahilly's idea that Conall, Eógan and Énda handed over the central portion of the

conquered Fifth to their allies and vassals, contenting themselves with the far north-west, seems somewhat unlikely, particularly in view of the later encroachments made by the Cenél nEógain upon Airgialla. The evidence points rather to an attack by Niall's sons from Connacht through Sligo into Ulster. If the Ulaid held the north as an overlord élite trusting in their horses and their chariots, they could not afford to be defeated, even in a remote corner of their domains. The genealogies are obscure and contradictory, but they reveal that the Airgialla were not a coherent ethnic or dynastic group, and sometimes they hint at distinctly plebeian origins. When the Ulaid once lost their military prestige, their vassal tribes may well have thrown off their yoke and given hostages to Niall in return for local autonomy. The Ulaid then retired eastwards to where their main strength lay: it is significant that one text of the genealogies states that the Ulaid themselves razed Emain Macha before their withdrawal. Warfare between the Ulaid and Airgialla is not a prominent feature of the early annals, although the earthwork known as the Dane's Cast was most probably built to mark the new boundary at Glenn Rige. But the Ulaid certainly were to remain for many generations a much more powerful force than later historians of the Uí Néill high-kingship cared to remember.

A variant of the Birth of the Hero myth is, as might be expected, recounted of Niall Noígiallach. The youngest of his brothers, son of Eochaid Mugmedón and a concubine, Cairenn, his mother gives birth to him beside the well whence she is constrained daily to draw water, and must leave him there for fear of Mongfind the queen. But the poet Torna rescues the child and fosters him. When in the fullness of time Torna introduces him to the court at Tara, Niall relieves his mother from drudgery and clothes her in purple. Eochaid tests his sons for their fitness to succeed him: on the advice of Sithchenn his druid they are sent into a smithy which is then burnt over their heads. Brión, the eldest son, rescues the chariot which was in the smithy, Fiachra a vat of wine, Ailill all the weapons, and Fergus a bundle of kindling containing a stick of yew (symbolising his sterility); but Niall brings out on his back the anvil, tongs, bellows, hammers and all the tools of the smith's trade.

A more interesting legend concerning Niall is recorded at greater length. It is told also of Lugaid Laígde, ancestor of the Munster Érainn, and recurs in various guises throughout Irish history and literature. In European folklore it forms for instance the basis of *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. Niall and his brothers go hunting and lose their way

in the forest. They cook a meal of game, but lack water. Fergus is sent to fetch some, and finds a well guarded by a hideous hag. He recoils in horror when she demands a kiss as price for the water, and goes back to his brothers. They set out in turn, but each retreats in equal haste. Fiachra, however, gives the hag a hurried kiss, and so his line (in the persons of Nath Í and Ailill Molt) will pay but a fleeting visit to Tara. But when Niall arrives at the well he boldly proclaims himself willing to lie with the loathsome hag; she is thereupon transformed into a beautiful damsel, and reveals herself as Sovereignty. Niall brings his brothers the water but will not let them drink until they promise him the kingship.

The goddess as giver of drink reappears in this same king-cycle also in her sinister aspect. Mongfind, the mother of Brión, Fiachra and Ailill, was sister to Crimthann mac Fidaig, king of Munster. Crimthann figures in the origin tale of the Eóganachta as uncle and fosterfather of Corc of Cashel. Some regnal lists make him succeed Eochaid Mugmedón in the high-kingship, and Cormac mac Cuilennáin, king and bishop of Cashel at the beginning of the tenth century, in his glossary of difficult and obsolete Irish words, the *Sanas Cormaic*, calls him 'king of Éire and Alba as far as the Ictian Sea'. Whether or not Crimthann ever existed, he certainly enshrines historical memories of the Munster settlements and colonies in Roman Britain, and from a description of him as ruling both in Ireland and Britain it was not difficult to raise him to the dignity of high-king of both countries. However, the saga relates that when Niall had secured the promise of the high-kingship, Mongfind persuaded the men of Ireland by sorcery and witchcraft to elect her brother Crimthann (since she despaired of obtaining the kingship directly for Brión, her favourite son). While Crimthann was engaged on his royal circuit of Alba, Mongfind divided Ireland between her sons and poisoned her brother at a feast given to celebrate his return. But because of Crimthann's suspicions she herself was forced to partake of the death-drink and died on Samain eve. Her true mythological character shines through the veneer of pseudo-history, and even the Middle Irish saga-writer must admit that 'the reason for which *samhain*-tide is by the common people called "the Festival of Mongfhionn" is that she, so long as she was in the flesh, had [occult] powers, and was a witch: wherefore it is that on *samhain*-eve women and the rabble address their petitions to her'.

Crimthann died on his way home to Munster at Sliab Aideda in Ríg, 'the mountain of the king's death' (Cratloe in Clare, just north of

Limerick city), and in revenge for his treacherous poisoning the men of Munster fought against Fiachra and Ailill. In the course of the warfare both were slain, and the southern portion of Fiachra's inheritance in Connacht was seized by Munster: hence it is that Clare is known as Thomond or north Munster (*Tuadmumu*), although the prehistoric division would place it in the Fifth of Connacht.

Most of the sagas concerning Niall and his family have come down to us in relatively late literary reworkings, but it is noteworthy that they do preserve traditions (albeit garbled) of Irish conquests in Britain. No one now would be so sanguine as to expect precise identifications of these Irish princes in the Roman records of the Scotti and their incursions, or to see with Ridgeway and MacNeill a reference to Niall in Claudian's panegyric on Stilicho's defence of Britain in AD 399:

totam cum Scottus Hivernen
movit et infesto spumavit remige Tethys

('when the Scot mobilised all Ireland and the ocean was churned to foam by his hostile oars'), for Niall, as we shall see, probably lived at least a generation later than Stilicho, and neither he nor Crimthann are likely to have been rulers of all Ireland. But the name of Niall's mother Cairenn sounds genuine enough, representing the fairly common Roman name Carina—though the medieval Irish anachronistically made her 'daughter of the king of the Allsaxain', i.e. a Saxon or English princess. While Niall's immediate ancestors are mere shadowy names, his father's epithet is suggestive, for O'Rahilly has interpreted Mugmedón to mean 'ruler of slaves', an appropriate title for a successful raider. The medieval Irish etymologists made a rather bad guess that the name meant 'moist middle', because, declares the seventeenth-century annalist Connell Mageoghegan, 'hee was much troubled with the flux of the Belly'.

Though Niall's own soubriquet derives from his Irish career, the schools would have us believe that he obtained a hostage from each of the five provinces of Ireland and four from Britain, or alternatively, five from Ireland, one from Alba (Scotland), one from the Saxons, one from the Britons and one from the Franks, 'for Niall went to Letha* and to Italy to seek a kingdom'. In spite of his prominence in Irish tradition, we are given very little concrete information about his reign—no doubt because his main achievements had been credited to the

* Letha is sometimes used vaguely for the continent, and sometimes more properly restricted to Brittany (Welsh *Llydaw*).

imaginary Three Collas and been pre-dated by a century or more. The annals of the late fifth and early sixth century agree with other evidence to show that the main activities of his sons and descendants in the midlands were directed to the object of winning the plain of Mide from the Laigin, and the saga of Niall's death attributes his slaying to a Leinster prince, Eochu son of Énda Cennselach.

Two distinct traditions appear to have been clumsily conflated in this death-tale, the other of which regarded Niall as having died in the course of a raid on Roman Britain. Here again lack of historical perspective on the part of the saga-writer takes Niall to the continent to meet a Roman envoy at the Loire, for the Roman occupation of Britain had been forgotten, and memories of Niall's attacks on the decaying empire could only be understood in terms of a march on Rome. The saga inconsequentially brings Niall back to Britain to visit Ercc, son of Eochu Muinremor, king of Alba, at whose court he is slain by his old enemy Eochu mac Éndai Chennselaig. The tenth-century poet Cináed ua hArtacáin credits Niall with seven raids on Britain, on the last of which he was slain 'above the surf of the Ictian Sea'—*ós muing Mara Icht**—by Eochu the Leinsterman 'in concert with the violent grasping Saxons' (just possibly a reminiscence of joint Saxon and Scottish raids, but more probably a mere anachronism). Niall's body is brought back by his men, who fight seven battles on the way, and is buried at Ochan (Faughan Hill between Kells and Navan in county Meath). His Saxon, Frankish and Roman hostages are then set free. Another *dindshenchas* poem by Cináed on Brug na Bóinne mentions Niall as one of the kings of Tara who was not buried in that ancient necropolis, 'after going seven times to Elpa'. *Elpa* or *Sliab nElpa* is the Irish for the Alps, but here there may be a confusion with Alba. Alba originally meant Britain—the classical Albion—but owing to the use of the term *Fir Alban*, 'the men of Alba', to denote the Irish colony of Dál Riata which expanded from Argyll and the Isles, the name Alba after the ninth century came to mean the kingdom of the united Picts and Scots under this dynasty. Thus earlier references to Britain as Alba were readily misunderstood.

The Alps were said to have been reached by Niall's successor in the high-kingship, Nath Í son of Fiachra. The late Middle Irish saga of his death and burial, *Aided Nath Í ocus a adnacol*, takes him to Sliab nElpa

* Muir nIcht, the Ictian Sea, is the English Channel, cf. *Ictis Insula*, St Michael's Mount (often confused with *Vectis Insula*, the Isle of Wight), and perhaps Caesar's *portus Itius* in Gaul.

where he attacks the tower of Forménus 'king of Thrace' who had retired thither as a hermit. Forménus prays that God might shorten Nath Í's reign and bring him to an inglorious grave, whereupon Nath Í is struck dead by lightning. His son Amalgaid takes command and brings his body back to Ireland, fighting nine battles on the way. He dies near Tara in the territory of the Déisi Temro, but Nath Í's body is buried at Cruachu, where a red sandstone pillar-stone is still said to mark his grave. The main portion of this text deals with Cruachu and the kings who are buried there: the actual 'saga' of Nath Í's death is related summarily in a few lines. The text belongs therefore to the *dindshenchas* or topographical genre, which is the repository of the least reliable type of Irish myth and legend, and this story is a characteristic farrago of the etymological ingenuities and misplaced learning of the medieval antiquaries.

It has been suggested that Forménus may be a distorted memory of the legendary Merovingian ancestor Faramund, whom the Frankish chronicler Fredegar claims led the Franks from Phrygia, perhaps confused with the eighth-century hermit St Pirmin; but the evidence is far too flimsy to warrant the assumption made by some historians that Nath Í was a leader of Scottic *foederati* brought to Gaul by the Romans. In fact, the whole legend looks very like a doublet of Niall's. No early confirmation of Nath Í's exploits appears to exist in Irish sources: they are not referred to by Tírechán, who was a direct descendant of Nath Í's son Amalgaid. It is noteworthy, nevertheless, that Silva Vocluti 'beside the western sea', the only Irish place-name mentioned by St Patrick in his *Confession* (and probably the place of his captivity, despite the better-known claims of Slemish in Antrim), should be located in the county Mayo barony of Tirawley which preserves the name and extent of the kingdom ruled by Amalgaid's descendants: Tírechán identified it correctly with Fochaill, now Foghill on the western shore of Killala Bay.

We cannot here enter fully into the thorny controversies which surround the missions of Palladius and St Patrick, but the tangled chronology of the latter is inextricably involved with that of Niall. Briefly, it is now generally acknowledged that the only first-hand sources for Patrick's mission are the two works from his own pen, the *Confession* and the *Epistle to Coroticus*, and that the seventh-century *Lives* by Muirchú and Tírechán, while of prime importance for the history of Armagh's claims, are of very little value for the biography of the saint. More recently, it has been realised that the fifth-century annals are hardly contemporary documents, and were in fact compiled much later

in accordance with the official doctrine. Nevertheless, their evidence cannot be wholly ignored. They all agree in giving Patrick's arrival as a missionary in 432, but there are two widely differing obits of the saint: one c.461/2 and the other thirty years later c.492/3. There is also an obit at 457.

It seems clear that the 432 date is based on the arrival of Palladius in 431. Prosper of Aquitaine tells us that he was sent by Pope Celestine to the Irish Christians as their first bishop. The Irish duly entered the date of his mission in their annals but obviously had no independent traditions about it and gave varied reasons for its supposed failure. The Armagh chroniclers had to date Patrick's mission as close as possible to that of Palladius in order not to rob their saint of his position as the apostle of the Irish. The theory of the 'two Patricks', brilliantly propounded by T. F. O'Rahilly, had in fact been anticipated by some of the medieval scholars: a passage in the *Book of Armagh* says that Palladius was also called Patrick, while other sources have vague references to 'the other Patrick'. Without subscribing to the 'two Patricks' theory (namely, that Palladius-Patricius, active as a missionary from 431 to 461, was succeeded by Patricius the Briton, author of the *Confession*, who died a generation later), we may suspect that some of the seventh-century traditions originally referred to Palladius and have been transferred, whether deliberately or as a result of genuine confusion, to the figure of Patrick.

Professor Carney has argued that the peculiar 457 obit was meant to record the arrival of Patrick, and there is much to support this view. It is clearly impossible to hope that we shall ever be able to give exact dates for his mission, but a difference of thirty years cannot be dismissed as the mere hesitation over a year or two normal in the early annals. Unfortunately Patrick's own writings are ambiguous: he mentions no Irish personal names and only one place-name, and his references to Britain and Gaul are almost equally tantalising. We know so little about the state of Britain in the fifth century that to try to correct Irish chronology with the help of British is to explain *obscurum per obscurius*. The internal evidence of Patrick's writings does perhaps favour the earlier dating, especially in view of the confidence the saint expresses in his *Romanitas*, and the lack of explicit references to the chaos which we presume to have prevailed in the late fifth century. But this is far from conclusive: our ignorance of the state of Britain (or of that region of it with which Patrick was familiar) forbids us to rule the later chronology out of court.

While the annals, Muirchú, Tírechán, the other documents in the *Book of Armagh* and the ninth-century *Vita Tripartita* are at best secondary authorities, the historian cannot overlook the fact that they all bring Patrick into contact with persons whose obits occur at the end of the fifth century or the beginning of the sixth. One might disregard the chronology of these late sources were it not for their remarkable unanimity. Even though the annalistic obits for this period are not contemporary records, it is perfectly clear from the genealogies together with the firmly recorded obits of descendants of these persons in later centuries that the fifth-century dates are not far from the truth. The traditions of the Ulaid, Laigin and Uí Néill agree with those of Munster and Connacht in synchronising Patrick with dynasts of the late fifth century. In fact, Lóeguire son of Niall, the high-king, whose obit is given c.461, is by far the earliest of the group.

The Irish tradition, for what it is worth, placed Patrick's arrival in the fourth or fifth year of Lóeguire's reign. Thus the later synchronists made Lóeguire succeed Nath Í in 428/9, although Nath Í's own death is recorded in the annals under the year 445. Carney has shown that the *Annals of Ulster* have a precise calculation (modelled on the obits of popes and Roman emperors) to the effect that Lóeguire died seven years, seven months and seven days after the Feast of Tara, which they record him as having celebrated in 454. Although this is quite artificial, it does confirm our belief that the *Feis Temro* was the inauguration feast of the high-king (the *Annals of Inisfallen* place the celebration of the feast in 456 and Lóeguire's obit in 463).

In an obvious attempt to save the phenomena, some annals (such as the *Chronicum Scotorum*, the *Annals of the Four Masters*, and the World Chronicle prefixed to the *Annals of Inisfallen*) give Nath Í an obit under the year 428. They also place Niall's death c.405. The *Annals of Ulster* do not mention Niall, but as they begin with the mission of Palladius in 431 the compiler evidently accepted an earlier date for the obit of Niall. O'Rahilly, on sound evidence, would eliminate Nath Í altogether from the list of high-kings of Tara—he is ignored by the oldest source, the seventh-century *Baile Chuind**—and thus places Niall's death in or around 427. This still leaves us with the apparent anachronism of Niall's association with his alleged slayer, Eochu mac Éndai, whose brother's obit is given c.483/5, and with Ercc mac Echach Muinremair (ob.474 *AFM*). Furthermore, Daui Galach, king of Connacht, son of Niall's eldest brother Bríon, is recorded as having been slain c.502.

* See Appendix I, pp. 276 f.

In fact, as Carney has pointed out, all known persons with whom Niall is associated belong to the latter half of the fifth century. The traditional annalistic and genealogical material is perfectly consistent except insofar as Niall's own obit is concerned. We may agree with O'Rahilly that Nath Í was never high-king of Tara, and, while accepting Carney's thesis that Niall died c.452, assign him a longer reign than one beginning with Nath Í's death c.445.

The internal chronology of the Uí Néill dynasty also demands that Niall's obit be placed in the middle of the century. The unimpeachable evidence of the bulk of his descendants' obits in the later annals all points to such a date. His grandsons Lugaid and Ardgal, for instance, died in 507 and 520 or 523 respectively, and his great-grandsons Muirchertach Mac Ercae, Tuathal Máelgarb and Diarmait mac Cerbaill in 536, 544 and 565, while another great-grandson, Ninnid mac Duach, fought in the battle of Cúl Dreimne in 561, and the contemporary annalistic records of their descendants in turn corroborate this chronology. The annals for the fifth century are not first-class witnesses, yet even they have no obit of any of Niall's sons earlier than 440 (Maine), and place the deaths of Lóeguire, Eógan and Conall Cremthainne in or around 462, 465 and 480. They further suggest that his eldest son Coirpre was alive in 485, when he won a battle over the Leinstermen at Granard, and as late as 501 another victory of his over the same enemy occurs in a secondary interpolation into the *Annals of Ulster*. Another son, Fiachu, appears in the annals for 516 as victor over the Leinster sept of Uí Failge at Druim Derge. It is true, however, that the names of Coirpre, Fiachu, Maine and Lóeguire continue to be used in later centuries simply to denote the kingdoms or dynasties descended from these sons of Niall, just as we find the names Benjamin, Dan or Juda similarly used in the Bible, so that absolute certainty as to the meaning of these last three annalistic entries is not possible.

That Niall should have died not earlier than 450 agrees very well with the theory which would place the fall of Emain Macha in that year. The creation of the satellite kingdoms of Airgialla was a direct consequence of that event, and these could hardly have given their nine hostages to a king who had been dead for a generation or more. We see then that the pre-dating of Niall's obit is due in part to the Palladian chronology of the Patrician mission, and in part to the insertion of Nath Í into the regnal lists between Niall and Lóeguire. The Irish sources, however little relation they may bear to the historical St Patrick, are overwhelmingly and independently in favour of assigning a

missionary period of c.450–92 to the saint remembered in Armagh tradition. There is good reason too to doubt Nath Í's occupation of Tara, although his son Ailill Molt did become high-king. When these distortions have been removed, the chronology of the annals and genealogies falls into place quite neatly.

MacNeill suggested that Patrick's choice of Armagh was influenced by the ancient glories of Emain Macha. The choice makes even better sense if we accept the alternative Irish tradition that Emain did not fall until the middle of the fifth century. Muirchú makes it clear (and we can sympathise with him) that the traditions of Patrick's career in his day were confused and perplexing. Yet the independent Ulaid, ruling over the eastern rump of their old kingdom, continued to venerate Armagh, although the see was now in Airgialla territory and thus under the indirect control of their hereditary enemies the Uí Néill. Moreover, the Ulaid boasted possession of Patrick's body at Saul or Downpatrick, and had many monasteries in their land—notably Bangor with its wealth and learning—which must have shared in the general hostility to Armagh's claims in the seventh century. In fact the Ulaid acknowledged Armagh's primacy long before they became reconciled even to the concept of an Uí Néill high-kingship. Dr Binchy has put forward the highly probable hypothesis that Patrick may have retired from Armagh to Downpatrick along with his defeated patrons the Ulster kings: the hagiographers, committed as they are to the theory that Armagh was part of Airgialla from its foundation, are obviously embarrassed by the saint's death at Saul. The destruction of Emain Macha and the collapse of the Ulster Fifth brought chaos to the embryonic diocesan system established by the early missionaries, and our sources exhibit great confusion as to the immediate successors of Patrick in the see of Armagh.

The rise of the great monastic churches in the sixth century further obscured the ecclesiastical picture and ensured that the historians of Armagh in the seventh century had largely to grope in the dark, with the help of fragmentary documents, oral traditions and local memories in the various churches which claimed a Patrician foundation. While the records assembled by Tírechán of Patrick's activities in Meath and especially in north Connacht may well be partly genuine, the saint's alleged close association with the sons of Niall and his confrontation with Lóeguire at Tara doubtless respresent the contemporary efforts of Armagh to enlist the support of the Uí Néill and to wean them away from attachment to such centres as Clonmacnoise (which Tírechán specifically mentions as hostile) and to the extensive monastic federation

founded by Colum Cille their kinsman. The ecclesiastical *terminus* or quasi-diocesan sphere of jurisdiction defined for Armagh in the eighth-century *Liber Angueli* is in some degree at variance with the political geography of the time, reflecting the conditions of an earlier age. Thus it comprises the kingdom of Ulaid (extending to the Boyne or at least to Druimne Breg north of the river) together with that of Airgialla, but excludes the Uí Néill territories and the petty kingdom of Dál Riata in the Glens of Antrim, which followed its kings—now long settled in Argyll—in accepting the Columban jurisdiction of Iona.

We learn from Patrick's *Epistle to Coroticus* that the new British kingdoms which arose in the aftermath of the Roman withdrawal were not merely capable of repelling Irish raiders but occasionally turned the tables on them. In Welsh tradition Cunedda, who may have been the father of Coroticus, is credited with the expulsion of the Irish settlers in North Wales. The Middle Irish saga of the death of Lóeguire refers to the cessation of Irish raiding expeditions. According to this text Lóeguire invaded Leinster to levy the *bóruma* tribute but was defeated and captured by the Laigin. He was released only after swearing by sun and moon, water and air, day and night, sea and land, that he would never again attempt to claim the cattle tribute. Such oaths by the elements are commonplace in Irish literature and seem an ancient Celtic inheritance: when the Danubian Celts made a treaty with Alexander the Great, so Arrian tells us, he thought them the most vainglorious of men, since when asked what they feared most they replied, 'nothing save that the sky might fall on their heads'. Similar oaths occur in Hittite treaties of the second millenium BC. It had been prophesied to Lóeguire that he should meet his death between Ireland and Britain, and to avoid this fate he never raided on the Irish Sea. But he broke his oath to the Laigin and attacked them again, only to be slain mysteriously by his sureties, the sun and the wind, at a spot on Mag Liphi between two hills called Ériu and Alba.

The geographical distribution of the Uí Néill kingdoms and their expansion over the course of the sixth and subsequent centuries give us good reason to agree with MacNeill as against O'Rahilly that they set out from a Connacht base. This can hardly have been other than Cruachu, the traditional capital of that province. Cruachu is not a hill-fort such as Tara, Ailech or Ailenn, but a concentration of large ring-forts arranged in military fashion as a large encampment on a slight eminence commanding a wide view of Mag nAí in county Roscommon.

We have no trustworthy account of the actual conquest of north-west

Ulster by Conall, Eógan and Éndae, but it is noteworthy that Donegal was thoroughly colonised, since we hear of few if any tributary kingdoms in this area: although the Cenél Conaill split into several septs, each of which formed its own petty kingdom, all the local princes were descendants of Niall. By contrast, the Southern Uí Néill created a patchwork of their own dynastic kingdoms in the midlands, in the interstices of which the indigenous tribes enjoyed some local autonomy as tributaries. The conquest of the North, then, was probably the first major effort of Niall's sons, and was obviously embarked upon from north Sligo: Conall was known as Conall Gulban, from Benn Gulban (the mountain of Benbulben). In this very area we find a kingdom of Cairpre, which then expanded right across Leitrim and the midlands to the barony of Carbury in county Kildare. The kingdom of Maine formed a parallel belt to the west, while Fiachu wrested southern Westmeath and parts of Offaly from the Laigin.

West of the Shannon Niall's brothers formed their own kingdoms, whose distribution likewise points to a radial expansion from Cruachu. For several centuries the Uí Fiachrach were most prominent. Their northern branch, Uí Fiachrach in Tuaisceirt, had two main lines: the Uí Fiachrach Muaide of the Moy estuary and the Fir Chera of the barony of Carra in Mayo. On the southern border of Connacht over against Munster were the Uí Fiachrach Aidne, whose territory in the twelfth century was represented by the diocese of Kilmacduagh: in the earlier period it may have been considerably larger, for they provided several kings of Connacht in the sixth and seventh centuries, of whom the best known was Guaire Aidne, the paragon of princely generosity. All septs of the Uí Fiachrach gave kings to Connacht until in the eighth century the Uí Briúin, who had kept to the central plain of Mag nAí around Cruachu itself, increased in strength and came to monopolise the provincial over-kingship. The Uí Briúin divided soon into several dynastic kingdoms spread across Connacht, and one of these, the Uí Briúin Bréifne, expanded east of the Shannon into the difficult and largely desolate terrain of Leitrim and Cavan. The Bréifne kingdom does not figure in the annals before the end of the eighth century, but it was to grow rapidly and its royal family of Ua Ruairc was to play an important part in the history of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In many respects the eastward and westward spread of the Uí Briúin affords a parallel to the course of the early conquests of the Connachta and Uí Néill. While the dynasties founded by Fiachra and Brión thus flourished, the descendants of Ailill, though retaining for a while their

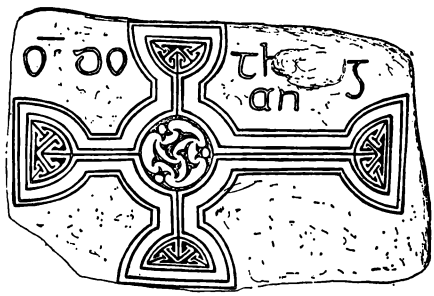
own minor kingdom (commemorated by the Sligo barony of Tirerrill), neither attained the over-kingship of the province nor achieved any historical prominence. Similarly, their Uí Néill cousins descended from Éndae never expanded beyond their territory around Raphoe and were eventually absorbed into Tír Conaill. The failure of a third line to maintain itself against two rival collateral branches is a recurring phenomenon in Irish dynastic history.

Whatever the validity of Nath Í's claims to be the high-kingship, his son Ailill Molt is universally recognised in the records as king of Tara. The annals mention his celebration of the Feast of Tara in 467 or 470, his battles against the Laigin, and his death at the battle of Ochae around 482. But they display a curious variety in their enumeration of his slayers: some attribute his death to his Uí Néill cousins and successors Lugaid son of Lóeguire and Muirchertach Mac Ercae, others to the king of Dál nAraidi or the king of Leinster or to a combination of these. It seems clear that the original annal simply recorded his death and the name of the battle, and that further details were supplied by later glossators on the basis of discrepant traditions. Nevertheless, it is certain from the entry in the *Annals of Ulster* that the battle of Ochae was a significant event, for chronological calculations are given dating it from the death of the legendary Conchobar mac Nessa and the death of Cormac mac Airt. From now on the high-kingship of Tara was a prerogative of Niall's family: the unity of the original Connachta was broken and the name restricted to the western kingdoms.

Early texts refer to the Uí Briúin, Uí Fiachrach and Uí Ailello as 'the Three Connachta', but with the decline of the Uí Ailello and the eventual exclusion of the Uí Fiachrach from the provincial kingship, the phrase was subjected to frequent reinterpretation. An important western kingdom which retained considerable power and autonomy was that of Uí Maine. The Uí Maine extended over the south of county Roscommon and south-east Galway, but by the twelfth century had been reduced to the area of the diocese of Clonfert, although after the Anglo-Norman invasion the O'Kellys of 'Hy Many' shifted the centre of their lordship northwards once more. The prominence of Uí Maine was recognised by the genealogists, who endowed them with a fictitious pedigree which linked them with the Airgialla and thus (according to the official doctrine) reckoned them as Connachta or descendants of Conn Cétchathach. Later archaising scholars feigned to regard them as one of the Three Connachta along with the O'Connors of Uí Briúin Aí and the O'Rourkes of Uí Briúin Bréifne, whose unprofitable lands in

Leitrim and Cavan became known as Garbthrian Connacht, 'the rough third of Connachta'.

Meanwhile, from the Connachta tribal complex of prehistory a new dynasty had emerged: the Uí Néill. They organised their conquests in the north and midlands on a territorial and dynastic basis. They broke away from pure tribalism and established the high-kingship of Tara (whose hieratic functions were soon to be rendered obsolete) as a symbol of suzerainty over a lordship which cut across the ancient provincial divisions. Ironically, it was to be descendants of the excluded Connacht kings who in the twelfth century came nearest to transforming this high-kingship into an effective monarchy of Ireland.



6

Diarmait mac Cerbaill and the consolidation of Uí Néill power

The two great Southern Uí Néill dynasties of the midlands were the Síl nÁedo Sláine (the Seed of Áed of Slane), kings of Brega in the east, and the Clann Cholmáin Máir (the Children of Colmán the Great) in Mide with their centre in the heart of modern Westmeath. The former are more prominent in the seventh century, but after the death of Cináed mac Írgalaig in 728 all the high-kings of the Southern Uí Néill come from the Clann Cholmáin except for a brief period between 944 and 956 when the king of Knowth, Congalach Cnogba, restored the high-kingship to the Brega line.*

The Southern Uí Néill territories consisted of the over-kingdoms of Mide and Brega together with the ancient territory of Tethbae in Longford which was divided between the dynasties of Cairpre and Maine. The Uí Néill kingdom of Cenél Fiachach fell within the jurisdiction of Mide, while those of Ardgal and Lóegaire were reckoned part of Brega. The Síl nÁedo Sláine owned the site of Tara, but their princes resided at Ráith Airthir (Oristown), Loch nGabor (Lagore), and, from the beginning of the ninth century, at Cnogba (Knowth). The Clann Cholmáin claimed the title *rig Uisnig* 'kings of Uisnech', after the sacred umbilical hill in their territory, and in the tenth and eleventh centuries their Ua Máelshechlainn kings dwelt at Dún na Sciath beside Lough Ennell or at Cró-inis on the lake itself.

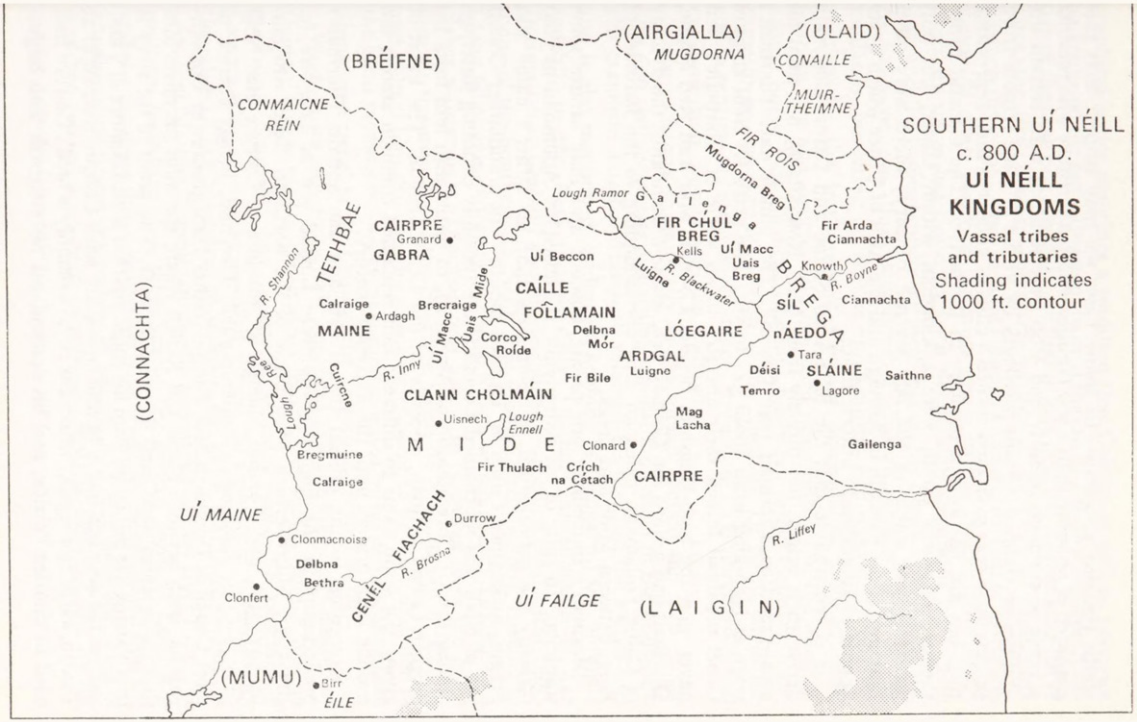
This picture is constructed from the detailed references in the

* See Appendix II, Tables 2, 3.

literature and records of the ninth and subsequent centuries and from the regnal lists and genealogies compiled by the Middle Irish synthetic historians. It is unlikely, however, to give a true idea of the genesis of the Uí Néill states in the archaic era. The regnal lists in particular present a false image of stability and dynastic continuity for the whole of Ireland in the sixth and seventh centuries. What little information we can derive from older sources suggests that a much more fluid situation preceded the formation of these territorial kingdoms. In various parts of the country loose tribal federations existed, while elsewhere a dominant dynasty exercised a vague supremacy over such tribes and rendered them tributary. The sixth and seventh centuries saw the consolidation of some such dynasties and the decline of others, but territorial boundaries are difficult to define.

Old tribal groups stubbornly persisted, often clinging to the poor lands in bogs and on mountain slopes, and in isolated patches cut off from their nearest kin. Many survived as fully formed tribal kingdoms; others left only their names in local topography. In some cases a branch of the overlord dynasty took over a tribal kingship and retained its ancient name: thus the Uí Néill kings of Knowth were also styled kings of Ciannachta from the eighth century, as they had conquered the lands of that tribe south of the lower Boyne; but north of the river the Ciannacht kings kept their royal status as lords of a reduced domain in Fir Ardda Ciannachta (the barony of Ferrard), and even succeeded in repelling the attempt of Cummascach, king of Knowth, to intrude his son Cináed as sub-king there in 828. Elsewhere, as in the north of county Meath—where it is very hard to delimit the lands of the Uí Moccu Uais Breg, the Mugdorna Breg, the Gailenga, and the branch of the Síl nÁedo Sláine known as Fir Chúl Breg—the evidence suggests a truly tribal polity of kindred or ethnic groups rather than strictly territorial units. Sometimes, indeed, the under-dogs were able to make a recovery: when the Fir Chúl Breg died out their kingdom was taken over by the Gailenga; the Luigni too re-established their kingdom on the extinction of their Uí Néill overlords, the Cenél nArdgail; and when the Síl nÁedo Sláine had been weakened by the persistent hostility of the Clann Cholmáin, various members of the Gailenga and cognate tribes, the Luigni and Saitne, were able in the eleventh and twelfth centuries to claim the title *rí Breg* 'king of Brega', and the Déisi Temro of Tara re-emerged as an independent kingdom after having been eclipsed since the eighth century.

The genealogies are full of references to extremely obscure tribes and septs which never find their way into the annalistic record and whose


SOUTHERN UÍ NÉILL
c. 800 A.D.
UÍ NÉILL KINGDOMS
Vassal tribes and tributaries
Shading indicates 1000 ft. contour
(BRÉIFNE)
(AIRGIALLA)
MUGDORNA
(ULAID)
CONAILLE
MUIR-THEIMNE
CONMAICNE RÉIN
FIR ROIS
Mugdorna Breg
Lough Ramor
Gailenga
FIR CHUL BREG
Fir Arda Ciannachta
Kells
Uí Macc Uais Breg
Knowth
R. Boyne
R. Blackwater
Luigne
BRÉG
SÍL nÁEDO SLÁINE
Ciannachta
Saithne
Lagore
Tara
Déisi
Temro
TETHBAE
CAIRPRE GABRA
Granard
Uí Beccon
CAÍLLE FOLLAMAIN
Delbna Mór
LÓEGAIRE
ARDGAL
Luigne
Fir Bile
CLANN CHOLMÁIN
Mag Lacha
Gailenga
CAIRPRE
Crích na Cétach
Fir Thulach
Clonard
Uisnech
Lough Ennell
M I D E
Bregmuine
Calraige
Brecraige
Ardagh
MAINE
Uí Macc Uais Mide
Corco Roíde
R. Inny
Currene
R. Shannon
R. Boyle
(CONNACHTA)
Uí MAINE
Durrow
FIACHACH
R. Brosna
CENÉL
Clonmacnoise
Delbna Bethra
Clonfert
(MUMU)
Birr
ÉILE
Uí FAILGE
(L A I G I N)
R. Liffey

status remains uncertain. In many cases we may suspect that they consisted of no more than a few families within a territory who retained a sense of common identity and who were afflicted with certain disabilities or claimed certain privileges by virtue of some remote tribal origin; these may even have owned a chief or kinglet as their representative, but did not form a territory in themselves. The Conailli Muirtheimne of north Louth were a kingdom within Ulster, but only achieved that status in the late seventh century; there were other branches of the Conailli in Armagh and the Ards of Ulster which never appear as kingdoms in historic times.

It is remarkable that the Síl nÁedo Sláine and Clann Cholmáin derive their origin, not directly from Niall Noígiallach, but from his great-grandson Diarmait mac Cerbaill. The annals date Diarmait's reign as high-king from about 544 to 565. The petty Uí Néill kings of Cenél nArdgail traced their ancestry to an uncle of Diarmait's, but never won the high-kingship. Besides Colmán Már and Áed Sláine, Diarmait had a third son Colmán Bec, whose descendants, the dynasty of Caílle Follamain, ruled an area corresponding to the baronies of Fore, between Mide and Brega.

Diarmait's immediate origins are obscure and may arouse some suspicion. In spite of his patronymic (latinised by Adomnán as *filius Cerbulis*) the genealogical tradition says that his father's name was Fergus, nicknamed *Cerrbél* or 'crooked mouth'. His grandfather Conall son of Niall was nicknamed Cremthainne (possibly denoting fosterage among the Uí Chremthainn of Airgialla), to distinguish him from his brother Conall Gulban, ancestor of the Cenél Conaill. The habit of giving the same name to different sons remained common among the prolific Irish princes until the sixteenth century.

According to the official regnal lists and the annals, Diarmait's predecessors in the high-kingship were Lugaid son of Lóeguire (c. 487–507), Muirchertach Mac Ercae of the northern Cenél nEógain (c. 507–536), and Tuathal Máelgarb, grandson of Coirpre mac Néill (c. 536–544). Adomnán's contemporary, Tírechán, brings Patrick to meet Conall at Domnach Mór Pátraic (either Donaghmore or Donaghpatrick, both between Slane and Kells), where the saint promises him that his brothers' seed shall serve his for ever. The point of the story is that Patrick has just come from his confrontation with Lóeguire at Tara, and on the way has had a hostile encounter with Coirpre mac Néill at Tailtiu, *ubi fit agon regale*, 'where the royal assembly is held'. Coirpre had tried to murder Patrick, and his descendants were cursed. This hagio-

graphical notice enshrines a tradition that Coirpre as well as Lóeguire had enjoyed the high-kingship: to hold the fair of Teltown was a prerogative of the king of Tara. Now we find in fact that the earliest king-list of Tara, the *Baile Chuind*, which was written in the reign of Fínsnechta Fledach (675–695), does include Coirpre's name after that of Lóeguire, though it omits many of the kings found in the Middle Irish lists.* Coirpre's name has evidently been deliberately expunged from these lists, and the hagiographers set their seal on the decline of his dynasty. As we have seen, three kingdoms of Cairpre survived: two in the midlands, bordering on Bréifne and Leinster and separated from one another by the territories of Conall's descendants, Colmán Már, Colmán Bec and Ardgal, and the third quite isolated in the north of county Sligo. This northern kingdom, when not under Connacht rule, came to be regarded as portion of the Northern Uí Néill, for in the eighth century the intrusive Connacht dynasty of Uí Briúin Bréifne had cut it off from contact with the midlands.

Coirpre figures prominently in the annals around the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries as battling against the Laigin in the midlands. His grandson Tuathal Máelgarb retained his place in the regnal lists and is also mentioned, under the kenning of Óengarb ('the uniquely rough'), in the *Baile Chuind*. After Tuathal's assassination in 544 Diarmait mac Cerbaill and his descendants captured permanent hegemony of the Southern Uí Néill. The Clonmacnoise writers, basking in Clann Cholmáin patronage, created a saga which placed Tuathal in a rather sinister light: Diarmait was hiding in outlawry from the high-king in the marshes of the Shannon when he encountered St Ciarán and helped him drive in the stakes which were to be the foundation of the great monastery—an event commemorated by his descendant Flann Sinna on a panel of the Cross of the Scriptures erected in 901.

We have already tentatively suggested that the kingdom founded by Coirpre represented a thrust deep into the midlands from a base in north-east Connacht and Longford. In later times the kingdom of Cairpre Mór centred at Granard shared the country of Tethbae with the other Uí Néill kingdom of Maine to the south. But there are indications that Maine's kingdom originally spread beyond the river Inny (the southern boundary of Tethbae) down the eastern banks of Loch Ree and the Shannon into county Offaly. A tradition incorporated into the annals asserts that a descendant of Maine, Áed mac Brénainn, king of Tethbae (ob. 589), granted Durrow in Offaly to Colum Cille. By the

* See Appendix I, pp. 276–7.

eleventh century, when Tethbae had largely been conquered by the Conmaicne Réin satellites of the O'Rourkes of Bréifne, we find the name Tethbae as well as its Cenél Maine dynasty transferred to this southern region on the borders of Westmeath and Offaly. From an early date many kings of Tethbae and Maine were buried at Clonmacnoise.

Across the Shannon from Mide lay the lands of the Uí Maine of Connacht. In early times they stretched far north into Roscommon and thus bordered on the like-named Uí Néill kingdom of Cenél Maine. Clonmacnoise held the graves of their kings too, and it is possible that there was originally but one kingdom of Maine embracing both shores of the middle Shannon. The eastern portion of the kingdom thus probably extended south of Tethbae to include overlordship over the Cuircne, Bregmuine, Calraige and Delbna Bethra. Clonmacnoise itself was in Delbna Bethra, and another branch of the same people, the Delbna Nuadat, were situated north of Clonmacnoise between the Suck and the Shannon, and were subject to the Uí Maine Connacht.

In 538 Diarmait mac Cerbaill's brother Maine (the coincidence of his name is quite fortuitous) was defeated and slain at the battle of Cláenloch near Gort in south Galway. According to the *Annals of Tigernach*, a Clonmacnoise compilation, he was slain by the king of Uí Fiachrach Aidne, Goibnenn mac Conaill, while attempting to claim the homage of the Uí Maine Connacht. In the later king-lists Maine mac Cerbaill is called king of Uisnech. In the minds of the compilers this meant that he was over-king of the Southern Uí Néill, but this is probably an anachronism, especially since Tuathal Máelgarb is supposed to have been high-king of Tara at this date.

Nevertheless, the tradition that the Uí Néill claimed suzerainty over the Uí Maine Connacht is probably genuine. They failed, and the Uí Maine were incorporated into the Connacht over-kingdom and accorded special privileges modelled on those enjoyed by the Airgialla within the Uí Néill hegemony. They were also, as we have seen, provided with a pedigree which connected them distantly with the Connachta and Uí Néill: most versions made them descend from Colla Fo Chrí, one of the fictitious founders of Airgialla; but other authorities said that their ancestor was Domnall, brother of Niall's grandfather Muiredach Tírech.

As for the Cenél Maine maic Néill, our two earliest genealogical manuscripts (both of which date from the twelfth century) differ irreconcilably as to the pedigree of that Áed mac Brénainn who granted Durrow to Colum Cille. We may suspect then that eastern Maine was

so successfully absorbed into the Uí Néill ambit that their kings, by a politic fiction, were accepted into the dominant dynastic circle. The parting of the ways between Connachta and Uí Néill then led to the total separation of the Uí Maine and Cenél Maine. The fact that the annalistic obit of Maine mac Néill in 440 is so much earlier than that of any of his supposed brothers also suggests that he was adopted into the dynasty some time after the synthetic historians had agreed to push back the date of Niall's reign by a generation or more.

Statements in the genealogies indicate that the territory of Lóegaire also extended at one time from Upper Loch Erne to Slieve Bloom on the Munster border. Even in later times septs of the name Uí Lóegaire still dwelt to the south of Lough Ennell and in the tributary kingdom of Uí Beccon in the far north of Mide, although the actual kingdom of Lóegaire was confined to an area around Trim and Navan. In the south-west, the Cenél Fiachach occupied lands in county Offaly. Their ancestor Fiachu mac Néill is said to have won the plain of Mide from the Laigin. The extent of their kingdom is described as from Birr to Uisnech—it was also known as Fir Chell.

Our evidence for the crucial period of formation of the Uí Néill kingdoms is confusing and never very reliable. Not only have early records been lost or suppressed, but the Middle Irish scholars who compiled the extant traditions were always predisposed to see the polity of their own day as ancient, immutable and preordained. But even on their own premises, the Síl nÁedo Sláine and Clann Cholmáin cannot have existed before the early seventh century. Through the mists of oblivion and calculated obfuscation we may discern a large-handed partition of the newly won midlands among the sons of Niall, which was disrupted by the ambitions of Diarmait, whose family dwelt around Slane and who also claimed descent from Niall. It is fatally easy to be too sceptical in dealing with Irish pedigrees: Diarmait's may quite well be genuine. The failure of his father and grandfather to achieve any distinction meant that under the *derbfhine* succession he and his sons were well on the way to political extinction, and this would explain the evident determination with which he pursued his objectives.

It is necessary to remind ourselves that in the century after Niall's death his descendants should normally have felt themselves to be a single *derbfhine*. But the wide extent of their conquests, which were still expanding, especially in the north, was accompanied by the carving out of individual kingdoms with no tribal or traditional basis. Unlike hereditary family land (*fintiu*), Irish kingdoms were normally indivisible. But the

depleted resources of royalty in the aftermath of the heroic age could not allow the permanence of a large kingdom under a single ruler. The abandonment of the great hill-forts is symptomatic of a decline in military and economic power. Munster, Leinster and Connacht were all divided into dynastic kingdoms whose origin was traced to a partition among the sons of a legendary ancestor. In the case of the Uí Néill the genealogists quoted a 'Testament of Niall':

> *Mo flaith do Chonall; mo ordan do Chrimthann; mo gaisced do Éogan; mo chrícha do Chairpriu; mo maisse do Énno; mo daithe & mo elgnus do Fhiachaich; mo chruth & mo chocad do Láegaire; mo eich & mo charpait & mo báede do Maine.*
>
> My sovereignty to Conall; my primacy (or succession) to Crimthann (i.e., Conall Cremthainne); my prowess (literally 'arms') to Eógan; my borders to Coirpre; my comeliness to Énda; my nimbleness and my mettlesome disposition to Fiachu; my form and my warfare to Lóeguire; my horses and my chariot and my kindliness to Maine.

Now by the eighth century the classical Uí Néill polity had emerged. We can see the Northern and Southern Uí Néill as fairly cohesive entities, sharing alternately in the titular high-kingship of Tara which was the symbolic bond of Uí Néill unity (never very manifest except when threatened by the hereditary enmity of the Ulaid or Laigin). The king of Cenél nEógain, when not high-king, is overlord of the North (In Fochlae), taking his title from the great fortress of Ailech. He claims the reluctant allegiance of the king of Cenél Conaill as well as of the lesser Uí Néill kingdoms in the north, and enjoys the tributes of the subject tribal kings. Similarly in the midlands, the king of Mide is sovereign of the Southern Uí Néill 'from the Shannon to the sea', although Brega retains a certain distinct character. The Síl nÁedo Sláine are still powerful locally and exercise suzerainty over all the tribes of Brega and apparently over the Uí Néill kings of Ardgal and Lóegaire as well: they are thus in the position of mesne lords in the political hierarchy.

Diarmait mac Cerbaill had a surprisingly unpropitious reign for so famous a king. The annalistic record is sparse but uniformly gloomy. His son Colmán Már was slain 'in his chariot' by a certain Dubsloit of the Cruthin in 555 or 558 (the dating of the sixth-century annals is full of uncertainty). In the latter year or in 560 Diarmait celebrated the

Feast of Tara, specifically described by the *Annals of Tigernach* as the last such occasion. The greatest defeat of his career took place in 561 at the battle of Cúl Dreimne, and in the following year he was defeated by Áed mac Brénainn of Tethbae at Cúl Uinsen. He had no part in the great battle of Móin Dairi Lothair in 563 by which the Northern Uí Néill crushed the power of the Cruthin west of the Bann and expanded into county Londonderry. It was the Cruthin over-king of Ulster, Áed Dub mac Suibni, who slew Diarmait in 565, and he was succeeded in the high-kingship by two of the victors of Cúl Dreimne, Forggus and Domnall, sons of Muirchertach Macc Ercae.

According to the rich saga tradition which grew up around the figure of Diarmait, he incurred the wrath of many powerful saints, although, as we have seen, Clonmacnoise revered his memory. The sixth century was the golden age of Irish monasticism, and the greatest among a galaxy of saints was Columba or Colum Cille, founder of Iona which became the centre of a network of Columban monasteries scattered throughout the north of Ireland and of Britain. Colum Cille belonged to the Uí Néill dynasty of Cenél Conaill. He was the pioneer of the Irish *peregrinatio* and the first saint of impeccably royal blood. Legend says that he had surreptitiously copied a book belonging to St Finnian; when the latter appealed to the high king Diarmait delivered the famous judgement: 'To every cow its calf and to every book its copy.' Colum Cille was so incensed that he incited his cousins, Ninnid mac Duach and Ainmere mac Sétnai of Cenél Conaill, to ally with Forggus and Domnall of Cenél nEógain and Áed mac Echach Tirmcharna, king of Connacht, to meet Diarmait in battle at Cúl Dreimne. The site of this encounter is at the foot of Benbulben just above the Columban church of Drumcliff. The saga tradition has infiltrated the annalistic account: the *Annals of Tigernach* do not mention the incident of the book, but say that one of the causes of the battle was the slaying by Diarmait of Curnán son of the Connacht king in violation of Colum Cille's protection. The *Annals of Ulster* merely say that the battle was won '*per orationes Coluim Chille*'. Both chronicles further report that Diarmait's army was protected by a druid barrier which proved ineffectual.

Both secular and hagiographical literature relate how Diarmait slew another Connacht prince, Áed Guaire of Uí Maine, in violation of the sanctuary of St Ruadán of Lorrha. Ruadán assembled Brendan of Birr and other prominent saints, 'the twelve apostles of Ireland', to fast against the king. They came to Tara and solemnly cursed it, since when

the site has remained desolate. This story has of course some historical justification insofar as it records the official abandonment of the pagan sacral kingship. But the traditions are not without sympathy for Diarmait: a poem is put in his mouth, *Mairg thachrus fri cléirchib cell*, 'Woe to him who contends with the clergy of the churches', which reflects more than a touch of anti-clericalism on the part of the medieval writer. Even the late *Life* of St Laisrian or Mo-Laisse of Devenish on Loch Erne—a typical product of the 'unreformed' Irish church of the twelfth century—represents that saint as remonstrating with the unpatriotic fanaticism of his brethren and as ensuring the salvation of Diarmait, although he cannot revoke the prophecy of his death. The same source tells how Colum Cille repented of the slaughter he had caused at Cúl Dreimne and went into exile to Scotland in obedience to the penance enjoined on him by Mo-Laisse.

Colum Cille's great biographer and kinsman, Adomnán, who was abbot of Iona from 679 to 704, refers twice in passing to the battle of Cúl Dreimne as having occurred two years before Colum Cille's departure for Iona, but he gives no information as to the battle itself or its causes. He does, however, refer to a synod held at Tailtiu where a sentence of excommunication was passed on the saint for certain 'trivial and very pardonable' offences. More surprisingly, perhaps, he condemns in no uncertain terms Áed Dub mac Suibni, the slayer of Diarmait and an apostate priest: '*Aidus Niger, valde sanguinarius homo et multorum fuerat trucidator. Qui et Diormitium filium Cerbulis totius Scotiae regnatorem deo auctore ordinatum interfecerat.*' ('Aid the Black, verily a man of blood, who had slain Diarmait the son of Cerball, who had been ordained by God's authority as ruler of all Ireland.') Adomnán gives no hint of any enmity between Colum Cille and Diarmait (unless the holding of the synod of Tailtiu on the site of the high-king's great assembly be interpreted as such). Elsewhere he depicts the saint giving a friendly warning to Diarmait's son Áed Sláine against the *fingal* or kin-slaying which was to make his dynasty a by-word:

> 'My son, you must take heed lest by reason of the sin of parricide you lose the prerogative of monarchy over the kingdom of all Ireland, predestined for you by God (*tibi a deo totius Everniae regni praerogativam monarchiae praedestinatam*). For if ever you commit that sin, you will enjoy not the whole kingdom of your father, but only some part of it, in your own tribe (*aliqua parte in gente tua*), and for but a short time.'

These words of the saint were fulfilled exactly according to his

prediction. For after Aid had treacherously killed Suibne, Colman's son, he had dominion over the part of the kingdom that had been conceded to him for no more, as it is told, than four years and three months.*

It is interesting that Adomnán should stress the Christian character of the kingship: he refers in very similar terms to Oswald of Northumbria as '*totius Brittanniae imperator a deo ordinatus*' ('ordained by God emperor of all Britain'). But, unlike his contemporary Muirchú, he keeps a prudent silence concerning Tara. Adomnán and Muirchú afford us the earliest unequivocal statements of the Uí Néill claims to high-kingship over all Ireland.

But nothing in Diarmait's life became him like the leaving it. His *Aided* or Death-tale contains the characteristic motif of the Three-fold Death. Like the mythical Cocaire mac Etarscélai, Diarmait met his death at the house of a mysterious hospitaller. This was Banbán of Ráith Bec, 'the small ring-fort', which lies beside Ráith Mór, the chief royal seat of the Cruthin dynasty of Dál nAraidi a couple of miles east of Antrim town.

The prophet Bécc mac Dé foretold that Áed Dub mac Suibni Araidi would be Diarmait's bane, and the young prince, then being fostered by the high king, is banished from Ireland. St Ruadán, too, when cursing Tara, had prophesied that the ridge-beam would fall on Diarmait. It was accordingly pulled down and cast out to sea. Such conflicting predictions led Diarmait to enquire the true cause of his death from his druids. The fey atmosphere of the saga is conveyed by Standish O'Grady's translation:

> His magicians were brought to Dermot, and he enquired of them what manner of death he should encounter. 'Slaughter', said the first magician: 'and 'tis a shirt grown from a single flax-seed, with a mantle of one sheep's wool, that on the night of thy death shall be about thee.' 'A light matter it is for me to evade that', Dermot said. 'Drowning', said the second magician: 'and it is ale brewed of one grain of corn that thou shalt despatch that night.' 'Burning', quoth the third wizard: 'and bacon of swine that never was farrowed—that is what shall be on thy dish.' Dermot said: 'all this is unlikely.'
>
> Then on his regal circuit Dermot travelled right-handed round Ireland, that is to say: from Tara into Leinster; thence into Munster;

* Translation by A. O. & M. O. Anderson. Áed Sláine slew his nephew Suibne mac Colmáin in the year 600.

thence into Connacht, and athwart Ulster's province; so that at the end of a year's progress he would by *samhain* again reach Tara in time to perform his *samhain*-tide office and to meet the men of Ireland at Tara's festival.

One day then as Dermot was on this circuit, he saw a warrior enter the house to him and: 'whence comest thou?' he asked. 'Not from any distance', he replied: 'come along and spend with me a night of guestly entertainment.' 'Good', said Dermot, 'tell Mughain.' 'Not so', she answered: 'so long as I live, never will I go on an invitation; and if thou eat, it is in my despite; for to go upon an invitation will have an ill event for thee.'*

With Banbhan Dermot goes to Rathbeg, and when they were set down in the house they saw a graceful young woman enter, with raiment that was rarely fine. 'Whence the woman?' Dermot queried. Banbhan made answer: 'a daughter to me she is and, to spite Mughain because she came not with me, the girl shall this night be thy wife.' 'I am well pleased', quoth the king.

Pending the preparation of meat a bed was made for them, and Banbhan said: 'Well, girl, hast thou brought raiment for the king?' 'I have', she said, and handed shirt and mantle, which the king took and put on. 'Tis a good shirt', said all. 'It is one worthy of thee', said Banbhan, 'being the shirt of one flax-seed: a fanciful girl is that one there, and she it was that sowed a single seed of flax and made a strike of it, which then became a ridge-full.' 'Tis a good mantle', cried all. 'Good it is', said Banbhan: 'of a single sheep's wool 'tis made.'

Then meat and liquor were supplied to them, and said Banbhan: 'the bacon that never was farrowed is good.' 'How so?' asked Dermot. 'It was pigs that were with young: they took knives to them so that their piglings (and they alive) were extracted from them, and fattened afterwards.' 'Tis good ale!', said all. 'Good it is', said

* Mugain was Diarmait's wife and her name suggests divine affinities. The tale *Geinemain Áeda Sláine* tells how her barrenness was cured through the blessing of St Finnian of Mag Bile and how she gave birth first to a spotless lamb, then to a silver salmon, and finally to Áed Sláine: 'good are his clan too in Bregia: good in respect of profuseness, of renown, of honour; of hardihood, of lifting tribute, of holding the upper hand; of rectitude, of heroic practice, of brilliancy; of dealing with church orders, of exercising hospitallers' functions, of compassionateness. . . . For "a golden wand across a plate of white bronze", that is what the seed of Aedh Sláine are athwart Bregia's plain; and all opulence whatsoever, every grandly ordered household, 'tis with that of Aedh Sláine that men compare it.'

Banbhan, 'ale brewed of a single grain of corn: it was one day that I went out to survey my tillage, and I killed a ringdove; in whose crop was found one grain, but of what cereal was unknown. It was committed to a ridge, however, and its yield was a sickle-full. This again was sown, and this is its produce in the shape of ale.'

After this Dermot looked upwards, and said: 'the lower part of the house is new, but its upper-work is not recent.' Banbhan answered: 'it was once upon a time that in currachs we went to take fish, and we saw towards us the ridgebeam of a house that floated on the sea. For the curiosity of the thing I had a house made with it.' Dermot said now: 'truthfully was Beg's prophecy uttered!' and with that sprang to get out. 'This is thy way!' said Black Aedh in the doorway, giving him at the same a spear in the breast that pierced him through and so broke his spine. Then Dermot turns back into the house; on the outside, Ulster surrounds the dwelling, and the same is burnt upon them that are in it. Dermot himself entered the ale-vat, and anon the mansion's roof-tree fell on his head so that he died.

Diarmait's slaying by the Ulster king is no mere incident in the warfare between the Uí Néill and their ancient enemies, but has been raised to a mythological plane. The saga-writer has anachronistically portrayed Diarmait as exercising the prerogative of a royal circuit which was assigned to the high-king by later political theorists, but Banbán has not invited him to an earthly meal.

MacBeth is but the best-known of Celtic kings lured to their doom by the false security of contradictory prophecies. One of the earliest literary notices of the Three-Fold Death is found in Adomnán in relation, not to Diarmait (whose Christian character he is anxious to stress), but to his enemy Áed Dub. Colum Cille prophesies:

'And Aid, unworthily ordained, will return like a dog to his vomit, and he will again be a bloody killer, and at last, pierced with a spear, will fall from wood into water, and die by drowning. He has deserved such an end much sooner, who has slaughtered the king of all Ireland. . . .'

And Aid the Black, priest only in name, returned to his former evil deeds, and, pierced with a spear by treachery, fell from the prow of a ship, into the water of a lake, and perished.*

* Andersons' translation.

Here the triple death prophesied seems to have been: by wounding, by falling from a tree, by drowning. These themes lead us into the murky depths of comparative mythology, confronting us with such figures as that of Odin the hanged god, pierced by a spear and suspended over Mimir's well.

In Irish tradition the Three-fold Death usually takes the form of *guin*, *bádud*, *loscad*—wounding, drowning and burning. Death by wounding in the attempt to escape from a burning house was to be sure no uncommon end to a dynastic feud in the early middle ages, and has nothing peculiarly supernatural about it. But in the Irish tales it is accompanied by drowning in a cauldron or vat of liquor. And while a huge cauldron was a normal article of furniture in a royal house, we can hardly ignore its mythological significance in the Celtic world. The most remarkable of Celtic cauldrons—the second century BC silver bowl from Gundestrup in Denmark, which is probably of Danubian origin—is ornamented with a striking sacrificial scene in which a small human figure is being plunged into a cauldron. As ale or wine was the symbol of sovereignty and the medium of the king's inauguration, so too did it fittingly feature in his death.

Muirchertach Macc Ercae, Diarmait's last predecessor but one in the high-kingship, died in very similar circumstances. Under the year 534 the *Annals of Ulster* record the '*demersio Muirchertaig filii Erce in dolio pleno vino in arce Cletig supra Bóinn*' ('the drowning of Muirchertach mac Erce in a vat full of wine in the citadel of Cletech above the Boyne'). The house of Cleittech on the Boyne, whose real location probably lay in the Otherworld, was also the scene of Cormac mac Airt's death. The late saga, *Aided Muirchertaig Meic Erca*, is thus summarised by Alwyn and Brinley Rees:

> One day when Muirchertach, King of Ireland, is seated alone on his hunting-mound, a beautiful girl in a green mantle appears beside him and he is so filled with love for her that he would give the whole of Ireland if he could have her for one night. She describes herself as 'the paramour of Muirchertach' and declares that, being skilled in places more secret than this, she already knows him and the other men of Ireland. 'I will give you power over me, O damsel,' says he, and she offers herself to him on condition that he never utters her name, that the mother of his children shall not be in her sight, and that clerics shall never be in the same house as herself. The king accepts these conditions and asks her what her name is, so

that he may avoid uttering it. Beautiful though she is, she utters a string of names similar to those of the loathsome Cailb*—'Sigh, Sough, Storm, Rough Wind, Winter-night, Cry, Wail, Groan'.

To please her, the queen and her children are turned out of the house of Cletech, and practitioners of every craft and art in Ireland together with their wives are brought into the drinking-hall. St Cairnech† is so incensed by the expulsion of the queen that he curses the steading and digs a grave for the king, saying, 'He whose grave this is has finished, and truly it is an end of his realm and his princedom.' The king sits on the throne with the girl on his right, and feeling that she is 'a goddess of great power' he asks her what kind of power she has. She replies that she believes in God; she is of the race of Adam and Eve, yet she can work great wonders. Muirchertach asks her to perform miracles. She makes wine of the water of the Boyne and enchanted pigs of ferns, and this magic repast saps the strength of the king and his host. She conjures up illusions, among which are two battalions of equal strength slaughtering each other, the one blue and the other headless. Muirchertach exhausts himself in battling against these shadows which are really nothing but stones, ferns and sods. Then on the seventh night, the eve of Wednesday after Samain, a storm arises. 'This is the sigh of a winter night', says the king. The girl replies: ''Tis I am the Rough Wind. . . . Winter night is my name. . . . Sigh and Wind, Winter-night.' When he again speaks of the storm (*sín*) that is raging she asks him: 'Why do you utter my name, O man?' and tells him that he is doomed. 'That is true, O damsel . . . for it was foretold that my death and the death of my grandfather would be alike'. Muirchertach had burned his grandfather in his house. Visions of burning and drowning now disturb his enchanted sleep. Sín sets the house on fire and arrays around it phantom attackers said to be Tuathal Maelgarb son of Cormac the One-Eyed and his armies seeking revenge. Muirchertach gets into a cask of wine and is drowned while fire falls on his head and burns the upper part of his body.‡

* A lone hag whom Conaire admitted into Dá Derga's hostel, thereby breaking one of his *gessa*.

† Founder of the church of Tuilén (Dulane just north of Kells, county Meath). The saga also relates how he made peace between Muirchertach and the descendants of Tadg mac Céin, i.e., the Delbna, Ciannachta, Gailenga, Luigni and Saitne.

‡ *Celtic heritage*, pp. 338–40.

Here the supernatural elements are clear enough, although Sín claims that she slew Muirchertach to avenge her father and brother and the aboriginal inhabitants of Tara—the *sentuatha Temra.*

The absolute historicity of Muirchertach Macc Ercae is open to question. His double name is suspicious. Macc Ercae was a proper name common in the archaic period, not a patronymic or metronymic, though it was later alleged that Muirchertach was called Mac Ercae because his mother was Erc daughter of Loarn king of Dál Riata, and a romantic story grew up around her wooing and winning by Muiredach son of Eógan, culminating in the slaying of Loarn by his grandson. In the *Baile Chuind* he is referred to as Mac Ercéni—a diminutive, but the annals always call him Muirchertach Macc Ercae. It must be remembered that these early annals were compiled in their present form at some time not earlier than the eighth or ninth century, when the Cenél nEógain were in their heyday. The Cenél nEógain did not figure so prominently in the sixth century, and it is not impossible that traditions of an early king of Tara Macc Ercae were attached by them to the shadowy figure of their own ancestor Muirchertach mac Muiredaig.

The name Macc Ercae was borne by several early Connacht princes: the ancestor of the Cenél Maic Ercae of Corcu Ochlann in north Roscommon of whom the *Vita Tripartita* says that they are 'the mightiest and firmest among the Connachta, but they do not rule like overkings' (they were later given a fictitious descent from Brión); the ancestor of the Fir Chera, a branch of the Uí Fiachrach, and a great-nephew of his, Macc Ercae son of Ailill Molt, who is said in the annals to have fallen at the battle of Tortan in Meath fighting against the Leinstermen in 543 or 548.

The annals give Muirchertach Macc Ercae over successive years a whole catalogue of triumphs in battle—in Irish terminology, a *caithréim*—which reads very like an artificial reconstruction of Uí Néill victories over representatives of all the other provinces. The regnal lists and annals also present his two sons Forggus and Domnall as joint high-kings for a year after the death of Diarmait mac Cerbaill. The annals record three important battles in which they were victorious: that of Sligo in 543 or 547, in which they allied with Ainmere mac Sétnai and Ninnid mac Duach of Cenél Conaill to slay Eógan Bél, king of Connacht; that of Cúl Conaire in Cera (barony of Carra, county Sligo), where they killed Eógan Bél's son and successor, Ailill Inbanda in 550; and that of Cúl Dreimne, which we have already discussed.

The first and last were fought in that strategic area which was to be debated between Connacht and Tír Conaill down to the sixteenth century. Albeit Cúl Dreimne was fought in alliance with the king of Connacht, the battles of Sligo and Cúl Conaire could well be seen as the perennial feud between Connacht and the North. It is possible, however, that the record of Cúl Conaire arises from a misinterpretation of an entry noting the death of Ailill Inbanda at the hands of 'the sons of Macc Ercae', that is, of the Fir Chera rather than the Cenél nEógain.*

However this may be, Macc Ercae and Diarmait mac Cerbaill were not the only kings of Tara to meet a supernatural death. Lóeguire, we remember, was slain by the sun and the wind, while both his son Lugaid and his predecessor Nath Í were struck by lightning. If the high-kingship of Tara was sacral in origin, it is not surprising that the high-kings should fall by no mere human hand. In this respect the Irish king-tales provide an interesting complement to those told of the early kings of Uppsala in the *Ynglingasaga*, the first book of Snorri Sturlasson's *Heimskringla*. In keeping with the generally more cheerful character of Irish mythology, the fertility theme of kingship marriage is more prominent, whereas the Norse accounts centre around the death of the sacral king. Even the euhemerising Snorri states bluntly that some of the Uppsala kings were sacrificed 'for peace and a good year'. Due perhaps to the longer influence of Christianity and its pervasive colouring of the literature, there is no explicit reference to such sacrifice in Ireland. It might be too prosaic to surmise that our milder climate rendered such drastic measures by the farming population less necessary.

Nevertheless the Irish tales, even in their late and edited form, can sound the unmistakable note of doom. In their very perceptive treatment of the *aided* or death-tale, the Rees brothers refer to the curious erotic element which normally accompanies the hero's death. This feature is very obvious too in the Norse death-tales. In Snorri's redaction, the king's death is often associated with an ill-advised marriage—sometimes to a witch. The myth of the death-bearing goddess who is also the king's bride is clearly discernible in the *Ynglingatál*, the older pagan poem on which Snorri's prose account is based and fragments of which he quotes: here the meeting of the king with Hel, goddess of death, is even described in sexual terms. Even more interesting is the fact that one of the prehistoric Uppsala kings, Fjolni, should die by drowning in a vat of mead, though here the possibility of literary borrowing cannot be discounted: in a later chapter of the *Ynglingasaga*

* See below, pp. 244, 298.

Snorri states that Danp and Dan, eponymous kings of Denmark, were son and grandson respectively of Ríg 'who was first called "king" in the Danish tongue'; Ríg appears too in the Eddic poem *Rígspula* as the name taken by Heimdall when he procreated Thrall, Karl and Jarl (serf, commoner and lord), and it is now accepted that this name is a borrowing of the Irish *rí*, *rig*, 'king'.

Diarmait mac Cerbaill was the last to hold the sacral kingship of Tara. He has also some title to be ranked as the first Christian high-king of Ireland. Two of his sons bore the specifically Christian name of Colmán, deriving from the Latin Columbanus. This ambivalent character, together with the fact that he was the direct ancestor of the two most powerful dynasties of the Southern Uí Néill, made him an obvious figure for saga and legend.

The regnal lists and the annals which have been influenced by them exhibit considerable confusion as to the succession to the high-kingship after Diarmait's death, and many ephemeral princes are accorded that honour, which they sometimes share with a rival. Something nearer to the true state of affairs is exhibited by the *Baile Chuind*. As we have seen, this list was composed in the reign of Fínsnechta Fledach, who is referred to thinly disguised under the kenning of Snechta Fína 'snow of wine', which is the meaning of his name (his epithet, no less attractive, means 'the feasting' or 'bountiful': he was of the Síl nÁedo Sláine, and like so many of that line, was assassinated by rivals of the Fir Chúl Breg in 697). The language of this document is poetic and deliberately obscure, and four unidentifiable names appear to follow that of Fínsnechta. But it clearly shows that Diarmait had no immediate successor for some considerable time. A difficulty arises from the fact that Aíd Olláin—who must be identified with Áed Allán or Uaridnach* of the Cenél nEógain, who died in 612—is here placed *before* Diarmait in a position which seems confirmed by the alliterative pattern which links the phrases of the text.†

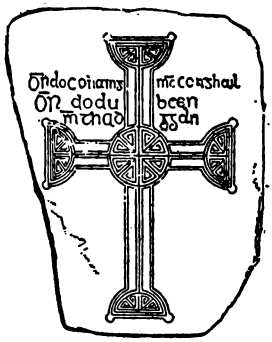
Diarmait's son Áed Sláine is said in the later sources to have shared the high-kingship with Colmán Rímid of Cenél nEógain—the maternal grandfather of the Northumbrian king Aldfrith whom the Irish knew as Flann Fína from his mother's name Fín. Áed Sláine and his alleged co-regent both died in 604, but Adomnán's account of Colum Cille's prophecy accords with Áed's absence from the *Baile Chuind*. Although

* The alternative epithet seems to have been coined by later writers in order to distinguish him from a later namesake.

† See Appendix, I, pp. 276f.

the historical picture is dark, the annals show the hostility of the other Uí Néill to Diarmait mac Cerbaill's rise to power. It is not until the joint reign of the sons of Áed Sláine, Diarmait and Blathmac (both recognised in the *Baile Chuind*) that the midland dynasties were firmly established.

Diarmait and Blathmac also figure in the king-tales, but generally in the background of stories relating to more colourful personages such as the generous king of Connacht, Guaire Aidne, the bold Leinster champion Máel Ódrán, or the romantic prince from Skye, Cano mac Gartnait. Their reign came to be regarded as an epoch in Irish history, largely no doubt because they both fell victim to the great plague which brought an end not only to the golden age of saints but also to the generations of kings mighty enough to become heroes of saga. The following years saw the work of reconstruction and compilation. With the eighth century the mists of legend recede as historical documents in the narrower sense become more abundant.



7
Ulster Kings

Batar trí prímcheinéla i nHére .i. Féni 7 Ulaith 7 Gáilni .i. Laigin.
'There were three principal races in Ireland: the Féni, the Ulaid and the Gáilni, i.e., the Laigin.'

So begins an eighth-century saga preserved in one of the law tracts. The context shows that the Féni (the word normally used in the laws for 'the Irish') are here regarded as the ancestors of the Connachta and Uí Néill. The statement, referring as it does to prehistoric times, is not to be taken as ethnographically exact, but represents the viewpoint of a jurist working in the Uí Néill sphere of influence. The Ulaid and Laigin were in fact the hereditary enemies of the Uí Néill high-kingship, and both cherished long memories of their dispossession.

The Ulaid, although by the eighth century reduced to Antrim, Down and north Louth—a mere rump of the ancient province of Ulster—enjoyed a unique position insofar as the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* and its cycle of related sagas about Conchobar mac Nessa's court at Emain Macha and the exploits of Cú Chulainn had achieved the status of a national epic in Irish literature. And whereas Homer maintains an attitude of divine impartiality between Greeks and Trojans, the Irish saga-writers favour the heroic men of Ulster. Later commentators derived this remarkable bias from the hospitality shown to the poets of Ireland by the Ulster king Fiachnae mac Báetáin at a time when they were allegedly threatened with banishment by the high-king Áed mac Ainmuirech at the Convention of Druim Cett in 575; and an eleventh-century writer says unkindly: 'these stories did not happen at all as they were told, but it was to ingratiate themselves with the rude Ulster race that the smooth-tongued poets invented the lying fables.'

In a world where tradition counted for so much, such memories of

ancient glory were a real political advantage. As late as 1084 the king of Ulaid, Donnsléibe mac Eochada, made a hosting to the Boyne and gave *tuarastal* (the royal gifts which were a token of suzerainty) to Donnchad Ua Ruairc, king of Bréifne. This was clearly an attempt to revive the ancient Fifth of Ulster by an alliance hostile to both the current rivals for the high-kingship, Domnall Mac Lochlainn of the Northern Uí Néill and Tairrdelbach ua Briain, king of Munster. It was doomed to failure: Mac Lochlainn dealt effectively with Donnsléibe, and shortly afterwards Ua Briain crushed Ua Ruairc at the battle of Móin Cruinneóice near Leixlip. But it remains an interesting assertion of ancient rights, for the upstart kingdom of Bréifne was situated in territory on the southern borders of the ancient Fifth, and a tract incorporated into the twelfth-century *Book of rights* indulges in similarly nostalgic archaism when it claims that the Uí Néill kings of Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain are bound to go on hostings with the king of Ulaid and that he gives *tuarastal* to the kings of Airgialla, Bréifne and Conmaicne. Such antiquarianism misled Giraldus Cambrensis into describing the whole north as *Ultonia*. In fact by the twelfth century, although the kings of Cenél nEógain were effective overlords of the North, the Ulaid were still struggling to preserve their independence. As long as their dynasty survived, in however attenuated a form, the Uí Néill could never call themselves kings of Ulster.

The polity of Ulaid was somewhat peculiar, in that the over-kingship was not confined to one dominant dynasty, but was shared between those of Dál Fiatach in eastern Down, the Dál nAraidi of Antrim and the Uí Echach Cobo of western Down.* The position of Dál Riata in the Glens of Antrim, whose kings resided in their Argyllshire colony, was also anomalous, as was, to a lesser extent, that of the border state of Conailli Muirtheimne in Louth. We have seen that a plausible reconstruction of fifth-century history would place the fall of Emain Macha around the year 450, followed by the withdrawal of the Ulaid eastwards across Glenn Rige, where the new boundary is marked by the Dane's Cast. It seems that the collapse of the Ulaid was not total nor regarded as irreversible. They may have occupied southern Louth well into the seventh century and their Cruthin associates were similarly tenacious in county Londonderry. Warfare between the Ulaid and Airgialla was not as endemic in the early centuries as one would expect from the saga account of the conquest of Emain by the three Collas. The real enemy were the Uí Néill, and in particular the northern branches of

* See Appendix II, Tables 6, 7.

that dynasty. This confirms our belief that the Airgialla were a conglomeration of tributary peoples who had transferred their allegiance to the Uí Néill but were not strong enough to attack their old masters.

The name Ulaid in the strict tribal sense was borne by the people who dwelt between Dundrum Bay and Belfast Lough. Their centre was at Dún-dá-Lethglass (Downpatrick)—originally a secular rather than a religious site—and their ruling dynasty were the Dál Fiatach. A minor branch, the Uí Echach Arda, ruled in the Ards peninsula but apparently succumbed to the Vikings in the ninth century. Ethnologically they were classed as Érainn. The Dál Riata too were Érainn but not closely related to the Dál Fiatach: already by the end of the fifth century they had migrated across the narrow water to Scotland but continued for some centuries to retain their Irish lands.

But the bulk of the population comprised in the reduced over-kingdom of Ulaid were the people known as Cruthin or Cruithni. Their name is the Q-Celtic version of *Pritani* (Welsh *Prydyn*)—the Picts of northern Britain. In Irish both the Picts and the Irish Cruthin are referred to by the same name, but authors writing in Latin, such as Adomnán, reserve the term *Picti* for the former. It is not therefore strictly correct to talk of the Ulster Cruthin as Picts. From their regnal succession we can see that they followed the Irish *derbfhine* system, unlike the matrilinear Picts.

The Cruthin on occasion usurped the over-kingship of Ulaid: more often than not they bore the brunt of the wars against the Uí Néill. They became bold enough to claim that they, and not the Dál Fiatach, were the *fír-Ulaid*, the 'true Ulstermen', and the genealogists obligingly explained that the Dál Fiatach, being Érainn, must have been intruders from Munster. The conservative *Annals of Ulster*, however, reveal the true situation by their reluctance to accord the title *rí Ulad* to any of the Cruthin over-kings: they use a circumlocution such as *rí in Chóicid*, 'king of the Fifth'. *A Cóiced*—the Fifth par excellence—was a term popular with the Ulaid, asserting defiantly the previous extent of their kingdom. But such was the strength of even spurious tradition that the genealogists continued to teach the doctrine that the Cruthin, despite popular usage, were the true Ulaid, for long after they had ceased to be serious contenders for the over-kingship.

The dynasty of Dál nAraidi, whose kings resided at Ráith Mór east of Antrim town in the district known as Mag Line, emerged as the dominant group among the Cruthin, although the Uí Echach Cobo (in the baronies of Iveagh, county Down) also supplied some over-kings of

Ulaid. It is possible that the Antrim Cruthin were cut off from those of Down by a Dál Fiatach expansion westwards to Lough Neagh and northwards into south Antrim in the course of the eighth century. These extended boundaries of Dál Fiatach are represented by the diocese, as distinct from the county, of Down.

But the genealogical connections between the Uí Echach Cobo and the Dál nAraidi are very artificial, and the Middle Irish regnal lists of Dál nAraidi present a false perspective. In the sixth and seventh centuries the Cruthin formed a loose confederation of petty states. Seven kings of the Cruthin fell at the great battle of Móin Dairi Lothair in 562 or 563, and Adomnán tells us that another, Eochaid Láeb (*Echodius Laib*) escaped from the defeat in his chariot—perhaps the latest reference to this archaic method of warfare. None of these are recorded in the king-lists or genealogies, although the death of Eochaid's son Eógan is mentioned in the annals for 611. Even the genealogy of Áed Dub mac Suibni Araidi, the over-king of Ulaid who slew Diarmait mac Cerbaill, has not been preserved. The annals notice the death of one Dícuil *rí ceneóil Cruithne*, 'king of a Cruthin tribe', in a battle against the Dál Riata in 629: the genealogies show that his uncle Cellach had been king of the Latharna of Larne.

Dynastic consolidation was a feature of Irish political history in the eighth century, and it was now that the Dál nAraidi emerged as the single dynasty ruling the remnants of the Cruthin east of the lower Bann. Following the normal pattern of Irish polity, they split into hostile factions. A northern branch was settled in Eilne between the rivers Bann and Bush and encroached on the Irish lands of Dál Riata, but were defeated decisively by their cousins of Mag Line in 776 and disappear after the ninth century.

One of the most notable of Ulster kings was Báetán mac Cairill of Dál Fiatach. In his short reign from 572 to 581 he sought to assert his suzerainty over Dál Riata in Scotland and over the Isle of Man. His career has been obscured by the activities of the synthetic historians, but enough has survived in early sources to enable us to glimpse the significance of his reign. The Ulster genealogists may certainly be accused of bias when they call him king of Ireland and Scotland (*rí Érenn ocus Alban*) and quote from a poem purporting to describe him receiving tribute from Munster, Connacht, Skye and Man at his fortress near Knocklayd in Antrim: such fantasies merely reflect later ideas of high-kingship. But even the compiler of the authoritative corpus of Irish genealogies admits Báetán alongside Brian Bóruma as an exception to the rule that

all the high-kings of Ireland after St Patrick were of the Connachta or Uí Néill—albeit with the qualification '*sed alii Boetan apud magnos reges non numerant*' ('but others do not count Bóetán among the high-kings').

Ulster interest in the Isle of Man was of ancient date—a name on an ogham inscription there can be identified with that of an early ancestor of the kings of Conailli Muirtheimne—and the annals record two expeditions of the Ulaid thither in 577 and 578. The genealogies say that the Irish were driven from Man two years after Báetán's death—an event probably connected with the annalistic notice of Áedán mac Gabráin's victory there in 582. The genealogies further claim that Áedán mac Gabráin had done homage to Báetán at Rinn Seimne (Island Magee near Larne).

This background helps us to understand the real purpose of the famous Convention of Druim Cett in 575. According to the traditional accounts this was an assembly of all the kings of Ireland under the presidency of the high-king Áed mac Ainmuirech of the Northern Uí Néill, which was attended also by Colum Cille and Áedán mac Gabráin king of Dál Riata. Among other matters (such as the proposed expulsion of the poets from Ireland) there was settled the question of the relationship of Dál Riata to the high-king. It was agreed that the Irish portion of the kingdom should be subject to the high-king and serve him with its land forces, but that the Scottish kingdom should be independent except for the obligation to serve the high-king with its fleet when required. Adomnán has a tantalising reference to Colum Cille's presence at a meeting of kings at Druim Cett in county Derry, but says nothing of the purpose of the conference, and the annals are similarly uninformative.

The traditional story suffers from several grave defects: the list of Irish kings who are supposed to have attended is full of errors and anachronisms and Báetán is conspicuously absent; furthermore, Áed mac Ainmuirech, even by the official doctrine, was not high-king as early as 575. In fact the annals and king lists admit to thorough confusion concerning the succession after the death of Diarmait mac Cerbaill. According to them Áed could not have become high-king until after the death of his cousin Báetán mac Ninnedo in 586. Both this person and his predecessors Báetán mac Muirchertaig and Eochaid mac Domnaill of Cenél nEógain are practical non-entities. The *Baile Chuind* admits none of them, nor even Áed mac Ainmuirech. The death of Diarmait mac Cerbaill must have signalled, not merely the demise

of the pagan sacral kingship of Tara, but also a period of considerable confusion among the Uí Néill as the various component branches of that dynasty sorted themselves out.

Since the Uí Néill high-kingship at this date certainly did not entail suzerainty over the Ulaid and still less over Dál Riata, and since the Ulster king Báetán mac Cairill was the person most nearly interested in any claims of Scottish Dál Riata to be independent of Irish jurisdiction, it seems clear that the Convention was in fact an alliance between Áedán mac Gabráin and Áed mac Ainmuirech against Báetán. We may further surmise that this alliance was brought about through the good offices of Colum Cille, Áed's own cousin, who had 'ordained' Áedán as king of Dál Riata. Colum Cille's earliest biographer, Cuimméne Ailbe, tells us (in a passage which has been incorporated into the later *Life* by Adomnán) that the saint strictly warned Áedán against breaking this alliance, and laments the folly of Áedán's grandson Domnall Brecc who brought disaster on Dál Riata by so doing in 637.

Báetán's efforts to offset the Uí Néill conquests in the north by building up Ulster's power beyond the sea were thus foiled. He was succeeded by two princes of the Dál nAraidi line, Áed Dub mac Suibni (581–588) and Fiachnae mac Báetáin (588–626). The latter was slain by his namesake Fiachnae mac Demmáin, nephew of Báetán mac Cairill and ancestor of all subsequent kings of Dál Fiatach, who himself met his death in a battle against the Dál Riata in 627. Two years later some of the Bernician princes currently in exile in Dál Riata fell in a battle where the Irish Cruthin were victorious.

Close relations between the north of Britain and Ireland at this time were not confined to the ecclesiastical and artistic spheres. Colmán Bec, son of Diarmait mac Cerbaill and ancestor of the midland sept of Caílle Follamain, accompanied Áedán mac Gabráin's predecessor Conall mac Comgaill on an expedition to the Western Isles in 567 or 568, and Máel Umai, son of the so-called high-king Báetán mac Muirchertaig, fought beside Áedán at Degsastan in 603 where he slew Eanfrith brother of Aethelfrith. Aldfrith, king of Northumbria (685–704), had an Irish mother, Fín daughter of the northern Uí Néill high king Colmán Rímid: it was to him that Adomnán dedicated his *De locis sanctis* and from whom he obtained the ransom of the Irish captives taken during Ecgfrith's raid on Brega in 684. Anglo-Saxon influence in Brega itself seems attested by the tendency to alliteration on the letter *C* in the pedigree of the North Brega dynasty from the seventh to the ninth century, as well as by the appearance there of the name Conaing

(the first to bear it being a king of Brega who died in 662), which is a borrowing of the Anglo-Saxon *cyning* 'king'. According to Bede, Edwin of Northumbria (616–632) conquered the Isle of Man, but by the end of the century the island had been occupied by expelled British princes who took to raiding the Ulster and Leinster coasts.

In this situation it is not surprising that the kings of Ulaid should have played a prominent part. They were more inclined to sea-faring than most of the Irish and were later to venture braving the Vikings on their own element in 913 and 1022. The title of a lost saga relates an expedition by Fiachnae mac Báetáin to *Dún Guaire i Saxanaib*, i.e., Bamborough in England, which the Welsh historian Nennius refers to as *Din Guayroi*: it is not certain whether the annalistic entry at 623 '*Expugnatio Ratho Guali la Fiachnae mac Baetain*' is to be connected with this tradition. In the eighth-century saga *Compert Mongáin* it is said that Fiachnae went to the aid of Áedán mac Gabráin and that in his absence the sea-god Manannán mac Lir, who was believed to reside on the Isle of Man, begot Mongán on Fiachnae's wife. Mongán is the subject of a whole cycle of saga and legend and was even said to have been a reincarnation of Finn mac Cumaill: he was slain by the Britons of Strathclyde in 625. A Middle Irish saga says that Fiachnae was king in Ireland and Alba. It is not altogether impossible that he is the mysterious Féachno who appears as Diarmait mac Cerbaill's successor to the high-kingship of Tara in the *Baile Chuind*.*

This supposition is not as strange as might appear. Even the synthetic historians allowed that before the time of Niall Noígiallach representatives of all the Irish provinces had been eligible to reign at Tara; and if that office was sacral rather than political there may be some truth in the tradition. At any rate, an archaic Irish text states unequivocally that Fiachnae's grandson Congal Cláen had for a while enjoyed that position.

Congal Cláen, king of Dál nAraidi, became over-king of Ulaid in 627. The following year he slew Suibne Menn of Cenél nEógain, the Uí Néill high-king, and in 629 (the year in which the king of Dál Riata and his Bernician guests fell in battle with Congal's Cruthin) he was defeated by the new high-king Domnall son of Áed mac Ainmuirech at Dún Ceithirnn in Derry. By 637, however, Congal had persuaded the Dál Riata to reverse their alliance. Together with Domnall Brecc of Dál Riata he met Domnall mac Áedo at the great battle of Mag Roth (Moira, county Down): Congal was slain and Domnall Brecc fled back

* See Appendix I, pp. 276f.

to Scotland to be slain a few years later by the Strathclyde Britons whose song of triumph over the death of 'Dyfnwal Vrych' has found its way into the *Canu Aneirin*. On the same day a naval battle was fought between the Dál Riata and Cenél nEógain on one side and the high-king's forces of Cenél Conaill on the other off Kintyre: apparently Congal had been able to play off factions within the Northern Uí Néill.

The battle of Mag Roth engendered a series of sagas, including the story of Wild Suibne, a totally fictitious king of Dál nAraidi, who is said to have gone mád from terror in the battle and taken to the forests where he lived a bird-like life as a holy fool among the trees. The sagas would have it that Congal had been fostered by Domnall at Tara and nursed a grudge against him because a bee had stung him in the eye—hence his cognomen Cláen or Cáech (the Squinting or Half-blind); he further resented the occupation of Ulster lands by the Northern Uí Néill and Airgialla, alleging that Domnall had promised to restore these to the Ulaid.

But an ancient law-tract on bees preserves an earlier version. It quotes as a leading case the judgement arrived at between the Féni and Ulaid concerning the damages caused by bee-stings—namely that the man who owned the bees should bear responsibility:

> *Air is sí cétnae breth inso cet-ara-chét im chinta bech for Congal Cáech cáechsite beich, bach rí Temro conid-dubart assa fhlaith.*
> For this was the first judgement ever pronounced concerning the crimes of bees against Congal Cáech whom bees blinded; and he was king of Tara until it put him out of his sovereignty.

(We remember that Cormac mac Airt had had to abandon Tara after his blinding, for no-one with a blemish could hold the kingship.) This is the only reference in the law-texts to Tara. It does not declare that the kingship entailed sovereignty over all Ireland, but does seem to indicate that it was a position of special prestige. And it runs directly contrary to the accepted doctrine that it was a monopoly of the Uí Néill.

The accident which preserved this text in a tract whose archaic language was obscure even to medieval Irish scholars has secured for us an untampered version of the legend. When we remember that the Ulaid and Cruthin were still powerful in county Londonderry and possibly still ruled directly in Louth as far as the Boyne in the early seventh century; that they cherished memories of their former dominance over all the North; that they considered the Uí Néill recent upstarts; that they had good prospects of restoring the balance by calling on

the original loyalties of their quondam sub-kingdom of Dál Riata: it is not difficult to imagine that they could with some justice lay claim to Tara, and that if the Uí Néill were to style themselves high-kings of Ireland, the Ulaid or their later eulogists could regard themselves equally distinguished. That the synthetic historians should have picked on two Uí Néill princes named Báetán to fill the awkward gap in the regnal list suggests that they were trying to disguise the actual tenure of the titular kingship of Tara by another of that name—Báetán mac Cairill of Ulster.

The battle of Mag Roth effectively put an end to such grandiose pretensions and established the Uí Néill as the dominant power in the North. When Domnall mac Áedo died peacefully in 642 the *Annals of Ulster* accord him the title 'king of Ireland'—'*Mors Domnaill maic Aedho regis Hibernie in fine Ianuari*' (the death of Domnall mac Áedo king of Ireland at the end of January'). These early annals are extremely sparing in their references to the high-kingship, and Domnall is the first to be so honoured by them. The second is Loingsech mac Óengusso at his death in 704, and the title is not awarded again until the middle of the ninth century when Máelsechlainn mac Máele Ruanaid began to make the ideal a reality.

The two centuries following Domnall's death saw the advance, not of his own family, but of the Cenél nEógain. This branch of the Uí Néill held the geographical advantage in the North. Since the battle of Móin Dairi Lothair when they first crossed to Magilligan's Point in north Derry from their peninsular home in Inis Eógain, they continued to push southwards, first driving the Cruthin east of the Bann, then gaining control over the Ciannachta of mid-Derry and steadily encroaching on the Airgiallan tribes of Uí Macc Uais, until by the ninth century they were firmly entrenched in the heart of the North which thereafter was to be known as Tír nEógain (Tyrone). The Cenél Conaill were isolated in their stronghold of Donegal and cut off from contact with the midlands. Their only hope of expansion was back into ancestral Connacht, and there Loingsech mac Óengusso was defeated and slain in 704. Loingsech's son Flaithbertach was the last Cenél Conaill high-king. He was challenged by Áed Allán of Cenél nEógain and finally defeated in 734 after a sea-battle off the mouth of the Bann in which the Dál Riata had come to his aid. He was deposed and died thirty years later at Armagh. The reign of Áed Allán (736–743) inaugurated a long period during which the high-kingship alternated regularly between the Cenél nEógain kings of Ailech and the Clann Cholmáin of Mide.

The development of this new power structure within the Uí Néill affected the Airgialla as well. Their nine tribes—the Uí Maic Cairthinn south of Lough Foyle, the Uí Fiachrach Arda Sratha and Uí Thuirtri west and east of the Sperrins (these three collectively known as the Uí Macc Uais), the Fir Chraíbe and Fir Lí on the western Bannside, the Airthir or *Orientales* of Armagh, the Uí Chremthainn to the west in Fermanagh and overflowing into Tyrone and Monaghan, the Uí Méith and Mugdorna in Monaghan—had all been vassals of the high king of the Uí Néill federation. Now they were to fall under the sole dominion of Cenél nEógain.

An eighth-century poem illustrates the earlier relationship: 'Let us establish the positions over which the lord of Tailtiu presided, let us recount the comparison of nobility with him of the Airgialla. . . .' In accord with Uí Néill propaganda the poet describes the places reserved for the kings of Munster, Connacht and Leinster in the banqueting hall —Ulster is significantly omitted:

> Afterwards the children of the Collas undertook service in battle-camps, against the king of the North they drew up a goodly array with a hundred shouts.
>
> The Uí Néill and the Airgialla are equal in nobility of race save the descendants of kings who preserve Truth through many years.
>
> Áed Allán, Áed son of Ainmere, to whom we cleave, Áed Sláine of the Síd,* who are most noble, let us instance.
>
> The descendants of Conall Cremthainne—fair the posterity—the descendants of Colmán Becc, the descendants of Colmán Már son of Diarmait.
>
> The five families unless defilement of complaint were to cling to them, they are entitled to entertainment, they are entitled to rising before them.
>
> They are entitled to their demands from anyone who submits to them, they are entitled to give testimony for they are highest over witnesses. . . .
>
> There is due from the king of the Uí Néill a firm statement of rights with power and authority when he is being besought about any evil.
>
> Judgements in favour of Truth are due from him and the pacification of claimants, corn is due and milk and mast and salmon.

* The *síd* or Otherworld dwelling of Brug na Bóinne—the prehistoric Boyne necropolis.

There is due from the Airgialla according to the terms of their clientship military service for three fortnights once every three years. . . .

Military service is not due from them in noble prosperous springtime. It is not due in autumn in which produce is gathered.

A third of all revenue for them that is won by their weapons wherever there is a grievous wound or fleeting or affliction.*

The five Uí Néill kings here listed are Áed Allán *alias* Uaridnach (+612) of Cénel nEógain, Áed mac Ainmuirech (+598) of Cenél Conaill, Áed Sláine (+604) of Brega, Colmán Bec (+587) of Caílle Follamain, and Colmán Már (+555/8) of Mide. In other words they represent the political situation obtaining after the descendants of Diarmait mac Cerbaill had won control of the midlands but before the alternate succession of Cenél nEógain and Clann Cholmáin to the high-kingship had been firmly established. The mention of Colmán Bec is particularly interesting: no member of his dynasty ever attained the high-kingship and after the death of the Follaman from whom they are named as king of Mide in 766 they were totally eclipsed by the Clann Cholmáin.

Towards the end of the poem further sureties on either side, both kings and saints, are enumerated. Four kings represent the Airgialla:

The brotherhood has sworn far and near about enforcing their rights for them from the king of the Uí Néill.

Their guarantors are venerable men who have sworn a mighty oath, Bécc son of Cuanu, Dam Aircit, Eógan from Loch Cál.

And the king of Ráth Commair, he does not refuse any contest, Máel Bressail, son of Máel Dúin, fierce grandson of Ál.

Bécc mac Cuanach fell in Áed mac Ainmuirech's army at Dún Bolg in 598: he was king of Uí Macc Uais. Cairpre Dam Aircit (+514) was ancestor of the Uí Chremthainn. Eógan mac Nialláin was ancestor of the Uí Nialláin sept of the Airthir, whose royal seat was at Loughgall north-east of Armagh. Máel Bressail mac Máele Dúin died as king of the Mugdorna in 665. We know from the testimony of Adomnán that the Mugdorna were powerful in the archaic period. They had branches in Meath and Ráth Commair may have been near Clonard in the south of the county. A similar southern extension of Airgialla is suggested in our poem. 'The Airgialla from Buaighne to Loch Febail are the kings

* Translation by Máirín O Daly.

of the race of Eochu Ḋoimlén, heroes with shields.' As this verse also occurs in a poem attributed to Máel Muru Othna (+887) it may be an interpolation, but it certainly records a very early tradition before the Cenél nEógain had absorbed the lands of Uí Maic Caírthinn on Lough Foyle, and Buaigne is the Tolka river near Dunboyne in Meath. It is probable that the Déisi Temro ('the vassal peoples of Tara') were originally reckoned as Airgialla. In fact three Airgiallan tribes—two southern branches of the Uí Macc Uais and the Mugdorna Breg—did become incorporated into the Uí Néill kingdoms of Mide and Brega, just as the northern Uí Macc Uais from an early date came to be treated as sub-kingdoms of Cenél nEógain. The Mugdorna Maigen in Monaghan were only cut off from the Mugdorna Breg by the rise of the Fir Rois as an independent sub-kingdom within Airgialla in the ninth century. The Fir Rois extended from Monaghan into central Louth in the region of Ardee, but were genealogically related to the Airthir of Armagh, though they find no mention in the earlier strata of the genealogical collections.

By the ninth century Airgialla proper, as a political entity, was practically confined to counties Fermanagh, Armagh, Monaghan and a strip of Louth, with the Uí Thuirtri kingdom in east Tyrone in process of being absorbed into the Cenél nEógain over-kingdom of Ailech. Until the battle of Leth Cam in 827 they were a loose confederation of coequal states. With the possible exception of Máel Fothardaig mac Máele Duib of Uí Chremthainn, who is styled '*rex na nAirgialla*' at his obit in 697, there seems to have been no king of Airgialla occupying a mesne position between the individual tribes and the Uí Néill high-king. When the claims of Armagh to primacy over the Irish church were generally recognised in the eighth century the Airgialla achieved a somewhat unwelcome prominence. Struggles between the Airgiallan dynasties for control of the abbacy and other ecclesiastical offices became frequent. The Ulaid had always accepted Armagh's primacy and their kingdom was within its direct *paruchia*. They were naturally anxious that Airgiallan dependence on the Uí Néill should not entail the subservience of Armagh. Such considerations may explain the death of Áed Airdd king of Dál nAraidi in alliance with Conchobar Macha king of Airthir (possibly against the Uí Chremthainn) at the battle of Telach Garraisc in Fernmag (Farney, county Monaghan) in 698.

In 735 the high-king Áed Allán inflicted a severe defeat on the Ulaid at Fochairt near Dundalk. The Ulster over-king Áed Róin and Conchad mac Cuanach king of Uí Echach Cobo were slain. Confused accounts in

later sources involve the Uí Ségáin as partly responsible. These were a small Airgiallan sept who controlled the abbacy of Lann Léire (Dunleer, county Louth) and who later supplied hereditary *sacerdotes* to Armagh. Like the Fir Rois, in whose territory Lann Léire lay, they were affiliated to the Airthir. From them sprang Cú Brettan mac Congusso, who died in 740 and whom some sources, perhaps anachronistically, style king of Fir Rois. He was the father both of Blathmac, author of the poem on the passion of Christ referred to in earlier chapters, and of Donn Bó, who was slain by Fiachnae mac Áedo Róin at the battle of Emain Macha in 759. The *Annals of Tigernach* blame the conflict on Airechtach *sacerdos* of Armagh and his enmity to the abbot Fer-dá-Chrích. The Airthir had by now split into three main septs, the Uí Nialláin (who later controlled the office of *oeconomus* or steward of Armagh), the Uí Bressail and the Uí Echdach. The abbot Céle Petair, of the Uí Bressail, had died in 758; Fer-dá-Chrích, son of a previous abbot Suibne, was of the Uí Nialláin and held the abbacy until his death in 768. Airechtach the priest was of the Uí Bressail and eventually secured the abbacy for a single year in 794.

The battle of Fochairt determined the political shape of county Louth until the end of the eleventh century. The evidence of the genealogical tracts suggests that the Dál Fiatach had ruled here directly in the seventh century; the kingdom of Conailli Muirtheimne does not appear in the historical record until 688—and then only as party to an internal feud among the Síl nÁedo Sláine of Brega. In that year Uarcraide ua hOsséni of Conailli was slain at the battle of Imlech Pích where the Ciannachta Breg also lost their independent status south of the Boyne. A late but probably reliable source also states that when the high-king Áed Allán was slain by Domnall Midi near Kells in 743 there fell among his allies not only the kings of Airthir, Uí Chremthainn and Uí Macc Uais, but also Fallach king of Conailli. Despite the appearance of continuity given by the regnal lists, an interregnum in the kingship of Ulster may have followed Áed Allán's victory at Fochairt. Fiachnae mac Áedo Róin restored the fortunes of Dál Fiatach during his long reign from 750 to 789, and it was probably then that Louth was tacitly divided into buffer zones between the overlordships of the Ulaid and Uí Néill. In the south the Fir Arda Ciannachta were tributary to the Síl nÁedo Sláine; the Conailli remained in Ulster, although the *Book of rights* classes them as non-tributary and the genealogists could not agree as to their ethnic origins; the Fir Rois insinuated themselves between the two. But the whole area maintained its ecclesiastical unity within the *paruchia* of Armagh, and the *máer* or

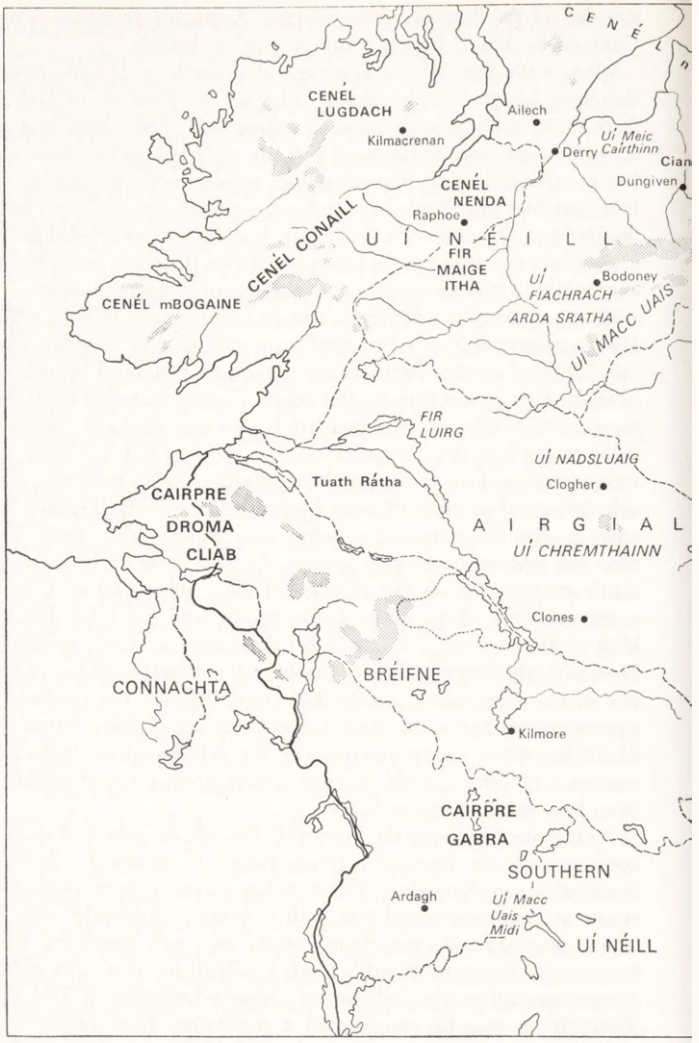
steward of St Patrick who collected Armagh's revenues from Sliab Fuait to the Boyne figures frequently in the annals.

Meanwhile the Dál Fiatach expanded northwards and across to the shores of Lough Neagh, thus cutting off the Cruthin of Dál nAraidi from those of Uí Echach Cobo. Fiachnae mac Áedo Róin bestowed his favours on Bangor: St Comgall and the early abbots had been Cruthin, but in later times Dál Fiatach names appear in the succession. We are told that Áed mac Eochocán (898–919) transferred the royal patronage finally from Dównpatrick to Bangor, but the monastery did not fall too closely into dynastic hands. Downpatrick on the other hand provides an example of a monastery founded mainly for dynastic reasons.

The very length of Fiachnae's reign had brought its own difficulties. His great-grandfather's line had monopolised the kingship since 674 and his third cousin Tommaltach, head of a collateral branch resident in south Down, was thus on the point of being excluded from the royal *fine* should Fiachnae be succeeded by his son Eochaid. When this in fact occurred in 789 Tommaltach flew to arms but was slain. He had however assured some measure of recognition for his posterity, who were acknowledged as kings of Leth Cathail—Cathal's Half of Dál Fiatach, named after Tommaltach's father and considerably more extensive than the present barony of Lecale. At least three of them in the late ninth century shared the title *leth-rí Ulad* 'joint-king of Ulster' with representatives of the main dynastic line, and Cú Ulad Ua Flaithrí, king of Ulster from 1065 until his deposition in 1071, seems to have been of Leth Cathail. This example of the actual working of the Irish law of royal succession shows that eligibility was not confined to the narrower *derbfhine* (embracing brothers and first cousins) but to the legal *fine* in its widest extent (technically the *indfhine* which included third cousins): in other words, anyone whose great-great-grandfather had been king was a *rígdomna.**

By the ninth century the main Dál Fiatach dynasty had shifted their centre north to Duneight (Dún Echdach, probably named after Fiachnae's son Eochaid). The site has recently been excavated and shows a triple-ramparted fort with a settlement outside—this *baile* or 'town' is specifically mentioned as having been destroyed when the fortress was burnt by Flaithbertach Ua Néill in 1010. The older royal centre was the ancient hill-fort of Dún-dá-Lethglass at Downpatrick. There is no specific mention of a monastery here earlier than the eighth century, and it may have been deliberately converted into one

* See diagram and note pp. 122–3.


CENÉL
CENÉL LUGDACH
Ailech
Kilmacrenan
Derry
Uí Meic Cairthinn
Cian
Dungiven
CENÉL NENDA
Raphoe
U Í N É I L L
CENÉL CONAILL
FIR MAIGE ITHA
Uí FIACHRACH
Bodoney
CENÉL mBOGAINE
ARDA SRATHA
UÍ MACC UAIS
FIR LUIRG
UÍ NADSLUAIG
Clogher
Tuath Rátha
CAIRPRE DROMA CLIAB
A I R G I A L L
UÍ CHREMTHAINN
Clones
CONNACHTA
BRÉIFNE
Kilmore
CAIRPRE GABRA
SOUTHERN
Uí Macc Uais Midi
Ardagh
UÍ NÉILL



The North c. 800 A.D.

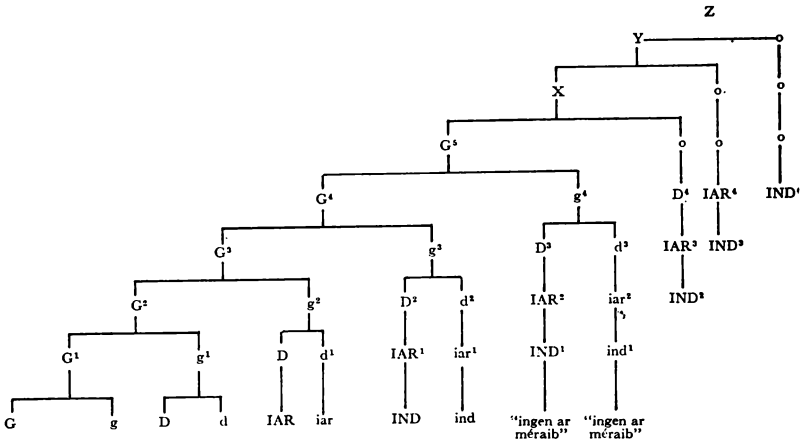
Shading indicates 1000 ft. contour

Dotted boundaries are those of later medieval dioceses of Raphoe, Derry, Connor, Down, Dromore, Armagh, Clogher, Kilmore and Ardagh.

Continuous boundaries those of ecclesiastical provinces of Armagh, Dublin and Tuam.

UÍ NÉILL DYNASTIES. **Subject tribes of Uí Néill**

TRIBES OF AIRGIALLA. Tribes of Airgialla directly subject to Uí Néill over-kingdoms



NOTE

This diagram presents a simplified scheme of the Old Irish *fine*. From the standpoint of G^1 his *geilfhine* ('clear' or 'obvious family') comprise his children G, g; his brother or brothers g^1; his father and uncle(s) G^2, g^2; and so on back to his great-great-grandfather G^5. His *derbfhine* ('certain family') comprises first cousins in every generation, from his nephews D, d to D^4 the cousin(s) of his great-grandfather. Similarly the *iarfine* (IAR, iar . . . IAR^4) and the *indfhine* (IND, ind . . . IND^4) comprise second and third cousins respectively—the terms are connected with those for great-grandson and great-great-grandson *iarmua* and *indua*. Children of members of the *indfhine* were called by the jurists *ingnea ar méraib*—'finger-nails', since on attaining majority they would cease to be members of the *fine*.

It will be observed that while the *geilfhine* extended over five generations (excluding children who were not *sui iuris*) the other branches of the *fine* only covered four. But in order to find all members of the *fine* it was necessary to calculate back a further three generations beyond G^5. Given the polygamous nature of Irish dynasts it was quite possible for g^4 to be alive during the maturity of G^1, and he would certainly be able to identify his cousins of the same generation. Thus the *fine* could be reconstructed from living memory in a preliterate society.

If the diagram be compared with Table 6 of Appendix II, it will be seen that Tommaltach mac Cathail stands in the same relationship to Fiachnae mac Áedo Róin as does IND^1 to G^1: therefore his children will not remain in the royal *fine*.* It is difficult to elucidate the exact workings of the system, since our diagram can only show the *fine* from the point of view of G^1. In ordinary families the headship of the *fine* would have devolved on G^1 or G^2 as the living and able representatives of

* See Additional Note.

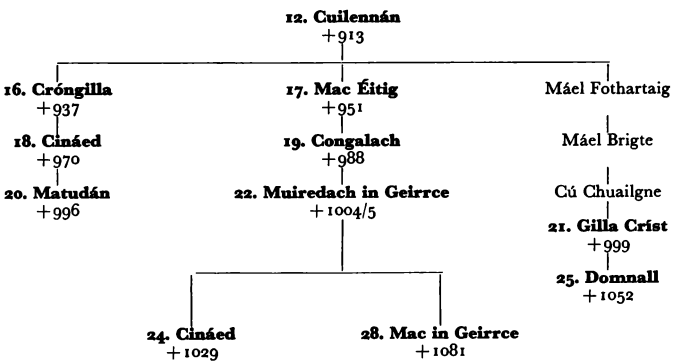
the senior male line, but such seniority did not entail primogeniture, and was not a determining factor in the matter of succession to the kingship. From the point of view of IND[1] his *geilfhine* would consist of his children, brothers and uncles as well as of IAR[2], D[3], g[4], G[4] and G[5]. Therefore, although Tommaltach was only in Fiachnae's *indfhine*, his own *geilfhine* included the kings Máel Cobo (+647) and Blathmac (+670).

It is doubtful how far the outliers not descended from G[5] could be considered as *rígdamnai*, but the early strata of the genealogies seem to confirm that they were. For instance, the eighth-century tract on the Dál Fiatach traces the descendents of Suibne son of Fiachnae mac Demmáin for three generations down to Rechtabra mac Áedo. Rechtabra would stand in the relation of IND[3] to Fiachnae's G[1]. Similarly, the son and grandson of Congal Cennfota are named: Demmán son of Cú Roí son of Congal would appear as IND[2] on our diagram, though since his grandfather had been king he had a reasonable hope of succeeding.

Normally, however, the *rígdamnai* were most likely to be those members of the reigning king's *derbfhine* who were still in the prime of life. The famous example of the Uí Dúnlainge succession to the kingship of Leinster is perhaps not strictly relevant here and will be discussed in the following chapter. Already in some legal texts we find the term *derbfhine* applied to the narrower *geilfhine*, and in Irish *derbráthair* means 'brother' whereas *bráthair* is simply a male relative. A similar tendency to narrow the limits of dynastic succession is clearly observable in the Middle Irish period.

ADDITIONAL NOTE

A rather similar case to Tommaltach's appears in the succession to the kingship of Conailli Muirtheimne:



Gilla Críst's accession (which occurred without any feud) assured the eligibility of his son Domnall in the following century. The picture is obscured, however, by lack of information as to the pedigrees of No. 23 Crínán (+1012), No. 26 Cináed (+1066) and No. 27 Mac Huí Tréodán (+1078).

by Fiachnae or his father Áed Róin. It would have been dangerous to allow any prestige from possession of the site to accrue to the rival princes of Leth Cathail. Accordingly, we find Fiachnae's son Loingsech abbot there at his death in 800. He was not celibate: his family and that of his brother Cairell (king of Ulaid from 810 to 819) remained prominent in the ecclesiastical 'city', and at least two of Cairell's descendants are recorded as *airchinnig* or lay-abbots in 989 and 1083. Such connections between secular and ecclesiastical power were a commonplace of this period of dynastic consolidation and monastic wealth, and the resulting abuses preceded the Viking raids which have often borne the full blame for the decline of the Irish church. But religious feeling existed even in the royal families: a nephew of Loingsech, Diarmait ua hÁedo Róin, was a leader of the ascetic Céli Dé or Culdees and founded the monastery of Dísert Diarmata (Castledermot, county Kildare), apparently on lands donated many centuries before to the monastery of Bangor by the king of Uí Bairrche.

The independence of the Ulaid in face of the growing power of the Uí Néill is well illustrated by an incident which took place towards the end of Fiachnae's reign. In 784 a meeting was arranged between him and the high-king Donnchad Midi at Inis na Ríg off the Brega coast. The Ulster king arrived by sea, but would not step ashore onto Donnchad's territory, while for the high-king to go aboard Fiachnae's boat would have been tantamount to going into his house—a formal gesture of submission. A marginal verse in the annals comments:

Ossí brígh
in dál occ Innsi na Rīgh:
Donnchadh ni dichet for muir,
Fiachnae ni tuidchet hi tīr.

And this is the outcome
of the conference at Kings' Island:
Donnchad cannot put to sea,
Fiachnae finds it impossible to land.

Alarm at the continuing encroachments of the Cenél nEógain on Airgialla and the church of Armagh accounts for the presence of Muiredach mac Eochada king of Ulaid on the losing side at the battle of Leth Cam in 827 where many kings of the Airgialla were slain. The victor was Niall mac Áeda, king of Cenél nEógain and later high-king. He fought to protect the abbot Eógan Mainistrech, who held in plurality also the abbacies of Clonard and Monasterboice, against the

attempts of Cummascach mac Cathail, king of Uí Chremthainn, to assert the rival claims of the bishop Artrí son of Conchobar. The offices of bishop and abbot at Armagh were now often separate, since the abbot, who was the real *comarba Pátraic* or 'heir of St Patrick', was often a lay dynast. It is possible that Artrí was the son of the current high-king, Conchobar mac Donnchada of the Southern Uí Néill: at any rate the latter attacked abbot Eógan three years later, carrying off his cattle and capturing his retinue.

The battle of Leth Cam settled the fate of Airgialla. The Cenél nEógain had already won over the Airthir, supporting their abbatial candidates against those of the Uí Chremthainn. From now on the abbacy and other offices were monopolised by Airthir families: the Uí Nialláin held the hereditary office of *oeconomus*, and from 996 the Clann Sínaig of Uí Echdach—that *generatio mala et adultera* denounced by St Bernard in his *Life* of St Malachy—kept a tight grip on the abbacy. Such spoils adequately compensated the kings of Airthir for the loss of any real political power. After 827 kings of all Airgialla appear regularly in the annals, though eligibility for this position was not confined to any one of the tribal dynasties. This over-kingship denotes no advance in status, for the king of Airgialla was now the direct vassal of Cenél nEógain.

The kings of Cenél nEógain, though styled of Ailech, had now their dynastic centre in Tyrone: they were inaugurated at Tulach Óc near Dungannon and buried in the *mausoleum regum* at Armagh. In the course of the following centuries the Uí Nadsluaig dynasty of Uí Chremthainn shifted southwards from Clogher and Clones to Farney in south Monaghan, reducing the Uí Méith, Mugdorna and Fir Rois to subordinate status. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries they were led by the powerful family of Ua Cerbaill (O'Carroll) who pushed southwards again to the Boyne, absorbing first the Conailli Muirtheimne of Ulster and then the Uí Néill sub-kingdom of Fir Arda Ciannachta. Thus they consoled themselves for their defeat, and many became kings of all Airgialla.

Meanwhile the Uí Thuirtri, whose lands had been absorbed into the kingdom of Ailech, moved eastwards across the Bann. This infiltration had started as early as 776, and it was as allies rather than conquerors that they sought to retain some measure of independence in Dál nAraidi. Nevertheless they probably contributed to and certainly profited by the decline of the Eilne branch of Dál nAraidi whose lands they acquired in the tenth century. Their ruling family of Ua Flainn

(O'Flynn, O'Lynn) kept territory west of the Bann—the Londonderry barony of Loughinsholin—albeit as a tributary kingdom within Cenél nEógain, but their own residence was strategically placed on crannogues in Lough Neagh and Lough Beg. Their connection with Airgialla proper ceased with the death of Máel Craíbe mac Duibsinaig, the last Uí Macc Uais king of all Airgialla, at the battle of Dublin in 919.

Dál nAraidi power was seriously weakened by the expansion of Uí Thuirtri and after 972 they never again provided an over-king of Ulaid. Even at the height of their fame they had not been able to prevent the Ulaid proper from winning the provincial kingship at least once in every generation—no king of Dál Fiatach is recorded who did not become king of Ulster, although the claims of Bressal mac Áedo Róin (+750) are somewhat doubtful. The Dál Fiatach had eaten into the south of Dál nAraidi, and by the twelfth century the Uí Thuirtri had advanced so far that Ua Flainn was styling himself 'king of Dál nAraidi and Dál Riata', although Ua Loingsig kings of the legitimate line still ruled Mag Line from Lisnalinchy.

The twelfth-century *Book of rights* exhibits uncertainty as to the status of Uí Thuirtri, treating it both as a subject kingdom of Cenél nEógain and, in accordance with genealogical and antiquarian tradition, as part of Airgialla. The confusion also affected the plans made at the synod of Ráith Bressail in 1111 for the introduction of diocesan jurisdiction. The diocese of Connor there envisaged embraced all of western Uí Thuirtri together with Fir Lí and Fir Chraíbe in county Londonderry, although the Fir Lí had in fact migrated with their overlords east of the Bann and their lands had been conquered by the Cenél nEógain sub-king Ua Catháin (O'Kane) who had made himself king of Ciannachta Glinne Geimin. Recognition of the true state of affairs came at the synod of Kells in 1152 when the diocese of Ráith Luraig was set up, and at the synod of Brí mac Taidg in 1158 when Ráith Luraig was absorbed into the newly created diocese of Derry. The diocese of Connor was now confined to the traditional extent of Dál nAraidi and Dál Riata. The diocese of Derry represents the Cenél nEógain territories, as that of Raphoe does those of Cenél Conaill, but it does not take into account their extension into county Tyrone, since Armagh was allowed to retain the northern limits of her eighth-century *paruchia*. The diocese of Clogher corresponds to the kingdom of Uí Chremthainn and its dependencies, but once again does not take note of the twelfth-century penetration of the Cenél nEógain sept of Cenél Feradaig to the Fermanagh border. Consequently Donnchad Ua Cerbaill, king of Airgialla, persuaded St Malachy, whose

brother Christian was bishop of Clogher, to transfer the see to Louth where the centre of his power lay. Only in the thirteenth century, when the Anglo-Norman conquest had transformed county Louth into 'English Oriel', was this area restored to the primatial diocese of Armagh.

The dominance of Cenél nEógain after 827 was a serious threat to the Ulaid. Although in 851 Matudán mac Muiredaig finally acknowledged Máelsechlainn mac Máele Ruanaid as high-king, and although the Ulaid subsequently appear on some great hostings called by the high-king—as in 919 when Áed mac Eochocáin fell at the battle of Islandbridge in the army of Niall Glúndub—they were determined to resist succumbing to the fate of the Airgialla. They would recognise a high-king of Ireland, even a Cenél nEógain high-king, but they would not submit to him so long as he remained merely king of the North.

In 1004 a great battle was fought at the inauguration site of Cráeb Tulcha. Eochaid mac Ardgail king of Ulaid, Donnchad ua Loingsig king of Dál nAraidi, and many other princes were slain, and complete ruin only averted by the death in battle of the victor, Áed ua Néill. So many of the Dál Fiatach *derbfhine* fell that the following years saw complete confusion as to the succession: no fewer than four kings met a bloody death at the hands of dynastic rivals in the single year 1007, and for three generations the kingship was contested between the families of Ua Mathgamna (whose pedigree has not been preserved) and Mac Duinnshléibe. It is a measure of Dál nAraidi impotence that they could not profit from the chaos.

In the eleventh century family surnames became common among the royal septs in Ireland. These probably originated in a desire to distinguish the *rígdamnai* from remoter relatives. Thus in Ulster not merely the sons and grandsons of Eochaid mac Ardgail, but also his later descendants took the name Mac Eochada or Ua hEochada (MacCaughey, Haughey, Hoey). The disintegration of the Old Irish legal system led to increasing uncertainty even among the jurists as to the precise definition of the legal terms referring to the various branches of the *fine*. Great dynasties such as the Cenél nEógain had proliferated into so many different septs that only an expert genealogist could trace their relationship, so that they adopted names such as Ua Néill (O'Neill) Mac Lochlainn (MacLoughlin), Ua Catháin (O'Kane), Ua Gairmledaig (O'Gormley). The surname Ua Néill derives from the tenth-century high-king Niall Glúndub, and has caused much confusion among modern historians since it is identical in form to their sept

name of Uí Néill common to all the descendants of Niall Noígiallach. Of course, after some generations even the surname failed to serve its original purpose. So for instance when after 1137 the Dál Fiatach kingship was confined to the descendants of Donn Sléibe Mac Eochada (slain in 1091), the *rígdamnai* set themselves apart from the rest of the family by using the name Mac Duinnshléibe (Donleavy).

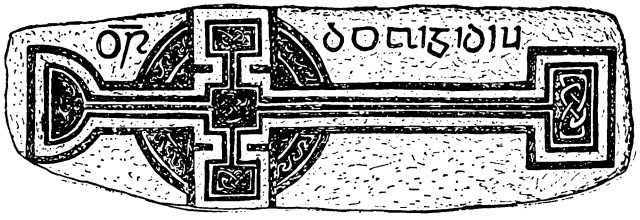
The Ulaid failed to ally with Brian Bóruma in his ambitious challenge to the Uí Néill, but by the end of the eleventh century they saw the advantages of a high-kingship seated in distant Munster and sought the aid of Muirchertach Ua Briain. Muirchertach's attempt to come to their aid and extend his authority to the North failed dismally at the battle of Mag Cobo in 1103: thereafter the Ulaid had to make their peace as best they could with Mac Lochlainn of Cenél nEógain. Domnall Mac Lochlainn pursued the policy of partition typical of twelfth-century aspirants to the high-kingship and in 1113 deposed Donnchad mac Duinnshléibe and divided Dál Fiatach between an unnamed member of the Ua Mathgamna family and Donnchad's brothers. He did not disturb the kings of Dál nAraidi and Uí Echach Cobo, but took the unprecedented step of depriving the Dál Fiatach of their overlordship of Ulster by asserting his own immediate suzerainty over these two kingdoms. However, the Ulaid were able to win back their old status from Domnall's son Conchobar in 1129.

In 1148 Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn renewed his grandfather's policy, dividing Ulaid between four *tigernai*—mere 'lords' rather than kings. His success so alarmed his powerful vassal Donnchad Ua Cerbaill of Airgialla that he was forced to reinstate Cú Ulad Mac Duinnshléibe as king. In 1165 Ua Cerbaill once again acted as peace-maker between Muirchertach (now high-king of Ireland) and Cú Ulad's son and successor Eochaid. In return he was granted the territory of Benna Bairrche—the Mourne mountains, which derive their present name from the migration thither of the Mugdorna from Ua Cerbaill's lands in Monaghan. It was Muirchertach's subsequent treacherous blinding of Eochaid Mac Duinnshléibe in 1166 that led to his own downfall and death when Ua Cerbaill transferred his allegiance to Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair king of Connacht.

Even after de Courcy's invasion and under the de Burgo earls of Ulster Mac Duinnshléibe remained *rex Hibernicorum Ulidiae*. The dynasty gave up the struggle about the year 1280 and are next found in service with Ua Domhnaill of Tír Chonaill—an Uí Néill king certainly, but one who shared their hostility to the dominant O'Neills of Tír Eóghain.

Commonly known by the soubriquet of Mac an Ulltaigh (MacNulty, 'son of the Ulsterman') they adopted the profession of physician. Similarly the Ua Cléirigh (O'Clery) family, once kings of Uí Fiachrach Aidne in south Connacht, found shelter with Ua Domhnaill to become well-known historians and genealogists. Clearly, membership of a learned order was an acceptable compensation for lost royalty.

It was therefore not until the end of the thirteenth century that the O'Neills could call themselves kings of Ulster. And it was not until 1364 that the conservative *Annals of Ulster* can bring themselves to style Áedh Mór Ua Néill *rí Uladh*. By then a junior branch of the dynasty, the Clann Áedha Bhuidhe or O'Neills of Clandeboy, had established themselves on the ruins of the Anglo-Norman earldom of Ulster. Niall Ua Néill legitimised his claim in the eyes of the learned classes by holding a great feast for the poets of Ireland at the site of Emain Macha in 1381. The restoration of the name Ulster to cover once again the whole North was made possible only by the extinction of the kingdom of Ulaid.



8

Kings of Leinster

The Province of Leinster (*Cóiced Laigen*) was a well-defined unit centred on the basins of the rivers Liffey, Barrow and Slaney, cut off from the midlands by the vast bogs of Offaly and by a zone of forest north of the Liffey, and from Munster by the uplands of Osraige rising west of the Barrow. The eastern seaboard received no real importance until it was opened up by the Norse settlements at Dublin, Wicklow, Arklow and Wexford. The eastern face of the Wicklow mountains remained in the hands of the Fortuatha Laigen—the unfree peoples of Leinster and those not regarded as ethnically Laigin. The centre of political power lay for centuries in the north, in the Liffey plains of Kildare, and the kingship of the Fifth was fittingly symbolised by the great hill-fort of Ailenn.

Time and again it was the fate of dynasties who lost their hold on these plains to retreat eastwards across the mountains into political impotence: the Uí Garrchon and Uí Enechglaiss in the sixth century, and the Uí Máil in the eighth were to be followed after the Anglo-Norman invasion by their supplanters, the O'Tooles and O'Byrnes of Uí Dúnlainge.

But the northern rulers, although kings of the province, had to tolerate a certain independence among the Uí Cheinnselaig in the south. Leinster was divided along the *gabair* or watershed between the Liffey and Slaney—a line reflected in the diocesan boundaries between Dublin, Glendalough and Kildare in the north (Laigin Tuathgabair) and Leighlin and Ferns in the south (Laigin Desgabair). The Loígis had been traditionally dependent on the northern dynasties, but their incorporation into the diocese of Leighlin probably resulted from the dominance of the Uí Cheinnselaig in the twelfth century.

The division of Leinster was so marked that the king of the province

is sometimes referred to as *rí Diabul-Laigen*—king of the double Laigin. Nevertheless, the ruling houses of the two Laigin were closely related and seem to have set off on their respective careers of expansion from the central region of the Barrow. Their origin legend commences with the saga of the destruction of Dinn Ríg—a large hill-fort near Leighlinbridge—allegedly brought about by their remote ancestor Labraid Loingsech. The early associations of the Uí Cheinnselaig were with Ráith Bile (Rathvilly in the north of county Carlow). After having been worsted in the struggle for the northern plains by the Uí Dúnlainge in the course of the seventh century, the more enterprising branches of the dynasty set off south-east across the Blackstair Mountains into county Wexford where they built up an isolated hegemony over the south based on Ferns, the monastery of St Máedóc. Hence they were to issue forth in the eleventh century when the Uí Dúnlainge had been weakened by centuries of humiliating defeats at the hands of the Uí Néill and the Dublin Norse as well as by internal feuds, and had finally fallen a prey to the ambitions of Osraige, whose kings had long since shaken off the hegemony of Cashel and aspired to become lords of Leinster.

But if Leinster's essential geographical unity lent it some degree of political stability its compactness was rather that of a well-fortified retreat. Like the Ulaid, the Laigin appear more often in a posture of defence than attack, and they too had memories, vague and poorly recorded it is true, of a wider area of dominance.

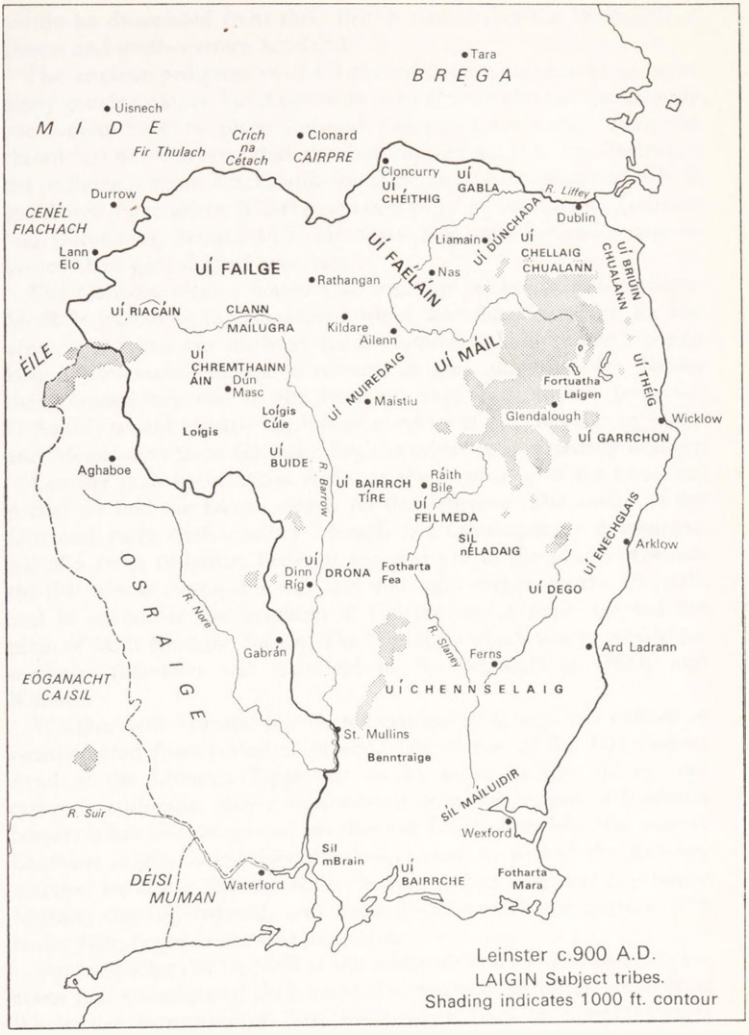
Racially too the Laigin claimed to be more united than the other Irish provinces. Their only *fortuatha* or alien peoples of any consequence were the Fothairt and the Loígis. The former were scattered throughout Leinster and had minor branches outside the province, but left their name on the baronies of Forth in south-east Wexford and in eastern Carlow—the kingdoms of Fothairt Mara and Fothairt Fea. Apparently as a subject population rather than as a tribal kingdom they are also found around the church of Kildare, whose foundress St Brigit was the most distinguished member of their race. It is interesting to observe that they are usually situated in close contiguity to one or other of the various groups of the Uí Bairrche, who were genealogically Laigin, descended from Cathaír Mar, and who were evidently more important a dynasty in the sixth and seventh centuries than later records allow.

The other and more prominent of the alien stocks were the Loígis, whose name has been given, though not with complete accuracy, to the county of Leix (*Laois*, formerly Queen's County). As the prime defenders

of the province against attack from Munster the Loígis enjoyed that status of most favoured vassal which the Uí Néill accorded to the Gailenga and Ciannachta. It seems clear, however, that not all of the famous seven branches of the Loígis were settled in this border zone: we hear of a sept among the Uí Enechglaiss near Arklow, while the barony of Shelbourne in south-west Wexford may be named from the Síl mBrain of Loígis. North of this is the barony of Bantry, the home of another *fortuath*, the Benntraige, who are found in Munster and elsewhere, but who play no real part in the historical record of Leinster. The Barrow estuary had curiously little significance until the foundation of the Norse city of Waterford, although one of Leinster's greatest saints, Mo-Ling, had founded his monastery of St Mullins near at hand. The Laigin, like most of the Celts, were by preference a land-locked people.

Nevertheless, their own origin legend brought them across the sea from Gaul under the leadership of Labraid Loingsech. They derived their name from the spears they carried, and while this seems etymologically unsound for the name Laigin, it does suit their archaic name of Gáileóin, which comes from the same root as that of the Gaesati or 'spearmen' who invaded Italy in the third century BC. The synthetic historians who composed the World Chronicle dated the destruction of Dinn Ríg, which marked the foundation of the Laigin confederacy, to around the year 300 BC, but it is impossible to be sure whether this calculation was based on any genuine tradition, was merely an intelligent guess, or is purely artificial, for the foundation of Emain Macha and the Ulster kingdom and the beginnings of the Pictish kingship in Scotland are both dated to the same period in what seems to be a deliberate attempt at synchronising their regnal era with the establishment of the 'kingdom of the Greeks' by Alexander and his successors in the Eusebian scheme of world history.

Early traditions, corroborated by the evidence of place-names, may well point to the Laigin as a distinct group of Celtic invaders who in the first flush of success swept across north Munster and the southern midlands to the Shannon and even beyond into Connacht and Clare. Identical with or closely associated with the Laigin and Gáileóin were the Domnainn or Fir Domnann, who have left their name at Inber Domnann (Malahide, county Dublin) and Irrus Domnann, the great wastes of bog in north-west Mayo, and who were remembered as one of the early population groups of Connacht later reduced to subject status until they finally disappeared from historical view. They can



Leinster c.900 A.D.
LAIGIN Subject tribes.
Shading indicates 1000 ft. contour

hardly be dissociated from their British name-sakes the Dumnonii of Devon and south-western Scotland.

The ancient pedigrees of the Leinster dynasts appear to preserve many genuine names, but if one were to treat their chronology seriously one would have to place Labraid Loingsech far earlier than the chroniclers do—not later than the sixth century BC. It is very likely that the pedigree is an artificial conflation of different tribal traditions which could well have arisen if three separate peoples, the Laigin, Gáileóin and Domnainn, merged their identities in a great federation and so pooled their genealogical resources.

The Gáileóin receive honourable mention in the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*. Medb is jealous of the contingent which they have provided for her army, and when her husband Ailill—himself a Leinsterman, though king of Connacht—refuses to connive at their massacre, she divides them among the rest of the host lest they become too powerful. O'Rahilly would identify the historical tribes of the Gailenga in Mayo and Meath with these Gáileóin, but the evidence is extremely obscure.

Leaving such speculations aside, at the beginning of the historical period we find the Laigin clearly on the defensive. The annals of the fifth and early sixth century, though not contemporary documents, tell of a series of battles between 475 and 516 in the course of which the tide of war swung this way and that until eventually the Uí Néill, and in particular the dynasties of Cairpre and Fiachu, wrested the plain of Mide from the Laigin. The boundary which was to remain for centuries thereafter was stabilised by the boglands of Offaly and Kildare.

Warfare with Munster is reflected confusedly in saga but cannot be reconstructed from historical record. The claims of the Dál Cairpri Arad of the Limerick-Tipperary border to be Laigin, though not certainly authentic, may commemorate an earlier extent of Laginian power; it has been suggested too that the Éli of north Munster were of Laginian origin. Eventually the Loígis were to defend the Leinster marches in Slieve Bloom, while Osraige (never very securely under Munster control) enjoyed, and was later to exploit, the position of a buffer state between the two provinces.

But even after the Uí Néill in the midlands and the Munster Eóganachta had consolidated their respective hegemonies until they met at the border monastery of Birr, the tenuous lines of communication leading from north Leinster across the bogs of Offaly to the Shannon and Lough Derg remained under the control of a series of monasteries

several of which were Laginian in tradition and sympathy. The most notable perhaps is Terryglass in Ormond, founded in the sixth century by the Leinster prince Colum mac Crimthannán, whose coarb Áed mac Crimthainn in the twelfth century was one of the principal scribes of the Book of Leinster.

The early sources for Leinster history are meagre and unsatisfactory. Contemporary annalistic writing in Ireland does not begin until the middle of the sixth century, but it is not until the eighth century that the annals deal in any way fully with Leinster affairs. Before this date we have mainly records of their warfare with the Uí Néill emanating from a northern source. The coherent account of the battles whereby the Uí Néill won control of the midlands, already referred to, probably represents genuine historical tradition later written up in annalistic form.

But Leinster does provide us with one extremely interesting set of documents which throw much light on archaic attitudes to kingship, bardic panegyric and the oral transmission of genealogical information in verse form. Regnal poems written in archaic verse which at times can be strangely impressive have survived in later manuscripts, such as these lines on a prehistoric king Mes Delmonn, credited in later teaching at least with the building of the hill-fort of Dún Ailinne:

Mál ad-rualaid iathu marb mac soër Sétnai,
selaig strathu Fomoire fo dóene domnaib
Di óchtur Alinne oirt triunu talman,
trebunn trén tuathmar Mes-Telmann Domnann.

A prince has entered the realms of the dead, the noble son of Sétnae; he ravaged the meadow-valleys of the Fomorians underneath the worlds of men.

From the summit of Ailenn he smote the strong ones of the earth—a mighty tribune of many peoples, Mes Delmann of the Domnainn.

The Fomoiri or Fomorians are the sinister forces of Irish mythology, often identified with human raiders from across the sea—perhaps the piratical broch-dwellers of Scotland. It is uncertain whether this poem is an elegy on the death of a king of Leinster who is visualised as triumphing over the realms of the dead as he had once over those of the living, or whether it is the record of an overseas expedition by Mes Delmann, for the popular imagination readily invested the lands over the seas with the characteristics of the Otherworld. Conversely, Welsh mythology often seems to regard Ireland as the Otherworld,

and the early Welsh poem on Arthur's raid on Caer Siddi reveals similar conceptions. At any rate, other poems in this series clearly refer to Leinster raids on Britain, Scotland and the Orkneys and even to battles with the Roman legions. The word 'tribune' in this poem is obviously a Latin borrowing (*pace* those scholars who would see in it a native Irish word), but whether such details reflect actual contact with the Roman world is a moot point, since they may be due to the later learning of the schools. But it is as well to remember that the Lleyn peninsula in Wales bears the name of the Laigin, and that the Irish are said to have been driven out of North Wales by Cunedda some time in the fifth century. But if records of these raids are correctly assigned to the princes named, then the chronology of the World Chronicle, and even more so that implied in the pedigrees, is plainly exaggerated.

Most scholars agree that these poems are early, but there has been no general consensus as to their exact date. It is certain that poems in this style continued to be written or at least re-edited as late as the seventh century, for the central poem purporting to give the pedigree of the kings of Leinster, which is ascribed to Laidcenn mac Bairchedo, a poet allegedly of the fifth century, devotes many verses to tracing their descent from Japhet through Noah back to Adam, as well as to the seventy-two races of the world descended from Noah according to a scheme found in Isidore of Seville and other authorities.

Kuno Meyer assigned most of these poems to the seventh century, but O'Rahilly thought that some at least were much later. On the other hand, Carney believes that some may indeed date from the fifth century, while Myles Dillon opts for the sixth. Dillon has translated some verses ascribed to a legendary king Find Fili in praise of his ancestor Móen or Labraid Loingsech:

Móen óen ó ba nóed ní ba noos ardríg;
ort rígu rout án hua Luircc Labraid . . .

Móen the only one, since he was a child—it was not the action of a great king—he slew kings, a noble cast, Labraid, the grandson of Lorc . . .

The warriors of the Gáliáin took lances into their hands; from that they are called Laigin, the valiant host of the Gáliáin.

They won battles as far as the seashores of the lands of Érimón. After his exile, the exiled one seized the lordship of the warriors of the Gael.

A griffin overran unknown country, the grandson of Lóegaire Lorc, higher than all men save only the holy king of heaven.

Gold brighter than the sun, he overcame men and gods, the one god is Móen son of Áne, the only king.

These Irish encomiums are remarkably like the early bardic poems preserved in the Gupta inscriptions; and it is my belief that here, as elsewhere, an ancient common inheritance has been preserved in India and in Ireland. It may be said that the praise of a king by his court-poet must always be in much the same terms. But the similarity of social position, the elaborate technique, the deliberate obscurity of language, which characterise both the Indian *kavi* and the Irish *fili*, are hardly accidental. We know that the Celts of Gaul had bards whose office was the same as that of the Irish bards, and I suggest that when Posidonius saw them standing in the assemblies chanting the praises of their patrons he was witnessing an ancient Indo-European custom.*

It is evident that these poems deserve much more attention than they have been accorded since they were first published and translated by Kuno Meyer. Meanwhile, whatever the date of their composition, they can afford at least some information to the historian. They are independent of and contradict the official picture of the regnal succession within Leinster which was promulgated by the genealogical tracts in which they have been embedded. The obscurity of their language protected them from tampering emendations while their traditional prestige ensured their preservation. Official doctrine claimed that the Uí Dúnlainge had enjoyed a near monopoly of the kingship as far back as the sixth century, but a glance at Table 9 in Appendix II will show that this was achieved by the simple expedient of converting the pedigree of the Uí Dúnlainge into a regnal list, thus giving a succession from father to son totally at variance with Irish law. This scheme was adopted by later interpolators of the annals, but the earliest annalistic texts, although sparing in their references to Leinster, display the artificiality of the scheme, while references elsewhere in Irish literature, particularly in the hagiography, also contain fossilised fragments of earlier tradition which have escaped the notice of the revisers of the genealogical texts.

For instance, the *Lives* of St Comgall of Bangor and of St Fintan or Munnu of Taghmon refer to Cormac mac Diarmata of Uí Bairrche as

* Dillon, *Early Irish Literature*, pp. 173 f.

king of Uí Cheinnselaig (an anachronism for 'king of South Leinster') and to his older contemporary Colum or Colmán mac Cormaic of Uí Cheinnselaig as 'king of North Leinster'. The unadulterated annals show that Crundmáel (+656), grandson of this Colmán, was king of Leinster, which suggests that his father Rónán is probably the king of Leinster who died in 624 rather than the like-named Rónán mac Colmán of Uí Dúnlainge, as the regnal lists would have us believe. The annals also reveal that at this date the Uí Cheinnselaig had not yet lost hope of controlling the central plains of North Leinster.*

Similarly, our archaic poems give a regnal list for the prehistoric period (probably late fourth and early fifth century) which is quite at variance with that of the Middle Irish texts:

Cathaír Már
Fiachu ba hAiccíd
Bressal Bélach (thus far a mere pedigree)
Muiredach Mo-Sníthech
Móenach
Mac Caírthinn
Nad Buidb.

Of these names Muiredach Mo-Sníthech and Móenach belong to the Uí Bairrche and Nad Buidb to the Uí Dego, while Mac Caírthinn may be of the Uí Enechglaiss—all septs, which while connected with the dominant Uí Dúnlainge of the north and Uí Cheinnselaig of the south, were never admitted into the later regnal scheme.†

The name of Mac Caírthinn is of peculiar interest, since although he is not mentioned in any of the genealogical texts, he is probably to be identified with the person commemorated on an ogham stone in the barony of Duleek two or three miles south of Slane and the Boyne which reads MAQI CAIRATINI AVI INEQAGLASI, 'of Mac Caírthinn grandson of Enechglass', and further with a mysterious obit in the *Annals of Innisfallen* c. 447 of a certain Mac Caírthinn son of Cóelub who fell in the battle of Mag Femin between the Laigin and the men of Munster. Here the Munster annalist has probably confused the place-name Femen in Brega (the area where the inscription is sited) with the better-known plain of that name around Cashel in Tipperary and thus thought of the battle as having involved the men of his own province. But the references to Munster in the early annals are even scarcer than those to Leinster, while both the ogham and the annals fit in neatly

* See Appenxix II, Table 10.

† See Appendix II, Table 8.

enough with the traditions of warfare between the Uí Néill and Laigin for the midlands, as well as with other evidence that the Uí Enechglaiss in the fifth and sixth centuries had not yet been relegated to the politically insignificant area of the Wicklow coast.

Again the annals show clearly that at least two kings of the Uí Garrchon, whom the later genealogists affected to regard as one of the *fortuatha Laigen*, fought as kings of all Leinster against the Uí Néill in the later fifth century—Findchad mac Garrchon (+485) and his son Fróech (+495). This sept too was later pushed out to the coast, and the later redactors of the annals hopelessly confused the notices of their activities. The ninth-century *Vita Tripartita*, drawing on earlier records, brings St Patrick to visit the king of Uí Garrchon at Ráith Inbir near Arklow, but closer examination of the text makes it virtually certain that the original tradition had the saint meet the king at Naas in Kildare, for the diversion to Arklow interrupts a clear itinerary and is otherwise unmotivated.

A tradition of writing archaising verse was maintained in Leinster. One of the more interesting of Irish regnal documents is the *Timna Cathaír Máir** or 'Testament of Cathaír Már', which though composed in heptasyllabic alliterative verse is hardly older than the eighth century. It is far more elaborate than the curt testament of Niall Noígiallach quoted above in Chapter Five. It is clearly modelled on the blessings of Jacob to his sons, progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel, in *Genesis*, xlix. This choice of form results from no mere flight of literary fancy or learned allusion, but rather from the very real similarity of tribal polity between the Old Irish and Old Testament cultures.

The *Timna* is in many ways a puzzling text. Cathaír makes bequests to ten sons, but the ancestors of the Uí Garrchon and Uí Máil are not among them, although both these septs had held the kingship of Leinster—in fact Cellach Cualann of the Uí Máil had died as over-king of the province as late as 715, so that even by the end of the century his dynasty might have cherished hopes of regaining their primacy. No doubt it was this lack of descent from Cathaír Már which enabled the genealogists and others to describe the king of Uí Garrchon as ruler of the *fortuatha Laigen*. On the other hand the Uí Bairrche and Uí Enechglaiss are included in the blessings, although they had recently also been rivals of the Uí Dúnlainge and Uí Cheinnselaig.

Most surprising of all, the text starts with an elaborate blessing on

* The translation of extracts from the *Timna Cathaír Máir* is taken from the edition by Myles Dillon in *Lebor na Cert: the Book of Rights*, pp. 150–69.

Rus Failgech, ancestor of the Uí Failgi, who is clearly promised the *ordan* (*ordinatio* or primacy) of his father:

My rank and my lordship
my beauty and my fame
my nobility and my endurance
my cherished ancestral possessions
my power and my protection
to my chosen champion Rus,
to my noble Failge of the red blade
to my champion stout as oak
to my chariot-fighter triumphant in battle
to my lion for daring
to my headstrong brilliant lord.
May he be head and king of the province,
this festive Rus Failgech!
May he be a protector of the *derbfhine!*
May he be a triumph of fame . . .
For he has the gift of generosity;
may he not hoard wealth
who apportions good grants* to everyone,
flower of the kindreds† of the Gáiliáin . . .
Victorious in battle over the frontier,
he will stoutly conquer the plain of Tara.
Let him not be a traitor to kinship‡! . . .
Cathaír, the torch of Ireland,
his noble honoured father
has chosen him over his brothers . . .

Cathaír leaves his weapons to Dáire Barrach, alleged ancestor of the Uí Bairrche, while his blessing to Bressal Enechglass shows that the Uí Enechglaiss at the time of composition were already settled on the coast:§

My sea with its full harvest to my sweet-voiced Bresal.
May each fierce warrior of thy numerous line
be the steersman of a well-laden fleet! . . .

* *ratha*—see above, p. 44.

† *geilfhine*—see above, p. 122.

‡ *bráithirse*, literally 'brotherhood', often 'alliance'.

§ According to a Middle Irish poem in the Book of Leinster, Rus Failge, Dáire Barrach and Enechglas were triplets born to Cathaír by the goddess Medb.

Many hounds and horses
are thine, and well-watered land,
beauty upon the women of thy race . . .

On account of thy father's love for thee,
he has sent thee from him to the sea.

Fergus Luasgán however is dismissed as untrustworthy to beget kings or princes. A blessing portending peace and prosperity is given to Ailill Céthech, ancestor of the insignificant Uí Chéthig who have left their name on the barony of Ikeathy in north Kildare. Similar blessings are promised to Crimthann, from whom the dynasty of Uí Chrimthainn Áin, St Colum of Terryglass and other saints were sprung:

May there be majesty in thy great houses
learning in the speech of judges,
companies of women with jewelry.
Save only that thou art not king of the province
naught shall be lacking to thy glories,
my heroic Crimthann.

Eochu Timmíne, ancestor of the Uí Buide of Leighlin in Carlow, is cursed like Reuben for violating his father's bed:

No one of his children equal in rank
will be a king rich in herds
at the horse-festivals.

Cathaír himself had committed incest with his daughter Eithne and leaves no land or inheritance to the offspring of that union, Áengus Nic. Cétach is said to be the firstborn and is praised for his valour and nobility; nevertheless:

Tara will not be thronged,
peopled by his heroic children.
The vigour and vow of his children
does not unite a complete territory . . .

His son will be in privations
among tribes and families
without dwelling or patrimony*
until the doom of fires
in which each hundred is consumed.

* '*cin adhbaidh na atharrdha*'—perhaps we should translate 'without a dwelling in his patrimony.'

In fact, Crích na Cétach, around Castlejordan in county Offaly, was quickly swallowed up by the Uí Néill in their conquest of the midlands.

At the very last, however, according to the Middle Irish prose which links the verse bequests, the ancestor of the great Leinster dynasties of Uí Dúnlainge and Uí Cheinnselaig arrives:

> Fiacha Baiced came to his father, and he was the youngest of his children, and he was asking his father for land. And Cathaír said: 'I have nothing for you, and I will give you my blessing since you have no land. And be in fosterage with your brothers until you have strength.' But Fiacha wept then in the presence of his father. Cathaír said then to Fiacha: 'Do so, my son', said he, 'and take my blessing. Abide a month with each of your brothers, and abide seven years with Rosa Failge, who first received my blessing.' The reason why Cathaír gave that instruction to Fiacha was that he might obtain the kingship by virtue of his blessing. Fiacha did everything that Cathaír asked of him. And then Cathaír said to Fiacha:
>
> 'Honoured is the unique youngest son,
> Fiacha, a man in many hundreds,
> lucky offspring of ardent Berba*!
> His brethren will serve him.
> He will seize pleasant Ailenn.
> He will hold famous Carman.†
> He will rule venerable Almain.‡
> He will strengthen Naas with splendour.
> Ladru the steersman with plenteous cargo (?).§
> Splendid salmon over Airgetros,
> he will seize Maistiu of the kings.'

After this enumeration of the chief royal sites of Leinster and Osraige (implied by Airgetros), the blessing brings Fiachu on a triumphant circuit of all Ireland through Munster and Connacht to Ailech, Emain and Tara:

* The river Barrow.

† The site of the *óenach Carmain*, the great provincial assembly of Leinster. It has not been identified, but was probably in the Liffey plain.

‡ The Hill of Allen in north Kildare, legendary home of Finn mac Cumaill and headquarters of the Fianna.

§ Perhaps 'the steersman of Ladru', with reference to Ard Ladrann, a royal site of the Uí Cheinnselaig near Gorey, county Wexford.

'Success in speech and judgement,
the kingship of Labraid Loingsech
be thine, thou manly Fiacha!

Fiachu's soubriquet *ba hAiccid* is explained as meaning 'Fiachu who was a tenant or farmer.' On the analogy of epithets such as Find Fili 'the poet or seer', an earlier king of Leinster, and Crond ba Druí 'Crond who was a druid', ancestor of the Ulster Cruthin, together with the fact that in this very poem Cathaír Már proclaims to Ailill Céthech:

I am Cathaír the triumphant.
I am thy druid and thy father,

it would be tempting to interpret *ba hAiccid* as 'who was a seer', although such a word (a noun of agency from the verb *ad-cī* 'to see') is not elsewhere attested. Perhaps, however, we should accept the traditional etymology, which certainly lends further support to the theory of Alwyn and Brinley Rees that Leinster's 'function' in the Irish cosmological scheme was agricultural and representative of the farmer caste.

The archaic Leinster poems are specific in their claim that the Laigin were entitled to be kings of Tara. Even the Middle Irish synthetic historians could not deny that Cathaír Már and other prehistoric Leinster kings had held the high-kingship before the time of Niall Noígiallach. And the traditions of warfare in the fifth century between Uí Néill and Laigin in Brega and Mide explain, as we have seen, the location of the Duleek ogham commemorating Mac Caírthinn of the Uí Enechglaiss. Mo-Sníthech of the Uí Bairrche is even called 'king of Ireland' in one of the genealogical tracts. The failure of their kings to protect Laginian interests in the midlands must have played a part in the decline of the Uí Bairrche, Uí Garrchon and Uí Enechglaiss, while the Uí Failgi certainly suffered most material damage through the loss of territory in Offaly and Westmeath.

Brandub mac Echach of Uí Cheinnselaig called a definite halt to Uí Néill expansion by his defeat of the high-king Áed mac Ainmerech at the battle of Dún Bolg in 598. He may even have succeeded in temporarily restoring Leinster control over parts of their lost midland territories. Poems preserved in the Book of Leinster record his 'seven blows against Brega', and it is significant that some of his immediate descendants, the Fir Thulach Mide, later ruled a petty kingdom under the overlordship of the Clann Cholmáin of the Southern Uí Néill.

The twelfth-century *Life* of St Colmán of Lynn in Westmeath, which

contains much information concerning the local dynasties of the district, says of Dún na Cairrge (the fort in the parish of Carrick, barony of Fartullagh, county Westmeath):

> This Carraig was ever the residence of the kings of Fir Tulach until the time of the daughter of the son of Conchubar, viz., the wife of Conchubhar Ua Maelsechlainn,* when the latter, the king of Midhe, and the former, his queen, wrested it from Cúcaille, son of Dubhlaidhe, king of Fir Tulach, and it was outraged by depriving it of its own king, and giving it to the queen of Midhe. She was the first of the queens of Midhe that took it, and every one after her has since held it, and it is their own special property, free from the king of Fir Tulach.

In spite of the violation of their rights, the *Life* goes on to claim certain privileges for the Kings of Fir Thulach:

> The king of Midhe is not entitled to demand a troop from Fir Tulach to accompany him on his round, except a lad for his horses when he is in Cró-Inis† instead of the troop to accompany him; and they are not obliged to join a battalion on a day of battle, except with the king, and strangers and mercenaries.

Typical of the manner in which genealogies were manipulated to accord to changed political circumstances is the fact that some authorities treat the Ua Dublaige dynasty of Fir Thulach Mide as a branch of their Ua Máelshechlainn overlords, while another traces their descent from a totally fictitious eponym Fer Tulach son of Niall Noígiallach.

Another dynasty which descended from Brandub mac Echach were the Uí Felmeda of Tulach Ua Felmeda (Tullow, county Carlow). That branch of the Uí Cheinnselaig which came to win dominance over all Leinster in the eleventh and twelfth centuries under the leadership of Diarmait mac Máel-na-mBó and his great-grandson Diarmait Mac Murchada were of a different line, but they were naturally tempted to glorify the memory of Brandub and to point the moral that the Uí Cheinnselaig had been notably more successful than any of the northern Leinster princes in resisting the encroachments of the Uí Néill.

It was against such a political background that the ambitious literary

* King of Mide, 1030–1073.

† The crannogue residence of the Ua Máelshechlainn kings on Lough Ennell near Mullingar.

work known as the *Bóruma Laigen*—'The cattle-tribute of Leinster'—was composed. This purports to tell the origins of the Uí Néill claim to tribute from Leinster and to narrate the chronicle of the centuries of warfare to which that claim gave rise. While the author accepts fully the doctrine of the synthetic historians concerning the Uí Néill ancestry and their high-kingship of all Ireland, he is clearly a patriotic Leinsterman. The central kernel of the tract, the 'Battle of Dún Bolg', is a true king-saga, and in fact survives independently as such; but the bulk of the work is very heterogeneous, and the author draws freely on pseudo-history, on the Fenian legends of Finn mac Cumaill, on the topographical lore of the *dindshenchas*, and to a remarkable extent on hagiography.

Indeed it is notable how in the Leinster tradition the saints function as Homeric gods, striving with fierce loyalty and vindictive piety for the fortunes of the peoples whose patrons they are. Thus in the saga of the 'Battle of Allen,' which tells how the high-king Fergal mac Máele Dúin was defeated and slain by Áed king of Leinster while trying to exact the *bóruma* in 722, Colum Cille is unable to help the Uí Néill because St Brigit appears above the Leinster army, striking terror into the northern hosts. The chief protagonist of the *Bóruma* tract itself is St Mo-Ling, and many of the poems interspersed in the text are in praise of his church of St Mullins. But by the twelfth century the ruling branch among the Uí Cheinnselaig was that settled at Ferns, and the *Life* of the founder of that monastery, St Máedóc, naturally makes him the principal actor and the helper of Brandub.

Briefly, the *Bóruma* tract relates how Eochu king of Leinster in the first century AD submitted to the high-king of Tara, Tuathal Techtmar (ancestor of the Uí Néill and Connachta), and obtained the hand of his daughter Fithir in marriage. Then he decided that he had made the wrong choice and, telling Tuathal that Fithir had died, married her sister Dáirine. The two princesses died of shame when they met (this part of the story probably owes much to the classical myth of Procne and Philomela). Their father the high-king and their foster-fathers the kings of Connacht and Ulster slew Eochu and ravaged Leinster, departing only after imposing a perpetual *éraic* or blood-fine upon the province—the *bóruma*: 'thrice five thousand cows, thrice five thousand swine, thrice five thousand mantles, thrice five thousand silver chains, thrice five thousand wethers, thrice five thousand copper cauldrons, a great cauldron of copper which held twelve swine and twelve oxen for the house of Tara itself, thirty white cows with red ears, with calves of

the same colour, with ties and tethers of bronze, and bronze pails as well.'*

The *bóruma* was levied regularly until the time of Cairpre Lifechar son of Cormac mac Airt, when Bressal Bélach king of Leinster obtained the aid of the legendary Finn mac Cumaill, leader of the Fianna war-bands. Finn led the Laigin to victory and slew the three sons of Cairpre. Thereafter the *bóruma* was not levied until it was reimposed in retribution for the slaying of the thirty princesses, each with a hundred maidens, by Dúnlaing son of Éndae Niae at Tara. But many of the high kings could only levy the *bóruma* by force; Lóeguire mac Néill met his death when he violated his pledge not to impose it, and the tract lists thirty-five battles in which the Laigin successfully resisted its exaction.

When Áed mac Ainmerech became high-king his son Cummascach asked his father's leave to go upon a 'prince's circuit' of Ireland, enjoying the hospitality of all the Irish kings and the privilege of spending a night with their queens in turn. In view of the significant link between marriage and royal inauguration, such a demand would be tantamount to expressing his direct overlordship of their kingdoms. When he arrived in Leinster Brandub trapped and slew him. Áed marched on Leinster to exact revenge. After an unsuccessful attempt by bishop Áedán of Glendalough to obtain a truce, Brandub devises a stratagem: the Laigin pretend to agree to provision the high-king's army and enter his camp hidden in the baskets of food. The result is the complete rout of the Uí Néill host at the battle of Dún Bolg and the death of the high-king.

A digression in the saga relates how the Laigin captured Diarmait mac Áeda Róin, son of the king of Ulster, and his youthful companions, who are released after his father arranges a truce with the Laigin. The alliance is said to have been prophesied in the prehistoric past by Conchobar mac Nessa, and is sealed by the Laigin and Ulaid drinking from a vat a mixture of blood, milk and wine. Diarmait decides to abandon his princely career and becomes a hermit on land granted to him by Brandub at Dísert Diarmata (Castledermot, county Kildare).

This episode is totally anachronistic, but accords with the atmosphere of the writer's own time. It is in the highest degree unlikely that the king of Ulaid should have accompanied the Uí Néill high-king on any expedition in the sixth century. Diarmait is an historical personage, grandson rather than son of Áed Róin, king of Ulaid; he was a leader of the Céli Dé reformers and died in 825 at the hermitage he had founded

* Dillon, *The cycles of the kings*, pp. 104 f.

in 811. Dísert Diarmata was regarded as a daughter-house of Bangor, which had extensive lands in Leinster allegedly granted by a king of Uí Bairrche who had been a disciple of St Comgall. We may recall that St Columbanus came from Leinster to join St Comgall's community at Bangor, whence he sailed for the continent in 590. An actual alliance between the Ulaid and the Laigin did in fact exist in the eleventh century during the reigns of Niall mac Eochada and Diarmait mac Maíl-na-mBó, thus lending verisimilitude to the claim made for Diarmait in the Book of Leinster that he had the allegiance of the Ulaid and was 'high-king with opposition'. The alliance proved disconcertingly effective in 1094 when Domnall Mac Lochlainn, the Cenél nEógain claimant to the high-kingship, was prevented from following up his defeat of his rival Muirchertach Ua Briain, king of Munster and Leth Moga, by the flat refusal of the Ulster contingent in his army to invade Leinster.

In spite of the victory at Dún Bolg, the *Bóruma* tract asserts that the Uí Néill continued to claim and often to levy the tribute until the time of Fínsnechta Fledach who granted St Mo-Ling a remission of the *bóruma* until Monday (*Luan*). He discovered too late from his irate kinsman St Adomnán that the *Luan* intended by Mo-Ling was the Day of Judgement, which the Irish believed would fall on a Monday. His anger was vented on Mo-Ling in vain, and as a result of the saint's curses he fell at the hands of his own cousins in 695.

Here the *Bóruma* tract ends, but a sequel is provided by the Middle Irish saga of the 'Battle of Allen,' where as we have seen the high king Fergal mac Máele Dúin fell in 722. This is the latest historical event to be enshrined in saga literature. The period around the year 730 saw the consolidation of the major provincial dynasties, and also the compilation of the first great genealogical collections, of the annals, and of the secular and ecclesiastical law codes. The heroic age was over, both in king saga and in hagiography, as dynasties had become settled in power and monasteries wealthy and secularised. Regnal dates now become more firmly acceptable to the historian, but the kings themselves cease to be suitable subjects for the writers of hero tales. Later kings indeed, such as Muirchertach of the Leather Cloaks, Cellachán Caisil, Cormac mac Cuilennáin or Brian Bóruma, became the protagonists of literary compositions, but these are no longer pure saga, but rather works of propaganda or historical fiction, based to some extent upon the annals or other historical documentation against which records their veracity can be checked.

It has recently been suggested that entries of Leinster origin begin to be a regular feature of the annals from about the year 775, probably due to the activity of a monk of Clonard, which, though within the Southern Uí Néill territory of Brega, had ancient Leinster connections dating back to the time of its foundation by St Finnian in the sixth century, at which time its lands may still have belonged to the Laigin. The dry and meagre record of the early annals is broken in 738 by a long and circumstantial account in Latin with some pretensions to rhetorical and even poetic style dealing with the battle of Uchbad or Áth Senaig, fought on Tuesday 19 August of that year at Ballyshannon west of Kilcullen, county Kildare, in the heart of the political power centre of northern Leinster.

Here the high-king Áed Allán avenged the death of his father Fergal at the battle of Allen sixteen years earlier:

> *Tunc nepotes Cuind inmensa victoria ditati sunt cum Lagenos suos emulos insolito more in fugam mittunt, calcant, sternunt, subvertunt, consumunt, ita ut usque ad internicionem universus hostilis pene deleretur exercitus, paucis nuntiis remanentibus, et in tali bello tantos cecidisse ferunt quantos per transacta retro secula in uno subcubuisse impetu et feroci ruisse conflictu non comperimus.*
>
> Then the descendants of Conn were granted an overwhelming victory, putting to flight, trampling under foot, prostrating, overthrowing, consuming their rivals the Laigin in unaccustomed wise, so that almost the whole of the enemy host was brought to the point of annihilation, few remaining to tell the tale; and men say that in this great battle more fell than we have been able to discover succumbing in a single assault or being laid low in a fierce conflict through all the centuries of recorded history.

The annalist says that Áed Allán and Áed mac Colggen—*binales reges celsi rigoris rectores*—fought hand to hand: Áed Allán was wounded but victorious, while the king of Leinster *militari mucrone capite truncatus est.* Beside him fell Bran mac Murchado, two kings of the Fothairt, Fergus mac Móenaig and Dub-dá-Chrích mac aui Cellaig, an unidentified son of Trian, Fiangalach hua Máele Aithcen of the Uí Briúin Cualann, Conall hua hAithechdai (probably great-grandson of Aithechdae, founder of a sept of the Uí Cheinnselaig), the four sons of Flann aue Congaile (probably of the Uí Failgi), and Éladach aue Máel Uidir, who is more likely to have been a member of the Síl Máeluidir (after whom the Wexford barony of Shelmaliere is named) than the ancestor

of the related Síl nÉladaig (barony of Sillelagh, county Wicklow).

This entry is worth attention for several reasons. Firstly, because of its unusual detail, which raises false expectations that the annals may bloom into a fuller chronicle. Secondly, this detail and the attempt at a literary style suggest that it may derive from a lost saga—perhaps our hypothetical Clonard annalist writing over a generation later was drawing on traditional lore. If the entry is in fact retrospective, the annalist showed good historical judgement in so highlighting it, for the defeat of Áth Senaig did in fact inaugurate a new age both for Leinster and for the evolution of the Uí Néill high-kingship. Áed Allán, the founder of Cenél nEógain supremacy in the North, had now followed up his defeat of the Ulaid at the battle of Fochairt in 735 with another crushing victory over the second great traditional enemy of his dynasty. And it is worth noting that the Uí Néill high-kings who figure most prominently as the bitterest foes of the Laigin—Áed mac Ainmerech, Fergal mac Máele Dúin, Áed Allán, and later Áed Oirdnide—all come from the Northern Uí Néill, and not, as geographical proximity might have led us to expect, from the midland dynasties. The truth is that the conflict between the Uí Néill and Laigin had ceased since the sixth century to be a war of territorial conquest. The Uí Néill had reached the limits of their expansion in the midlands, and had evidently not the desire, or at any rate not the resources to take over more land. Their interest in Leinster was now rather to assert their suzerainty: perhaps, as has already been suggested, their title of kings of Tara seemed to necessitate at least nominal overlordship of the Laigin. In order to make their title less unrealistic the high-kings who came from the far north no doubt felt it incumbent upon them to prosecute the war against Leinster more vigorously than their southern rivals.

The entry in its original form (best preserved in the *Annals of Ulster*) also shows beyond doubt that Áed mac Colggen was king of all Leinster. The regnal lists ignore him and treat the Uí Dúnlainge king Bran Becc mac Murchado as sole ruler. The *Annals of Tigernach*, infected by this doctrine, compromise by calling Áed and Bran joint kings. Áed was therefore the last of the Uí Cheinnselaig before the revival of their power in the eleventh century to have been king of the province. His father Colgu is recorded in the annals at 722 as king of Ard Ladrann.*

The lively topographical traditions preserved in even the late texts of the 'Battle of Dún Bolg' show that during the reign of Brandub mac

* See Appendix II, Tables 9, 10.

Echach the Uí Cheinnselaig were trying to creep northwards from their ancestral home at Ráith Bile in Carlow along the western foothills of the Wicklow mountains in the region of Baltinglass, whence they hoped to dominate the Liffey plain. They were foiled by the grip which the Uí Dúnlainge maintained here after successfully ousting the Uí Failgi to the north-west and the Uí Garrchon, Uí Enechglaiss, Uí Máil and Uí Briúin Chualann to the east. The Uí Cheinnselaig, while not losing sight of the provincial kingship, turned their attention, as far as territorial lordship was concerned, to the south. Apart from the dynasty of Ard Ladrann near Gorey, and the Uí Felmeda who remained near their original home in central Leinster, other branches of the dynasty contended for the leadership of Uí Cheinnselaig, such as the Síl Máeluidir and a branch which took over the name and lands of the related but declining sept of Uí Dróna in south-west Carlow.

In the early ninth century Viking pressure from the Barrow estuary affected the power struggle among the south Leinster septs. In 809 we hear of civil strife among the Uí Cheinnselaig in which the king of Uí Dróna was slain. In 817 the head of Síl Máeluidir, Cathal mac Dúnlainge, is recorded as king of Uí Cheinnselaig when together with the *familia* or monastic community of Tech Munnu (Taghmon) he inflicted a defeat on the *familia* of Ferns, slaying 400 of the latter. At his death two years later in addition to his royal title he is styled *secnap Fernann*—prior or vice-abbot of Ferns. The *secnap* (from Latin *secundus abbas*) was a monastic official who enjoyed right of succession to the abbacy much as the *tánaise ríg* was heir-apparent in secular politics. Warfare between monasteries, which had become territorial powers, was only too common a feature of Irish ecclesiastical life in the century before the Viking raids, while royal interest in the fortunes of a monastery had begun much earlier. The links between local kings and wealthy monasteries became even stronger under the impact of the Norse danger, when the monasteries needed a strong protector, and it is evident that the kings in turn benefited from the alliance. Cathal's son Cairpre, king of Uí Cheinnselaig, was again joined by the fighting forces of Taghmon when he defeated the Vikings in 828. But after the middle of the century a hitherto obscure sept of Uí Cheinnselaig came to the fore. In 866 Tadg mac Diarmata was slain by his own brothers and his own people. His brother and successor as king of Uí Cheinnselaig, Cairpre, met a similar fate in 876. Nevertheless, Cairpre's son, grandson and great-grandson were all kings of Uí Cheinnselaig in the following century, although it was not until the eleventh century that their descendants,

later to be known by the family name of Mac Murchada (Mac-Murrough) monopolised the kingship and won back for the Uí Cheinnselaig the overlordship of the province. It is noticeable, however, that the early portion of their pedigree is defective by at least three generations.

From 738 until 1042 the kingship of all Leinster was in the hands of the Uí Dúnlainge of the Liffey plain. In contrast to the diffusion of power between the different branches of the Uí Cheinnselaig, they present a remarkable picture of dynastic cohesion. No less than four sons of Murchad mac Brain are said to have succeeded their father and each other as kings of Leinster: Dúnchad, Fáelán, Bran Becc and Muiredach. There is, as we have seen, considerable doubt as to the reality of Bran Becc's claims, since he fell alongside Áed mac Colggen in 738. The evidence concerning his brother Fáelán is also confusing. The first entry in the annals for 738 records his unexpected death at an early age (although he had slain his elder brother Dúnchad at the battle of Ailenn ten years previously). The last entry for 738 records an expedition of the king of Munster, Cathal mac Finguine, to Leinster when he exacted hostages from Fáelán—or, according to the *Annals of Tigernach*, from Bran. On the other hand, we have no positive guarantee that the entries for 738 have been recorded in proper chronological order, though in general the annalists attempted to do so.

From three of these brothers are descended the Uí Dúnlainge sub-dynasties of Uí Dúnchada, Uí Fáeláin and Uí Muiredaig, among whom, in spite of considerable fratricide, the kingship of Leinster alternated for three centuries in a remarkable tripartite succession.* Since MacNeill first drew attention to this phenomenon it has been regarded as the classical model of Irish regnal succession. While it certainly illustrates the possibilities of the Irish dynastic system, it is questionable whether any strict legal deductions can be made from it, as the three branches soon developed into distinct territorial kingdoms. That of Uí Muiredaig was centred at Maistiu (Mullaghmast) in south Kildare, which was the original home of the Uí Dúnlainge. When not over-kings of the province their kings are often referred to as *rig Iarthair Liphi* 'kings of western Liphe' (Liphe or Life was the name of the plain rather than the river, whose proper name was Ruirthech). Further north the Uí Fáeláin at Naas ruled the eastern part of the plain (Airther Liphi). In course of time the Uí Dúnchada spread north-east to the outskirts of Dublin, where the district of Dolphin's Barn is said to be a

* See Apprendix II, Table 9.

corruption of 'Dunphy's Cairn' (*Carn Ua nDúnchada*), and their royal seat was at Liamain (Castlelyons on the Dublin-Kildare border). The later medieval families of Ua Tuathail (O'Toole) and Ua Brain (O'Byrne) took their names respectively from Tuathal, Uí Muiredaig king of Leinster (ob. 958), and Bran mac Máelmórda of the Uí Fáeláin, who succeeded his father after the battle of Clontarf until he was blinded by Sitric Silkbeard of Dublin in 1018. The surname later adopted by the kings of Uí Dúnchada was Mac Gilla Mo-Cholmóc—they prudently sided with the Normans after the battle of Dublin in 1170 and were given the simpler if less euphonious appellation of FitzDermot.

Tírechán in the late seventh century tells how the high-king Lóeguire refused baptism from Patrick so that he might be buried in pagan fashion fully armed in the ramparts of Tara facing his hereditary enemy the son of Dúnlaing who was likewise buried at Maistiu in the Liffey plain, and it is probable that the tradition that Illann and Ailill, sons of Dúnlainge, were kings of Leinster is correct. Otherwise the role assigned to the early Uí Dúnlainge in the regnal lists is patently false. The true founder of the dynasty's fortunes was Fáelán mac Colmáin in the seventh century. The sparsity of references to kings of Leinster in the annals of the sixth century means that the true succession must remain for ever obscure. But in 626 the Uí Néill laid siege to Crundmáel Bolg Luatha, a prince of the Uí Cheinnselaig, and in 628 the new high-king Domnall son of Áed mac Ainmerech, ravaged all Leinster. In the same year the *Annals of Ulster* say that Fáelán mac Colmán, king of Leinster, had slain Crundmáel, but they seem to give him the royal title by anticipation, for in 633 they record the death of Crimthann mac Áeda king of Leinster at the battle of Áth Goan in Iarthar Liphi. Crimthann was of the Uí Máil, and the *Annals of Innisfallen* add that he was slain by Fáelán mac Colmáin and Faílbe Flann, king of Munster. A Munster tract claims that Faílbe Flann had paid the *bóruma* to the Uí Néill on behalf of the Laigin, but this may be discounted as propaganda in favour of Munster pretensions to rule all of Leth Moga, including Leinster. Fáelán's death is not recorded by the *Annals of Ulster* and the other annals give him an obit c. 666, which is obviously calculated from the later regnal lists. He must have died much earlier, for Crundmáel Erbuilc of Uí Cheinnselaig was king of Leinster at his death in 656.

The hagiography of Glendalough brings Fáelán into close contact with St Cóemgein (Kevin), who is said to have fostered the young

prince when he was rejected by his step-mother. The legend was itself fostered by the close contacts between the later kings of Uí Dúnlainge and the monastery. St Kevin himself, like St Conláed of Kildare and many other Leinster saints, was one of the Uí Garrchon.

Of even more importance in assessing the power of Fáelán is the fact that his brother Áed Dub was abbot and bishop of Kildare. Another brother Áed Find was ancestor of the sept of Uí Máele Caích of Naas, and *his* son Óengus was also bishop of Kildare. Kildare was in the kingdom of Uí Failgi, but Áed Dub's obit in 638 is the first notice of it in the annals apart from the records referring to St Brigit herself and her episcopal colleague St Conláed in the early sixth century. The genealogies call Áed Dub *ríg-epscop Cille Dara 7 Lagen uile* 'royal bishop of Kildare and of all Leinster'. It was about this time or very shortly after that Cogitosus wrote his *Life* of St Brigit, which is the earliest example of Irish hagiography. Cogitosus makes extravagant claims for his church—*cathedra episcopalis et puellaris*, 'an episcopal and virginal see'—whose *paruchia* he claims to extend from sea to sea, and which is the repository of royal treasures and so magnificent as to attract the idle sightseer as well the pious pilgrim. Later Kildare was to acknowledge the primacy of Armagh in return for the recognition of Brigit's supremacy in her own province. The genealogies in their encomium of Áed Dub cite a poem which it is tempting to read as originally satirical in intent, if one interprets the opening words as addressed by a member of the Kildare community to a fellow-monk cheated of his hopes of succession by the dynastic intrusion:

> Oh brother,
> if you follow faith
> what right have you to compete with Áed
> unless indeed you have drunk henbane?
>
> Are *your* drinking-horns of the wild ox?
> And is *your* ale ale of Cualu?
> Is the Curragh of Liffey in *your* land?
> Are *you* a descendant of fifty high kings?
> Is Kildare *your* church?
> And is your companionship with Christ?*

The reference here to the *cuirn buaball* 'drinking horns of the wild ox' and to the *coirm Chualann* 'ale of Cualu' is to the symbols of royal

* Kuno Meyer's translation.

power among the Laigin. Regnal insignia of the more familiar kind occur rarely in Ireland, where kingship was displayed by the avoidance of certain *gessa* or taboos and the exercise of certain *buada* or prescriptive rights as well as by the possession of the ancient hill-forts and royal inauguration sites. According to the eleventh-century poem by Cúán ua Lothcháin the ale of Cualu was one of the *buada* of the kings of Leinster, and Meyer quotes another text: *Ni ba rí ar án-Érinn mani tora coirm Cualann* 'he is not king over glorious Ireland who does not consume the ale of Cualu'. Drinking-horns too feature prominently among the *tuarastal* distributed by the king of Leinster to his sub-kings in the *Book of rights*, and a quatrain preserved in a tract on bardic metre comes from a praise-poem addressed to Domnall mac Murchada, king of Leinster from 1072 to 1075:

Cuirn Chualann
cia 'sin chóiciud nos-congbann?
Do Domnall
dáilter in buiden buaball.

The horns of Cualu—
who in the Fifth supports them?
For Domnall
is poured out the host of ox-horns.

Even in the seventeenth century a sept of the Kavenaghs, claiming to be the heirs of the twelfth-century Mac Murchada kings of Uí Cheinnselaig and Leinster and living at Garryhill in county Carlow 'betaking themselves to that place for securitie it being a place of fastness and compassed with very large woods and bogs', maintained a forlorn relic of their royal dignity. 'This House of Garrchoyle for a testimony that they were the eldest of the Kavenaghs and descended from the stock of the kings of Leinster had a great seate and a vessell or cup to drinke out of called Corne-cam-more.'

A few miles to the north-west of Kildare, on the edge of the Bog of Allen, stands the ring-fort of Ráith Imgain (Rathangan), the residence of the kings of Uí Failgi, about which there is a moving little poem in free verse also quoted in the genealogies:

Ind ráth hi comair in dairfheda
ba Bruidgi, ba Cathail,
ba Áeda, ba hAilella,

ba Conaing, ba Cúiléni,
ocus ba Máele-Dúin.
Ind ráith d'éis cach rig iar n-uair
ocus int shluaig foait i n-úir.

The fort over against the oak-wood,
it was Bruidge's, it was Cathal's,
it was Áed's, it was Ailill's,
it was Conaing's, it was Cúiléne's,
and it was Máel Dúin's.
The fort remains after each king in turn,
as for the hosts—they sleep in the clay.

Bruidge's death is recorded in 579; Áed Rón son of Cathal was slain by the Clann Cholmáin in Westmeath in 604; Cúiléne was slain by rivals of his own dynasty in 652.

We have seen that the *Timna Cathaír Máir* gives reason to believe that the Uí Failgi were dominant in North Leinster in the early period, and they certainly bore the brunt of the border warfare against the Uí Néill, in the course of which they lost much territory. The evidence leads us to suspect that the rise of the Uí Dúnlainge was connected with the ambitions of the Clann Cholmáin of Mide, who had most to fear from the Uí Failgi. According to the *Annals of Tigernach* Conall mac Suibni of Clann Cholmáin was allied with Fáelán mac Colmáin and Faílbe Flann at the battle of Áth Goan in 633, and in 643 the *Annals of Ulster* record the obit of Uasal sister of Conall mac Suibni, while the other annals say that she was the wife of Fáelán. It may also be significant that the annals say that Áed Rón of Uí Failgi was slain by the Clann Cholmáin on the same day as Conall mac Suibni slew his great-uncle, the high-king Áed Sláine of Brega, in revenge for the killing of his own father some years earlier. The suggestion is that the Uí Dúnlainge were assisted to power in Leinster as a friendly dynasty who might neutralise the border situation and thus enable the Clann Cholmáin to pursue their vendetta against the Síl nÁedo Sláine. Certain it is that both the Clann Cholmáin and the Uí Dúnlainge were to attain their goal of monopolising their respective provincial kingships contemporaneously in the second third of the eighth century. Fáelán had also been married to Sárnat, daughter of Eochu of the Fothairt, a tribe whose connections with St Brigit may have been of considerable advantage to him in winning control of the church of Kildare.

The significance of Kildare as a perquisite of the over-king of Leinster may well go back to pagan roots. While it would be hyper-sceptical to doubt the existence of a real Christian saint named Brigit (of whom, indeed, practically nothing historical is known: Cogitosus clearly had very little concrete biographical information) it has long been suspected that her legend, cult and even her church have incorporated elements from the worship of a pagan goddess. Her feastday, 1 February, coincides with the festival of Imbolc, one of the turning points of the Celtic year, and in the twelfth century Giraldus Cambrensis attests the existence at Kildare of an inextinguishable vestal fire tended by the nuns. Nearly three centuries earlier, Cormac mac Cuilennáin, king and bishop of Cashel, states quite baldly that a goddess Brigit, daughter of the Dagdae, was worshipped by poets, that she had two sisters of the same name, who were goddesses of healing and smithcraft, and that Brigit was a common name for 'goddess' among the Irish.

Her name derives from the very common Celtic root **brig-*'high, exalted', attested in many place and tribal names. The well-known Brigantes of North Britain probably were named from the goddess, for dedications to DEA BRIGANTIA (in one instance identified with VICTORIA) are of frequent occurrence in their territory. Ptolemy mentions a tribe of Brigantes on the Wexford coast, whom O'Rahilly took to be the ancestors of the Uí Bairrche. The latter, in spite of their official descent from Dáire Barrach son of Cathaír Már, evidently from the grammatical form of their name are called after a female ancestor *BARREKĪ—a name with much the same basic meaning as *BRIGANTĪ while a masculine counterpart *BARREX or *BARREKIOS may be deduced from another inscription of the Romano-British Brigantes at Carlisle to a god identified with Mars—MARTI BARRECI. We have noted the close contiguity of the Uí Bairrche and Fothairt in Leinster, and may further remark that the Déissi of Munster (whom the genealogists connected with the Fothairt) included a tribe known as the Uí Brigte—the descendants of Brigit. St Brigit too, as we have seen, functions as defender of the Laigin, terrifying their enemies in the same manner as the war-goddesses Macha, Badb and the Morrigu in heroic saga.

Dr Binchy has recently made the interesting suggestion that the Welsh word for 'king' *brenin* (earlier *breenhin;* Cornish *brentyn*)—which displaced the older word *rhi*—derives from a form **Brigantinos* meaning 'the spouse of **Brigantī*'. If this be so, then we may see in the cult of St Brigit, which in Leinster has a peculiarly patriotic fervour, a

Christianisation of the pagan concept of the territorial goddess of sovereignty. The fact that Kildare lay in the lands of the Uí Failgi explains some of the pre-eminence accorded to them in archaic records, and accounts for the determination of the Uí Dúnlainge to gain control of the church as a symbol of their overlordship.

The familiar poem on the hill-fort of Ailenn and the early kings of Leinster down to the time of Bran mac Conaill (+693), edited and translated by Kuno Meyer under the title of *Hail Brigit*, accepts the Uí Dúnlainge version of the regnal succession and contrasts the ephemeral life of the kings with the saint's eternal role as guardian of Leinster. It may have been written by Orthanach ua Coílláma of the Curragh, who died as bishop of Kildare around the year 840 and was a typical representative of the new school of synthetic historians who flourished in the secularised atmosphere of later Irish monasticism.

> Sit thou safely enthroned, triumphant Brigit, upon the side of Liffey far as the strand of the ebbing sea! Thou art the sovereign lady with banded hosts that presides over the Children of Cathaír the Great.
>
> God's counsel at every time concerning virgin Erin is greater than can be told: though glittering Liffey is thine to-day, it has been the land of others in their turn.
>
> When from its side I gaze upon the fair Curragh . . . , the lot that has fallen to every king causes awe at each wreck . . .
>
> Oh Brigit whose land I behold, on which each one in turn has moved about, thy fame has outshone the fame of the king—thou art over them all.
>
> Thou hast everlasting rule with the king apart from the land in which is thy cemetery. Grandchild of Bresal son of Dian, sit thou safely enthroned, triumphant Brigit!

That the Uí Dúnlainge were enabled to consolidate their power in Leinster by favour of the Clann Cholmáin is further suggested by the fact that the first high-king of that dynasty, Domnall Midi, never attacked them. In fact his whole reign of twenty years until his death and burial at Durrow in 763 was extraordinarily peaceful, and Domnall himself showed evidence of more than nominal Christianity for twice in his life he retired briefly to a monastery. His successor in the high-kingship, Niall Frossach of the Cenél nEógain, was of similar temperament, and in fact abdicated for religious reasons in 770, dying in Iona eight years later. Legends grew up to account for the difference between his character and that of his warlike elder brother Áed Allán. It was

said that at Niall's birth a shower of honey fell upon the ramparts of the Laigin, and a shower of silver and a shower of wheat at his home at Fahan in Inishowen. Hence he was called Niall Frossach 'the showery'.

The relative peace and prosperity during these two reigns was a result of the temporary satiation of Uí Néill ambitions as reflected in the equilibrium between their hegemony in Leth Cuinn and that of the Eóganachta iñ Leth Moga. But Uí Néill ascendancy over the Laigin, geographically in Leth Moga, made it certain that the balance would tip in favour of the north. The year 770 saw renewed dynastic strife in Leinster. In the south Eterscél son of Áed mac Colggen won the kingship of Uí Cheinnselaig from Cennselach mac Brain of the Síl Maíluidir, while in the north Cellach mac Dúnchada, over-king of Leinster, slew Cináed mac Flainn of Uí Failgi and Cathnio mac Bécce of the Fothairt. Immediately afterwards the new high-king, Donnchad son of Domnall Midi, asserted his suzerainty over Leinster. After an initial defeat near Castledermot he encamped for seven days at the ancient hill-fort of Ailenn and ravaged the country with fire. In the same year and in 781 there were minor battles between the Uí Néill of Brega and the eastern Leinster dynasties of Uí Theig and Uí Garrchon on the borders at Dublin and Leixlip.

It is not surprising to find Donnchad in conflict with Munster in 775 and 776. According to the northern annals he was victorious, but the chief feature of interest is that on the second occasion the fighting forces of the monastery of Durrow were involved. In 775 the high-king had an armed confrontation with the monastic community of Clonard. Meanwhile, however, as so often happens in the history of the church, a powerful antidote to the prevalent secularisation was being spread by the ascetic communities known as the Céli Dé (Culdees).

Irish secular law treated all tenants of monastic land, whether they were living under a religious rule or not, as *manaig* or 'monks', and equated the relationship between a *manach* and his abbot with that between a *céle* or client and his lord. Perhaps as an implied rebuke the reformers styled themselves Céli Dé, 'vassals of God'. The greatest of their houses was that of St Máel-Ruain at Tallaght near Dublin, and their initial sphere of influence might be roughly demarcated by a triangle with its base drawn westwards from Dublin to the Shannon at Lough Derg and its sides running down the Barrow valley and transversely through eastern Munster. Although they were to suffer disastrously from the Viking raids, and particularly from the Norse

settlement at Dublin, the evangelical piety of the Céli Dé left a lasting impression on Irish literature and art. Their devotional writing in poetry and prose was paralleled by a series of high crosses which sought to preach sermons in stone, depicting basic lessons from the Old and New Testaments. The early crosses in Leinster, at Old Kilcullen beside Ailenn, at Moone, Castledermot and St Mullins were the first of the great figured crosses which were to become the characteristic product of Irish sculpture in the ninth and tenth centuries. These works were influenced by Carolingian art, and from the Carolingian world the Céli Dé probably derived ideals of specifically Christian kingship which they propagated in exhortatory poems and sought for a while to put into practice.

As befitted the region of their origin and greatest strength, the Céli Dé first asserted themselves on the political stage by mediating between the Uí Néill and the Laigin. In 780 the high-king Donnchad once again invaded Leinster and put to flight Ruaidrí mac Fáeláin and Laidcnén king of Uí Cheinnselaig at Kilcock (county Kildare). In the consequent burning of their lands the churches were not spared. But later in the year the *Annals of Ulster* record 'a meeting of the synods of the Uí Néill and the Laigin at the city of Tara, where many anchorites and scribes were present under the leadership of Dublitter' (*congresio senodorum nepotum Neill Laginentiumque in oppido Temro ubi fuerunt ancoritae et scribe multi quibus dux erat Dublitter*). Dublitter, friend and associate of St Máelruain, was abbot of the new Céle Dé house of Finglas just north of Dublin, and the designations of 'anchorite' or 'scribe' (in the New Testament sense of one learned in divine law) were much favoured by the reformers.

Peace was evidently established, for when Donnchad next led a hosting to Leinster it was at the invitation of its king, Bran Ardchenn mac Muiredaig, in 794, to aid the Laigin against the men of Munster. Bran was married to Donnchad's daughter Eithne and had succeeded his cousin Ruaidrí in 785. At a battle on the Curragh beside Kildare in 782 Bran had been taken prisoner by Ruaidrí and his ally, Mugrón mac Flainn king of Uí Failgi, had been slain. His marriage alliance with the high-king may well have caused resentment, for in 795 both he and his wife met their death by burning while staying at Cell Cúile Dumai (near Stradbally, county Leix). The perpetrator of the burning was Fínsnechta Cetharderc ('Four-eyes') of the Uí Dúnchada, who duly became king of the province.

During Fínsnechta's reign the subordinate position of Leinster was

made painfully obvious. In 797 Áed mac Néill king of Ailech became high-king. He is known in the regnal lists as Áed Oirdnide, 'the ordained', and he may possibly be the first king of Tara to have been inaugurated ecclesiastically. The first recorded Christian ordination of an Irish king actually took place outside Ireland, when St Colum Cille consecrated Áedán mac Gabráin as king of Dál Riata in the sixth century. His biographer Adomnán also refers to the high-king Diarmait mac Cerbaill and Oswald of Northumbria as having been 'ordained by God', but the vagueness of the reference suggests that Adomnán was more concerned with propagating ideas of Christian kingship than with strict accuracy. Certainly in the course of the eighth century the view that kings needed ecclesiastical consecration was gaining ground. In the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* the normal accession formula *feng to rice* is sometimes replaced by *to cyninge gehalgod* (i.e. 'was consecrated king' rather than 'took the kingship'). The practice received special impetus from the deposition of the last of the Merovingians in Gaul and the subsequent anointing of the Carolingian Pippin by St Boniface in 751, a ceremony repeated by the pope himself at Saint-Denis in 754. Consecration by anointing, based on the Old Testament models, provided a necessary charisma for upstarts who could not boast the Merovingian descent from tribal gods. Charlemagne had his two sons anointed in Rome in 781, just as he had been anointed in his father's life-time. The fashion spread rapidly. In 787 Offa of Mercia had his son Ecgfrith anointed, and in 795 Eadwulf was consecrated king of Northumbria at St Peter's in York. As early as 786 the papal legates in England mention in their report to Pope Hadrian the 'ordination of kings . . . chosen by priests and elders', and they specify that only legitimate children were eligible to be anointed; furthermore they condemn as sacrilege the crime of conspiring to kill 'the Lord's anointed'. And in 793 the *Annals of Ulster* record the ordination of Artrí as king of Munster: '*ordinatio Artroigh maic Cathail in regnum Mumen*'. It should be noted, however, that there is no explicit reference to anointing in any of the Irish sources.

In 804 a *congressio senatorum nepotum Neill* took place at Dún Cuair, just north of Enfield on the Leinster border. Binchy has suggested that it was on this occasion that Áed was 'ordained', for the assembly was presided over by Condmach, abbot of Armagh, and according to later sources it was here too that the high-king freed the monasteries from the obligation of providing troops for his hosting. This was again a problem of topical interest elsewhere. Sixty years or more previously

St Boniface had written from his mission in Germany to Ethelbald of Mercia objecting to the imposition of the *trimoda necessitas* of hosting, bridge-building and fortification on church lands, and towards the end of the eighth century clauses of immunity from secular burdens become common in Anglo-Saxon charters.

The site of the assembly portended evil for Leinster, for Dún Cuair was a regular rendezvous for Uí Néill armies attacking the province. In fact Áed devastated Leinster twice in one month this year. He cannot have been satisfied with the submission he obtained from Fínsnechta, for the following year he returned, deposed Fínsnechta, and divided Leinster between Muiredach mac Ruadrach of Uí Fáeláin and Muiredach mac Brain of Uí Muiredaig. He had previously taken simi'ar action in Mide, which he divided between Conchobar and Ailill, sons of the late high-king Donnchad. This was an unprecedented and drastic assertion of sovereignty by a high-king, and inaugurated a policy which was to be exercised frequently in later centuries. Naturally it was extremely unpopular, and in neither case did Áed really succeed. In Mide Conchobar soon slew his brother and reunited his kingdom: later indeed he in turn was to become high-king, reasserting Clann Cholmáin's rights to alternate succession after Áed's death in 819. Muirges mac Tommaltaig, king of Connacht, engaged in expanding the territory of the Uí Briúin at the expense of the Ciarraige and other subject tribes in central Connacht, was hostile to Áed's ambitions. A fragment of a bardic eulogy cited at his obit in 815 by the annals claims that he aided 'the son of Cellach of the Curragh from the Barrow in the south'. The annalist reports baldly that in 806 Fínsnechta *regnum suum accepit*, but the Book of Leinster adds that he recovered his kingdom by defeating the two sons of Ruaidrí—no doubt Muiredach and his brother Diarmait, ancestor of the later Uí Fáeláin kings.

Earlier, in 803, Fínsnechta had procured the death of Óengus mac Mugrón, king of Uí Failgi, and in the year of his restoration Óengus' successor was slain in his fort at Rathangan, which seems hardly coincidental in view of Fínsnechta's character and of his determination to keep control of Kildare. It was at Kildare that Fínsnechta died of a painful disease in 808; his sister Muirenn died as abbess of Kildare in 831, and no less than two of his brothers, a nephew and a grand-nephew, all enjoyed the abbacy in the ninth century, while his great-grandson Muiredach united the titles of king of Leinster and *princeps Cille Dara* at his death in 885. The Latin *princeps* and the apparently equivalent Irish title *airchinnech* ('erenagh'), denote the abbot in his function as

territorial lord, and very often the persons so designated were lay abbots.

In 808 or 809 Áed Oírdnide invaded Leinster again: he was defeated on the banks of the Liffey according to the *Annals of Innisfallen* (which may be why the other annals ignore the event altogether). There was some civil strife in Leinster after the death of Fínsnechta: in 809 among the Uí Cheinnselaig themselves, while in 814 the Uí Cheinnselaig were defeated by the sons of Bran—probably Cellach and Muiredach. Cellach became king only in 829, and the king of Leinster at this date seems to have been the other Muiredach, son of Ruaidrí, of the Uí Fáeláin: the death of his brother Bróen, *satrapa Lagenarum*, is recorded this year (814). Muiredach son of Bran, who had once been made joint-king of Leinster by Áed Oirdnide, died in 818 and is accorded the title of *leth-rí Laigen*. Apparently the Conchobar who was defeated by the Uí Néill sub-king Cellach mac Fogartaig of south Brega the same year was a son of the ruling king Muiredach mac Ruadrach. Perhaps however the annalistic entries for 818 have been placed in the wrong order: between the obit of the *leth-rí* Muiredach and the defeat of Conchobar mac Muiredaig occur two entries recording yet another expedition by the high-king to Dún Cuair and a second attempt on his part to divide the province, this time between 'two grandsons of Bran'. We can only guess who these may have been: Tuathal and Dúnlaing, each of whom became king in the second half of the century, seem too young. Following this we hear that the *airchinnech* of Cell Mór Enair (Kilmore near Armagh) had his honour violated by the Laigin when his vice-abbot was slain. It is questionable whether this implies an actual raid by the Laigin as far north as Armagh, but it was no doubt to avenge this crime that the high king ravaged Leinster in 819, devastating Cualu as far as Glendalough—his last recorded act before his death at Áth dá Ferta in Mag Conaille on the Louth border of Ulster.

Áed Oirdnide had sought to pose as the champion of the church, especially when such piety coincided with his political ambition. In 809 he had defeated the Ulaid and ravaged from the Bann to Strangford Lough in revenge for the violation of the shrine of Patrick when Dúnchú *princeps* of Tulach Liss (Tullylisk, barony of Iveagh, county Down) had been slain in its presence in the abbot's house, presumably in pursuance of a feud between the Dál Fiatach and the Uí Echach Cobo. Nevertheless, the high-king's own record was not completely clean, and he suffered two notable humiliations at the hands of the clergy. In 811 the community of Tallaght imposed a boycott on the high-king's great

assembly, the Óenach Tailten, which was so effective 'that neither horse nor chariot reached it'. This was a protest against the violation of their *termann*—the area which enjoyed the privilege of ecclesiastical sanctuary—perhaps during the unsuccessful campaign of 809. Áed yielded and made ample reparation, which was accepted (although the ninth-century Tallaght memoranda show that the Céli Dé were very scrupulous about accepting gifts from the sinful laity). The Tallaght documents also show that friendly relations existed between the Columban community of churches, particularly Iona (Moone in Kildare was a Columban church), and the Céli Dé, and Áed fell foul of these too when Máel Dúin mac Cinn Fáelad, *princeps* of Raphoe, was slain in 817. Some explanation of this occurrence may be found in the death of Áed's brother Colmán at the hands of the Cenél Conaill two years previously. At any rate the *familia* of Colum Cille proceeded to Tara where they solemnly cursed the high-king. Furthermore, in 818 Cuanu abbot of Louth took the shrine of its founder St Mochtae in exile to Munster, fleeing before Áed.

Whatever may have been Áed Oirdnide's shortcomings as a Christian monarch and as high-king of Ireland (and a marginal notice of his death in a contemporary Irish manuscript now in Carlsruhe is evidence that some at least regarded him as *rex Hiberniae*), he had demonstrated for all to see the effective dominance of his dynasty over the province of Leinster. When his son Niall Caille became high-king in his turn he led a hosting to Leinster in 835 and 'ordained' Bran mac Fáeláin as king over the Laigin, and it was in Leinster that the main confrontation between him and his formidable rival Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, king of Cashel, took place in 841.

The prestige of the Uí Dúnlainge was further weakened by the establishment in 841 of a permanent Norse settlement at Dublin which from time to time was strong enough to extend its control over a wide area and threaten the neighbouring petty kingdoms. In the south, Norse raids up the Barrow and its sister rivers were met by the rise of a new power. From 847 until his death in 888 Cerball mac Dúnlainge, king of Osraige, cleverly played off rival bands of Vikings against one another and took some into his own service. His daughters married Norsemen, and during the period of relative weakness which befell the Dublin kingdom after 873 Cerball appears to have even acted as its patron and protector. As Kjarvalr Írakonungr (Kjarvall the Irish king) he is remembered in the pedigrees of many of the leading Icelandic houses.

The expedition of Máelsechnall mac Máele Ruanaid in 858 which made him the first high-king to obtain hostages from Munster was also directed against Cerball's pretensions in Leinster. Although the king of Osraige eventually gave submission to the high-king, and never succeeded in gaining official recognition of his power in Leinster, he did prevent the superficially impressive succession of Uí Dúnlainge princes from exercising much effective control of the province. The artificiality of the convention in the regnal lists that they actually succeeded each in turn to the kingship of the province is revealed by the difficulties encountered in determining the exact order and chronology of their reigns. In fact the *Annals of Ulster* accord only subordinate titles to some of them. So Tuathal mac Máele Brigte, slain in treachery by his brothers in 854, and Ruarc mac Brain at his death in 862, are simply called kings of Uí Dúnlainge, while Muirecán mac Diarmata, killed by the Norse in 863, was merely king of Naas and Airther Liphi.

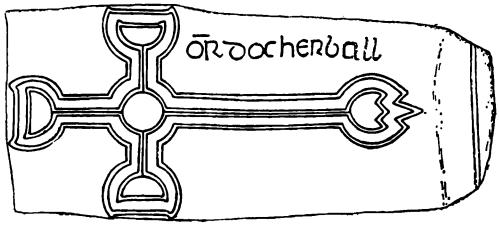
It may have been in Cerball's lifetime that the genealogists were persuaded to forge a Leinster pedigree for the Osraige; but they made the connection between the two lines so far back in prehistory that it can hardly have been taken seriously by the learned. Cerball's son Diarmait, who became king of Osraige in 894, appears to have had himself proclaimed king of Leinster a few years later by presiding over the Óenach Carmain (the *Annals of the Four Masters* have a garbled entry *s.a.* 894 recording his celebration of the Óenach Tailten), but his ambitions were foiled by the alliance of the king of Uí Fáeláin, Cerball mac Muirecáin, with the high-king Flann Sinna.

Throughout the tenth century the kings of Osraige tried to contest the kingship of Leinster, and in 1036 Donnchad Mac Gilla Pátraic finally displaced the Uí Dúnlainge and was recognised king of the province. He had in fact merely cleared the way for the return of the Uí Cheinnselaig. For thirty years until his death in battle against Conchobar Ua Máelshechlainn king of Mide in 1072 Diarmait mac Maíl-na-mBó firmly established the dominance of that dynasty and taught his descendants the dangerous lesson that the high-kingship of all Ireland might not even yet be beyond the grasp of a king of Leinster.

Cerball mac Muirecáin was the last of the Uí Dúnlainge kings to gain any notoriety before the reign of his great-grand-nephew Máelmórda mac Murchada who was to fall fighting with Earl Sigurd of Orkney against Brian Bóruma at Clontarf. The Book of Leinster contains several poems in his praise—among them that translated by Meyer as 'The song of Carroll's sword'—allegedly by his court poet

Dallán mac Móre, extolling exploits many of which find little confirmation in the annals. But his picture was painted darkly by the romancers who wove the tragic tale of Gormlaith, daughter of Flann Sinna. This princess had supposedly been betrothed to Cormac mac Cuilennáin, king and bishop of Cashel, whose saintly disposition led him to embrace celibacy; on her marriage to Cerball mac Muirecáin she had to endure his unseemly gloating and brutal insults after Cormac's defeat and death; after Cerball's own death in 909 she was too briefly the happy wife of Niall Glúndub, the heroic high-king who fell at the battle of Islandbridge fighting against the Dublin Norse in 919. Conall Mageoghegan's pathetic account in his *Annals of Clonmacnoise* that 'after all these royal marriages, she begged from door to door, forsaken of all her friends and allies, and glad to be relieved of her inferiors', seems to owe more to the 'many pitiful and learned ditties' composed in her name by poets of a later age than to historical record or probability. Indeed the whole romance smacks strongly of the perennial Irish myth of the goddess who appears both as the bride of kings and as hag. The annals notice Gormlaith's death in 947 but have nothing to say of her marriages.

Cerball's loyalty to Flann Sinna was of crucial moment when the high-king was faced with the challenge from Munster. The battle of Belach Mugna in 908, where Cormac mac Cuilennáin was slain, was fought near Leighlinbridge in the strategic corridor leading into that province from the south-east. It was now clear to all that in the rivalry between Tara and Cashel he who could hold Leinster in his grasp would emerge as ultimate victor.



9
Cashel

On entering Munster we find ourselves in a subtly different atmosphere. In many respects Munster is a world to itself. Alwyn and Brinley Rees have drawn attention to its otherworldly character—its association with women, witches, musicians and the dead—and would attribute to it the functions of the *sudra* caste. While this may appear far-fetched, there is a consistency in the Munster traditions that lends it some mythological, if not historical, plausibility.

Munster, being thus the outsider and also the Otherworld in this cosmological scheme, can present a mirror image of Ireland. Munster too is divided into five Fifths, though the text which spells out this doctrine is a late one, detailing boundaries which correspond to those of the twelfth-century dioceses: Killaloe and Kilfenora represent north Munster or Thomond (*Tuadmumu*), Cashel, Ossory, Waterford and Lismore east Munster or Ormond (*Aurmumu*), Limerick and Emly mid-Munster (*Medón Muman*), Cork, Cloyne and Ross south Munster or Desmond (*Desmumu*), and Ardfert or Kerry west Munster (*Iarmumu*).

More commonly accepted was a division of Munster into two parts, often regarded as each being the equivalent of a normal Fifth or *Cóiced*. Such a division—between Thomond, the O'Brien kingdom, and Desmond, that of the MacCarthys—was a political reality in the twelfth century. In earlier times however it was Iarmumu, ruled by the king of Eóganacht Locha Léin at Killarney, which tended to form a separate entity, although the king of Cashel in the east was theoretically king of all Munster.

It is often claimed that Ulster has always had a distinctive character. This is true, but it is equally true of all the Irish provinces. From the point of view of a modern nationalist Leinster might be said to have the worst record: it was the Leinstermen who revolted against Brian

Bóruma and sided with the Norse at Clontarf, and it was a king of Leinster who introduced the Normans to Ireland. Munster too is different, and west Munster even more so. Even in prehistory west Munster failed to share the same influences which spread over the rest of Ireland, and in the mythological tradition it is here that the house of Donn (*Tech Duinn*), the ancestor god to whom all the Irish will journey after death, is situated.

Mother goddesses predominate in Munster myth, and are commemorated in the place-names of the province. Áine of Knockaney in Limerick, the seat of the Eóganacht Áine; Aíbell of Craig Liath in Thomond, who turns up in the eighteenth century to preside over Bryan Merriman's *Midnight court;* Anu, mother of the gods, whose breasts are represented by the Paps mountains on the Kerry border. The Mountain of the Fair Women, *Sliab na mBan Finn*—Slievenamon south-east from Cashel—known in the early literature as Síd ol Femun, the *síd* beyond the plain of Femen, was the residence of Bodb, king of the Tuatha Dé Danann. This is another mirror image: when the Tuatha Dé Danann occupied Ireland they ruled it from Tara, the centre of royal authority in both mythological and pseudo-historical tradition, but when they were defeated by the sons of Míl and chose to live in the Otherworld residences of Ireland, in mountains and mounds and under the lakes, their king is found in Munster.

Sometimes the women of the Otherworld are humanised as the wives of kings. Such are Aímend, daughter of Óengus Bolg of the Corco Loígde, the mother of the Eóganacht dynasties and wife of Corc of Cashel, and Mór Muman, daughter of the historical west Munster king Áed Bennán and queen to successive kings of Cashel. O'Rahilly has shown that their names and functions reveal them as manifestations of the sun goddess.

More ancient, more primeval, is the Caillech Bérri or Hag of Beare, still remembered in folklore, and to whose activities many megalithic monuments are attributed. Her name is variously given as Digde, Dige or Duinech and we are told that 'she passed into seven periods of youth, so that every husband used to pass from her to death of old age, so that her grandchildren and great-grandchildren were peoples and races (*comtar tuatha ocus chenéla a huí ocus a hiarmuí*)'. She appears in the genealogical tradition as the foster-mother of Corc Duibne, ancestor of the Corcu Duibne of the Kerry peninsulas and incestuous son of Coirpre Músc, from whom the widely scattered tribes of the Múscraige traced their descent. The ogham stones which abound in Kerry tell us

that the Corcu Duibne in fact claimed a female ancestress DOVINIA. In what seems to many the greatest of Old Irish poems, 'The lament of the Old Woman of Beare', a subtle use is made of two landscapes which form the basic imagery of the poem: that of the lonely island of Beare in the south-west and that of the prosperous plain of Femen around Cashel in the territory of the Múscraige:

The ebbing that has come on me
is not the ebbing of the sea.
What knows the sea of grief or pain?—
Happy tide will flood again . . .

I am the hag of Buí and Beare—
the richest cloth I used to wear.
Now with meanness and with thrift
I even lack a change of shift . . .

These arms you see,
  these bony scrawny things,
had once more loving craft
  embracing kings . . .

'Where it not for Feven's plain
  I'd envy nothing old;
I have a shroud of aged skin,
  Feven's crop is gold.

'Ronan's city there in Bregon
  and in Feven the royal standing stone,
why are their cheeks not weathered,
  only mine alone?

Winter comes and the sea will rise
  crying out with welcoming wave;
but no welcome for me from nobleman's son
  or from son of a slave . . .

Blessed the island in the great sea
  with happy ebb and happy flood.
For me, for me alone, no hope:
  The ebbing is for good.*

* Carney's translation.

The Rónán referred to is probably Rónán Mór, mentioned in the genealogies of the Múscraige Treithirne, a branch of the Múscraige of Bregon to the west of Cashel, who probably lived in the early eighth century: his great-grandson, Donn Dige, was named from the Hag of Beare.

According to the scheme which would divide Ireland into two roughly equal halves, all north of a line between Dublin and Galway Bay was Conn's Half—Leth Cuinn. The south of Ireland was Leth Moga, named after Mug Nuadat, ancestor of the Eóganachta. The name Mug Nuadat means 'slave of Nuadu' and the god Nuadu himself was the ultimate ancestor of many Irish tribes. Names compounded of the element *Mug* and a divine name are frequent in the prehistoric pedigrees of the south of Ireland, both in Munster and in Leinster, but they disappear in the Christian period. The same concept however persists in names compounded with *Máel* 'tonsured, devotee', *Céle* 'client, vassal' and *Gilla* 'servant' prefixed to the names of saints (compare Arabic names in *'Abd-*).

The synthetic historians taught that in the second century Ireland had been divided between Conn Cétchathach, ancestor of the Connachta and Uí Néill, and Mug Nuadat (also known as Eógan). In the even more distant past a similar division had supposedly been carried out by Éremón and Éber sons of Míl. The theory was probably conceived in the seventh or eighth century to account for the political spheres of influence exercised by Tara and Cashel. We have seen that it failed to correspond to reality in the case of Leinster, which increasingly fell under the sway of Tara and never came under the overlordship of Munster until the reign of Brian Bóruma.

The terms Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga are, however, also capable of another interpretation: namely, 'the chief's half' and 'the slave's half', which, as MacNeill says, 'is, to say the least, suggestive of ancient politics'. A similar etymology is suggested by the vague traditions concerning the queen or goddess Mugain. This name occurs frequently in topography and seems sometimes to be confused with the name of the province *Mumu* (dative *Mumain*). In the legend of the birth of Áed Sláne Mugain appears as the second wife of the high king Diarmait mac Cerbaill, who is humiliated by Eithne, Diarmait's chief wife and the mother of his sons, but is cured of her barrenness by St Finnian of Mag Bile and gives birth to a spotless lamb, a silver salmon, and finally to Áed Sláine.* She was supposedly the daughter of Conchrad mac Duach of the Uí Duach in Osraige. Another Mugain, daughter of

* See above, p. 98.

Fiachnae Find king of Jarmumu, had twelve sons, six of them bishops and six of them kings. Her best-known son, Cumméne Fota, abbot of Clonfert (592–662), she bore incestuously to her father—a clear case of the king-myth being grafted onto hagiography. *Mugain* is the obsolete feminine form of the word *mug* 'slave', just as *rígan* or *rígain* is of *rí* 'king'.

More prosaically, it is true that Munster was largely cut off from the rest of Ireland and forms a clearly recognisable entity at all periods of Irish history, though the buffer zone of Osraige has always enjoyed an ambiguous status, and tradition, for what it is worth, claimed that the bulk of Thomond in county Clare originally belonged to Connacht and was only acquired by Munster shortly before the dawn of history (it was in fact administratively linked with Connacht again in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries).

Access to Munster was restricted. The normal path for an army from the north was down through Leinster and across by Belach Gabráin in southern Osraige, where the prehistoric hill-fort of Freestone Hill guards the pass. To the north Sliab Bladma (Slievebloom) formed a barrier continued by the bogs of Offaly, where the Munster territory of Éile marched with the Leinster Uí Failgi and the Uí Néill kingdom of Cenél Fiachach and its sub-state of Delbna Bethra. The 'royal road' known as the Slige Dála does not seem to have been very practicable for military purposes. The monastery of Birr stood just within the Munster border in a relatively narrow area through which troops could at some pains (given the primitive commissariat of the age) be brought. The river Shannon offered a roadway into Munster which was not utilised by military forces until the Vikings had opened the eyes of the Irish kings to the possibilities of elementary naval strategy. Considering the length of time which the Uí Néill needed to consolidate their power, it is not surprising that major clashes between them and Cashel (apart from those fabricated for their ancestors by the pseudo-historians) were rare before the eighth century.

As far as our limited evidence warrants, it is possible to see Munster and Leinster forming a cultural area of Leth Moga in the seventh century. The south of Ireland accepted the new Roman dating of Easter at the synods of Mag Léna (the border plain around Durrow) and Mag nAilbe (in Carlow) about 632. The absence of early annals for the south is probably not unconnected with the paschal controversy itself, since there is good reason to believe that the Irish annals grew out of paschal computations. Iona was the home of the earliest annals, and

Bangor a possible secondary centre of compilation. Both churches were deeply committed to the 'Celtic' Easter. St Columbanus, a teacher at Bangor, though of Leinster origin, makes it clear in his letters that pride in their mathematical skill was largely responsible for the stubborn resistance of the northern churches to the Roman dating. If the southern ecclesiastics had little interest in this abstruse science they would have been the more willing to accept Rome's ruling, and they are unlikely to have concerned themselves with annalistic records.

On the other hand, there is a good deal of evidence for a high standard of Latin learning in Munster during the sixth and seventh centuries, particularly associated with the churches of Lismore and Clonfert-mulloe. The tract *De duodecim abusivis saeculi*, whose chapter on the justice of the king was to have such widespread influence, came from this school, which also produced works on biblical exegesis and Latin grammar. Even the Old Irish genealogical poems lean heavily on Isidore of Seville for the prehistoric sections, while archaeological evidence shows the southern coasts to have been in touch with Mediterranean merchants down to the seventh century.

The isolation of Munster was of course only relative. The wandering scholar, monk or craftsman could cheerfully brave the wilds where an army would starve. In fact the northern marches became a flowering garden of monasteries: Clonmacnoise, Durrow, Gallen, Rahan, Lynally, Birr, Roscrea, Terryglass, Lorrha, Seirkieran and Clonfert-mulloe. Roscrea in particular, situated on the Slige Dála, one of the five royal roads of Ireland which legend asserted to have spread out from Tara on the birth of Cormac mac Airt, was so renowned for its hospitality to travellers that the puritan Céli Dé of the eighth and ninth centuries set up a reformed house in the more ascetic surroundings of Loch Cré some miles from the highway.

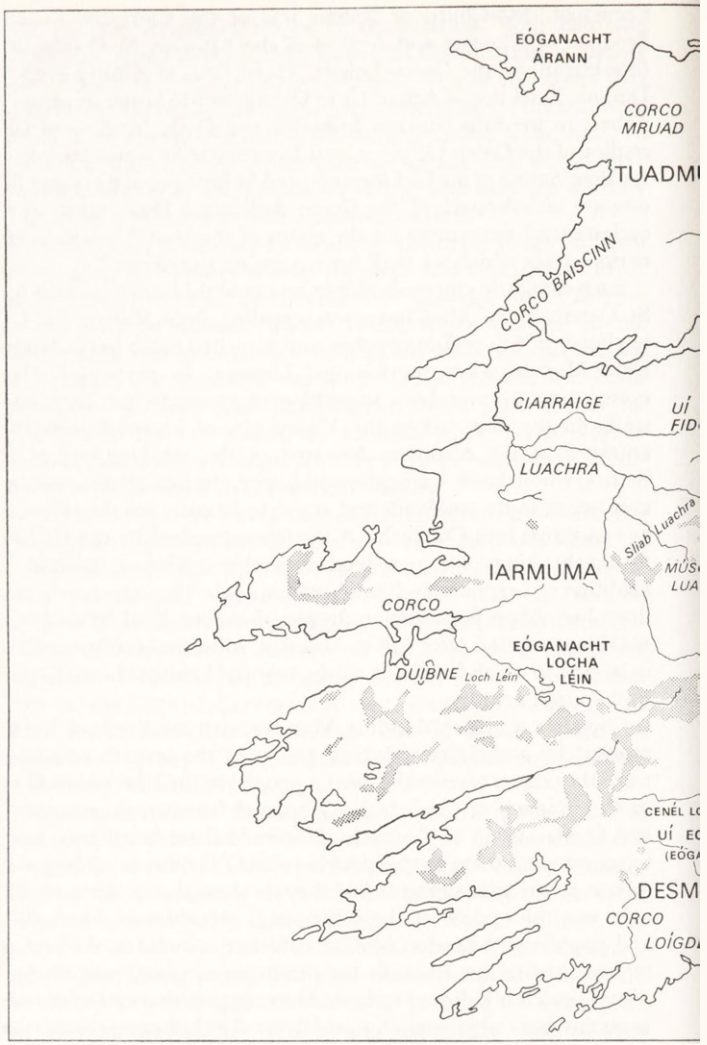
An interesting feature of the ecclesiastical scene is the number of houses founded by saints of west Munster origin in the sixth and seventh centuries across the centre of Ireland, often outside Munster itself—such as Clonfert among the Uí Maine of Connacht. The tribes of the south-west coast—the Corco Loígde, the Corco Duibne, the Ciarraige of north Kerry and the Altraige whom they subsumed, together with the Corco Baiscind of west Clare—may have formed a maritime federation. Although of disparate genealogical origin, we find occasional interchange of their kings, suggesting a close alliance between the tribes. If so, they could well have controlled the Shannon estuary with the access the river provided to the midlands and

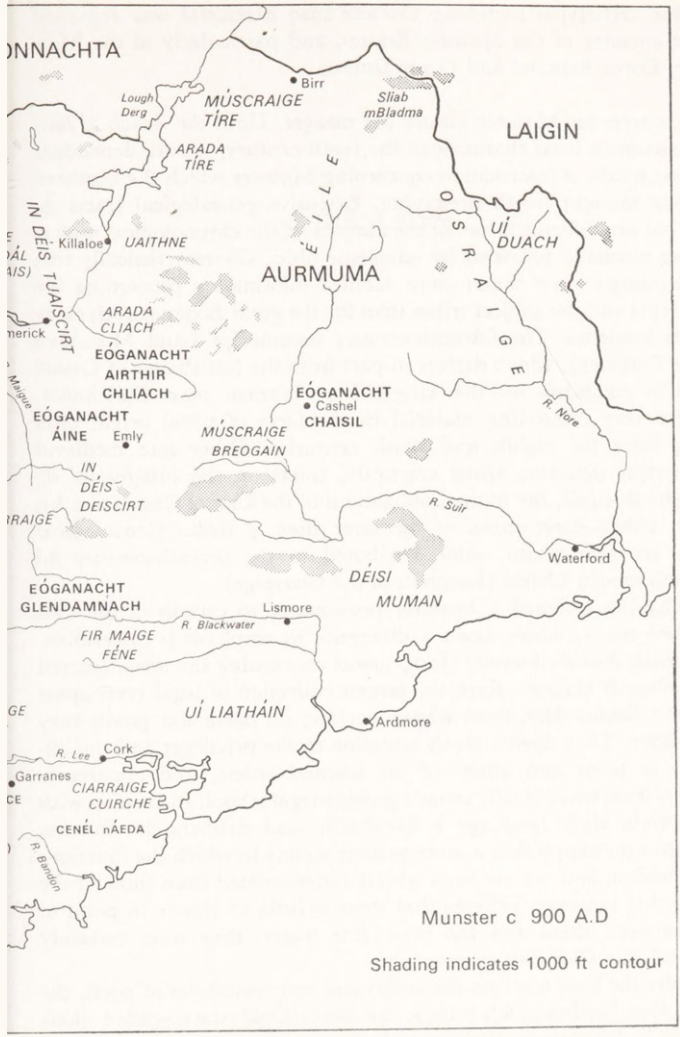
Connacht. Mo-Chutu of Rahan was of the Ciarraige Luachra, St Brendan of Clonfert and Ardfert of the Altraige, St Ciarán of Saigir (Seirkieran) of the Cofco Loígde, Fínán Cam of Kinitty of the Corco Duibne, Laichtíne of Achad Úr in Osraige of the Múscraige from Belach Febrat in the hills between Limerick and Cork, Mo-Lua of Clonfert-mulloe of the Corco Óchae, a west Limerick tribe which later fell under the domination of the Uí Fidgeinte, and St Brendan of Birr came from the obscure *aithech-thuath* of the Corco Auloimm. These saints appear as ecclesiastical guarantors for the rights of the west Munster tribes in a curious tract which we shall have occasion to refer to.*

Such monastic empire-building was bound to cause certain frictions. St Carrthach of Mo-Chutu was expelled from Rahan (in Uí Néill territory) in 636 *in diebus paschae*, and travelled south to the lands of the Déisi Muman where he founded Lismore. In particular, Clonmacnoise seems to have been something of an emporium for continental traffic in the days before the Viking city of Limerick forestalled the entrance to the Shannon. Situated in the sub-kingdom of Delbna Bethra, whose lands were poor and boggy, she nevertheless commanded easy access to the midlands and across to Leinster via the eskers, as well as westwards into Connacht. Although patronised by the Uí Néill and Connacht kings she remained staunchly plebeian, faithful to the tradition of her founder Ciarán mac in tSaír 'the carpenter's son', and drew her abbots from among the *aithech-thuatha* of all Ireland, with the notable exception after 638 of Munster. Munster hostility to Clonmacnoise was to reach its climax in the reign of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn in the ninth century.

Common traditions binding Munster with the north of Ireland are attested by archaic genealogical poems of the seventh century which trace the origins of several Munster peoples to the Ulster heroes: notably to the progeny of the legendary amours between Fergus mac Róich and Queen Medb of Connacht. Naturally these 'traditions' have little to recommend them to the historian—as O'Rahilly says, Fergus proved a boon to the genealogists—but they do show that at an early date not only was the outline of the Ulster saga in existence, but well-known and popular in Munster. Similar evidence is found in the archaic and highly obscure law tract on the privileges of poets, part of the *Bretha Nemed*, which is believed to be of Munster provenance but reveals close acquaintance with such figures from the Ulster cycle as the poet Aithirne. We have already seen in our examination of the Tara traditions

* See below, p. 217.


EÓGANACHT
ÁRANN
CORCO
MRUAD
TUADM
CORCO BAISCINN
CIARRAIGE
UÍ
FID
LUACHRA
Sliab Luachra
MÚS
LUA
IARMUMA
CORCO
EÓGANACHT
LOCHA
LÉIN
DUIBNE Loch Léin
CENÉL LO
UÍ EC
(EÓG
DESM
CORCO
LOÍGD


ONNACHTA
Lough Derg
Birr
MÚSCRAIGE TÍRE
Sliab mBladma
LAIGIN
ARADA TÍRE
FÉILE
OSRAIGE
UÍ DUACH
IN DÉIS TUAISCIRT
Killaloe
UAITHNE
AURMUMA
ARADA CLIACH
EÓGANACHT AIRTHIR CHLIACH
EÓGANACHT CHAISIL
Cashel
R. Nore
EÓGANACHT ÁINE
Emly
MÚSCRAIGE BREOGÁIN
IN DÉIS DEISCIRT
R. Suir
Waterford
DÉISI MUMAN
EÓGANACHT GLENDAMNACH
Lismore
R. Blackwater
FIR MAIGE FÉNE
UÍ LIATHÁIN
Ardmore
R. Lee
Cork
Garranes
CIARRAIGE CUIRCHE
CENÉL nÁEDA
R. Bandon
Munster c 900 A.D
Shading indicates 1000 ft contour

that the archetypal high-king Conaire mac Eterscélai was regarded as the ancestor of the Munster Érainn, and particularly of the Múscraige, Corco Baiscind and Corco Duibne.

Early sources for Munster history are meagre. Until the *Annals of Inisfallen* assume a local character in the tenth century, we are dependent on those scraps of information concerning Munster which the northern annalists thought worth preserving. Extensive genealogical tracts do exist, but are difficult to use in the absence of the chronological underpinning normally provided by annalistic obits. Characteristically too, the genealogists give much more detailed information concerning the lesser septs and the subject tribes than for the great Eóganacht dynasty and its branches. The fifteenth-century manuscript Laud Misc. 610 (in the Bodleian), which derives in part from the lost Psalter of Cashel allegedly compiled by the king-bishop Cormac mac Cuilennáin, contains very interesting material in the form of tribal origin tales dating from the eighth and ninth centuries. Other late medieval manuscripts preserve, albeit corruptly, tracts on the *Frithfholaid ríg Caisil fria thuathaib*, the mutual obligations of the king of Cashel and his subject tribes—forerunners of the later *Book of rights*. Genealogical poems are also extant, some attributed to the seventh-century *fili* Luccreth moccu Chérai (Luccreth of the Ciarraige).

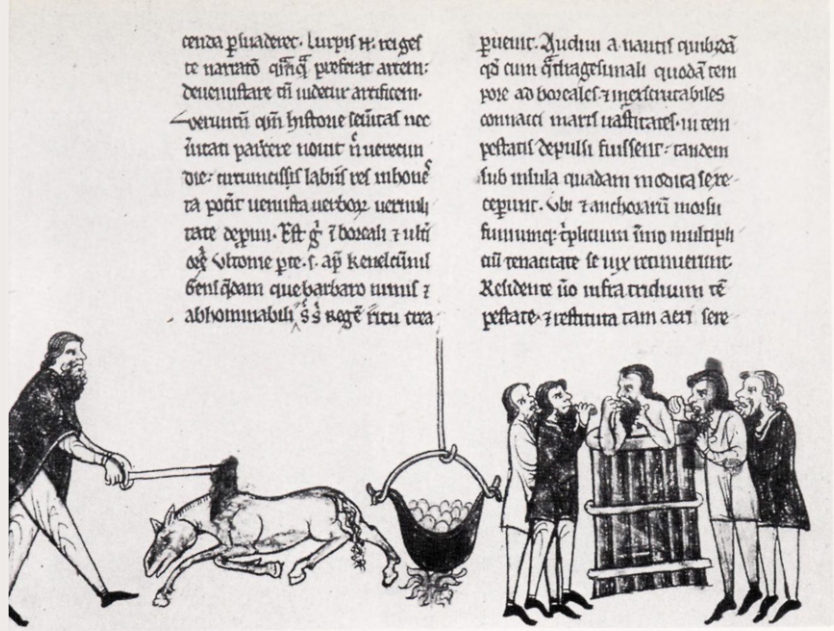
Binchy has assigned a Munster provenance to certain of the Old Irish law tracts, where again a difference in emphasis is discernible. The *Bretha Nemed*—literally 'Judgements concerning the *nemed* (sacred or privileged) classes'—form the largest collection of legal texts apart from the *Senchas Már*, from whose teaching on particular points they often differ. They devote much attention to the privileges and qualifications of poets and others of the learned orders, and apparently emanate from what Binchy terms a poetico-legal school. In keeping with their origin their language is bombastic and deliberately obscure. They thus perhaps reflect a more archaic society in which the functions of the brehon had not yet been wholly differentiated from those of the *fili*. Binchy, however, believes that there is little to choose in point of date between them and the other law tracts: they were certainly compiled in a Christian environment.

Besides the long tract on the rights and responsibilities of poets, the *Bretha Nemed* include such texts as the *Bretha Étgid* (the so-called 'Book of Aicill'), *Cóic Conara Fugill*, which deals with the procedure to be followed in law suits, and the *Audacht Moraind*, which we have already

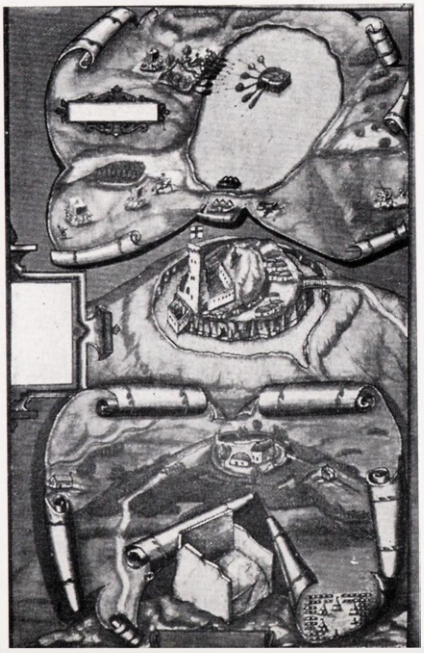
THE PLATES



1 *Figure of a king from White Island, county Fermanagh (8th or 9th century).*



2 *Inauguration ceremony of Irish king according to Giraldus Cambrensis.*



3 (*left*) *Tulach Óc. Bartelet's sketch of the inauguration site of O'Neill at Tullahogue in 1602.*

4 (*below*) *9th-century warrior from the Book of Kells.*







5 (*left*) *The description of a king's house in a brehon law tract.* 6 (*right*) *The seven ways in which a king may lose his honour-price: from a legal manuscript.*



7 *Knowth: neolithic passage grave and royal site of kings of north Brega in 9th and 10th centuries.*



8 *Cruciform burial chamber with stone carved bowl; 3rd millenium* B.C., *Knowth.*

9 *Early medieval ring-fort at Knowth.*





10 *Pagan statue of the god Nuadu from Tanderagee, co. Armagh.*

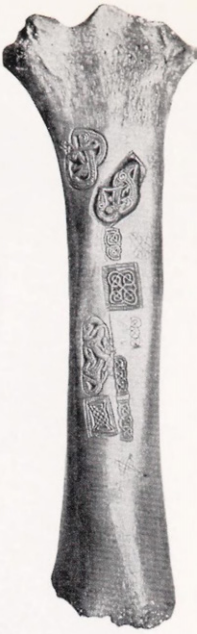
11 *Tara, looking south along the* cursus *towards the main complex of Ráith na Rig with the* Clóenferta *or sloping trenches at bottom right.*



12



13



14

Objects from Lagore crannogue, co. Meath, seat of kings of south Brega, 8th–10th centuries:
12 *Decorated belt buckle.*
13 *Iron chain and collar for hostages.*
14 *Engraved bone trial-piece for artist or craftsman.*

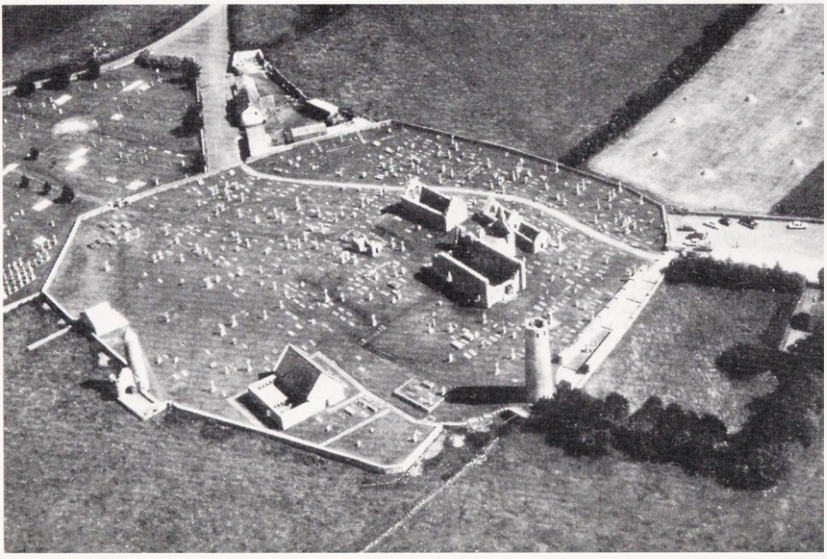


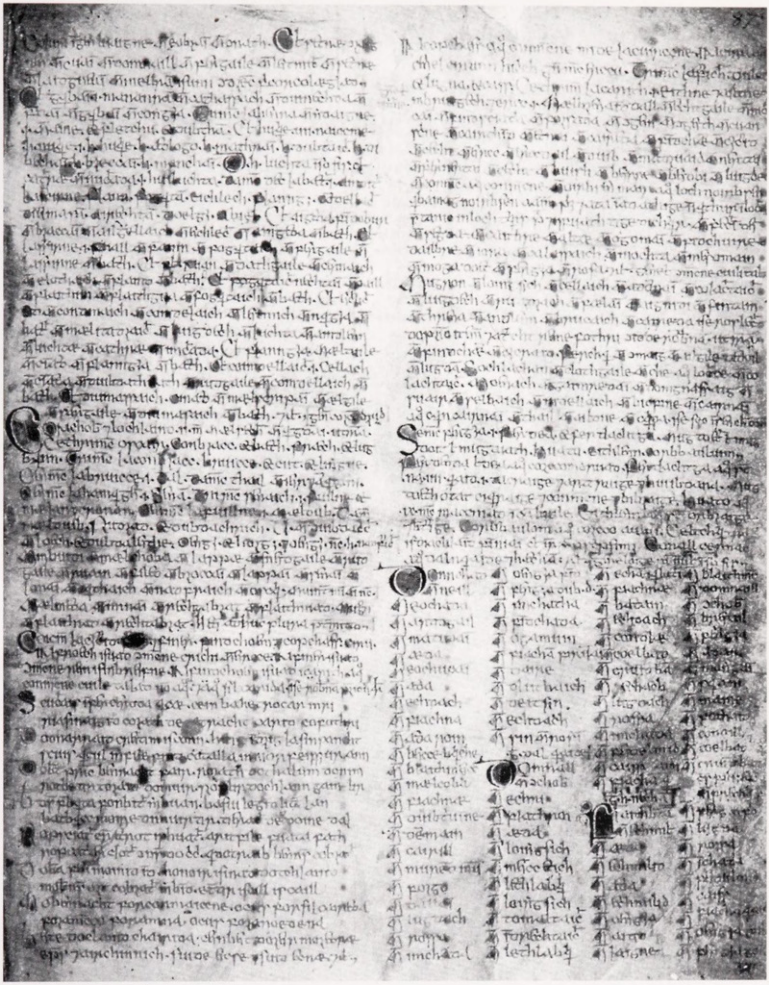
15 *Celtic human sacrifice as depicted on the Gundestrup cauldron (c. 100* B.C.).





16 (*above left*) *Cross of the Scriptures, Clonmacnoise; erected by the high-king Flann Sinna c. 900* A.D. 17 (*above right*) *Grave-slab from Durrow of Aigide, king of Tethbae (early 10th century).* 18 (*below*) *Clonmacnoise from the air.*



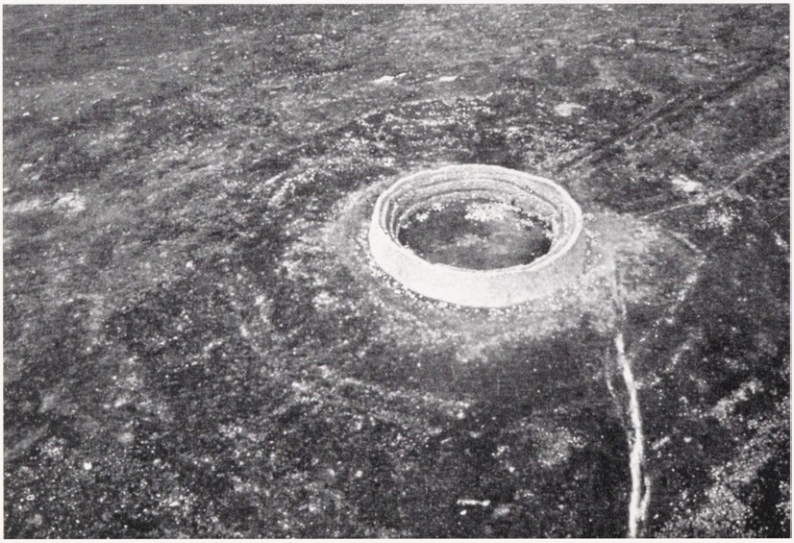


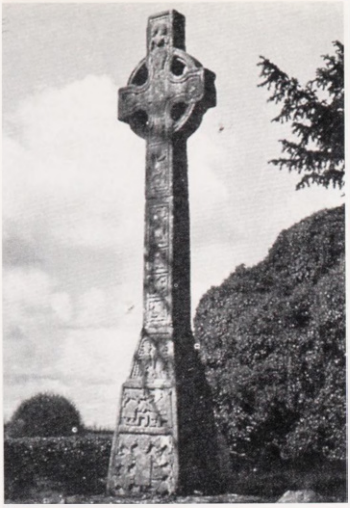
19 *Pedigrees of the kings of Ulster, Dál nAraide and Uí Echach Cobo from a 12th-century manuscript.*





20 (*above left*) *7th-century warrior with sword and shield from a slab at Carndonagh, co. Donegal, in the territory of Cenél nEógain.* 21 (*above right*) *Grave-slab of Arttrí, king of Tethbae, slain 826; from Clonmacnoise.* 22 (*below*) *Ailech. Royal seat of the Cenél nEógain in Inishowen, co. Donegal.*





23 *High cross at Moone, co. Kildare (late 8th century).*

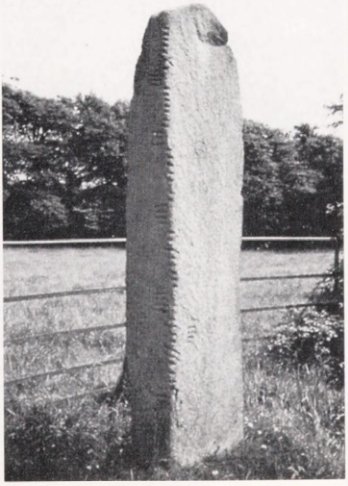


24 *High cross at Castledermot, co. Kildare (9th century).*

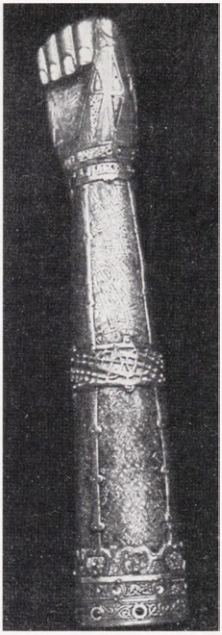
25 *Ogham stone, Burnham, co. Kerry; probably 4th or 5th century.*



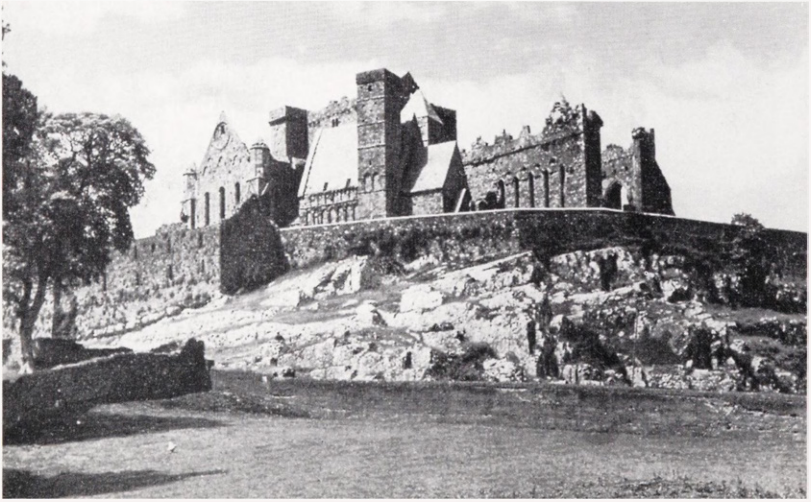
26 *Ogham stone, Dunloe, co. Kerry; probably 4th or 5th century.*







27 (*above left*) *Grave-slab of Tuathal the craftsman at Clonmacnoise; 10th century.*
28 (*above right*) *12th-century shrine of St Laichtine's arm, made for kings of Desmond, c. 1120.* 29 (*below*) *The rock of Cashel.*





30 *King and abbot: sculptures of 8th or 9th century, White Island, co. Fermanagh.*

31 (*below*) *Horsemen and chariot from base of 8th-century cross at Ahenny, co. Tipperary.*





32 (*above*) *Cleric on horseback, Book of Kells.*



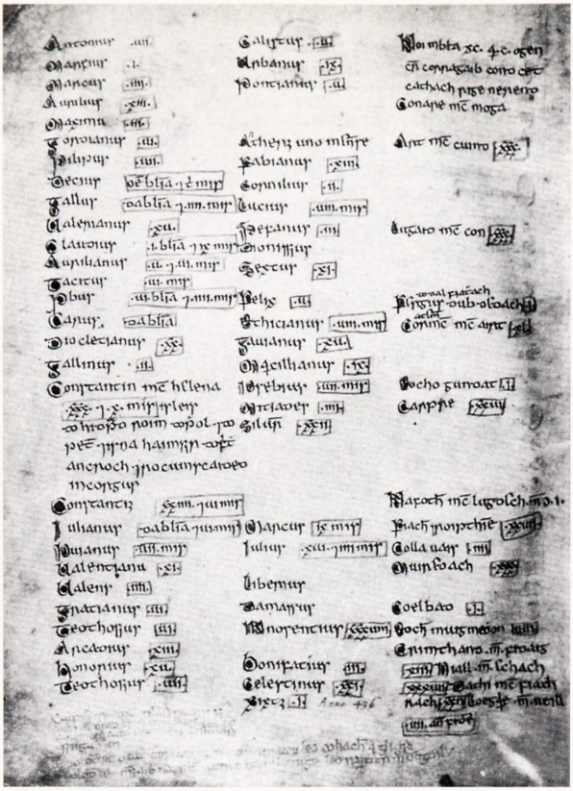
33 *Stag caught in a trap, from 8th-century cross-shaft at Banagher, co. Offaly.*



34 *Romanesque doorway at Killeshin, co. Laois; built by Diarmait Mac Murchada.*

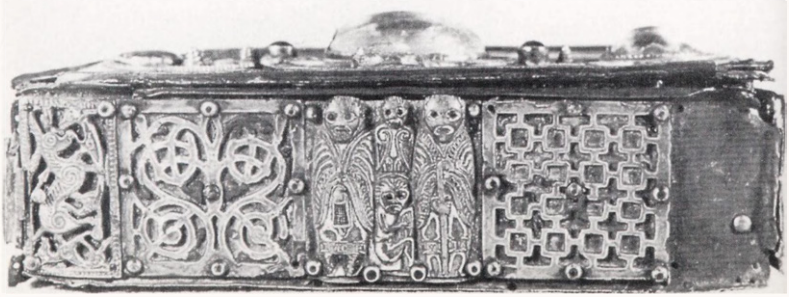
35 *Inscription on an arm of the Cross of Cong, made for Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobair in 1123.*





36 *Synchronisms of the Roman emperors, popes and high-kings of Ireland, 199–432* A.D.

37 *Shrine of the Stowe Missal, made for Donnchad mac Briain 'king of Ireland' ; c. 1050.*



quoted as the earliest Irish 'mirror for princes'.* Several of the aphoristic collections belong to this school, which also produced an important tract on status, the *Uraiccecht Bec* or 'Small primer', which affords an interesting comparison with the northern tract on the same subject, *Críth Gablach.*

The *Uraiccecht Bec* stresses the claims of those whose social and legal status depended, as did that of the *filid*, on their professional skills rather than on birth and wealth: *is ferr fer a chiniud*, 'a man is better than his birth'. The *sóer-nemed* classes are scholars, churchmen, nobles and poets; the *dóer-* or 'base' *nemed* are 'the folk of every art or craft besides'. They are called *dóer-nemed* because they serve the *sóer-nemed.* The word *dóer* here, as in the term *dóer-chéle*, does not mean 'unfree': it is used relatively in opposition to *sóer* 'noble'. Franchise is purchased by art. Honour-price (*díre*) equal to that of the lowest grade of the nobility (*aire déso*) is granted to 'the accurate wright of oaken houses', and to 'the diligent wright of ships and barks and hide-covered boats and vessels, who is able to make all of these', as well as to the mill-wright and the master of yew-carving. 'Whose art is one, his *díre* is one. Whose art is multiple, his *díre* is multiple. It increases franchise.' Lower status, equivalent to that of a prosperous freeman or *bóaire*, is given to 'chariot-wright and house-carpenter and cloth-figurer and relief-carver and shield-maker', and yet lower but still free status to 'turners and fettermakers and leatherworkers and wool-combers and fishermen'. The *dóer-nemed* class includes all 'wrights and blacksmiths and brasiers and whitesmiths and physicians and jurists and druids'.

> The harper, that is the one craft of music that is entitled to franchise, so long as he accompanies nobility. The franchise of a first *bóaire* for him . . . The folk of vocal and instrumental music besides, jockeys and charioteers and steersmen and followers in feast and retinue, and mummers and jugglers and buffoons and clowns and the lesser crafts besides, it is in regard of the honour of those who keep them that *díre* is paid for them. Otherwise they have no franchise apart.†

The *Uraiccecht Bec* states: *ollam uas rígaib rí Muman* 'greatest over kings is the king of Munster'. The use of the term *ollam* is symptomatic: elsewhere in Old Irish it has become restricted in meaning to denote the highest grade of the learned class. Another early tract, the *Miadslechta*, also calls the high-king *ollam*, and quotes as an example of this usage a line of archaic verse referring to the king of Connacht: *ní hollam nad cóiced nAilello maic Máta móra* 'he is no *ollam* who does not

* Above, pp. 24f.

† MacNeill's translation.

magnify the Fifth of Ailill mac Máta' (or 'whom the Fifth . . . does not magnify'). Although Binchy has not classed the *Miadslechta* definitely with the *Bretha Nemed*, it goes on to apply the term for the second grade in the poetic hierarchy, *ánruth*, to the mesne over-king: 'A high *ánruth*, he binds but is not bound (i.e., he takes hostages but does not give them), as for instance the king of the Érainn.' This statement agrees with the position claimed in the Munster tracts by several of the kings nominally subject to the king of Cashel, and may refer to the king of Corco Loígde. The *Uraiccecht Bec*, after speaking of the king of Munster, says that the chief scholar of a great monastic city 'such as Emly or Cork (Corcach Már Muman)' has equal honour-price with the king.

The late introduction to the *Cóic Conara Fugill* claims that this tract was written in the reign of Cathal mac Finguine, the king of Munster who died in 742. A much more obscure legal text which has survived only in fragmentary condition, the *Cáin Fuithirbe*, is stated by later commentators to have been composed in the time of Cathal's father Finguine (678–695). The author was the poet Amairgein mac Amalgado maic Máele Ruain of the Déisi, who was sent by the men of Munster to study *fénechas*, and returned with twelve books which he proceeded to turn into verse. The law was promulgated at an assembly summoned by a certain king Cormac at Mag Fuithirbe on the borders of Cork and Kerry, who asked that the name of his petty kingdom should appear as its title. While this may be mere legend, the text does begin with a poetical invocation known as the *Ordbendacht Aimirgin do rigaib Muman:* a salutation by the poet to the kings of Munster in order of precedence.* From the fragments of these verses the following royal names have been extracted: Finguine himself appears several times, followed by 'the son of Máel Dúin', i.e., Cogal, king of Iarmumu, who died in 690; Donennach, king of Uí Fidgenti, who died in 683; Cumscrad, king of Fir Maige Féne; Slébéne, king of Corco Duibne; Dúnlaing, king of Uí Echach;† and kings of Corco Loígde and the Déis Tuaiscirt whose names have not been preserved. In its present state therefore the text reveals a distinct west Munster ambience.

The Eóganachta who ruled Munster until the middle of the tenth century were distributed strategically throughout the province. The Eóganacht Chaisil, although dwelling around the rock of Cashel, seat

* Compare the occurrence of the same word *ordbendacht* 'rank-blessing' in the saga of the Finding of Cashel, below, p. 188.

† See Appendix II, Table 14.

of the high-kingship of the province, had no prerogative claim to that office. Geographically they were outliers, the most easterly of the dynastic groups. Their closest blood-relations were the Eóganacht Airthir Chliach and the Eóganacht Glendamnach. The former were on the western borders of Tipperary and controlled the important church of Emly, whose patron Ailbe is one of the so-called 'pre-Patrician' saints. The more powerful Eóganacht Glendamnach were seated to the south-west on the upper Blackwater near Fermoy: the Glendamain from which they took their name is the modern village of Glanworth. The Eóganacht Áine Cliach at Knockaney (Cnoc Áine) in Limerick were close neighbours of the Eóganacht Airthir Chliach in the Golden Vale, an area which is a veritable palimpsest of half-submerged tribes. Somewhat isolated but powerful in Desmond were the Eóganacht Raithlind of the Lee valley: their ruling sept, the Uí Echach Muman, were themselves divided into the Uí Lóegairi to the west and the Cenél nÁeda, now Kinalea barony between Cork and Kinsale; the neighbouring barony of Kinelmeaky derives its name from a further sub-sept, the Cenél mBécce. In the far west, ruling in Iarmuma or Iarluachair (the region to the west of Sliab Luachra, the mountainous barrier between the modern counties of Cork, Kerry and Limerick), were the Eóganacht Locha Léin at Killarney.

In spite of the theory that the name Eóganacht denoted descent from Eógan Már son of Ailill Ólum, or indeed from his grandfather Mug Nuadat, in practice it was confined to those septs descended from Conall Corc, who allegedly 'found' Cashel in the fifth century. Two important Munster dynasties, however, the Uí Fidgenti and the Uí Liatháin, claimed to be Eóganachta, though not descended from Corc. One of the genealogical tracts says that Maine Munchaín and Dáire Cerbba, cousins of Conall Corc, were twins: in their mother's womb they had their backs to one another and a chafer beetle was between them, representing the seed of Mug Roith the druid, 'so that neither of them could come to the aid of the other'. The Uí Fidgenti in west Limerick and the Uí Liatháin in east Cork were cut off from one another by the hostile non-Eóganacht tribe of the Fir Maige Féne at Fermoy, whose descent was traced to a sinister druid disciple of Simon Magus. The Uí Liatháin are given precedence in the *Frithfholaid* tracts, where it is said that the *rath* given them by the king of Cashel is the greatest. One version claims that Bressal mac Ailello Thassaig, grandson of Echu Liathán, had been king of Munster (though this is not confirmed by any other source), and that he had decreed that when

there was an interregnum in the kingship of Cashel all of Desmond should be under the tutelage of the king of Raithlend. The Uí Fidgenti only produced one rather doubtful claimant to the kingship of Cashel in Ólchobar mac Flainn, abbot of Inis Cathaig (Scattery Island), who died in 796; he is styled king only in the *Annals of Ulster*.* It has been suggested that the Uí Fidgenti and Uí Liatháin were really Dáirine, like the Corco Loígde, and were only later attached to the Eóganacht genealogy. The tract on the Expulsion of the Déisi, however, includes the two dynasties together as one of the Three Eóganachta of Munster along with the Eóganacht Raithlind and the Eóganacht Locha Léin.

The standard list of the 'seven Eóganachta' in the genealogical tracts reads: Eóganacht Chaisil, Eóganacht Áine, Eóganacht Locha Léin, Eóganacht Raithlind, Eóganacht Glendamnach, Eóganacht Árann and Eóganacht Ruis Argait. This enumeration must be quite early, for the Eóganacht Árann (otherwise Eóganacht Ninussa)—in the Aran islands and the neighbouring part of the Burren—and the Eóganacht Ruis Argait, who may have moved from the north of Osraige to Ormond, disappear from history. Some versions of the list add the Eóganacht Airthir Chliach, who are the latest of the Eóganacht groups to emerge as a separate dynasty. Ailill mac Cathbad, whom St Patrick allegedly baptised at Óchtar Cuillend in Uí Chuanach (Cullen on the Limerick-Tipperary border), is styled king of the Eóganacht Airthir Chliach by the *Vita Tripartita*—anachronistically, for he was a nephew of Conall Corc's and ancestor of the Uí Chathbad Cuille, a dynasty later displaced by the Eóganacht Airthir Chliach who had not yet come into existence in the fifth century. The Eóganacht Airthir Chliach supplied two kings to Cashel: Fergus Scandal who died in 583, and Cenn Fáelad hua Mugthigirn, abbot of Emly (an office also enjoyed by his uncle Rechtabra and his son Eógan), who died in 872. Cenn Fáelad's pedigree as preserved is evidently faulty, and in fact the genealogy of his dynasty peters out as early as the eighth century.† They were no doubt eclipsed by their neighbours and cousins the Eóganacht Áine as they themselves had overlaid the Uí Chathbad Chuille. The Golden Vale of east Limerick and west Tipperary is an area which the lack of early annalistic evidence renders it very difficult to apportion between the various tribes and dynasties that successively ruled it and continued to occupy it after their fall from power. The Déis Becc, the Corco Óchae and the Arada Cliach all had to contend at different periods against the encroachments of the Uí Fidgenti and

* See Appendix II, Table 16.

† See Appendix II, Table 13.

Eóganachta into parts of this rich country which never became a centre of real political power but remained as a prize for the strongest hand.

Genealogical poems ascribed to Luccreth moccu Chérai form a series commencing with verses *Cú-cen-máthair maith clann* tracing the descent of Cathal Cú-cen-máthair 'the motherless hound' of the Eóganacht Glendamnach, who ruled Munster from 662 until his death of the plague in 665 or 666. It is merely a metrical list of his ancestors back to Adam, of which the prehistoric portion has been lifted wholesale from the Leinster poems attributed to Laidcenn mac Bairchedo. There follow similar verses on Áed Bennán of the Eóganacht Locha Léin, who died in 619 or 621, and whom some regarded as king of all Munster. The discrepancy between his date and that of Cathal Cú-cen-máthair could be explained by the fact that no subsequent king of Iarmumu up to the time of writing had achieved such prestige. The next king commemorated is Dúngal Raithlind son of Coirpre Clárenech: the confused state of his pedigree makes it impossible to say more of him than that he probably lived in the seventh century. Fáelgus mac Nad Froích, who in these poems represents the Eóganacht Chaisil, lived two generations later than Cú-cen-máthair. Amalgaid mac Éndai appears for the Eóganacht Áine: as his son Cúán, who died in 641, is universally acknowledged as king of Munster, whereas his father's claims are contested, it is difficult to understand the choice of Amalgaid by the poet. The Uí Fidgenti have two poems, one on Óengus mac Nechtain of the Uí Chonaill Gabra, who died in 636, and another on Eóganán mac Crundmaíl, who died as king of Uí Chairpri in 667.*

Luccreth might have written the poem primarily for Cathal Cú-cen-máthair and supplemented it with verses linking the pedigrees of the Eóganacht Locha Léin and the Uí Fidgenti to his at the appropriate points. On this assumption one might also allow the sections on the Eóganacht Raithlind and the Eóganacht Áine to be genuine. But one would have to admit that the poem on the pedigree of the otherwise undistinguished Fáelgus was a clumsy addition made in the ninth or tenth century when his descendants were the leading sept of the Eóganacht Chaisil. Carney would dismiss the whole collection on linguistic grounds as a late imitation of the Leinster poems, and believes that Luccreth moccu Chérai, author of the archaic poem on the descent of the Ciarraige from Fergus mac Roích, lived at the end of the sixth or beginning of the seventh century. We can then only accept the evidence of these verses as valid for the views of a ninth-century

* See Appendix II, Tables 12–16.

antiquarian as to the relative importance of the Eóganacht groups. A poem in similar style occurs elsewhere in the genealogies on the pedigree of Bran Find mac Máele Ochtraig, king of the Déisi, who was slain in 671, and another quatrain on the same person is found in the medieval metrical tracts as an example of archaic verse.

The substrata of Munster's population are confusing in their multiplicity. In this province the traditions of old tribal groups, reduced to political impotence as *aithech-thuatha*, remained most lively, while the apparent looseness of the Eóganacht sway permitted tribes who in the normal Irish polity would have been mere *dáer-thuatha*, tributary kingdoms with local autonomy, to enjoy many privileges and retain some prestige. Three or four marcher kingdoms held extensive lands under very few obligations: the Éli in the north, the Osraige in the east, and the Déisi in the south-east. A branch of the latter, the Déis Becc, are said to have conquered Thomond from Connacht in the fifth century, and by the tenth century their ruling dynasty, the Dál Cais, were able to seize the kingdom of Munster almost painlessly from the enfeebled grasp of the Eóganachta: they justified their success on the patently false grounds that they were not Déisi at all but of common descent with the Eóganachta with whom they had anciently enjoyed alternate rights to the kingship.

The practical model for this spurious theory may have been suggested by the actual practice whereby the Clann Cholmáin alternated with the Cenél nEógain in the high-kingship of Tara; since the eighth century a similar alternation (technically known as *selaidecht*) apparently existed in the kingship of the Déis Becc, between the Déis Tuaiscirt and the Déis Deisairt. But a similar theory was also to be found in the Munster genealogical tracts which claimed that in dim prehistory the Eóganachta (in those days known as Deirgtine) had shared the kingship with the Érainn people called Dáirine, who were represented in the historic period by the Corco Loígde, and 'when the Deirgtine had the kingship the offices of brehon (*brethemnus*) and of *tánaise ríg* belonged to the Dáirine'. Obscure traditions survived that the Osraige had once been ruled by Corco Loígde kings. Even in the twelfth century they succeeded in having their tiny kingdom erected into the diocese of Ross, while in the later middle ages their O'Driscoll lords played a significant maritime role in trade, fishing and piracy. St Ciarán of Saigir, patron of the Osraige, was of the Corco Loígde: of the 'pre-Patrician' saints he and St Declan of Ardmore, patron of the Déisi, are the most genuine. The hagiographers say that Ciarán was born on Clear

Island off south-west Cork, where the cross was first seen in Ireland.

Though the tradition has been hopelessly muddled, it seems as though the Corco Loígde lost their sway over Osraige in the sixth or early seventh century. Eóganacht sources, however, claimed that Osraige was forfeited to Munster by Leinster as an *éraic* or blood-fine for the slaying of Fergus Scandal, king of Munster, in 583—which looks suspiciously like propaganda dating from the time when Osraige was asserting its Leinster affiliations in the eleventh century (or even as early as the ninth). It is fairly clear that Éli fell into Munster hands in the fifth century from the Laigin when the latter were sorest pressed by the Uí Néill. Some of the various peoples of differing origin known as the Arada Cliach in north-west Tipperary also had Laginian pedigrees.

The long saga of the Expulsion of the Déisi states that after having been driven from Tara and wandering through Leinster they had finally found a home in county Waterford and south Tipperary, granted them by Óengus mac Nad Froích in return for driving back the Osraige and defending the Munster borders. It is unlikely that this story has much historical basis. The Déisi Muman, whose name simply means 'the vassal peoples of Munster', formed a continuous block running from the south-east to the north-west of the province with the Déis Becc or 'little Déis' of east Limerick and Clare. They were most probably indigenous to Munster and had no real connection with the Déisi Temro or 'vassal peoples of Tara'. The distribution pattern of the Múscraige reveals a similar diagonal band of the opposite inclination from Nenagh in north Tipperary (Múscraige Tíre) to the upper Lee valley in west Cork (Múscraige Mittine), interrupted by horizontal bars formed by the various Eóganacht dynasties who ruled over them while according them special rights and privileges. There were six or seven Múscraige kingdoms in all, and although widely separated they seem to have had a mesne king of all Múscraige to represent them as a whole vis-à-vis the king of Cashel. Furthermore, they themselves in their various territories acted as overlords of many submerged *aithech-thuatha*. The Déis Becc of county Limerick were hard pressed by the Uí Fidgenti from the west, and after the Viking settlement at Limerick their northern branch, Déis Tuaiscirt, lost their lands south of the Shannon and were confined to east Clare, whence they were shortly to emerge victorious over Danes, Uí Fidgenti and Eóganachta as the 'Dál Cais' under Mathgamain mac Cennétig and his brother Brian Bóruma.

Given the nature of the evidence it seems futile to speculate as to the origins of the Eóganachta. The name of the dynasty implies descent

from a divine or human personage connected with the sacred yew tree, suggesting a parallel with the Gaulish 'yew people', the Eburones, whose *leth-rí* Catuvolcus (*rex dimidiae partis Eburonum*) poisoned himself with yew after his defeat by Caesar. The legend which tells of the final break in the Eóganacht-Dáirine succession arrangement deals with the judgement given by Ailill Ólum when his sons disputed with his fosterson Lugaid Mac Con (the representative of the Érainn whom we have earlier met in the saga of Cormac mac Airt)* over the possession of the Otherworld musician Fer Fí and of the yew tree in which he was sitting. Fer Fí, originally Fer Í (man of the yew) was son of Eógabul (yew-fork); Eógabul had been slain and his daughter Áine ravished by Ailill Ólum at Cnoc Áine; Fer Fí is the apple of discord by which the Otherworld took its revenge. The other Irish name for the yew (*ibur*) appears in the site of the chief church of the Eóganachta at Emly (Imlech Ibair, 'the marsh of the yew tree'). The fabulous *Life* of St Flannan of Killaloe, written for Domnall Mór Ua Briain sometime after 1162, tells how the saint's father Toirrdelbach (ancestor of the Uí Thoirrdelbaig sept of Dál Cais and of the O'Brien family) cut down an ancient yew-tree at Emly, thus symbolising the future Dál Cais destruction of Eóganacht power in Munster. The Gaulish war-god Segomo occurs also in their early pedigrees, where a prehistoric ancestor bears the name Nia Segamain (Segomon) 'champion of Segomo'. But there is little need to postulate a new invasion of Celts from Gaul to explain the origins of a dynasty which all the available evidence suggests came to power and even into existence in the fifth century. The Eóganachta no doubt sprang from the Celtic population already long settled on Munster soil. Foreign influence however is probable in the sense that they owed their rise to successful forays on Roman Britain and perhaps to their early adoption of Christianity.

The mythological traditions of the dynasty seem to centre on Cnoc Áine and the area to the south in county Limerick. On the other hand, MacNeill noticed that several of the names in their prehistoric pedigree are attested in the ogham inscriptions of the Déisi country in Waterford. Nia Segomon appears there as NETASEGAMONAS, Fer Cerb in the inscription commemorating a certain Cathbarr: CATABAR MOCO VIRICORB, Lugaid Láigne perhaps as LUGUDECCAS, Mug Corbb perhaps as MACORB, and Meilge (who is not himself in the pedigree but was a prehistoric king of Ireland allegedly slain by Mug Corbb) as MELAGIA.

The ogham inscriptions reveal close interaction between Roman

* Above, p. 66.

Britain and Ireland. The ogham alphabet is based upon the Latin, although schematised into a system of strokes and dots. The Irish inscriptions are clustered thickest in the lands of the Corco Duibne of the Kerry peninsulas and of the Déisi in Waterford. They also extend across the sea into Wales, Cornwall and western England, where sometimes they are accompanied by inscriptions bearing the same message in British or Vulgar Latin. In the middle ages memories remained of the Irish settlements made during the fourth century in these parts of Britain. The Welsh kings and saints of Brycheiniog (Brecknock) claimed Irish descent, and although the kings of Dyfed in south-west Wales expunged such foreign elements from their official genealogy, the Old Irish saga of the Expulsion of the Déisi preserves what is probably the more genuine pedigree of the early eighth-century king of Dyfed Tewdws ap Rhein (Teudos map Regin). While the Déisi were sojourning in Leinster it is said that one of their princes, Eochaid Allmuir mac Artchuirp, went across the sea with his children to the territory of Demed (Dyfed—in Roman times the tribal territory of the Demetae). The saga adds, oddly, that 'it is from them is the race of Crimthann over there'. This must refer to the legendary conquests made in Britain by Crimthann mac Fidaig, king of Munster or even of Ireland, first cousin in the genealogical scheme to Conall Corc and brother to Niall Noígiallach's step-mother Mongfind. About the year 900 Cormac mac Cuilennáin in his glossary of Old Irish words and names, the *Sanas Cormaic*, has an entry:

> *Mug Éime*, the name of the first lap-dog that was in Ireland. Coirpre Músc son of Conaire* brought it from the east, from Britain. For when great was the power of the Irish over the British they divided Alba amongst them in districts, and each of them knew his friend's habitation, and the Irish dwelt on the east of the sea no less than in Scotia (Ireland), and their mansions and their royal forts were built there. *Inde dicitur* Dinn Tradui, i.e., Dún Tredue, i.e., the three-fossed fort of Crimthann Már mac Fidaig, king of Ireland and Alba and down to the Ictian Sea, *et inde* Glasimpere na nGáedel (Glastonbury of the Irish), a church on the border of the Ictian Sea. In that part is Dind Map Lethain in the lands of the Cornish Britons, i.e., Dún Maic Léthain, for *mac* is the same as *map* in British. Thus did each tribe of them divide, for there was an equal proportion on the east, and they possessed that power long after the coming of Patrick.'†

* The ancestor of the Múscraige. † Based upon Stokes' translation.

Thus the Uí Liatháin (for *Létháin* is the archaic form of *Liatháin*) had settlements in Cornwall. In Ireland they were next-door neighbours to the Déisi, and an ogham inscription in what was later Déisi territory in county Waterford commemorates a CALUNOVICA MAQI MUCOI LITENI.

The saga traditions of Conall Corc and the finding of Cashel present several features worthy of notice. There are no myths or legends concerning the rock of Cashel relating to pagan prehistory: we are told that the site (despite its obvious prominence in the Munster landscape) was found accidentally or revealed miraculously, and the story has a strong Christian coloration, even in its most archaic versions. The very name of Cashel (*caisel*) is a borrowing from the Latin *castellum*, and although the word passed into the Irish language as a common noun denoting a stone-built ring-fort, we may well surmise that it was first applied to a fort built on the rock of Cashel by victorious Scotti who had seen the Roman *castella* or auxiliary fortresses, such as the one erected at Cardiff to repel their raids on the British coast. Elements of Christianity as well as the Roman alphabet were included in their booty. Certainly they brought Christian slaves from Britain such as those who are said to have fostered St Ailbe of Emly.

The eighth-century collection of Munster genealogies tells the story of Conall Corc in a version which contains many folk motifs. Early Irish heroic saga usually prefers more exalted characters such as druids to be the intermediaries of the supernatural, but here we have references to witches and palmistry which typify the different nature of the Munster tradition:

> Fedelm the witch, daughter of Móethaire of the Corco Óchae, was the fostermother of Conall Corc mac Luigthig. On the night that Corc was born the witch spent the night in the house of king Luigthech. His mother was Bolce Ben-bretnach of the Britons. She was a female satirist. On the king she put an irrefusable request that she should sleep with him. In consequence Conall mac Luigthig was conceived. The name of his fostermother, however, was Láir Derg.* Hence was said 'Corc mac Láire', and hence too the Uí Maic Láire† are so called.
>
> The witch was harrying the king in Femen where is Fertai Chonaill (the grave-mounds of Conall). When his mother was delivered of

* 'Red Mare'—apparently a nick-name of Fedelm's.

† A generic term for the eastern Eóganachta.

Corc she put her son under the protection of Fedelm the witch, and on that account it is she who reared him.

On the next night a coven was due. She concealed her boy under the hearth beneath the ground. The witches came into the house. One of them said: 'I do not destroy except what is under the cauldron.' The fire darted at the child and burned his ear. As a result Corc mac Luigthig was red (*corc*). The next day a diviner examined the hand of Corc, who was with his fostermother. He said to him: 'You are to free captives wherever you may see them and whenever you may be able to do so. If you do, your race will be famous and your name will be on it. Your pre-eminence (*ordan*) consists therein that you do so.'*

Conall Corc's cousin, the childless Crimthann mac Fidaig, here represented as king of Ireland, adopted the boy. Later, when Crimthann's wife slandered Conall, he tried to have him slain. Here we have an interesting early European version of the international folktale of Proteus and Bellerophon in a form which was later to be used by Saxo Grammaticus in his tale of Hamlet. Crimthann sent Conall to the king of the Picts in Scotland with a secret ogham message engraved on his shield, which only the Pictish king would understand. But as Conall lay asleep on the Pictish coast a scholar whom he had once rescued from captivity in Leinster came upon him, and reading the baleful message changed the oghams so that Conall was welcomed and won the king's daughter in marriage. On Crimthann's death he returned to Ireland 'in the time of Niall mac Echach', who is pointedly not termed king of Ireland. Conall bought off with his wealth hostages at Tara whom Niall had condemned to death for the slaying of his son. He settled the hostages in Munster, where they became the ancestors of the Gregraige, Corco Daula and Mendraige: 'from them the king of Cashel is entitled to three cows together with their accessories and summer foods, with full rights over them in respect of the prerogatives of lordship . . . When Corc came to Femen the kingship of Ireland closed around him.'

A literary version of the saga written in the tenth century brings it to an end here with an account of the Finding of Cashel. When Conall arrived at Mag Femin with thirty warriors a heavy snowstorm caused him to lose his way:

* Vernam Hull's translation.

On that day, the swineherd of Áed, the king of the Múscraige, was tending his pigs. That night he said to Áed: 'I saw a wonder today', said he, 'on these ridges in the north. I beheld a yew-bush on a stone, and I perceived a small oratory in front of it and a flagstone (*lecc*) before it. Angels were in attendance going up and down from the flagstone.'

'Verily', said the druid of Áed, 'that will be the residence of the king of Munster forever, and he who shall first kindle a fire under that yew, from him shall descend the kingship of Munster.'

'Let us go to light it', said Áed.

'Let us wait until morning', said the druid.

But Conall Corc comes upon the rock and lights a fire for his wife and sons. Áed arrives in the morning, welcomes him and gives his own son as hostage to Conall. The story concludes with its aetiological moral:

The hostage of the Múscraige is the first hostage that a king of Munster ever took, and afterwards they were freed and they have a queen in Cashel. Moreover, the swineherd who was found in Cashel, freedom was given to him and to his children by the king of Cashel, that is, without tribute and without exaction of king or steward (*rechtaire*). It is he too who raises the cry of kingship for the king of Cashel, and is given a blessing by the king, and straightway receives the garment* of the king.

We are here presented with a most intriguing amalgam of pagan and Christian elements: the sacred yew-tree, totem of the dynasty, the inauguration flagstone, the sacred swineherd who inaugurates the king, and the biblical story of Jacob at Bethel (a text used in the liturgy for the consecration of a church). The Rees brothers observe that in Celtic tradition swine belong to the Otherworld: herding swine was a servile occupation and the laws forbid princes to own swine. It is consonant with the Munster atmosphere that here the swineherd should act the part elsewhere accorded to the *fili*. The kingdom of Dyfed in south Wales offers a curious parallel, for in the Mabinogion Pryderi son of Pwyll, lord of Dyfed, is described as the swineherd of his fosterfather Pendaran Dyfed, and in the Triads as one of the Three Powerful Swineherds of the Island of Britain. We recall the predominance of 'servile' names among the ancestral figures of Munster mythology—Mug Nuadat, Mug Néit, Mug Láma, Mug Roith, Mugain. These

* *Dechelt* 'a garment of two pieces'.

pagan features were soon overshadowed by the Christian character with which the kingship of Cashel was imbued, especially after the kings of Munster admitted the primacy of Armagh in the eighth century.

The story of the Finding of Cashel is preserved as an independent tract in two versions which have been conflated in the manuscript text. The first portion dates from the eighth century and deserves to be quoted in full, as far as the obscurities of the language allow:

Corc son of Lugaid was in Cathair Étain Tairb and Temair Eimín which are side by side, when Cashel was revealed to Duirdriu, swineherd to the king of Éile, and to Cuirirán, swineherd to the king of Múscraige. It was they who first found Cashel, and the woods of Cashel were yellow that time, and mast was plentiful there.

The swineherds went to put their swine to mast. Sleep came upon them and their swine slept for three days and three nights. Thus the swineherds saw Corc son of Lugaid and they heard the blessing which the angel gave him. There was shown to them the cycle of the kingship of Munster for ever in all its dignity, and the length of each reign and their prosperity and their peace. The dignity of the kingdom (*ordain in fhlatha*) is the blessing which the angel gave.

'The blessing of the mighty Lord who made the whole world by his sole Word from its yellow foundation.

A powerful blessing of prosperity south upon you all, kings of Cashel: blessing of rule, blessing of cattle, blessing of victory, blessing in battle, blessing of wealth, a blessing for the plain, a blessing for the wood, a perfect blessing, blessing of wine, a sound blessing, a noble blessing, a lasting blessing.

Blessing of heaven cloud-blessing,
blessing of earth fruit-blessing,
blessing of sea fish-blessing,
blessing of sun rank-blessing,
blessing of moon honour-blessing,
blessing of ale food-blessing,
blessing of light dew-blessing,
blessing of wisdom valour-blessing,
blessing of . . . (?) plough-blessing . . .

A life-blessing is the firm blessing of the mighty Lord so long as you keep Truth with the divisions of mercy, a strong Prince who

reigneth without beginning without end, who is greater than everlasting telling. A blessing upon you all, kings of Cashel.'

The swineherd told this to his king, that is to Conall mac Nenta Con,* so that the place in which he had seen the vision might be earned for him. And Conall Corc son of Lugaid came there. He bought it from him. Thus the Uí Duirdrenn† are entitled to seven *cumala* from the king of Cashel.

Hii sunt reges Caisil: Corc, Nad Froích, Óengus, Echu, Feidlimid, Duibgilcach, Cairpre, Feidlimid mac Tigernaig, Faílbe Fland, Finguine, Cathal, Cúán, Máenach, Cú-cen-máthair, Colcu, Finguine, Ailill, Eitirscél, Cormac, Cathal—twenty-two kings.‡ Artrí, Feidlimid, Ólchobar, Áilgenán, Mácl Gualae, Cenn Fáelad, Dúnchad, Dub Lachtna.

These are the *Dicta* of Cuirirán the swineherd in trance, about the blessing of the kings of Cashel which he heard in a dream: . . .

[Here follows a short but obscure 'rhetoric'.]

Respondit rex et dixit: rob fír fírthar, rob bríg brígther.§

Respondit populus: Amen.¶

These may well be the actual formulae used at the consecration of the kings of Cashel. The heptasyllabic verse blessing is pagan in spirit, with its emphasis on fertility and its references to the elements and to the Prince's Truth. But it was composed by a Christian, as is obvious from the very word *bendacht*, as well as from the terms *ord-bendacht* 'rank-blessing' and *grád-bendacht* 'honour-blessing', derived from the Latin *benedictio*, *ordo* and *gradus*. The king-list originally ended with Cathal mac Finguine (721–742), the additional names being due to a scribe writing at the end of the ninth century.

The second text, dating from the tenth century, gives a fuller narrative and has been coloured by Patrician hagiography. Here the swineherds see 'a cleric in his white robes, with two chanting choirs about him, symbolising the coming of Patrick'. The angel has taken over the function of the goddess of sovereignty, dispensing drink 'for every righteous prince who should become king of Cashel'. Corc kindles a fire on the site, drives in stakes to build his house and prepares a

* King of the Éile Deiscirt.

† The family descended from Duirdriu.

‡ Only twenty are named.

§ 'May it be a Truth that is confirmed; may it be a Power that is enforced!'

¶ Based on the translation by Myles Dillon.

banquet. He bids Cuirirán summon the king of Múscraige, and he asks 'that it should always be his successor who would be summoned to the king of Cashel first, and that was granted to him; and he did not know that Duirdriu had gone to proclaim Corc'. Duirdriu tells his master, Conall king of Éile, about the vision and prophecy. Conall is displeased, since Cashel lay in his territory, and he marches on the rock, only to find Corc there before him. He accepts Corc's ale, and Duirdriu relates his vision.

> Then the king of Éile said: 'Let Corc give you a reward for the story you have, and for giving him the blessing which the angel recited.' And Duirdriu gave him the blessing at Ráith na nIrlann by the lawn of Cashel, and he was proclaimed king at once. And Corc gave seven *cumala* to Duirdriu: an ivory-hilted sword, a *cumal* of brooches, a *cumal* of shields, a *cumal* of belts, a *cumal* of cloaks, a *cumal* of horses, and a *cumal* of clothing, and seven widths of silver for every *cumal*.
>
> It is the duty of the Uí Duirdrenn to pronounce this blessing every year upon each king who shall succeed to Cashel, and they are free from all other obligations to the king of Munster in return for it; and the king upon whom he pronounces it shall not die by violence, provided he observe his prescriptions (*buada*), namely that he gave Truth and Mercy.*
>
> One king upon whom it was not pronounced, Cormac hua Máenaig, was slain to fulfil the prophecy of Patrick who had said that only one king would die a violent death in Cashel, on account of the point of Patrick's crozier which went into the foot of Óengus mac Nad Froích at his baptism in Cashel.

This and further details about Patrick's blessing of the men of Munster have been tacked on to the story from the *Vita Tripartita*. It is said that Corc's taking of Cashel occurred sixty years before the baptism of Óengus, and the amount of the tax of 'the scruple of Patrick's baptism upon Munster' which was to be paid every three years to Armagh is specified: it is no doubt the same as the *Cáin Phátraic* promulgated in Munster by Feidlimid mac Crimthainn in 823 and possibly earlier by Cathal mac Finguine in 734. The Cormac ua Máenaig, king of Cashel, referred to was slain in 713 at the battle of Carn Feradaig (Cahernarry in county Limerick) by the Déis Tuaiscirt.

In the seventh century Tírechán retails the information that Patrick

* Note how the pagan concept has been assimilated to the language of the Psalms.

baptized Óengus and his sons *super petram Cothrigi** at Cashel. The *Vita Tripartita* has a long and circumstantial narrative. When Óengus wakes up in the morning after the arrival of Patrick he finds that all the idols of Cashel have fallen on their faces. There follows one of the best-known incidents in Patrician hagiography: while baptizing the king Patrick accidentally drove the pointed end of his crozier through his foot, and Óengus made no complaint, assuming that this was part of the ritual. The saint then promises that none of his successors will die a violent death. Further 'no one is king of Cashel until the *comarba* of Patrick ordains him and gives him orders (*gráda*) . . . And twenty-seven kings have ruled under a crozier in Cashel until the time of Cenn nGécán of the seed of Ailill and Óengus.' Óengus was ancestor of the Eóganacht Chaisil, Eóganacht Airthir Chliach and Eóganacht Glendamnach, while his brother Ailill was ancestor of the Eóganacht Áine. Finguine 'Cenn nGécán' (Goosehead) was king of Cashel from 896 until his abdication in 901. The following year he was slain by the Cenél Conaill Caisil, a collateral branch of his own dynasty, the Eóganacht Chaisil. If we ignore contested claims in the list of kings of Munster (and it must be admitted that the Cashel regnal lists are very contradictory), we find that Cenn nGécán was the twenty-seventh after Óengus; and only one king who was not a descendant of either Ailill or Óengus, Ólchobur mac Cináeda (847–851), is admitted by all authorities.†

The phrase 'have ruled under a crozier' is obscure. In the seventeenth century Colgan translated it *in monachos tonsi*, but although several kings of Cashel were also clerics, this was by no means the rule. The annalistic reference in 793 to the 'ordination' of Artrí mac Cathail as king of Munster we have seen to reflect the growing tendency of his time towards the ecclesiastical consecration of kings, rather than a trait peculiar to Cashel. There can be little doubt, however, that the kings of Cashel did regard their office as essentially Christian: one of their *buada* as enumerated in the Middle Irish tract on the taboos of the kings of Ireland was that they should chant the Passion in Lent at Cashel.

The *Vita Tripartita* was probably written in the reign of Cenn nGécán. A note added by a later scribe between 927 and 939, when Joseph was bishop and abbot of Armagh, purports to name the twenty-four officials, clerics and craftsmen who formed Patrick's household: 'and

* 'The rock of Patrick'—Cothrige was an early Irish form of Patricius.

† See below, Appendix II, Tables 11, 12.

that is the number that it is right should be in the household* of Joseph; and that is the number that it is right there should be around the table of the king of Cashel from the time of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, i.e. king of the two Fifths of Munster [820–847], onwards.' The same number recurs in a much later note in the genealogical tracts, dating from the time of the revival of Eóganacht power in the reign of Cormac Mac Cárrthaig, the builder of Cormac's Chapel:

> It is in this wise that the kings of Munster should be elected: the twenty-four best chief counsellors in the two Fifths of Munster should choose him, as the German emperor (*an tImper Almanach*) is chosen, and he should be brought to the Stone of Cothraige (*lecc Cotraidi*) and to Cormac's great church (*tempoll mór Cormaic*) and there proclaimed king, and be brought to Lis na nUrlann and proclaimed there also.

The MacCarthys had direct connections with Germany through the Schottenklöster, the Irish Benedictine houses, particularly with St James in Regensburg, which became the mother house of the Benedictine monastery of Cashel, for which Cormac's Chapel was built between 1127 and 1134: it was consecrated in the latter year. Dirmicius (Diarmait), abbot of St James from 1121 to 1133, sent a small party which probably included his successor Christian Mac Carrthaig, a relative of Cormac's, to help in the foundation, and when Christian became abbot at Regensburg he founded a daughter house of St James at Würzburg, a city which had a long connection with Irish churchmen and scholars since the time of its founder St Kilian, martyred there in 689. Würzburg in turn established a priory at Ross Carbery in Corco Loígde, possibly before 1148. Cormac's Chapel is the first and most ambitious example of the Irish romanesque, and it has long been thought to display affinities with Rhineland architecture and also with that of St James at Regensburg; more recently, however, it has been argued that its direct model was the cathedral at Canterbury, whose prelates took an active interest in the reformation of the Irish church.

The synod which actively inaugurated this reformation was the first synod of Cashel held in 1101 under the presidency of Muirchertach Ua Briain, king of Munster and high-king of Ireland 'with opposition'. On this occasion Muirchertach solemnly gave the site of Cashel to the church, and at the synod of Ráith Bressail ten years later, when a regular diocesan structure was first set up for the Irish church, Cashel was

* *Óentaid*, literally 'unity'.

chosen as the second metropolitan see next to Armagh. Muirchertach's motives in donating the rock to the church were not entirely disingenuous, for he thereby hoped to deprive the rival Eóganachta of any political prestige derived from their ownership of the ancient capital. Cormac Mac Carrthaig's grandiose building schemes were an attempt to make the best of this situation. But the presence of a tenth-century round tower on the rock of Cashel indicates the existence of an earlier church even in the days when it was a centre of secular power.

It is an attractive hypothesis that the *Book of rights* was composed for recitation at the synod of Cashel, when Muirchertach Ua Briain was at the height of his career. The author makes great play of the Christian character of Cashel as compared with the paganism of Tara:

> The princedom of Tara was extinguished by the fasting of Patrick with his *familia* against Lóegaire son of Niall, and the fasting of Ruadán of Lothra, son of Óengus, with the saints of Ireland against Diarmait mac Cerbaill and the four kindreds of Tara. And these saints promised that there would not be a house in Tara from Lóegaire nor from the line of Niall until there should be one from the line of Ailill Ólum.*

The king of Cashel should normally and rightfully be high-king of all Ireland. 'The heir to Cashel is the common head of all, as is the heir (*comarba*) of Patrick.' The *Book of rights* does not presume to exclude other provincial kings from legitimate aspirations to the high-kingship, but when the king of Cashel is not king of Ireland 'he is entitled to the overlordship of half of Ireland, namely from Tech Duinn west of Ireland to Áth Cliath in Leinster'.† A summary of the Finding of Cashel saga forms the introduction to the *Book*, but the vision seen by the swineherds is here identified with Victor, the guardian angel of St Patrick. He prophesies the coming of the Faith and proclaims 'that the dignity and primacy of Ireland would always be in that place. Accordingly that is Patrick's sanctuary and the principal city of the king of Ireland. And the rent and service of the men of Ireland is due to the king of that place always, namely to the king of Cashel through the blessing of Patrick son of Calpurnius.' The *Book of rights* proper ends with a blessing of Patrick upon the men of Ireland which is merely a slightly modified version of the heptasyllabic blessing of the kings of Cashel from the Finding of Cashel text.

* Dillon's translation.

† i.e., from Dursey Island to Dublin.

Let us return for a moment to the eighth-century account of Conall Corc, which omits all mention of the 'finding' of Cashel. After Corc has assumed the kingship of Munster, or indeed of Ireland, his wife Aímend, daughter of Óengus Bolg of the Dáirine or Corco Loígde,*

> dreamt a dream in Cashel; that is, it seemed to her that she was a bird, that she was in a nest, and that she hatched nestlings. Three of them flew to South Munster, and another one to the middle of Munster. After them came a bird which settled itself to the west of them. The fifth one had remained in the nest. She related her dream to a druid. He said to her: 'Thus will be your seed. Five will be the number of your sons. The sixth, namely Coirpre of Luachair, who settled himself to the west of them, is the son of the Pictish woman. Nad Froích it is who has remained in the nest. The three to the south are Mac Caiss, Macc Brócc [and Macc Iair], the one situated in the middle of Munster is Daig.'†

Other genealogical tracts have an alternative version. Aímend dreamt that she gave birth to puppies or wolf-cubs. One she bathed in wine (Nad Froích), one in ale (Mac Cass), one in new milk (Mac Brócc), and one in water (Mac Iair). A fifth came to her bed from outside; him she bathed in blood and he gnawed at her breasts.

The political moral is clear, although the second version represents a slightly later situation. The Uí Maic Brócc and Uí Maic Iair early lost any real importance, and their status is denoted by the liquids in which their ancestors were bathed; the descendants of Daig were so insignificant that the later genealogist has forgotten them. The eastern Eóganachta claimed descent from Nad Froích; the Eóganacht Raithlind in Desmond were somewhat apart, but had a share in the 'ale of sovereignty'. But the Eóganacht Locha Léin, the kings of Iarmumu or Iarluachair;‡ west of Sliab Luachra, the mountainous barrier between the counties of Cork, Limerick and Kerry, were regarded with hostility by the Cashel historians, who are reluctant to admit any of them as high-kings of Munster. Conall Corc's sojourn in Scotland (itself probably

* Óengus Bolg was the ancestor divinity of the Érainn peoples, who were also known originally as Fir Bolg.

† Based on Vernam Hull's translation.

‡ Our texts often refer to these areas as *Irmumu* and *Irluachair* (gen. *Irlóchrae*), with *ir-* for the normal *iar-* 'west, behind'; this seems to be a rare example of a dialect variant in Old Irish.

an anachronistic memory of actual exploits in Roman Britain) provided an excuse for labelling Coirpre Luachra Coirpre Cruithnechán 'the little Pict' in contrast to his half-brothers whose mother was of the ancient Érainn of Munster. Later, when the Picts of Scotland became Gaelicised after the ninth century, Conall Corc proved a usefully respectable ancestor for the so-called Eóganacht of Mag Geirginn (the Mearns), for the Lemnaig or Lennoxes, and later again for the Stewarts, all allegedly descended from sons whom he or Coirpre had left behind in Scotland.

Our tract tells how Coirpre arrived with thirty horsemen at Cashel. Having bought horses in the north he unyoked them on Corc's land, according to the correct legal procedure for laying claim to property. But when he slew his father's *rechtaire* Corc cursed him and banished him to west Munster, although the genealogist has to admit that he was eventually buried in Femen near Cashel. Corc then gave the *rechtairecht* or stewardship of Iarmumu to Maine son of Coirpre. Dauí Iarlaithe later succeeded to this office but did not pay his dues to Cashel. War followed between him and his cousin Óengus mac Nad Froích, and eventually Dauí became high-king of all Munster—*réthe Muman uile*, (this is not conceded by the later regnal lists).

Of Óengus mac Nad Froích we learn that he gave the Aran islands (always part of Munster in the middle ages) to St Éndae, but our tract has no mention of his alleged baptism by St Patrick. Óengus indeed here retains many pagan traits. He lost thirty battles until helped by the druid Bóinda: afterwards he won thirty. He did not turn his face south, but slept facing the north and was buried (like Lóeguire mac Néill in Tara and his enemy the son of Dúnlaing at Mullaghmast) in a standing position facing north 'under the couch of the kings at Cashel'. This statement has obvious political relevance to the hostility between Munster and Leth Cuinn, but it also reminds us of the curious Munster inversion of values. In Irish custom the north of the house was always the side of honour, so that the king normally sat facing southwards. The Rees brothers have noted similar conventions in Iceland, in Roman tradition (Numa faced south at his inauguration), and in the *Analects* of Confucius.

The battles of Dauí Iarlaithe against the Uaithni of the Lough Derg area (who seem identical with the south Connacht tribe noted by Ptolemy as the *Auteinoi*), are related in a very obscure passage which is marked by folkloristic motifs as well as by technical legal language. Another legal passage in the tract tells of an agreement between

Eochaid son of Óengus mac Nad Froích and his brothers. This was known as a *cuindelc*, and under its terms the co-heirs to a property held the shares as a common unit with right of survivorship. Eochaid made such a *cuindelc* with eight of his brothers and outlived them all, thus inheriting the whole property. His brother Feidlimid had made a similar arrangement, but with only three of his brothers, and similarly survived to take all. Such is the explanation put forward for the fact that the patrimony of the Eóganacht Chaisil, descended from Feidlimid, was significantly smaller in extent than that of the Eóganacht Airthir Chliach and Eóganacht Glendamnach, both descended from Eochaid. The anecdote illustrates the aetiological methods of the genealogical schools.

So too some reason had to be found for the exclusion of the Eóganacht Raithlind or Uí Echach Muman from reigning in Cashel itself. The explanation is apparently based on a legal technicality: Corc is said to have imposed his grandson Echu on the forfeited tribes (*tótha dílsiu*) after his father Mac Cass had run out of his inheritance. Corc then took Echu's lands (presumably those which he would have inherited in the Cashel area) as a price for having arranged his fosterage.

> Thus we have the proverb: 'Every descendant of Echu, though he may be king of all Munster, shall not go to Cashel.' That even applied to Feidlimid mac Tigernaig. He was king of Munster. He did not go to Cashel, but Bodumbir was dug by him. So Cumman, the wife of Coirpre, made this quatrain after she had come to Feidlimid after Coirpre's death:
>
> *Amra n-adamrae la nech*
> *iadad Caisil frim dá hech;*
> *amra n-adamrae leou*
> *iadad Caisil frim eochu.*
>
> Anyone would be greatly surprised
> that my two horses were barred from Cashel;
> they would be astonished to learn
> of the shutting of Cashel against my horses.

The quatrain is alternatively ascribed to Gobbán 'the charioteer of Feidlimid, the high-king of all Munster'. The fortress of Bodumbir was apparently near Cahir some miles south of Cashel. The formula 'to dig' is regularly used of the construction of the earthworks of a ring-fort as

is that "to plant (stakes)" for the building of a house within it. The triple-ramparted ring-fort of Garranes in south Cork has been associated with the Raithlend dynasty: it has been dated by excavation to around the year 500, two or three generations earlier than Feidlimid's time, and has yielded evidence of some trade contacts with the Mediterranean. The great hill-fort of Carn Tighernagh, situated about half-way between Garranes and Cashel, and built around a much older burial cairn, as are so many of the Irish hill-forts, may preserve the name of Feidlimid's father, though it is likely to be several centuries earlier in date.

The origin legend of Corc and his descendants concludes by saying that the Cenél nAngse (a sept apparently otherwise unknown—but perhaps our text is corrupt) did not go to Cashel 'until recently' because they would give none of their share for a *brug ríg*. Brug Ríg occurs as a place-name (Bruree in county Limerick), but is here used as a common noun, denoting that parcel of land which each *tuath* assigned as demesne for the over-king of the province. We know that such a custom obtained within the greater lordships of sixteenth-century Ireland, and it is interesting to find it attested in such an early text, thus showing that the acceptance of the principle of overlordship was already sufficiently entrenched to encroach upon the essential autonomy of the *tuath* in such a sensitive matter as land-holding. Cashel, however, belongs to the Cenél nÓengusso maic Nad Froích, because Nad Froích alone of the sons of Corc gave a *brug ríg* to Cashel.

Hence Corc said:

Bid cathir Nad Fraích,
bid Nad Fraích tír cháich;
int í bessa haí Cassel
is hé are-labrathar Mumain n-uili.
(*.i. biad Mumu huile ina géllsine*).

It will be Nad Froích's city;
everyone's land will be Nad Froích's;
he to whom Cashel belongs,
he is the spokesman for all Munster
(glossed: 'i.e. all Munster will be in vassalage to him.')

The *Frithfholaid* texts on the mutual obligations of the king of Cashel and his sub-kings are corruptly preserved and still await the services

of an editor, but they throw much light on the character of Munster polity in the ninth or tenth century. The king of Cashel is said to pay the dynastic and tribal kings *rath* or *indarrad* (wage or stipend) every seven years. The amount is calculated in *cumala*—sums equivalent to the price of a bond-maid—with no mention of the elaborate gifts enumerated in the *Book of rights*.

The Uí Liatháin are mentioned first. They do not give their hostages until all the other hostages of Munster have been collected. Their king receives a *rath* of thirty *cumala* and their sub-king of Uí Maic Caille (barony of Imokilly, county Cork) twenty. The king of the Déisi receives fifty *cumala* 'for it is the Déisi who first established the kingship of Cashel'. The king of Fir Maige Féne receives twenty *cumala* and sends a druid to Cashel (fittingly, since this tribe claimed druidic descent); also the best man of the tribe shall be in the high king's council: *i sanais la ríg Caisil* (the word *sanas* 'secret' is also found as the title of Cormac mac Cuilennáin's glossary, *Sanas Cormaic*). The king of the Dáirine or Corco Loígde receives forty *cumala* since the Dáirine had enjoyed alternate kingship with the Eóganachta until the time of Lugaid Mac Con.

The king of Raithlend does not accept any *rath* but exchanges hostages with the king of Cashel. The kings of Uí Fidgenti and of Iarluachair (Eóganacht Locha Léin), and in one of the versions, the king of Thomond, are in a similar position. These are not even bound to go on a hosting with the king of Cashel, unless it be to defend the honour of Munster against Leth Cuinn or the Laigin. Furthermore, they lay it down that their kings are entitled to seven *cumala* (i.e. the normal *éraic* or blood-price) from the king of Cashel in return for this military service, if they return alive; if they do not return, this sum has to be paid to their successors; and if the king of Cashel himself does not return alive, his successor must pay. Each of them is to rule the *tuatha* of his own area during an interregnum in the high-kingship. If they accept gifts as *rath* from the king of Cashel they must pay him the interest accruing therefrom, but if they choose they can return the original chattels: in other words their allegiance is a terminable contract similar to that between a *sóer-chéle* and his lord.

The king of the Múscraige is entitled to a cow from each prey made by the king of Cashel, and he sends three men to sit in the high-king's council, while his queen sends three women to attend the queen of Cashel. He himself is entitled to sit beside the king of Cashel, unless the kings of Uí Fidgenti, Iarluachair or Raithlend be present—these

he salutes by raising his knee (a token of respect or homage between equals). The Múscraige claim a third of every wrack cast up on the shore throughout Ireland 'except the portion of the king of Tara'—which is rather odd, since none of the Múscraige kingdoms known to history bordered on the sea. Every man of the seed of Coirpre Músc who can compose poetry is entitled to the rank of *ollam*, and the *ollam* or chief poet of the king of Cashel must always come from the Múscraige. Similarly the brehon of the king of Cashel must be of the Déisi.

Other subject tribes send officials or craftsmen appropriate to their tribal names or origin legends: physicians from the Dál Mugaide, harpers from the Corco Óchae, bronze-smiths from the Cerdraige, dairy-stewards (*rechtairi for blicht*) from the Bóindrige, charioteers and horsemen from the Arada Cliach, champions from the Uaithni, Orbraige and Corco Athrach (the last-named were an *aithech-thuath* living beside Cashel itself), fools* and door-keepers from the Corcomruad.

To some kings an extra payment of protection money or *cumtach* is made—evidently a sum which the king of Cashel will forfeit if he fails to come to their aid. We are told that this is not paid to the Osraige, since kings had come from their seed, nor to the Laigin, because Faílbe Fland had paid the *bóruma* tribute on their behalf to the Uí Néill. The king of Éile receives a *rath* of seven *cumala* and a *cumtach* of twenty scruples, as does the king of the Arada. A third of this latter sum goes to the king himself and the rest is divided equally between the people and the churches of his kingdom. Elsewhere in the tract, however, it is said that a third of the *cumtach* of the Éile is due to the Uí Duirdrenn whose ancestor first 'found' Cashel. The king of Cashel appoints a steward to collect his rents and tributes from Ormond (*rechtaire tobaig*), but the Uí Maic Láire (the descendants of Conall Corc) and the Déisi and Múscraige are exempt.

It will be apparent that the duties of the subject kings are hedged about with exemptions. Certainly the purpose of these tracts (which are no doubt as artificial in their own way as the later *Book of rights*) is rather to stress the privileges and rights of the tribal kings than the powers of their overlord. No details are given of the tributes presumably paid by the *fortuatha*. The actual lordship of the king of Cashel is restricted to Ormond: the other over-kings in the south and west

* The words *drúth* and *drui* are often confused; probably we should read the latter here since the tribal name Corcomruad (originally Corco Mo-druad) means 'seed of my druid'.

acknowledge him only on their own terms. Even the allegiance of the non-Eóganacht Múscraige seems as much dependent on the special position they enjoy as on the might of the high-king. It is especially noteworthy that the prospect of periods of interregnum is regarded with equanimity.

It has been said that Munster was the most peaceful area in western Europe during the Dark Ages. This is very much an argument from silence: the lack of early annals has left both the petty wars and the more important power struggles in the south of Ireland unrecorded. Nevertheless, the Munster genealogists and writers of dynastic propaganda do stress the essentially benevolent nature of the Cashel kingship. Nowhere is this concept more clearly expressed than in the origin legend *De bunad imthechta Eóganachta* which forms part of the Laud genealogical collection.

The author was evidently familiar with the kernel of the story of the sons of Míl which was later elaborated into the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, according to which the ancestors of the Goídil after many wanderings in Egypt and Scythia eventually reached Spain, whence Éremón and Éber, the two sons of Míl Espáne, led them to Ireland and became the ancestors of the Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga dynasties respectively. But for his own purpose he gives the story a quite different twist.

A fleet of Irish origin manned by the sons of Eógan Taídlech (the Shining), also known as Mug Nuadat or Eógan Fitheccach, arrives at Inber Colpthai, the mouth of the Boyne, after much sea-voyaging. They make a truce with the men of Ireland, who are so impressed by their wealth that they agree to foster the son of Eógan Taídlech in return for fosterage fees (*séta*). There is total confusion in the text as to whether Eógan Taídlech is the name of the son or the father, but we are told that the boy 'became the pet of Ireland'. He was given three forts, one near Kinnitty in Loígis, one among the Ciarraige Luachra, and one among the Uí Néill *fortuath* of Delbna. In each of these there was a souterrain (*fithecc*) and there was a prophet (*fáith*) at each.

> Once Eógan asked one of the prophets: 'What is going to happen to us?' The prophet said: 'A great famine is coming on the men of Ireland.' 'When will it come?' 'It will come after three years; and sell gold and silver for food this year and you will be able to support four men on the food of three.' And after that he asked each prophet in turn each year and they said: 'The famine is still coming: and sell

your bronze and your iron for food, and you will be able to support three men on the food of two', said the second prophet. The third prophet said: 'Sell your clothes for food, and you will be able to support two men on the food of one.'

When the famine came the men of Ireland came to Eógan asking him for help since they had fostered him; otherwise they would storm his fort. Eógan asked for a truce of three days, after which they were too weak with hunger to attack him. He then brought their nobles into his own fort and he fed the commoners (*dóescursluag*) for three years from the stores hidden in the souterrains of the three forts outside. They then made the son of Eógan Taídlech king. Hence descend the Eóganachta, as a result of the blessing that the men of Ireland gave him for saving them from starvation.

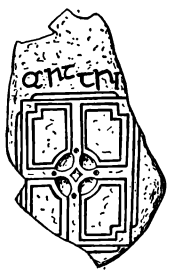
The Dál Cuinn, however, have another origin. Some time later the 'second Míl Espáne' arrived in the north of Ireland at a place called Trácht Delossath. Some say that his crew of one hundred and fifty men were those who had previously been left behind in the lands of the Amazons; others that they had stayed behind at Brigantia in Spain. They invaded the country and won sword-land. 'That is how they seized sovereignty at first, and it will always be so: by force they take lordship.' They shared the northern kingship alternately with the indigenous Cruthin until the time of Conn Cétchathach who was victorious in a hundred battles. The Cruthin, however, rose against his grandson Cormac mac Airt, and Fianchu Araide, ancestor of the Dál nAraidi, expelled Cormac from Tara. He went into exile to Munster and besought Fiachu Munlethan for help, and Cormac submitted to Fiachu at Raphaind (Knockgraffon in south Tipperary, apparently the home of the Eóganacht before the finding of Cashel.) The southern Half of Ireland then went with Fiachu and defeated Fiachu Araide at the battle of Fochaird Muirtheimne and Cormac was restored to his kingdom. In return Cormac gave Fiachu Munlethan the lands now occupied by the Ciannachta, and Fiachu settled them on Connla mac Taidg. Some say that Connla received these lands after the battle of Crinna.

A clever turn has thus been given to the Uí Néill origin legend of the battle of Crinna, with the glory now going to Fiachu Munlethan son of Eógan Már. The Ciannachta are made to appear vassals of Munster rather than of Cormac mac Airt. It is very likely that this story was compiled, if not composed, by Cormac mac Cuilennáin when the

Eóganachta were making a final effort to challenge the Uí Néill high-kingship. The Ulaid were of course the prehistoric enemies of the Dál Cuinn in the north, but our author accepts the eighth-century doctrine that these were really the Cruthin or Dál nAraidi.

Further, the arrival of the 'second Míl Espáne' is dated to the time of Ailill, Óengus and Fiacc, the three sons of Buan mac Lóegairi Birnd, ancestor of the Osraige. 'It is they who first planted stakes in Tara'—i.e. who first built a dwelling there. In other words, even Tara was originally an appanage of the Munster kingdom of Osraige. This statement is perhaps a protest against the successful assertion by the high-king Máelsechnaill mac Máele Ruanaid of his suzerainty over Osraige in 859. Ailill, Óengus and Fiacc are not to be found in the extant pedigrees of the Osraige (which link Lóegaire Birnd with the Dál Cuinn), but an Óengus Osraige mac Imchado and a Fiacc mac Imchado are found as prehistoric ancestors of the Ulster Dál Fiatach.

Even more subtle is the implication that Eógan Taídlech was the first 'Míl Espáne'. His adventures are modelled on those of Joseph in Egypt: the parallel becomes even clearer when one reads the account of Joseph in the Middle Irish versification of the bible story, *Saltair na rann*, which exhibits striking verbal similarities. The Eóganacht claim to rule is based on the distribution of wealth and prosperity and the consequent gratitude of the subject tribes—unlike that of the Uí Néill, who know no right but that of the sword. The picture harmonises with that presented in the *Frithfholaid* texts. Our tract envisages a permanent division between Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga. The arrival of the 'second Míl Espáne' has inaugurated the last age, 'of which it was said: the sovereignty shall belong to the seed of Conn and to Munster forever'.



10

Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga

The men of Munster saw the king of Cashel as supreme, and took little account of a high-kingship of all Ireland until the ambitions of the Uí Néill forced the concept on their attention. During the eighth century the Uí Néill won unchallenged control of the northern Half, and the Munstermen evolved the doctrine of two equal hegemonies of Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga. An elaborate parallelism was worked out between the traditions of Dál Cuinn and Eóganacht: the Goídil had come to Ireland under the two sons of Míl, Éremón and Éber, from whom the northern and southern dynasties were descended; Mug Nuadat was synchronised with Conn Cétchathach and the two divided Ireland between them along the ridge of the Esker Riada which runs from Clonard to Clonmacnoise; Ailill Ólum was married to Sadb daughter of Conn; both Eógan Már and Art mac Cuinn were slain by Lugaid Mac Con of the Érainn at the battle of Mag Muccrime in Connacht, and each had a posthumous son, Fiachu Mullethan and Cormac mac Airt; Conall Corc was thus contemporary with Niall Noígiallach.

The equilibrium could not last. Even in the synthetic scheme of Irish prehistory the dominance of Leth Cuinn was signalled by the descent from Éremón given to the Laigin and Osraige. As time went on other dynasties were admitted into the Milesian family: the Ulster Cruthin were given an ancestor Ír son of Míl, and the Corco Loígde were traced to Lugaid mac Ítha, a cousin of Míl's. In a passage which originally served as the introduction to a genealogical collection for the whole of Ireland, probably composed by Cormac mac Cuilennáin, Éber comes first, followed by Éremón, Ír and Lugaid mac Ítha, thus beginning and ending with the ancestor figures of Munster. Several of the manuscripts, however, have placed Éremón first, according to

the scheme which became official shortly after Cormac's death, and which stated that Éremón took the northern half of the country together with the monarchy.

Three kings of Cashel made notable attempts to challenge the growing power of the Uí Néill: Cathal mac Finguine (723–742), Feidlimid mac Crimthainn (820–841), and Cormac mac Cuilennáin (902–908). While Cathal sought merely to restrict the Uí Néill to their own proper sphere of interest in Leth Cuinn, political momentum forced Feidlimid to adopt the idea of high-kingship which had been invented by the Uí Néill. In the event, however, it was no Eóganacht king, but Brian Bóruma mac Cennétig of Dál Cais who was to succeed in establishing the high-kingship of all Ireland in Munster.

Throughout the struggle the Uí Néill held the initiative, geographically, politically and in the development of dynastic propaganda. The weakness of the Eóganachta is reflected in the disarray of their records. Few of the regnal lists are in agreement, and the various annals, most of which were written outside Munster, recognise kings of Cashel who are not to be found in the lists or synchronisms. The pedigrees of individual kings are often hard to trace, and those of the Eóganacht Chaisil, the sept which produced most kings of Munster, exhibit a bewildering confusion. The Eóganachta, in short, did not succeed in evolving an 'accepted lie' which could give their cause the morale it needed in the eyes of the learned public.

The kingship of Cashel was in fact a very loose hegemony operating under rules proper to the archaic and tribal stage of Irish society. The genealogy of the Eóganacht Chaisil in particular shows a singular lack of dynastic cohesion. The Eóganachta were scattered over the whole of Munster so that their domination of the province was assured. But although some of their dynastic groups were more successful than others in winning the over-kingship, this remained very much an open contest.

Among the Uí Néill two dynasties emerged in the eighth century as clear overlords of the North and the midlands. A similar pattern is observable in the other provinces. In Munster, however, there was no such development of dynastic principle, nor any concomitant consolidation of territories. The wide geographical spread of the Eóganachta finds its visual parallel in the genealogical tables.* Rank outsiders were never totally ineligible for the over-kingship—in the tenth century

* See Appendix II, Tables 11-16.

Flaithbertach mac Inmainén, who is said to have been of the Múscraige, and therefore not a member of the Eóganachta at all, reigned from 914 until at least 922. This may be taken as indicative of the final collapse of the Eóganachta before the successful Dál Cais coup of 964, but the surprising lack of sensation caused by Mathgamain mac Cennétig's seizure of Cashel in that year suggests that he was not so much usurping a kingdom as reviving one which had become moribund.

It is symptomatic that the *Frithfholaid* tracts regard the prospect of an interregnum in the kingship of Cashel with some complacency. The conflicting claims of the regnal lists suggest that such periods of interregnum were common. Similar situations occurred elsewhere—even in the Uí Néill kingship of Tara, but the fact that they are disguised by the official sources bespeaks a different attitude which regarded the theory of a continuous succession as sacrosanct. Furthermore, the confusion in the genealogies does not necessarily mean that we have less genuine information concerning the Eóganachta (apart from the obvious and very real loss occasioned by the lack of annals): the neat picture presented by other royal pedigrees too often conceals a more fluid reality.

For a while indeed it seemed as though some dynastic order was about to evolve in Munster. From the beginning of the seventh century until the middle of the eighth the kingship of Cashel did circulate within a compact triangle of dynastic groups dominating the geographical centre of the province: the Eóganacht Áine, the Eóganacht Chaisil and the Eóganacht Glendamnach, sited respectively in east Limerick, Cashel and north Cork.

Such a regular succession between the three dynasties is assumed in the story of Mór Muman, the daughter of Áed Bennán of the Eóganacht Locha Léin. Her legend reflects the classical Irish myth of the goddess of sovereignty who is rescued from the squalor of old age or poverty by marriage with the rightful prince. Like many of the Munster tales it has affinities with international folklore.

> Mór Muman was the daughter of Áed Bennán. She was under enchantment at first. She used to go only as far as the door of a house. 'Woe to thee, Mór', a voice would say from the air above. Moreover, the kings of Ireland were seeking her. One day she heard the voice saying, 'Woe to thee, Mór!' 'I should prefer it to be given than constantly promised.' 'Shall it be in the beginning or at the end?' 'In the beginning, indeed', she said. Thereupon a great derangement

was put upon her and she bounded over the *liss*.* It is not known where she went.

She wandered over Ireland for two years, clad in rags and blackened by the sun and wind. Finally she came to Cashel, where Fíngen mac Áedo was king. She tended his sheep for three days, and then one day she went into the palace out of the pasture and threw herself down by the fire. Fíngen wanted to put her out, but his wife (the daughter of the king of the Déisi) said that he would have to sleep with Mór and offered him her brooch for doing so. Otherwise she would not sleep with him again. Then Mór left off her rags and went to his bed. Fíngen asked her who she was, and then she told her name and her senses came to her. In the morning she arose to go to the sheep, but was retained by Fíngen, who gave her the purple cloak of the queen and her brooch. He told the queen that Mór would stay in her place, because she was of better race. The text adds that every beautiful woman in Ireland was compared with Mór Muman.

She remained with Fíngen and bore him a son, named Sechnassach. Then Fíngen died and she went to Cathal mac Finguine, king of Glendomain. For the kingship of Munster was centred in Cashel for one period, in Glendomain for the second and in Áine for the third; for these are all Eóganacht. So she went to Cathal in Glendomain.†

The story does not tell us explicitly that she then went to the king of Áine, but such was clearly her function. Fíngen mac Áedo Duib of the Eóganacht Chaisil died in 619 as king of Munster, and was succeeded by Cathal mac Áedo Flaind Chathrach of the Eóganacht Glendamnach, who died in 628. The author or a later scribe has confounded him with his more famous great-grandson Cathal mac Finguine.

The theory implied in the story did not work out quite so neatly in practice: Cathal mac Áedo was in fact succeeded by Faílbe Fland, a brother of Fíngen mac Áedo, and the Eóganacht Áine did not get their turn until his death in 637 or 639, when Cúán mac Amalgado became king of Cashel. A hint of the same theme is found in the

* The rampart of the ring-fort (*duae ind liss*). A similar phrase is used by the Hag of Beare:

> God be thanked, I had joy of my youth.
> I swear that it's true,
> if I hadn't leapt the wall
> this old cloak still were not new.
> (Carney)

† Summary of O'Nolan's translation by Proinsias Mac Cana.

anecdote in the Conall Corc saga concerning Cumman 'who came to Feidlimid after Coirpre's death', thereby symbolising the transference of kingship to Feidlimid mac Tigernaig of the Eóganacht Raithlind on the death of Coirpre Cromm mac Crimthainn of the Eóganacht Glendamnach.* Feidlimid mac Tigernaig's death is recorded in the annals under the years 590 or 593, but he was not universally recognised, as the story of the closing of Cashel against his chariot indicates, and his place in the regnal lists has been usurped by the like-named Feidlimid mac Coirpri in the interests of the Glendomain line. Our tale ignores the intervention of Fergus Scandal of the Eóganacht Airthir Chliach, who died in 583.

The saga of Mór Muman relates that Cathal rebuked Mór Muman and her sister Ruithchern for continually lamenting the dead Fíngen, whereupon she promised to forget her late husband and love the living. The *Annals of Tigernach* quote a quatrain at their obit of *Fíngen mac Aedha, rí Muman, de quo coniunx dixit:*

In Muma
re linn Fíngen maic Áedha,
robdar lána a cuiledha,
robdar toirrtigh a treba.

Munster
in the time of Fíngen mac Áedo,
its store-houses were full,
its homesteads were fruitful.

Similarly the *Annals of Inisfallen* quote a verse in the same metre said to have been uttered by Mór Muman on the death of Cathal mac Finguine in 742:

In tImblech
ro-sáer Ailbe dia bachail,
is óen ina erdarcus
a úr dar étan Cathail.

Emly
which Ailbe ennobled with his crozier:
one thing for which it is famous—
its clay over Cathal's face.

* See above, p. 195.

This need not be considered an anachronism if Mór Muman were the personification of the perennial goddess, here acting the traditional part of the 'banshee'. The death of Mór is recorded in the annals at 632, and there may have been such an historical daughter of Áed Bennán to whose person the ancient myth was later attached.

The story of Mór Muman tells of warfare between the sons of Áed Bennán and the sons of Cathal:

> How should the battle be fought, asked the Munstermen. If the sons of Cathal went against the sons of Áed, they would fall by each other through their equal pride. So the sons of Áed went against the *echtar-thuatha* to the east, i.e. Osraige, the Déisi, Éile, Múscraige Bregoin, Airther Femin and Fir Maige Féne . . . The sons of Cathal faced the Corco Loígde, Corco Duibne, Ciarraige, Corco Baiscind and Corcomruad. In the ensuing battle the sons of Cathal conquered and carried the pursuit from Inde Mór to Luachair Dedad, while the sons of Áed routed before them and followed eastwards to Cenn Currig.

Thus the major powers are alleged to have avoided confrontation by confining hostilities to the territories of their client states. *Echtar-thuatha*, literally 'outside tribes', is here the equivalent of the more usual term *fortuatha*, and the passage offers interesting evidence for the practical division of early Munster into eastern and western quasi-provincial units.

In fact, the success of the three eastern dynasties in monopolising for a century and a half the kingship of Cashel was severely limited by the effective existence of Iarmumu as an independent over-kingdom. We have seen the hostility expressed towards the Eóganacht Locha Léin in the mythical origin legend of Conall Corc's sons. Áed Bennán, the supposed father of Mór Muman, is recognised by several of the annals as king of Munster at his obit in 619 or 621, and was thus an exact contemporary of his son-in-law Fíngen mac Áedo. The overlordship of the king of Cashel in west Munster can have been barely nominal when the Loch Léin dynasty were at the height of their power.

Cathal mac Finguine was of the Glendomain line and succeeded Eterscél mac Máele Umai of the Eóganacht Áine in 721. In the year of his inauguration he undertook the offensive against the Uí Néill, laying waste Mag mBreg in alliance with the king of Leinster, Murchad mac Brain. The northern high-king, Fergal mac Máele Dúin, immediately showed that he did not regard the Laigin as legitimately part of Leth

Moga by invading their country later in the year as a preliminary to his great hosting of 722 which ended fatally for him at the battle of Allen. It is surprising that Cathal took no part in that conflict, and perhaps there is some truth in the manifestly partisan entry in the *Annals of Inisfallen* for the year 721:

> The harrying of Brega by Cathal son of Finguine, king of Mumu, and after that he and Fergal son of Máel Dúin, king of Temuir, made peace; and Fergal submitted (*giallais*) to Cathal. For these were the five kings of the Munstermen who ruled Ireland after the Faith, viz., Áengus son of Nad Fraích, and his son, i.e. Eochaid, who ruled Ireland for seventeen years, and Cathal son of Finguine, and Feidlimid son of Crimthann, and Brian son of Cennétig.

The reference to Brian shows that this entry cannot be earlier than the eleventh century. The regnal synchronisms which the scribe of Laud Misc. 610 claims derive from the 'Psalter of Cashel' give in parallel columns the kings of Tara from Lóeguire mac Néill, the abbots of Armagh from St Patrick, and the kings of Cashel from Nad Froích mac Conaill Cuirc, and state that Cathal mac Áedo Flaind Chathrach, who died in 628, was *rex Hiberniae*. Such retrospective declarations are of course quite anachronistic. But if peace were made between Cathal and Fergal in 721 Cathal's absence from the battle of Allen is understandable.

The following years were a period of comparative weakness for the Uí Néill. Two kings of Brega succeeded one another rapidly in the high-kingship, to be followed by Flaithbertach mac Loingsig (728–734), who failed to maintain the Cenél Conaill succession against the rising power of Cenél nEógain under Áed Allán. In 733 Cathal mac Finguine took advantage of that disunity by another raid into Brega, where he was beaten off from Tailtiu by the king of Mide, Domnall mac Murchado (himself to become high-king in 743), and where he defeated Folloman, king of Clann Cholmáin Bicc (Caílle Follomain) at Tlachtga. The sacral character of these battlefields is suggestive, but Binchy has shown that the evidence does not warrant any presumption that Cathal was laying claim to the high-kingship of Ireland by attempting to preside over the Óenach Tailten, which at this date was merely the assembly of the Uí Néill under their over-king. The language of the annals suggests that these were mere skirmishes, and there is no mention of any celebration, abortive or otherwise, of the *óenach*. The *Annals of Inisfallen* ignore the incident altogether.

If he were to be supreme in Leth Moga Cathal would have to make good his overlordship of Leinster, and this he signally failed to do. In 732 the Munstermen had been defeated in battle by Áed mac Colggen leading the forces of Laigin Desgabair, and in 735 there was a more serious battle at Belach Éile where many of the Laigin were slain and an even greater host of the Munstermen, including Cellach mac Fáelchair, king of Osraige, Cathal himself escaping with his life. So the *Annals of Ulster*; but the *Annals of Inisfallen* say that Cathal was victorious over Fáelán, king of Leinster. The site of the battle, in the strategic area between Munster and Mide, bordered by the north-western extension of Leinster in Uí Failge, is rather peculiar and suggests that the king of Osraige may have been the chief aggressor. Our best sources indicate that Áed mac Colggen was the most powerful king in Leinster at this date, and Osraige may have hoped to rely on his acquiescence in an attack on his north Leinster rival Fáelán. The last entry for the year 738 says that Cathal mac Finguine invaded Leinster and obtained hostages and much wealth from Fáelán. This was the year of Áed Allán's crushing defeat of the Laigin at Áth Senaig, culminating in the deaths of Áed mac Colggen and of Bran Becc, so that the *Annals of Tigernach* do not really help matters by giving Bran's name instead of Fáelán's as that of the king who submitted to Cathal. Fáelán had died 'at an immature age' early in the year. Cathal could hardly have obtained submission from the Laigin after such a decisive assertion of Uí Néill authority as the battle of Áth Senaig.* All in all, it is safest to refer this entry to the beginning of the year, before the death of Fáelán: Cathal's exploit may have furnished an additional motive for Áed Allán's invasion.

In 737 the annals laconically mention a *dáil* or meeting between Áed Allán and Cathal mac Finguine at Terryglass (Tír-dá-glass). We learn nothing of what took place, but the entry is followed immediately by another: *Lex Patricii tenuit Hiberniam.* The seventeenth-century historian Keating assumed that this meant that Cathal formally accepted the supremacy of the church of Armagh at this meeting with the high-king, and although there is no necessary textual connection between the two entries, he may have been correct. In the next century Feidlimid mac Crimthainn was to show himself well aware of the value of Armagh's friendship. The entry could have little meaning if Munster were not to be included, and this would necessitate the formal proclamation of the *Cáin Pátraic* by the king of Cashel. In 784

* See above, p. 150.

the Law of Ailbe was imposed on Munster, which may represent an attempt by the church of Emly to reverse Cathal's policy. The pretence that Ailbe of Emly was a pre-Patrician saint was designed quite deliberately as ammunition against Armagh, but it is not borne out by the meagre traditions concerning that saint, who evidently lived in the early sixth century. His hagiographers eked out his biographical material with the more genuine evidence for the claims of Ciarán of Saigir and Declan of Lismore.

It is unlikely that the meeting between the two kings involved much more than an agreement concerning their respective spheres of influence. Áed Allán was serving notice that the Uí Néill were now united under a strong and ambitious king and would not tolerate any further raids on the midlands. He had shown the strength of his arm by his defeat of the Ulaid two years earlier at the battle of Fochairt, leaving Ireland in no doubt as to who was master in the North. There is no reason to suppose that Cathal acknowledged Áed Allán as high-king of Ireland: the fact that the meeting took place on Munster soil indicates if anything the reverse, but Terryglass may have been regarded as relatively neutral ground, being in some senses a Leinster outpost. But if Cathal thought that the agreement allowed him hegemony over all Leth Moga the events of 738 must have disillusioned him. Once more the Uí Néill held the initiative, and Cathal gave them no further trouble until his peaceful death in 742.

Munstermen of later times looked back to the reign of Cathal mac Finguine as a golden age. A poem in the Book of Leinster, *Teist Cathail meic Finguine*, calls him king of Munster, king of Connacht, high-king of Tara, high king of Ulster, king of Clann Chonla (Airgialla), king of the Déisi, king of Clare (Thomond), king of Áine and high-king of Ireland. In a reference to his generosity to poets it is said:

Lucht admolta Cathucáin
ónd uair tictis ina thír
nucu téigtis assa dáil
arin ruirig batis rig.
The people who praised Cathucán,*
from the time that they entered his country
until the time they left his assembly
were treated as kings by the high-king.

The author of the twelfth-century goliardic satire, 'The vision of

* An affectionate diminutive of Cathal.

Mac Conglinne', places his story in Cathal's reign, and the hero saves the king from the unwelcome attentions of a demon of gluttony. Mac Conglinne himself is represented as a student of poetry at Armagh, where he had eight companions, one of whom was Donn Fiach, nicknamed 'Caillech Bérre' (possibly therefore the author of the 'Hag of Beare'), and another Dub-dá-Thuath mac Stéléne, an actual poet whose death is recorded in 783, and to whom a poem of 'Advice to a prince', *Diambaĝ messe bad rí réil* ('If I were an illustrious king'), is ascribed in some manuscripts. Elsewhere it is attributed to a certain Fíngen who is said to have composed it for Cormac mac Cuilennáin—a date which fits the language of the poem better. The poet advises:

> . . . the king who has not hostages in keeping is as ale in a leaky vessel. The Instructions of Cormac to hasty Coirpre Lifechair were a wise contract: the raiding to guard hostages is best to prove the loyalty of *tuatha*.
>
> The king from Leth Cuinn sought tribute of the king of round Cashel of warrior-bands. 'Give it not to him', said noble Ruadán; 'better be doomed to perish than be a feeble wretch.'
>
> When the saint had finished his advice the spirit of the king was not weak; it was an advantage for the land's apostle that the hostages were kept in their own country.*

St Ruadán of Lorrha was of Eóganacht descent: his monastery was one of the many set in the border zone where Munster and Mide met, and the legend that he had cursed Tara made him an obvious symbol of hostility to the Uí Néill high-kingship.

In Feidlimid mac Crimthainn we meet one of the most enigmatic figures in Irish history. King and ecclesiastic, overlord of Leth Moga and aspirant to the high-kingship of Ireland, a pious ruler who solemnly proclaimed the Law of Patrick in Munster and who is gratefully remembered in the *Vita Tripartita*, a friend of the Céli Dé ascetics, even a member of their order and regarded later as a saint, a renowned warrior, at a most critical era in Irish history, when devastating Viking raids were succeeded by permanent base-camps and settlements, Feidlimid never once devoted his arms to attacking these heathen foreigners but distinguished his martial career by burning and plundering some of the greatest of Irish monasteries—Kildare, Gallen, Durrow, Clonfert, and above all Clonmacnoise—captured and maltreated the

* Based on Tadhg Ó Donnchadha's translation.

abbot of Armagh, allowed the abbot of Cork to die without the comforts of religion in his prison at Cashel, and was finally struck down by the vengeance of St Ciarán.

The plundering of churches had not been an habitual practice among Irish princes, barbarous though they were in many respects. It did indeed occur from time to time, and can hardly have been discouraged by the increasing tendency of the monastic communities to resort to arms against one another, but the frequency of lay attacks upon religious houses was a product of the Viking wars. By the eleventh century, indeed, churches fell more often a prey to Irish kings than to foreign raiders. The great monasteries which survived the time of troubles had won the protection of local princes and were provided with stone buildings and round towers, making them favoured store-houses for the wealth of the surrounding country. Royal patronage brought further secularisation, and the more closely were churches associated with the interests of their local kingdom the more likely were they to be considered fair game by its enemies. But to Feidlimid mac Crimthainn belongs the unenviable distinction of being the first great Irish king to introduce the practice, and that before the Norse presence had endured long enough to break down the traditional morale of Irish society.

Feidlimid's motives and character must be assessed from a tantalisingly scanty number of annalistic entries supplemented by the reputation he enjoyed among later generations. This reputation was safe in Munster, where he was regarded as having vindicated his title to the high-kingship of Ireland. In the twelfth century Giraldus Cambrensis accepted this version as historical fact. Oddly enough, in a poem on the kings of Munster attributed to Cormac mac Cuilennáin, which admits the Dál Cais claim to have provided seven kings of Munster in prehistoric times, the name of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn is omitted altogether and replaced by that of a mysterious Dub Rois. Dub Rois is the hero of a romantic early Modern Irish tale, where he is alleged to have been a contemporary of Feidlimid's, but not a king (although the story has obvious affinities with the myth of king and goddess). The genealogical traditions of the Dál Cais record a much earlier Dub Rois as ancestor of the Déis Bec, and it has been surmised that this poem may commemorate a ninth-century pretender to the Munster kingship from that dynasty. But it must be said that there is no contemporary historical evidence for the existence of such a person, and there is little reason to suppose that Cormac would have supported

his claims. The poem is probably later than his time, for the Dál Cais historiographers were prone to citing Cormac as an authority for their pretended traditions. Another verse attributed to Cormac does mention Feidlimid as one of the 'Unity of Máel-Ruain'.

Feidlimid mac Crimthainn is sometimes referred to as a bishop, but this does not appear to be correct. He was an ecclesiastic and associated with the Céli Dé. He seized the abbacy of Cork in 836, and he sat in the abbot's chair of Clonfert in 838, but we do not know for certain that he was an abbot at the time of his accession to the kingship in 820, nor what his earlier clerical connections may have been. The election of ecclesiastics to the kingship of Cashel is a startling phenomenon, and one characteristic of the ninth and tenth centuries. Four or five kings of Cashel can be positively identified as clerics. Cormac mac Carrthaig (1124–1138), the builder of Cormac's Chapel, was apparently not, although one source styles him *rígepscop* 'royal bishop'. It has been plausibly suggested that the Eóganacht magnates deliberately sought to avoid internecine strife during a contested election by choosing a neutral candidate whose ecclesiastical office would command respect and ensure that he would not pose a threat to the legitimate ambitions of other families interested in the succession. But at this date it could not safely be assumed that a cleric would be celibate. The bishop-king Cormac mac Cuilennáin is expressly stated to have been so, but one anecdote mentions a wife of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, and Cenn Fáelad hua Mugthigirn, king of Cashel and abbot of Emly, had at least one son, Eógan, who later became abbot himself.

Ólchobur mac Flainn, abbot of Inis Cathaig (Scattery Island), who died in 796 or 797, is the only member of the Uí Fidgenti to be mentioned as king of Cashel. His father Flann mac Eircc had died in 762 or 763 as king of Uí Fidgenti, and his brother Scandlán held the kingship until his death in 786. They were of the western branch of the dynasty, the Uí Chonaill Gabra, and had a hereditary interest in the church of Inis Cathaig.* It is rather doubtful, however, that Ólchobur was ever king of Cashel. The 'ordination' of Artrí mac Cathail of the Eóganacht Glendamnach as king of Munster is recorded in 793, and as he did not die until 821 (although he had evidently abdicated some time before), Ólchobur's claims, which are not recognised by the regnal lists, are flimsy. The *Annals of Ulster* may have been misled by confusion with two other Eóganacht princes of the same name. The *Annals of Inisfallen* record in 805 the death of Ólchobur mac Duib-Indrecht, *rígdamna*

* See Appendix II, Table 16.

Muman. His title is explained by the recent share which his dynasty, the Eóganacht Áine, had held in the tripartite alternation of the kingship.* Later in the century there reigned in Cashel an Ólchobur whose claims are universally acknowledged in our sources. The immediate successor of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, he ruled from 847 to 851 and was also a cleric, abbot of Emly. He was the son of Cináed of the Eóganacht Locha Léin, and enjoys the distinction of being the only member of the west Munster dynasty to be admitted without reserve into the regnal lists. This fact, taken in conjunction with the recent loss of his family's grip over the western tribes, suggests that he was in fact chosen as a neutral candidate: significantly no later member of the Eóganacht Locha Léin ever attempted to win the kingship of Cashel.†

The pedigree of Cormac mac Cuilennáin shows plainly that he did not belong to the inner dynastic circles of the Eóganacht Chaisil, and he too must have been a compromise choice.‡ The traditions about him, admittedly semi-hagiographical in tone, stress that he was a religious man and a scholar, averse to the worldly cares of kingship. His evil genius, according to this tradition, was the abbot of Inis Cathaig, Flaithbertach mac Inmainén of the Múscraige, who was to succeed Cormac and who is the last king of Cashel known to have been a cleric.

It is quite possible, then, that Feidlimid mac Crimthainn may himself have inaugurated the tradition of ecclesiastical kingship. We have met examples in Leinster of kings who held monastic office at Kildare and Ferns, but these seem royal intruders into the abbacy, rather than abbots who were elected to the kingship. But such a combination of offices is peculiar to Leth Moga and is confined to the period of the worst Viking attacks, which rendered the prospect of direct royal protection attractive to the monasteries.

Two other abbot-kings from Munster in the tenth century deserve notice. Rebachán mac Mothla died as king of the Déis Tuaiscirt and abbot of Tomgraney (Tuaim Gréine) in 934. He seems to have been a compromise choice on the Eóganacht pattern, for his reign marked the transition between the rule of his own family, the Clann Óengussa, and that of the Uí Thoirrdelbaig, who emerged as undisputed kings of Dál Cais in the reign of his successor Lorcán mac Lachtna, grandfather of Brian Bóruma (Rebachán was of the Uí Chernaig, and the previous three kings had been of the Uí Echthigirn—both branches of Clann Óengussa). Cormac mac Mothla, king of the Déisi Muman, was also abbot of Cell Mo-Laisse (Kilmolash in county Waterford) as well as

* See Appendix II, Table 13. † Ibid., Table 15. ‡ Ibid., Table 12.

bishop and vice-abbot (*secnap*) of Lismore and 'chief counsellor of Munster'. His death at the hands of the Déisi sept of Uí Fothaid Aiched in county Tipperary (baronies of Iffa and Offa) is described as 'martyrdom' (*martra*—the normal term for the death of an ecclesiastic by violence) in the *Annals of Inisfallen* at 920. At this time the Déisi in particular suffered heavily from Norse attacks carried out from their permanent base at Waterford. He was not celibate, for his son Fáelán died as king in 966, and the two royal septs of Ua Bruicc and Ua Fáeláin are both his direct descendants. By an understandable slip of the pen the *Annals of Inisfallen* call him Cormac 'mac Cuilennáin'.

With the exceptions of the ecclesiastics Ólchobur mac Cináeda (847–851), Cenn Fáelad hua Mugthigirn (859–872) and Flaithbertach mac Inmainén (914–922), and of the brief reign of Dub-dá-Bairenn mac Domnaill of the Eóganacht Raithlind (957–959), all the successors of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn until the Dál Cais seizure of power in 964 came from the Eóganacht Chaisil. He may therefore be given the credit for establishing a virtual monopoly of the kingship of Munster in his own dynasty, though he left no recorded family to profit by his success. None of Feidlimid's immediate ancestors back to Fíngen mac Áedo (ob. 619) had been kings of Cashel, and it was the descendants of Fíngen's brother Faílbe Flann (ob. 637/9) who were to benefit most.*

The details of Feidlimid's accession are obscure. We are told by the annals that he took the kingship of Cashel in 820. Artrí mac Cathail died the following year, which presupposes that he had abdicated. According to the regnal lists Feidlimid was preceded in the kingship by Tnúthgal mac Donngaile, a non-entity unnoticed in the annals. He was of the Eóganacht Chaisil, but the genealogies are hopelessly confused as to his pedigree, and none of them give him a father named Donngal, although some make him son of Donngus son of Donngal. Other regnal lists admit an equally shadowy Tuathal son of Artrí before Tnúthgal: he would thus have been the last of the Eóganacht Glendamnach to hold the kingship, but the similarity of his name to that of Tnúthgal leads us to suspect that this lay figure has been interpolated by local patriotism.

It seems fair to assume that the kingship of Cashel was at a low ebb when Feidlimid was inaugurated in 820. In the previous century the Uí Néill high king Donnchad mac Domnaill had launched a campaign against Munster which, while it achieved no spectacular results, at least displayed the aggressive energies of Leth Cuinn. In 775 and 776

* See Appendix II, Table 12.

he wrought great devastation in Munster, and on the second occasion brought the forces of the monastery of Durrow in his host. The high-king, though victorious, lost several of his brothers in the campaign of 776, but we hear nothing of the Munster kings who were involved. The *Annals of Inisfallen* ignore these events and also the final expedition made by Donnchad in 794 to help the Laigin against the men of Munster.

The basis upon which Feidlimid was able to build the power of his dynasty in Munster was prepared by the decline of the Eóganacht Locha Léin, whose over-kingdom of Iarmumu dissolved when the subject tribes of the west transferred their allegiance directly to Cashel. This event is illustrated by a curious document preserved in the Laud collection of genealogies and origin legends, which purports to tell of a west Munster synod held apparently in the sixth century (though some of the personages introduced belong to the seventh):

> Mac Arddae mac Fidaig was king of Ciarraige Luachrae as far as the sea. He was mother's son to Ciarán mac int saír.* Mac Arddae then and Ciarán and Brendán moccu Altai hold a conference. Mo-Chutu Rathin came to them: he was knowledgeable in this matter. Ciarán said to Brendán and to Mac Arddae that they should make an alliance (*bráithirse* 'brotherhood') with the Corco Óchae and with all the Múscraige: 'A difficult time is in store for you under the high king of Luachair and Loch Léin.' It was after that that they made an alliance with the surrounding *tuatha*. And Brendán and Fínán Cam and Nessán Corco Óchae and Lugaid moccu Óchae and Laichtíne of Achad Úr were there. It is then that Brénaind Biror† and Comgán the *comarba* of Ailbe came, and they made an eternal alliance with the *tuatha* individually. There came the oath of warranty of Brendán and of Mo-Chutu for the Ciarraige, the oath of Fínán Cam and of Mo-Nessóc‡ for the Corco Duibne, and the oath of Mo-Lua§ for the Corco Óchae, and the oath of Mo-Lachtóc¶ and of his *comarba* for the Múscraige, and the oath of Brénaind of Birr for all the Cuirigi (?), and the oath of Comgán *airchindech* of Imlech Ibair (Emly) on behalf of the *fortuatha*.
>
> All these saints came into a perpetual alliance between those

* 'The carpenter's son', i.e. St Ciarán of Clonmacnoise.

† St Brendan of Birr; the tract uses the names Brénaind and Brendán indiscriminately for the two Brendans.

‡ Hypocoristic form of Nessán, founder of Mungret (Mungairit), near Limerick.

§ Hypocoristic form of Lugaid, founder of Clonfertmulloe.

¶ Hypocoristic form of Laichtíne of Achad Úr (Freshford).

races (*cenéla*) until the Day of Doom. It is then that Crimthann Odor, king of Iarmumu, came and said to them: 'Is it true that you are injuring our sovereignty?'* Brendán of Birr answered him: 'There shall be no king in this synod but the king of heaven. And the *tuatha* shall have no superior but the king of Cashel.' And the two Brendans said to Crimthann Odor: 'There shall be no king of your progeny till Doom.' And Brénaind moccu Altai said: 'No king of Iarmumu shall rule over the Ciarraige from the days of the king whose name shall be Máel Dúin, but Irmumu (West Munster) will be free by choice whatever king may be in Cashel of the progeny of Óengus mac Nad Froích, and it should be he that should place a king over every *tuath* in Munster, and there should be no king in the North but the king of Tara, and it is he that should place a king over every *tuath* in Leth Cuinn.'

It is then indeed that Mac Arddae and Furudrán gave their hostage to the son of Dercomanath, Crimthann mac Feidlimthe, king of Cashel. And Mo-Chutu Rathin said: 'Whoever may be king of Munster of the Arai (?)†, we shall be loyal to him, for we are brothers one to another.' Crimthann mac Feidlimthe said to the Ciarraige: 'You shall be free in my regard, and nothing shall be taken on your behalf except as you yourselves shall choose.'

We have already met saints acting as guarantors in the early poem on the relations between the Airgialla and Uí Néill. Ciarán mac int saír here may be a scribal error for Ciarán Saigir, who was of the Corco Loígde, as Ciarán of Clonmacnoise's parents were of the Latharna and Cruthin of Dál nAraidi in Ulster, and his monastery had no Munster connections after the death of abbot Crónán moccu Loígde (of the Corco Loígde) in 638: the exclusion of Munstermen thereafter may have been a result of the paschal controversy, which was also responsible for the expulsion of Mo-Chutu Rathin from Rahen in 636. The other saints who appear here, with the exception of Nessán of Mungret and Comgán abbot of Emly (perhaps identical with the Mac dá Cherda who died in 641 or 645), are the representatives of the west Munster monastic expansion already referred to.‡

The tract goes on to say that if the Ciarraige wish to submit to the king of Loch Léin it shall be on the following conditions: that the king

* Or perhaps: 'Is it right to defend the sovereignty against us?'

† The text seems corrupt: reference to the Arai or Arada Chliach is improbable.

‡ See above, p. 171.

of Loch Léin shall choose one of the Ciarraige as his *rechtaire* and maintain him in proper style; any tribute that is due to the king of Loch Léin from the Corco Thrí, the Orbraige and all the other *forsloinnti* of Iarmumu shall be divided in two between the Eóganacht king and the king of Ciarraige; any tribute due to the king of Loch Léin from the Ciarraige shall be left in the possession of the Ciarraige and their king: 'that is one of his *folaid** from the king of Loch Léin.' Furthermore, when the king of Ciarraige gives a hostage to the king of Loch Léin the latter also gives him a hostage as guarantee for the payment of his *folaid*. The king of Loch Léin gives the king of Ciarraige three hostages, and the king of Ciarraige gives him two. But the king of Ciarraige does not give his hostages until the king of Loch Léin has asserted his authority (*cáin*) over every one of the surrounding *tuatha*: the Corco Baiscind, the Corcomruad, the Uí Fidgenti, the Corco Loígde both by land and sea, and the Uí Echach Muman. The Ciarraige are not bound to go on an expedition until all of Iarmumu is assembled in the camp of the king of Loch Léin, and they have only to spend four days and four nights in camp if they do not wish otherwise, nor will they take part in a hosting against any of the Munster *tuatha* with whom they have made this alliance on account of the oaths of the saints who acted as their intermediaries.

It will be seen that the kingdom of Iarmumu envisaged here and in the story of Mór Muman is far wider than simply the region of Kerry and west Cork. It embraces all the west of the province from Corcomruad in the north of Clare through the territories of the Uí Fidgenti and their subject tribes in county Limerick, and even includes overlordship of the powerful Eóganacht Raithlind, thus precluding the existence of a rival kingdom of Desmond. Notable by their absence from both sources are the Déis Tuaiscirt or Dál Cais: their later kingdom of Thomond was only made possible by the weakening of Loch Léin's grip on Limerick and west Clare as well as by the decline in the eighth century of the south Connacht kingdom of Uí Fiachrach Aidne.†

The last king of the Eóganacht Locha Léin to bear the title *rí Iarmuman* in the *Annals of Inisfallen* is Cú Chongelt mac Coirpri, at his death in 791. Subsequent kings are merely styled *ríg Locha Léin*, as for instance Cobthach mac Máele Dúin in his obit in 833 (though the *Annals of Ulster*, less well informed on Munster affairs, continues the usage 'king of Iarmumu'). The Máel Dúin referred to in St Brendan's prophecy is most probably Máel Dúin mac Áedo, who died in 786 and

* 'Substances', here roughly equivalent to *rath*. † See below, p. 243.

is called king of Munster by the annals. With him the greatness of the Eóganacht Locha Léin came to an end. As early as 766 he had suffered a defeat at Énboth Breg near Tralee at the hands of the Uí Fidgenti and the Arada Chliach. Two further indications of revolt by the *fortuatha* are recorded: in 793 the king of Corco Duibne fell at the battle of Conchenn, and in 803 Cú Chongelt's brother Áed Allán mac Coirpri fell in a battle between the Ciarraige and Eóganacht. Although Máel Dúin's great-grandson Ólchobur mac Cináeda ruled Munster from 847 to 851, we have seen that he probably owed his election and universal recognition to his position as abbot of Emly.*

The Crimthann Odor against whom the alliance of the western tribes was allegedly made might be identified with Crimthann mac Cobthaig, father of Áed Bennán; but as his descendants were in fact kings, and even claimants to the kingship of Munster, the tradition reflected in the tract may refer to a Crimthann whom the genealogists failed to remember, precisely because the prophecy was fulfilled only too well.

The Crimthann, king of Cashel, to whom the Ciarraige transferred their allegiance presents something of a problem. Crimthann mac Feidlimthe of the Eóganacht Chaisil was never king of Munster. He had two first cousins also named Crimthann: they were brothers, the sons of Eochaid mac Óengusso maic Nad Froích. Crimthann Srem or Feimin was the ancestor of the Eóganacht Glendamnach and king of Cashel in the middle of the sixth century. It is his brother, however, Crimthann Airthir Chliach, ancestor of the Eóganacht Airthir Chliach, who is said by the genealogists to have had a mother named Dercco or Dercomanath. Our author has either hopelessly confused the three Crimthanns, or he may have preserved an earlier genealogy in which they were not distinguished (it was common for the genealogists to invent separate ancestors where none were required, merely because a sept had become divided into rival or geographically distant moieties).†

The conditions put forward by the Ciarraige for their submission to a king of Loch Léin are so outrageous as to have made his title of king of Iarmumu nugatory. Our tract is a political manifesto. The tripartite alternation of the kingship of Cashel between the Caisel, Glendomain and Áine dynasties had been broken by Máel Dúin mac Áedo of Loch Léin some time in the second half of the eighth century. The last king of Cashel to come from Áine was Cathussach mac Eterscélai, who presumably succeeded Cathal mac Finguine in 742, but whose

* See Appendix II, Table 15. † See Appendix II, Tables 11, 12.

obit has not been recorded. Ólchobur mac Duib-Indrecht, *rígdamna Muman*, who died in 805, was a grandson of his first cousin, but the kingship passed from their family.* Máel Dúin's rule in Munster cannot have been popular with the eastern Eóganachta, and since his own subject tribes in the west were restive too, it is easy to see why he is ignored by so many of the regnal lists. The battle of 803 affords the real background to our tract, but it is likely that the treaty it records was made by the Ciarraige with Feidlimid mac Crimthainn.

If such an alliance with the western tribes ensured the dominance of the Eóganacht Chaisil in Munster, it was in the event to prove a flimsy basis on which to build a rival high-kingship to that of the Uí Néill. Such conditional loyalty as was promised by the Ciarraige might have removed the threat posed by the rival Eóganacht Locha Léin, but it entailed no positive access of territory or power. For the moment, however, Feidlimid was firmly established in Munster and able to lead the province in a serious challenge to Leth Cuinn.

Feidlimid saw that in order to counter the Uí Néill claims effectively he must adopt their policy. Their expansion could not be halted by mere insistence on any theoretical supremacy of Cashel in Leth Moga. The high-kingship of all Ireland was a magnetic concept: Cashel, with its immaculately Christian associations, must be the true centre of an Irish monarchy. He appreciated how much the Tara high-kingship owed to the support of Armagh. There was, however, no reason to suppose that Armagh, necessary as she found the idea of monarchy to ensure the permanence of her own primacy, was irrevocably committed to the Uí Néill. A high-king based at a safer distance from the ecclesiastical city might prove more attractive.

Accordingly, in 823 Feidlimid and Artrí mac Conchobair, bishop of Armagh, jointly proclaimed the *Lex Patricii* in Munster. In the same year he burnt the monastery of Gallen (Galinne na mBretan) 'with all its dwellings and its oratory'. In 825 Artrí—who acted as effective abbot during the tenure of that office by Mac Loingsig (812–826)—promulgated the *Lex Patricii* in Connacht. In 826 Feidlimid led a hosting of the men of Munster to ravage the little kingdom of Delbna Bethra. Artrí mac Conchobair failed in his attempt to take the abbacy of Armagh: in 827 at the battle of Leth Cam, Niall mac Áeda of Ailech effectively asserted Cenél nEógain authority over the Airgialla and their indirect control of Armagh by vindicating the case of Eógan Mainistrech.†

* See Appendix II, Table 13. † See above, p. 124.

In 827 the high-king of Tara, Conchobar mac Donnchada, met Feidlimid at a *rígdál* at the monastery of Birr, just inside the Munster border. We do not know what was agreed, but Feidlimid's raids on the marches of the Southern Uí Néill were a personal threat to Conchobar, and both kings may well have been disturbed by Artrí's failure to win the abbacy of Armagh. Conchobar's own forces of Mide inflicted a defeat on the Connachta in 829 and Feidlimid won a victory over the southern Uí Briúin of Mag Seóla the next year. The alliance, if it was such, was short-lived, for in 830 too Conchobar's brother Folloman was slain by the men of Munster, and the *Annals of Inisfallen* say that this took place during Feidlimid's Connacht campaign. Again in 830 Feidlimid burnt an unidentified place (presumably a monastery) called Foir—the common assumption that this was Fore in Westmeath (Fobar) seems to rest on no secure basis.

In 831 Feidlimid put himself at the head of a hosting of all Leth Moga, both Munster and Leinster, and invaded Brega, reaching as far as Fennor (Finnabair) near Slane and ravaging the country. Conchobar replied in kind later in the year by devastating the Liffey plain. He died at the end of 832 and was succeeded by the more formidable figure of Niall mac Áeda, known to later writers as Niall Caille, because he met his death by drowning in 846 in the river Calann at Armagh.

In 832 Feidlimid raided Delbna Bethra thrice and burned the *termonn* of Clonmacnoise. He returned again in 833, when he slew many of the monastic community and burned the *termonn* 'as far as the door of the church'. He then wreaked the same fate upon the community of Durrow, which (while a rival to Clonmacnoise for the favour of the Clann Cholmáin) had aided a previous high-king against Munster in 776.

Feidlimid's hostility to Clonmacnoise throughout his life was unremitting. The little kingdom of Delbna Bethra, nominally a *fortuath* subject to the Southern Uí Néill under its own tribal king, must in practice have been an ecclesiastical state ruled by the abbots of Clonmacnoise, who owned much of the best land in this boggy and infertile area. Clonmacnoise had possession of the monastery of Liath Mancháin (Lemanaghan)—originally a Munster foundation—and most probably also controlled Gallen. It was patronised by the kings of Uí Maine, Connacht and Mide, but happily avoided too strict dependence on any one of them. During Feidlimid's reign it and its subject churches on both sides of the Shannon and on Lough Ree

suffered heavily from the Vikings as well as from the Munster king. That it should have survived at all is a tribute to its resilience and to the wealth which it continued to accumulate. In the long run it became even richer by absorbing the lands of those smaller monasteries which failed to weather the storm on their own.

Since 638 no Munster abbot had ruled in Clonmacnoise. The local annalist in *Chronicum Scotorum* states under the year 827 that the vice-abbacy (*secnapóte*) was given to the Munstermen, the first time that this had ever occurred. It is therefore likely that the Four Masters are nearer the truth in dating to 835 (the correct year is probably 837) an entry which occurs in the *Chronicum* under 823, to the effect that Cathal mac Ailella, king of Uí Maine, violated Clonmacnoise by drowning the vice-abbot in the Shannon. The victim was Flann mac Flaithbertaig of the Uí Forga, a sept of the Múscraige Tíre around Nenagh just south of the Munster border. This unfortunate event happened shortly after the abbatial office had been vacated by a certain Rónán, for reasons which are not recorded. In recompense the king gave seven churches to Clonmacnoise. Under the same year the *Chronicum* states that Feidlimid mac Crimthainn was defeated at Mag nAí by the same Cathal mac Ailella. Here the annalist seems again confused, for the *Annals of Ulster* have two entries for the year 837, the first recording the ravaging of Uí Maine by Feidlimid, and the second his defeat (presumably further north in Mag nAí) by Cathal mac Muirgiussa, king of Connacht.

In the meantime Feidlimid had turned his attention eastwards to Kildare, which he sacked in 836. He stormed the oratory and captured Forindán, abbot of Armagh, who was there on visitation: he and his retinue were thrown into prison and treated with contumely. This startling act of violence does not in fact run counter to Feidlimid's policy of cultivating good relations with Armagh. The death of Eógan Mainistrech in 834 had opened the abbacy to a fresh contest. Eógan was succeeded by Diarmait ua Tigernáin, who was ousted by Forindán in 835. Diarmait did not accept defeat, and for the next seventeen years the abbacy remained in dispute. In 836 the two rivals had each gone on a circuit: Forindán to Leinster with disastrous results, Diarmait *cum lege et vexillis Patricii* on a successful tour of Connacht, displaying at least some of the relics of Patrick such as the Bachall Ísa (the Crozier of Jesus), the Bell of Patrick and his Gospels (though if the latter were identical with the present Book of Armagh it was very new at the time: its scribe, Ferdomnach, was still alive), which were the essential insignia of the abbot of Armagh. In 839 Diarmait was again formally

installed in office. By 842 the two abbots had apparently worked out a theory of coexistence, as both were present in Munster with the Law of Patrick. Journeys to the south were to prove unlucky for Forindán, however, for in 845 he was captured by the Viking fleet of Limerick at Cluain Comarda in the lands of the Uí Fidgenti: he may have been once more in exile from Armagh or else on a visitation to the Patrician churches in county Limerick, of which the most important was Ard-patrick. His captors broke up and carried off the shrine of Patrick. Forindán was eventually ransomed and returned to Armagh in 846. In 848 he was once again displaced by Diarmait, who appears as officiating at the meeting of 851 between the high-king Máelsechnaill and Matudán king of Ulaid at Armagh.* The two contesting abbots died in the same year, 852, and the impartial annalist calls them *duo heredes Patricii, Forinnán scriba et anchorita et Dermait sapientissimus omnium doctorum Europae.*

The dispute of 835 came shortly after the inauguration of the new high king of Tara. That year Niall mac Áeda asserted his authority in Leinster by 'ordaining' Bran mac Fácláin, but had to quell trouble from the Southern Uí Néill and ravaged Mide, burning it as far as Tech Máelchonóc—another monastery in the sensitive area of Delbna Bethra: it was no doubt during this campaign that the Munstermen slew one of his sub-kings, Fergus mac Bodbchada of Carraic Brachaide in Inishowen. Thus Feidlimid was in a favourable position to bargain with Armagh. He decided to take a hand in the dispute: if he succeeded in putting Diarmait securely back on the abbatial chair he could surely count on his support for the high-kingship of Ireland. Bran mac Fáeláin, the new king of Leinster, was obviously a mere nominee of Niall mac Áeda.† His predecessor, Cellach mac Brain, had in 833 defeated the monastic community of Kildare in battle, slaying many 'on the feast of St John in the autumn' (29 August). This common hostility to Kildare suggests that he may have been sympathetic to Feidlimid for political or religious reasons: in 824 the community of Kildare had themselves plundered Tallaght, the mother church of the Céli Dé reformers. It is ironic that, of the two Armagh abbots, Forindán would seem to have been the one most likely to have won Céli Dé support (to judge by the titles accorded him in his obit). However, we do not possess enough information concerning the pedigrees of Diarmait and Forindán to enable us to understand what political and dynastic rivalries lay behind the abbatial contest: neither belonged to the Clann Sínaig.

* See above, p. 127, and below p. 263. † See above, p. 162.

Forindán was not the only abbot to have been imprisoned by Feidlimid. Earlier in 836 the annals record the death of Dúnlaing mac Cathussaig, abbot (*princeps*) of Cork, with the sinister phrase *mortuus est sine communione i Caisiul regum*; while the *Annals of Inisfallen* omit this obit they afford the complementary information that in this year Feidlimid assumed the abbacy of Cork. Cork had been attacked by Vikings in 822 and was soon to become the site of a Norse town, but meanwhile the monastery of St Finnbarr was busily engaged in securing its grip on the scattered churches which formed the nucleus of the later diocese. In 807 there had been a great slaughter of the ecclesiastics and monastic officials of Cork in a battle with Clonfert. In 828 Cork lost Éladach mac Dúnlainge, one of the princes of the Eóganacht Raithlind, together with 170 dead in a battle with the Múscraige Mittine, probably in an attempt to keep control of the patron's hermitage church of Gougane Barra, a dangerous rival for the headship of the *paruchia*. Nothing daunted, 'the community of Corcach again collected the Uí Echach and Corcu Laígde and Ciarraige Cuirche* to Múscraige, and they left two hundred dead with them again'. The charitably minded might be inclined to see in Feidlimid's drastic action an attempt to purify the monastic community according to the ideas of the Céli Dé. At any event, it gave him a useful foothold in Desmond, for the Eóganacht Raithlind, no less than the Eóganacht Locha Léin, displayed a dangerous tendency to regard themselves as a separate over-kingdom.

Feidlimid's attack on Uí Maine in 837 may have served the double purpose of revenge for the murder of the Munster vice-abbot of Clonmacnoise and of pursuit of the Cork feud with Clonfert—which had itself a Munster tradition as the church of St Brendan and of Cuimíne Fota. The *Annals of Inisfallen* do not mention this raid nor Feidlimid's subsequent discomfiture at the hands of the king of Connacht, but for the year 838 they have the following remarkable entry:

> A great assembly of the men of Ireland in Cluain Ferta Brénainn, and Niall son of Áed, king of Temuir, submitted to Feidlimid, son of Crimthann, so that Feidlimid became full king of Ireland that day (*corbo lánrí Hérend Fédlimmid in lá sein*), and he occupied the abbot's chair of Cluain Ferta.

That Feidlimid did sit in the abbot's chair at Clonfert, whether as abbot or as king, and that he did claim to be high-king of Ireland, we have no

* A branch of the Ciarraige S.W. of Cork city—now the barony of Kerrycurrihy.

reason to doubt; but the statement that the high-king of Tara submitted to him speaks more for the patriotism of the Munster annalist than for his historical veracity.

There was a meeting between Feidlimid and Niall in 838, according to the northern annals, but it took place at Cluain Conaire (Cloncurry) just inside the Leinster border in Kildare. It is called a *rígdál mór*, but as usual no communiqué appears to have reached the annalists. In 840 Feidlimid ravaged Mide and Brega and encamped at Tara, thus announcing his ambitions in the clearest possible manner. On his return he devastated yet once more the unlucky kingdom of Delbna Bethra as well as the neighbouring Uí Néill kingdom of Cenél Fiachach—significantly called Fir Chell 'men of the churches', since most of its lands were under the control of the great monasteries such as Durrow, Rahan and Lynally. The *Annals of Ulster* quote a contemporary verse:

Is hé Feidlimid in rí
dianid opair óen-laithi
aithrígad Connacht cen chath
ocus Mide do mannrad.

Feidlimid is the king
to whom it is the work of a single day
to un-king Connacht without a fight
and to plunder Mide.

According to the Munster annalist Feidlimid had ravaged from Birr to Tara and had furthermore seized Niall's queen Gormlaith, daughter of Donnchad,* together with her female retinue. This deliberate insult to the high-king (Gormlaith is described at her obit in 861 as *amoenissima regina Scotorum*) had a symbolic significance which would not have been lost on the contemporary public.

Such flamboyant gestures could not win Feidlimid the essence of the high-kingship. As usual Leinster provided the real test in the conflict between Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga. In 841 Feidlimid led a hosting as far as Carman, evidently intending to proclaim his overlordship of the province by celebrating the *óenach*. Niall mac Áeda was ready and came with a great army to Mag nÓchtair near Cloncurry, the scene of their previous meeting, and gave the death-blow to Munster hopes. No details of the battle are given; few if any princes were slain; in fact

* The annalist has confused her with the better-known Gormlaith, daughter of Murchad, king of Leinster, and wife of Brian Bóruma.

Feidlimid seems to have been caught totally off guard, as a triumphant satire notes:

> *Bachall Feidlimid figlig*
> *forácbad isna draignib.*
>
> The crozier of vigil-keeping Feidlimid
> was left behind in the thorn-bushes.

The *Annals of Inisfallen* maintain a discreet silence. Niall mac Áeda was now high-king without opposition, and Feidlimid received the two rival abbots of Armagh on their joint visitation of Munster in 842 without gaining further political capital.

One might hope that the king of Munster had devoted his remaining years to that pursuit of learning and asceticism with which his obituary notice credits him, but in 846 he led his forces yet once again against Clonmacnoise, and in the words of the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* (extant in Conall Mageoghegan's rather free seventeenth-century translation):

> . . . all the Termynlands belonging to St Queran were preyed and spoyled by Felym mcCriowhainn without respect of place, saint or shrine. After his returne to Munster ye next year, he was overtaken by a great disease of the flux of the belly, which happened in this wise. As king felym (soone after his return into Mounster) was takeing his rest in his bed, St Queran appeared to him with his habit and bachall or pastoral stafe, & there gave him a push of his Bachall in his belly whereof he tooke his disease and occation of Death, and notwithstanding his great iregularity and great desire of spoyle he was of sum numbered among the scribes and anchorites of Ireland.

The same story is told less picturesquely in the *Chronicum Scotorum*, a version of the local Clonmacnoise annals, but the compiler is generous enough to quote a verse from an elegy remarking that Feidlimid's death was a cause of sorrow to the men of Ireland. It also has substantially the same obit as that given by the Armagh chronicler in the *Annals of Ulster: Feidhlimidh rex Muman, optimus Scotorum, pausavit scriba et ancorita.*

There can be no doubt that Feidlimid was a powerful champion of the Céli Dé. He is one of the twelve leading members of the movement listed in the 'Unity of Máel-Ruain of Tallaght', along with Máel-Díthruib of Terryglass, Diarmait of Dísert Diarmata and Óengus, author of

the *Félire Óengusso*. Kathleen Hughes has pointed out that the distribution of these twelve Céli Dé shows a strong Munster bias: three belong to Tallaght in county Dublin, one each to Westmeath, Kildare and Clare, two to Cork and five to Tipperary. She has also drawn attention to another document entitled the 'Unity of Feidlimid', which is an expanded version of the other list:

> There are twenty-four about Feidlimid son of Crimthann, who have one request in heaven and one entreaty upon earth . . . They used to be together in Daire Ednech, no false order, practising devotion without extravagance, at cross vigil in Lent.* They came precisely to Daire Ednech to work their miracles, until their journeying arrives in the east, on the flagstone at Tallaght . . . They used to come hither to Druim Abrat, these saints whom we expect; in this place they used to practise with renown the eight hours.

Druim Abrat and Daire Ednech were both in county Tipperary, the former not far from Cashel.

The official collection of O'Brien genealogies compiled in the early seventeenth-century *Leabhar Muimhneach* recalls Feidlimid mac Crimthainn as a famous, courageous and pious ruler:

> This is how Feidhlimidh was wont to be: with a bishop at either shoulder, and ten priests around him and seventy-two pleasant excellent sages to say the responses at mass; so that they were the folk who used to share his house and his table and his council, in the same manner as the household of the Holy Father.

The *Leabhar Muimhneach* pushes to absurd lengths the claims of the Dál Cais to have been congeners of the Eóganachta and to have alternated with them in the kingship of Cashel. As they won Thomond as sword-land from the Connachta they claim that they should pay no tribute for it. Even the meagre genuine information extant concerning the Déis Tuaiscirt has been falsified: Feidlimid is brought into contact with Lachtna, great-grandfather of Brian Bóruma, although Lachtna's line, the Uí Thoirrdelbaig, did not even enjoy the kingship of the Déis Tuaiscirt until the tenth century. When Feidlimid sought hostages from the *sáer-thuatha* of Munster, namely, the seven Eóganachta, the Uí Liatháin, the Uí Chonaill Gabra and the Uí Chairpre, they refused unless he first obtained hostages from the Dál Cais. Feidlimid demurred

* A favourite Irish ascetic practice, which consisted in keeping vigil with the arms extended in the form of a cross.

at pressing such an unjust claim, but the others promised to help him and to submit to him as king of Munster if he succeeded. Finally Lachtna is so impressed by the piety of Feidlimid that he agrees to give his allegiance, and Feidlimid waives any claim to tribute. Lachtna then invites Feidlimid to spend Lent (rather incongruously) feasting with him in Dál Cais.

This story is totally fictitious, but it does illustrate Feidlimid's later reputation in Munster and seems in some way a distant descendant of the ninth-century tract on Mac Arddae's synod. A bardic elegy on the death of John Cantwell, archbishop of Cashel from 1452 to 1482 compares him with Feidlimid mac Crimthainn as a paragon ruler of church and state. Archbishop Cantwell had an active career asserting the rights of his see against Norman and Gaelic lords and in pacifying the Butlers and Fitzgeralds during the Wars of the Roses, so that the parallel is not altogether inept.

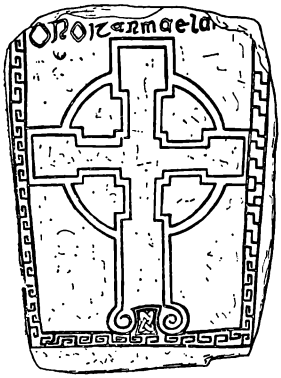
> I have heard—just the comparison—of a crowned just-judging king who was formerly in the *ráth* of Cashel; that was a happening of earlier times.
>
> The king got heaven in reward for his humility—holy was the sign—laity and clergy under his control, the best reward for his stewardship.
>
> Feidhlim mac Crimhthainn accepted the yoke of piety at once—it is right to understand it as he understood it—to protect that place belonging to Patrick.
>
> It was seen long before them that they were made king in turn, the shadow of two kings over the *ráth* of Cashel, the protection of everyone was a duty on that couple.
>
> Each of them maintained the rank of bishop and high-king; making for heaven of the saints beyond they both followed the same path.
>
> Feidhlim mac Crimhthainn whom he revered levied from Cashel the tax of the apostle over Ireland—its loss was a gain for us.*

Although the community of Clonmacnoise no doubt found it hard to differentiate between the Viking plunderers of 844 and the crozier-carrying king of Munster on his visit in 846, it is quite likely that Feidlimid's antagonism was founded on puritan zeal. One anecdote relates the punishment he inflicted on one of the 'seniors' (*sruith*) of

* Translation by Anne O'Sullivan.

Clonmacnoise who had previously refused hospitality to him, his wife, his servant boy and his hound, when he was travelling in Leth Cuinn disguised as a pauper. After sacking the monastery Feidlimid fettered the proud ecclesiastic together with *his* wife, servant boy and dog, tying them in an undignified circle which seems an obscene parody of an Irish manuscript illumination, and pronouncing a satire on their unseemly attitudes. A more ferocious account adds that he also slew them. The more extreme protagonists of the Céli Dé reform were bitterly hostile to the 'folk of the old churches' (*lucht na sen-chell*), whom they denounced as corrupt and decadent. It was even debated whether it was proper for an anchorite to accept material support from such communities. Clonmacnoise, Durrow and Kildare indeed offered eminent examples of the abuses characteristic of the Irish church in this period, though they were also flourishing centres of art and culture—and a little reflection will suggest that the two phenomena are not unconnected. But it must be observed that Feidlimid's wrath was politically selective. He expended his reforming spirit on houses which stood in the way of his path to Leth Cuinn and the high-kingship.

The feast day of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn is celebrated on 28 August in the *Martyrology of Donegal.*



II

Connacht

Connacht, the poorest and most sparsely populated of the Irish provinces, is of importance in the centuries prior to the eleventh less for its own sake than for its function as an *officina gentium*—a supply-base and as it were manufactory of tribes. In the fourth and fifth centuries it was the original home of the Uí Néill, and in the ninth and tenth centuries the Uí Briúin Bréifne carved out lands for themselves east of the Shannon and were to play an ever-increasing role in the midlands. By and large, however, Connacht itself was a backwater whose affairs impinged little on the main course of Irish history until the spectacular and totally unexpected career of Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobair as high-king of Ireland in the twelfth century.

The western province contained reasonably fertile regions around Moy estuary, in parts of county Sligo, in the south between Galway Bay and the Shannon, and in the east of county Roscommon—Mag nAí the traditional royal plain where Cruachu stood amid its complex of ring-forts. The north-east of county Galway, by no means barren by Connacht standards, seems to have lain curiously empty in the early middle ages: occupied by the Sogain and Corco Moga, subject tribes of Uí Maine, much of it fell later into the hands of the Uí Briúin Aí. Possibly it may have been heavily forested; at any rate, it served as a political watershed between the north and the south of the province. The region beyond Loch Corrib lay largely waste, thinly peopled by the Conmaicne, Delbna and Partraige. Iar-Chonnacht means literally 'west of Connacht', i.e. beyond the province proper. It was not until the latter half of the eleventh century that it was occupied by an important dynastic family—the O'Flahertys of Uí Briúin Seóla, who had been displaced from the plains around Tuam by the victorious O'Connors of Uí Briúin Aí.

The name of the Fifth refers primarily to the descendants of Conn Cétchathach, collateral kinsmen of the Uí Néill. The three septs which claimed descent from Niall's brothers formed the *teóra Connachta* or 'Three Connachts'. According to tradition the Fifth beyond the Shannon was once known as Cóiced Ól nÉcmacht, the Fifth of the Fir Ól nÉcmacht (or Nécmacht), which may conceal the name of the *Nagnatae*, a tribe whom Ptolemy locates in the west of Ireland. On the other hand, it may be simply a pseudo-antiquarian device to describe the province as it presumably was before the Connachta had come into existence. Other traditions claimed that the Connachta under Cormac mac Airt took the kingship of the Fifth from the Gamanraid, an *aithech-thuath* who later survived in the wilds of Erris in West Mayo. Here they were neighbours of the Fir Domnann (Erris is called Irrus Domnann) who may have been a forlorn remnant of an early sweep by the Laigin or Domnainn west of the Shannon: an event that left its traces in the Laginian origin ascribed to Ailill mac Máta, the king consort of Medb in the *Táin*, and in the regiment of Gáileóin who are said to have aroused Medb's jealousy on that hosting.*

If, however, the Uí Néill themselves originated in Connacht, there is no reason to posit a prehistoric conquest of that province by the Connachta. They would have emerged as a successful dynasty from among the population whom they later ruled: they had specially close relations with the Gailenga, Luigni, Corco Fir Thrí and Grecraige. It was probably not until the end of the sixth century that the name Connachta was restricted in its application to those of the dynastic group who remained in the west: the Uí Fiachrach, Uí Briúin and Uí Ailello. The unity of Uí Néill and Connachta could now only be expressed by the term Dál Cuinn and by the geographical concept of Leth Cuinn as the northern Half of Ireland which they jointly controlled.

By a genealogical fiction the use of Dál Cuinn was extended to cover the Airgialla and Uí Maine as well, while the decline of the Uí Ailello in the eighth century left the way open for the powerful Uí Maine, whose large over-kingdom spread over the whole south-east of the province, to be accepted as one of the Three Connachta. It is a moot point how far the unity implied in the names Dál Cuinn and Leth Cuinn was a political reality: whether in fact the Connachta acknowledged the Uí Néill high-kingship of Tara. The early portion of the official Tara regnal list of course includes such figures as Nath Í mac Fiachrach and his son Ailill Molt alongside their Uí Néill cousins, but

* See above, pp. 132f.

after Ailill's death at the battle of Ochae in 482 the Uí Néill ruled alone.

It is odd that the Connacht regnal lists do not include Nath Í: perhaps as 'king of Ireland' he could not be mere king of a province; but they do name Ailill Molt as king of Connacht. When Tírechán was writing his *Breviarium* of St Patrick's missionary journeys in the late seventh century he made no mention whatsoever of a king of Connacht, although he brought the saint to Cruachu, where he baptized the two daughters of the high-king Lóeguire mac Néill, who were in fosterage there. This has been interpreted to mean that in St Patrick's day the king of Tara was also automatically king of Connacht, and the probable unity of the descendants of Conn in the fifth century is thus affirmed. It is also possible that even in Tírechán's own time there had emerged no clear concept of a separate over-kingship for the western Fifth.

Certainly there can be no doubt of the artificiality of the early section of the Connacht regnal lists. These have suffered extensive interpolation of Uí Briúin names designed to give respectability to the dominance which that dynasty won in the course of the eighth century. Tírechán himself came from Tír nAmalgado and belonged to a collateral branch of the northern Uí Fiachrach who were the most influential dynastic family in seventh-century Connacht. He provides us with detailed information concerning the north and north-west: north Roscommon, Mayo and Sligo. He has but one bare reference to the sons of Brión, whose *aulae* or royal halls he locates at Duma Selga near the ancestral capital of Cruachu. He incidentally shows that in his time the Uí Briúin kingdom of Bréifne had not yet come into being, for Patrick travels through Mag Réin in Leitrim *before* he enters Connacht. A hundred years after Tírechán the Uí Briúin pushed the boundaries of Connacht eastwards and by the tenth century Bréifne extended into the hitherto waste lands of county Cavan.

Tírechán also makes a brief reference to the Uí Maine, indicating that their kingdom reached into the heart of Roscommon at Fuerty, leaving the Uí Briúin Aí a very narrow area to themselves. East of them on the shores of the Shannon were the Corco Ochlann or Cenél Maic Ercae, an important *fortuath* of Connacht. The *Vita Tripartita*, which follows Tírechán's account closely, says of them: 'The race of Macc Ercae is the mightiest and firmest among the Connachta, but they do not rule like over-kings.' By the time this source was written they had acquired a spurious descent from Brión, and they were later known as the Uí Briúin Sinna, having successfully attached themselves to the rising fortunes of the Uí Briúin Aí.

It is probably safe to take Tírechán as a guide to the actual conditions of Connacht in the seventh century rather than to assume that he was in a position to reconstruct with any accuracy the fifth-century situation. Regrettably, he tells us very little about central or southern Connacht: these were areas where either no Patrician traditions had survived, or where his mission to collect such data was distinctly unwelcome. He is quite explicit in his references to such enemies of Armagh, who take from Patrick what is his due and who fear lest, if the heir of Patrick were to claim all that is rightfully his, the whole island would be acknowledged as his *paruchia*. Patrick baptizes the Uí Maine and founds the church of Fidarta (Fuerty), but goes no further south. Their kingdom was in fact under the ecclesiastical authority of other churches, notably Clonfert and Clonmacnoise. Tírechán tells us that the community of Clonmacnoise had seized many Patrician churches after 'the most recent plagues' (evidently those of 680–684): *familia Clono per vim tenent locos Patricii multos post mortalitates novissimas.*

Some further indication of the rapid changes which occurred in the years after Tírechán wrote his *Breviarium* is given by the space he allots to many of the smaller tribes as compared to the ruling dynasties of the Connachta. Some such tribes in fact disappeared and are recorded in no later sources, a fact which may serve to warn us against placing too much reliance on the antiquity of Irish genealogical tradition.

The *fortuatha* of Connacht are representative of many of the tribal groups which are found elsewhere in Ireland. The Gailenga and Luigni are linked closely here as they are in the midlands: situated south of the Ox Mountains they formed a large block between the northern Uí Fiachrach and the Uí Briúin.* They themselves dominated smaller tribes, and have some claim to be considered an over-kingdom, as was recognised in the twelfth century when their lands were erected into the diocese of Achonry. Their ruling families of O'Gara and O'Hara remained prominent well into the seventeenth century. The baronies of Gallen in Mayo and Leyney in Sligo, along with Corran and Coolavin in the Curlew mountains, looming over the fertile plain of Mag Luirg into which the Uí Briúin Aí were to expand, were crowded with small tribes, some of whom are intimately connected with the origin legends of the Connachta. Here were the Grecraige and the Corco Fir Thrí, as well as a branch of the ubiquitous Calraige who were also to be found in Tír nAmalgado, in north Sligo and Leitrim under the Uí Néill over-kingdom of Cairpre Droma Cliab, and in the Uí Néill lands of southern

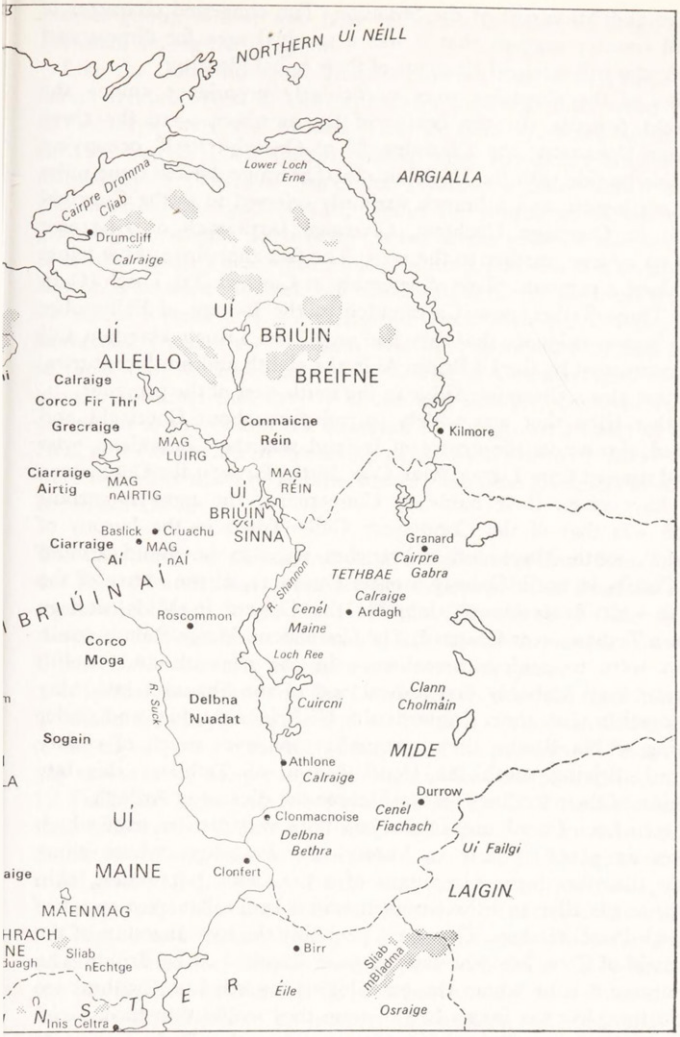
* Cf. p. 69 above.

CONNACHTA and UÍ MAINE **Subject Tribes of Connac**

Placenames TERRITORIES Approximate borders of Munster, Laigin and S. Uí Néill

Shading indicates 1000 ft. contour




NORTHERN UÍ NÉILL
AIRGIALLA
Lower Loch Erne
Cairpre Dromma Cliab
Drumcliff
Calraige
UÍ
UÍ AILELLO
UÍ BRIÚIN BRÉIFNE
Calraige
Corco Fir Thri
Grecraige
MAG LUIRG
Conmaicne Réin
Kilmore
Ciarraige Airtig
MAG nAIRTIG
MAG RÉIN
UÍ BRIÚIN SINNA
Baslick
Cruachu
Ciarraige Aí
MAG nAÍ
Granard
Cairpre Gabra
TETHBAE
Calraige
BRIÚIN AÍ
R. Shannon
Cenél Maine
Ardagh
Roscommon
Corco Moga
Loch Ree
Clann Cholmáin
Cuircni
R. Suck
Delbna Nuadat
Sogain
MIDE
Athlone
Calraige
Durrow
Cenél Fiachach
Clonmacnoise
Delbna Bethra
Ui Failgi
UÍ
MAINE
Clonfert
LAIGIN
MAENMAG
Birr
Sliab nEchtge
Sliab mBladma
Éile
Osraige
Inis Celtra

Tethbae and Mide east of the Shannon. The congested character of this hill country suggests that it was a survival area for dispossessed peoples who still retained elements of their tribal identity.

Tribes of the Ciarraige were particularly prominent among the Connacht *fortuatha*. In the centre of the province were the three Ciarraige Connacht: the Ciarraige Aí of Cruachu itself, occupying lands side by side with the Uí Briúin, the Ciarraige Airtich some miles to the north-west, and a branch variously referred to as the Ciarrichi Superni or Ciarraige Uachtair, Ciarraige Iartharach or Ciarraige Locha na nAirne, further to the west. The fact that these three tribes maintained a common place of assembly at Cara na Trí Tuath (Cara of the Three Tribes, now Carranadoo in the barony of Ballintober North) is clear evidence that they had once been a single kingdom and were fragmented by the Uí Briúin Aí in the eighth and ninth centuries. There was also a Ciarraíge Aidne in the south-west of the province.

Another tribe that was widely spread throughout Connacht and scattered also across the centre of Ireland was the Conmaicne, who claimed descent from Lugaid Mac Con. In the far west the Conmaicne Mara have given their name to Connemara; the most important division was that of the Conmaicne Cúile Tolad in the barony of Kilmaine, south Mayo; other branches were to be found around Loch Corrib, in north Galway around Dunmore, at the source of the Suck in west Roscommon, alongside the Cuircni in Mide, and in northern Tethbae near Granard. The Conmaicne Maige Réin in south Leitrim were to achieve prominence in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; they probably first moved east of the Shannon into Mag Réin together with their overlords the Uí Briúin Bréifne, and under the wing of Ua Ruairc they eventually took over much of county Longford, driving south the Cenél Maine of Tethbae: this late expansion of their territory was to become the diocese of Ardagh.

Between Loch Corrib and Loch Mask lay a very ancient tribe which achieves no place of note in history—the Partraige, whose name suggests that they were a remnant of a pre-Celtic population, akin perhaps to the Illyrian tribe commemorated in the Bavarian resort of Garmisch-Partenkirchen. They were probably the true ancestors of the Fir Umaill of Clew Bay who later appear disguised as Uí Briúin. The Sogain were a tribe whom the genealogists regarded as Cruthin: we are told that, like the Loígis (with whom they would thus have racial affinities), they were divided into seven groups, six of whom were in Uí Maine. They were the predominant population in the north of that

over-kingdom, but we also hear of Sogain in Mide or Brega and in Fernmag among the Airgialla.

Like the Conmaicne, the Delbna show an east to west distribution across Ireland. West of Galway city in the lands later ruled by the O'Flahertys, were the Delbna Tíre dá Loch. A small group were situated east of Loch Corrib, and a more significant kingdom was formed by the Delbnae Nódot (or Nuadat—a name which denotes descent from the god Nuadu, whom the fragments of the earliest genealogical scheme apparently regard as the ultimate ancestor deity of all the Irish). These were subject to the Uí Maine and occupied all the lands between the Suck and the Shannon. In former times they had no doubt formed a single territorial block with the Delbna Bethra immediately across the Shannon who were dominated by that cuckoo in their nest, the monastery of St Ciarán at Clonmacnoise. We have already surmised that the Uí Maine had similarly been cut off from congeners to the east of the Shannon by the growing apart of the Uí Néill and Connachta in the course of the sixth century.* Also in Mide were two other tribes of Delbna, one of which has given its name to the barony of Delvin.

The Clonmacnoise annals and those which derive from them (notably the Four Masters) have been subject to interpolation from the official regnal lists which favour the Uí Briúin. The *Annals of Ulster* and the *Annals of Inisfallen* are uncontaminated, but their records concerning Connacht for the early centuries are somewhat sparse.

It is clear, however, that the Uí Fiachrach were the most important Connacht dynasty from the end of the fifth century until the middle of the eighth, even if the high-kingship of the province did not exist in any real sense in these years. Although in the later period the northern Uí Fiachrach were widely separated from the Uí Fiachrach Aidne of the south-west, it is probable that the hegemony they exercised over the intermediate *fortuatha* was of the loose nature characteristic of the tribal state of Irish society in the sixth and seventh centuries, so that the geographical distance between them was not of much moment until the expanding Uí Briúin developed territorial concepts of lordship and by extending their sway directly over the intervening area cut them off from one another and reduced the Uí Fiachrach Aidne to a diminutive territory—a process aided by pressure southwards and westwards by the Uí Maine, themselves under attack in the north from the Uí Briúin Aí.

* See above, p. 92.

The northern Uí Fiachrach ruled the Moy estuary, rich in salmon and with a fertile coastal strip (Muiresc) to the east. This was O'Dowd's country of Tireragh (Tír Fhiachrach) in the later middle ages, and here the Meic Firbhisigh, hereditary genealogists to O'Dowd (Ó Dubhda), preserved many of the manuscript materials on which we rely for our knowledge of early Irish history. The last of this learned family, Dubhaltach Mac Firbhisigh, in the introduction to his Book of Genealogies, written in 1650, defends the reputation of his race against charges that the Irish were unacquainted with building in stone until the coming of the Norse and later the Normans. He points to the evidence of raths and other earthworks in a curious passage which illustrates the meeting of the traditional lore of his caste with the beginnings of scientific antiquarianism, as exemplified in his patron Sir James Ware. Referring to a great fort beside the Mac Firbhisigh home at Lecan, he says:

> Very great royal earthworks and enclosures are plentiful throughout Ireland, in which there is a variety of smooth well-cut stone and a cellar or building underground under their walls, for instance in Ráth Maoilchatha in Caisléan Conchabhair, of Baile Uí Dhubhda, in Tír Fhiachrach, on the banks of the Muaidh.
>
> There are nine cellars of even smooth stone under the wall of that rath, and I have been inside, and I think it to be one of the very ancient raths of Ireland, and its wall is a good height for a bawn. I leave that and many other similar matters to experts to judge . . .

Rathmulcah is indeed an impressive structure, and does contain a large complex of souterrains within its enclosure. It commands a ford over the estuary leading into the Uí Fiachrach lands of Tír nAmalgado on the Mayo side, as well as a fine view of the widening estuary and its many islands. A topographical poem from the *Dindshenchas* purports to describe a prehistoric king sitting on the hill of Ard na Riag just beside Ballina three or four miles to the south, watching the busy trafficking of his ships from the river to the sea. It is easy to understand why the title 'king of the Moy' was a favourite of this dynasty. A charming fragment of Old Irish song, preserved only in a metrical tract, tells how

Mac ríg Muaide mid samraid
fuair i fid uaine ingin;
tuc dó mess ndub a draignib,
tuc airgib sub for sibnib.

The son of the king of the Moy at midsummer
found a girl in the greenwood;
she gave him black sloes from thornbushes,
she gave him armfuls of strawberries on rushes.

—an early example of the *binsín luachra* theme common in Modern Irish folk poetry and related to the medieval French *pastourelle*.

Rathmulcah was the home of Máel Cothaid mac Máele Umai, king of Connacht according to the regnal lists, though he is merely styled *rex nepotum Fiachrach* in the *Annals of Ulster*, which record his flight in 603 when the Uí Fiachrach Muirsce were defeated at the battle of Echros (Aughris Head) by the Cenél Coirpri: an incident in the perennial feud between the Connachta and the Northern Uí Néill for control of the strategic route through Sligo.

Máel Cothaid's defeat (we know nothing of his death) may have contributed to the failure of his line to maintain their hold on the Moy. His sept are in future found far to the south as the Fir Chera of Carra in Mayo. The collateral branch which were to provide the royal line of the northern Uí Fiachrach is first represented in the regnal lists of Connacht by Dúnchad Muirisci who flourished towards the end of the seventh century: his epithet indicates that he won control of Muiresc.*

Dúnchad's penultimate predecessor in the kingship of Connacht was Guaire Aidne of the southern Uí Fiachrach. He is one of the most prominent figures in the Irish king sagas, and under his rule the Uí Fiachrach Aidne reached the height of their power in Connacht. Although the Munster conquest of Thomond was dated by tradition to the fifth century, it may be that the real expansion of the Déis Tuaiscirt into east Clare is marked by the battle of Carn Feradaig in 627. Carn Feradaig (Cahernarry in Limerick) later marked the border between the northern and southern branches of the Déis Becc. Here Guaire was put to flight by Faílbe Fland, king of Cashel, and the king of Uí Maine was slain. We remember that in 538 Goibnenn mac Conaill, king of Uí Fiachrach Aidne, had vindicated the right of his dynasty to the allegiance of Uí Maine against Maine mac Cerbaill of the Southern Uí Néill.† Guaire must have been quite young in 627, and the reverse he suffered may have paved the way for the succession to the high-kingship of Connacht of Ragallach mac Uatach, who reigned until his death in 649 and was the true founder of the Uí Briúin fortunes.

In 649 also Guaire experienced another serious defeat at the hands of

* See Appendix II, Table 18. † Above, p. 92.

the high-king of Tara, Diarmait mac Áedo Sláine, at the battle of Carn Conaill in his home territory near Gort. The regnal lists say that Guaire did not become king of Connacht until the death in 655 of his brother Laidgnén or Loingsech. As Laidgnén was ancestor of no dynastic line whose influence could have caused his name to be interpolated into the lists, his claims are probably genuine. The saga of the battle of Carn Conaill gives no hint of his reign, but it is possible that Guaire's defeat entailed a temporary loss of the kingship giving rise to stories that he had toyed with the idea of entering the religious life. In the ninth-century poem 'King and hermit' Guaire is portrayed visiting his (probably quite legendary) brother Marbán in his woodland glade:

Guaire: Hermit Marbán, why do you not sleep upon a bed? More often would you sleep out of doors, with your head, where the tonsure ends, upon the grounds of a fir-grove.

Marbán: I have a hut in a wood; only my Lord knows it: an ash-tree closes it on one side, and a hazel, like a great tree by a rath, on the other.

Two heather doorposts for support, and a lintel of honeysuckle—. The wood around its narrowness sheds its mast upon fat swine . . .

Around it tame swine, goats, young pigs, wild swine, tall deer, does, badger-cubs, and badgers have their lairs.

Grouped in bands, at peace, a mighty army from the countryside, an assembly gathering to my house—; foxes come to the wood before it: it is a lovely sight.

Beautiful are the pines which make music for me, unhired; through Christ, I am no worse off at any time than you.

With no moment of strife, no din of combat such as disturbs you, thankful to the Prince who gives every good to me in my hut.

Guaire: I will give my great kingdom and my share of Colmán's heritage, undisputed possession of it till my death, to live with you, Marbán.*

But the saga of the Battle of Carn Conaill turns Guaire's military defeat into a moral victory. The story was evidently composed at Clonmacnoise and reflects the success of that monastery in winning and keeping the support of the rival Uí Néill and Connachta. Diarmait and Guaire vie in piety, but Guaire wins the contest by his humility and generosity. On the eve of the battle Diarmait crosses into Connacht at Clonmacnoise, where he asks the abbot and community to pray for his safe return. In a retrospective justification of the absorption by

* Murphy's translation.

Clonmacnoise of a smaller and weaker rival in the ninth century, he is said to have donated the land on which the monastery of Liath Mancháin stood, 'and he bestowed three curses on the king of Mide if any of his people should consume even a drink of water therein. Wherefore no king of Mide ventures to look at it, and none of his people ventures to partake of its food.' Diarmait also asked that he might be buried at Clonmacnoise, which indeed (so the author tells us) eventually happened. Guaire sends Cumméne Fota, abbot of Clonfert, to ask for a truce, but although the Connacht forces with their allies are the stronger, Diarmait trusts to the will of God, refuses any truce, and is victorious.

When the defeated Guaire goes to Diarmait to make 'submission at the sword's point' (*giallad fri claideb*)—according to the story-teller, this literally meant that the victor placed the point of his spear or sword between the teeth of his supine opponent—the high-king tests his much-vaunted generosity, and a jester, a leper and others pester the prostrate king for gifts. Eventually Guaire begs Diarmait to allow him to rise in order that he may take off his shirt, which is now all that is left to him, and give it to a Céle Dé. ' "Well," says Diarmait, "thou hast submitted to another king, even to God's Son. Here, however, is my submission to thee." ' And so peace is made. Even after Guaire's death many years later a jester came to his grave in Clonmacnoise and the dead king's arm came out of the grave to offer a handful of dust which turned into gold, 'and that was Guaire's last generosity'.

The saga asserts that Guaire was aided in the battle of Carn Conaill by Munster forces, led by Cúán mac Éndai, king of Cashel, Cúán mac Conaill, king of Uí Fidgenti, and Tolomnach, king of Uí Liatháin, who all fell. This is improbable: such contingents are not mentioned in the early annals, which moreover record the death of Cúán mac Éndai in 641. The Uí Liatháin would hardly have been involved so far from home; the name Tolomnach is unusual, though it occurs in the Corco Baiscind genealogies, and a Talamnach mac Laidcind, king of Corco Baiscind, is mentioned as having been killed in 665 in a battle at Loch Fén (Loughfane in county Limerick) between the Munstermen and the Connachta. It is at least possible that he was on the Connacht side. But his son fell in 721 in a battle between the Corco Baiscind and the Connachta, which may be symptomatic of the decline of the Uí Fiachrach Aidne and the extension of Munster authority into all of Thomond.

Relations between Guaire and the Uí Fidgenti (whose overlordship at times extended north of the Shannon estuary) are reflected in a

poem ascribed to Créide daughter of Guaire, supposedly a lament for the death of an Uí Fidgenti prince Dínertach who had been wounded 'in the battle of Aidne'. Carney would, however, see the poem as a genuine seventh-century composition written by Guaire's court poet, and an early example of the bardic conceit whereby the poet represents himself as the legitimate spouse of his patron. It would thus be a delicate compliment to a Munster prince:

> Great love for a man of another land who excelled his coevals has taken my bloom (little colour is left); it allows me no sleep.
>
> I have every good with Guaire, the king of cold Aidne; but my mind seeks to go from my people to the land which is in Irluachair.
>
> In the land of glorious Aidne, around the sides of Cell Cholmáin, men sing of a glorious flame, from the south of Luimnech* of the graves, whose name is Dínertach.†

About the cycle of stories and poems concerning Guaire Aidne there has also clustered much hagiographical legend. Anecdotes are told of his familiar relations with saints such as Cumméne Fota of Clonfert, Colmán mac Duach of Kilmacduagh, Cáimmín of Inis Celtra, and the eccentric holy fool Mac-dá-Cherda 'son of two trades', who may be identical with the Comgán abbot of Emly whom we have met in connection with Mac Arddae's synod.‡ All this suggests that Guaire's influence did stretch, if only indirectly, into parts of Munster. Kilmacduagh, the chief church of his territory and later its diocesan see, was situated on the border with Corcomruad, and Cumméne Fota was a Munsterman. Indeed, it seems likely that Guaire gained much of his good reputation by patronising that curious expansion of west Munster saints up the Shannon which we have already noted. Inis Celtra on Lough Derg was later closely associated with the Dál Cais of Thomond, but St Cáimmín's foundation there had itself displaced the memory of the Leinster saint Colum mac Crimthannáin of Terryglass. Tuaim Gréine (Tomgraney), another Dál Cais church, may have attracted Guaire's interest, and he may well have been the ancestor of two abbots, Rechtabra ua Guairi and Cathnia ua Guairi, who died in 752 and 794 respectively. Even in the tenth century Tuaim Gréine had an abbot from Uí Fiachrach Aidne, Cormac ua Cillín, who died in 966 and who was also abbot of Clonmacnoise and Roscommon: it was he who built

* Luimnech = the Shannon estuary; later the name was given to the town founded by the Vikings at Inis Sibtonn (Limerick).

† Murphy's translation. ‡ See above, p. 217.

the church and its round tower (*cloigthech*, literally 'bell-house'—this is the earliest written record of such a building).

Guaire's hegemony would thus have reached into Thomond, possibly involving overlordship of the Corcomruad and Corco Baiscind and consequent rivalry with the Uí Fidgenti, as well as actual territorial holdings in territory which was only later completely taken over by the Déis Tuaiscirt or Dál Cais. The failure of his dynasty to retain control here must accóunt for their subsequent unimportance in the history of the Connacht over-kingship. The *Chronicum Scotorum* styles Guaire's son Muirchertach Nár 'king of Connacht' at his death in 668, but other sources record only one king of the province from the Uí Fiachrach Aidne, Guaire's grandson Fergal Aidne, who died in 697. Two other descendants of Guaire, his son Airmedach and his grandson Écomras mac Congaile, met violent deaths in 675 and 697, but we are not informed of the circumstances. Close relations between south Connacht and Thomond would of necessity continue, and when the political roles were reversed the Uí Fiachrach Aidne and the Uí Maine were the only two Irish kingdoms outside of Munster who furnished contingents to Brian Bóruma's army at Clontarf in 1014.

Créide daughter of Guaire became herself the subject of a cycle of romantic legends, which have survived only in fragmentary form. She plays the role of a proto-Iseult in an early version of the Tristan tale, the story of Cano mac Gartnait from Skye, who stayed for a while at Guaire's court: the part of king Mark is taken by the like-named Marcán mac Tomaini, king of Uí Maine, who fell in battle against the Uí Briúin kings Cend Fáelad mac Colgan and Máenach mac Baíthín in 653.

Guaire is associated too with the figure of the outrageously arrogant poet and scholar Senchán Torpéist in the story of the Finding of the *Táin*. Senchán tests Guaire's hospitality to the limit, blackmailing him by threat of satire, and the king is only released from his dilemma through the advice of his hermit brother (or nephew) Marbán, whose pet white boar has been sacrificed to provide lard for the poet's wife Muirenn. In its early Modern Irish version, *Tromdámh Guaire* ('Guaire's troublesome guest-company'), the text is a full-blown burlesque on the pretensions of the poetic caste, although Yeats has made Senchán the hero in his play *The king's threshold*. The theme of the Finding of the *Tain* is referred to as early as Cormac's Glossary. Senchán was finally silenced when Marbán challenged him to recite the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*. The Ulster epic had been lost, for the only copy had been taken abroad by an Irish scholar and given away in exchange for the *Culmen*

(Isidore of Seville's encyclopaedic *Etymologiae*). The story contains a kernel of truth in that native Irish heroic and mythological tradition was in danger of disappearing in the seventh century with the growing popularity of monastic Latin culture which regarded Isidore's work as the 'summit' of knowledge. But Senchán finally succeeded in conjuring up the figure of the Ulster hero Fergus mac Roích who recited for him the whole epic.

Guaire appears in a surprisingly unfavourable light in another early Modern Irish text, the *Betha Chellaigh*—a very fabulous *Life* of St Cellach, bishop of Killala and patron of that see. As Cellach is represented as a son of Eógan Bél, he lived, if indeed he ever existed, a century before Guaire's time; and the *Life* savours more of secular fiction than hagiography. Eógan Bél fell in 543 or 547 at the battle of Slicech (the river which flows through the town of Sligo), defending Connacht against the Northern Uí Néill, who were led by Forggus and Domnall, the two sons of Muirchertach mac Ercae, and by Ainmere mac Sétnai of Cenél Conaill. The saga says that Eógan Bél was buried upright at Ráith Ua Fiachrach on Knocknarea, facing northward with his red spear still in his hand. As long as he remained thus the northerners could never defeat Connacht. Eventually the Uí Néill took counsel and disinterred his body, burying it face downward at Óenach Locha Gile, the assembly place of Lough Gill.

It was in this territory, that of the Uí Néill kingdom of Cairpre Droma Cliab, that the battle of Cúl Dreimne was fought by the same northern princes, this time in alliance with Áed mac Echach, king of Connacht, against the high-king of Tara, Diarmait mac Cerbaill, in 560 or 561.* In later centuries, when Connacht power was in the ascendant, and when the Uí Briúin Bréifne had cut off this northern portion of Coirpre's kingdom from its southern half in county Longford, the territory was claimed by Connacht: by tradition the prehistoric Fifth of Connacht had its border with Ulster at the river Drowes some miles to the north of Drumcliff. But by inclination the kings of Cairpre ranged themselves alongside their northern cousins, and the status of their kingdom remained debatable down to the sixteenth century.

In 550 Eógan Bél's son and successor Ailill Inbanda was slain by the same Forggus and Domnall at Cúl Conaire in Cera; but it is possible that this entry is a misunderstanding of some earlier record to the effect that Ailill fell at the hands of his Uí Fiachrach cousins, the Fir Chera, who were also descended from a Macc Ercae.

* Above, p. 95.

The genealogical tradition concerning Eógan Bél is very confused: the most reliable indications are that he was a grandson of Ailill Molt. Certainly he was of the Uí Fiachrach, in spite of the attempt by some of the regnal lists to make him a son of Dauí Tenga Umai or Dauí Galach of the Uí Briúin. The historicity of the Uí Briúin pedigree, Dauí—Eógan Srem—Muiredach Mál—Fergus—Echu Tirmcharna, is extremely dubious.* Eógan Srem and Muiredach Mál are mere duplications of Eógan Bél and his son Muiredach, brother of Cellach. Dauí Tenga Umai and Dauí Galach were originally identical: both have been pressed into the service of the Uí Briúin. No Dauí son of Brión is mentioned by either Tírechán or the *Vita Tripartita:* an omission which is very strange had Tírechán known of such a king of Connacht. Any bias which he might have felt as a member of the Uí Fiachrach could easily have been expressed by means of a curse from the saint, but Patrick merely blesses the sons of Brión in passing.

The second half of the *Betha Chellaigh* saga has as its hero Muiredach son of Eógan Bél, who, like his saintly brother, is treacherously slain by Guaire. In spite of the lateness of the text, and the anachronistic introduction of Guaire, we have here genuine memories of a feud between the northern and southern branches of the Uí Fiachrach.

Echu Tirmcharna and his son Áed, the remaining sixth-century kings of Connacht who are said to have been Uí Briúin, seem at first sight to have been genuine enough. But the fact that the latter's death is recorded by the *Annals of Ulster* at 577 in the following terms: *iugulatio Aedha maic Echach Tirimcharna la Hu Briuin*, 'assassination of Áed . . . by the Uí Briúin', combined with the fact that this is the first mention of the Uí Briúin in the early annals, leads us to suspect that he died, not as their king, but as the first prominent victim of their ambition. The *Annals of Inisfallen* call him *rí Connacht* and claim that he gave Enach Dúin to St Brendan of Clonfert: Annaghdown on Lough Corrib is a site unlikely to have been in the gift of a king from Mag nAí.

The Uí Briúin pedigrees show every sign of falsification. As the dynasty was comparatively insignificant as late as the seventh century, and spread out from central Connacht in the course of the eighth, we should look for a parallel expansion of its genealogical ramifications at approximately the same date. The normal Irish genealogical tree sends out its branches generation by generation as the dynasty grows

* See Appendix II, Table 19: it has been necessary to reproduce this pedigree in order to illustrate the official descent of the Uí Briúin, but Eógan Srem has not been shown as king, and the duplicate Dauí Galach has been omitted altogether.

in power. But the Uí Briúin Umaill of Clew Bay, the Uí Briúin Sinna of east Roscommon, the Uí Briúin Seóla of the Tuam area in county Galway, the Uí Briúin Bréifne and the Uí Briúin Aí each trace their separate descent through lines of unrecorded or dubious ancestors to Brión or his supposititious son Dauí in the fifth century. The Uí Briúin Sinna, earlier known as the Cenél Maic Ercae, and the Uí Briúin Umaill (first recorded under this name in 787) were almost certainly attached to the pedigree in the eighth century: such an adoption guaranteed them the tribute-free status of *sáer-thuatha* and ensured that Uí Briúin power should stretch from the Shannon to Clew Bay.

Although the death of Uatu mac Áeda is recorded in 601 or 602 the *Annals of Ulster* do not call him king of Connacht. The first member of the Uí Briúin whom we may reasonably accept as king of Connacht in some sense is his son, Guaire's contemporary Ragallach mac Uatach, who died in 649. The regnal lists say that he slew his predecessor, Guaire's father Colmán mac Cobthaig, at the battle of Cenn Buga (Cambo near Roscommon). A late epitome of king tales recast into pseudo-annalistic form represents him in a sinister light. He gained the kingdom by treacherously slaying his brother, and his wife Muirenn learns that he himself will be brought to his death by means of his own offspring. So when she bears him a daughter Ragallach has the child exposed. She is rescued, however, and reared by a holy widow. Ragallach later brings the girl to court and takes her as his concubine. Muirenn seeks the aid of her fosterson, Diarmait the high-king of Tara, and the saints of Ireland come to fast against Ragallach and curse him. One day a wild deer passes by the crannogue where Ragallach is, and he leaps into a boat to hunt it. When he reaches the shore and catches up with the deer he finds that it has been slain by some peasants who are cutting turf in a bog. Ragallach demands the carcase from them and they slay him with their spades: thus he meets the inglorious end which the saints had invoked upon him.

The *Annals of Ulster* merely note the violent death of Ragallach king of Connacht. His sway cannot have been very extensive, for his death at the hands of peasants in the saga is merely an exaggerated account of the actual event recorded in the *Annals of Tigernach*. He was killed by Máel Brigte mac Mothlachán and the Corco Cullu, an *aithech-thuath* of the Ciarraige, who were still the major population group in the Uí Briúin home territory of Mag nAí. In an early verse attributed to Muirenn by the saga, Ragallach is styled *rí Selga* and is said to have been brought

for burial to Baslick (Baslecc, *basilica sanctorum*). This early Patrician foundation, the only Irish 'basilica', although in Mag nAí, remained in the hands of the Ciarraige until the end of the eighth century.

The beginnings of the Uí Briúin expansion to the west are indicated by the death of the next member of the dynasty to achieve the over-kingship of the province. Cenn Fáelad mac Colgan of Uí Briúin Seóla was slain by the Conmaicne Cúile in 682. The fact that these early Uí Briúin kings fell at the hands of subject tribes reveals the extent to which they were intruders into their new territories, and may have lulled the still dominant Uí Fiachrach into a false sense of security. But their new policy of territorial lordship was to form a solid basis for Uí Briúin power. Tribes which had owed but easy-going allegiance to the Uí Fiachrach hegemony were to transfer their loyalties, partly under coercion, partly induced by favours, partly indeed by adoption into the Uí Briúin, until the Uí Fiachrach were left only with the lands they immediately occupied. The Uí Fiachrach supplied but three kings of Connacht in the eighth century, and after the death of Donn Cothaid mac Cathail in 773 the Uí Briúin reigned unchallenged, although their own division into distinct septs was to render future contests for the kingship even fiercer.

In 704 the high-king of Tara, Loingsech mac Óengusso, led an army against Connacht and was defeated and slain at the battle of Corann in south Sligo: 'on the fourth of the Ides of July [12 July], at the sixth hour, on a Saturday' state the annals with unusual precision. Loingsech was of the Cenél Conaill, who had been outflanked in the North by Cenél nEógain expansion into county Londonderry. In order to maintain the fortunes of his dynasty his only outlet was southwards into Connacht. No doubt he also wished to assert the reality of his high-kingship—he is one of the few kings of Tara awarded the title *rex Hiberniae* by the *Annals of Ulster*. He failed, and his son Flaithbertach, forced into abdication by Áed Allán in 734, was the last Cenél Conaill king of Tara. Three of Loingsech's sons and many other Uí Néill princes were slain in this battle, which was won by Cellach mac Ragallaig, who died one or two years later *post clericatum*. The saga account represents Cellach as very old, and indeed his father had been slain fifty-five years previously. But he was not as decrepit as the poets of the high-king alleged in their satires. After bathing in herbs and anointing himself with oil he seats himself between the two Dúnchads—Dúnchad Muirisci and 'the other Dúnchad'—and goes into battle. His ancient bones crack loudly as he leaps out of the chariot. He promises the kingdom

to the two Dúnchads and retires after victory into the church.

The saga-writer has his chronology somewhat mixed, unless indeed Cellach has been misplaced in the regnal lists. Officially he was not succeeded by Dúnchad Muirisci but by the latter's son Indrechtach. Who the 'other Dúnchad' may have been we do not know. Cellach mac Ragallaig is also called Cellach Locha Cime, from Loch Cime, now Lough Hacket near Headford, far west of Mag nAí. His children, the Síl Cellaig, contested the kingship of Connacht successfully with the Síl Muiredaig and Síl Cathail throughout the eighth century, but were later displaced from the Headford area by the Uí Briúin Seóla.

His successor Indrechtach mac Dúnchado of the Uí Fiachrach Muaide was slain in 707 in revenge for the defeat of 704 by the Northern Uí Néill led by Fergal mac Máele Dúin, king of Cenél nEógain, Fergal son of the late high-king Loingsech, and Conall Menn, king of Cenél Cairpri. The *Annals of Tigernach* here call Indrechtach *rí teóra Connacht*. This term, 'king of the Three Connachta' is common from the eighth to the tenth century and its use may indicate the development of a true provincial over-kingship arising out of hostility to the Uí Néill pretensions. Such a concept could only be to the advantage of the Uí Briúin, engaged as they were in occupying the central plains of Connacht and enjoying unchallenged possession of the prehistoric capital of Cruachu in Mag nAí.

The reign of Indrechtach mac Muiredaig from 707 to 723 saw the consolidation of the Uí Briúin as the dominant dynasty in Connacht. He himself died peacefully as a pilgrim at Clonmacnoise, a monastery whose favour helped the acceptance of Uí Briúin rule in the south of Connacht. His great-grandmother Muirenn is mentioned in an archaic praise poem to Indrechtach (in the saga of Ragallach she bears some of the characteristic marks of a mythological figure):

Indrechtach iath mBriúin,
bresfhota, bailc baind,
breö derg di chlaind
chét ríg, roart caur,
caínfháel ilchonda,
aue Muirne muín.

Indrechtach of the lands of Brión, battling far with mighty deed, a red flame of the children of a hundred kings, lofty hero, lovely wolf able for many hounds, treasured descendant of Muirenn.

The Uí Briúin were further aided by the decline of the 'Third Connacht', the Uí Ailello to the north of Mag nAí. In 743 these were engaged in battle in Mag Luirg, the plains of Boyle, with the Gailenga. In 752 the Uí Briúin themselves defeated the Calraige Luirg, possibly at this date a vassal tribe of the Uí Ailello. In 753 the Grecraige defeated the Uí Ailello. In 789 the Uí Ailello overthrew the Luigni at Achad Ablae in the barony of Corann, and the following year they defeated them again at Áth Rois, where they slew Dub-dá-Thuath *dux na trí sloinnte*, chieftain of the three septs of the Luigni Chonnacht. These victories were but a dying gasp: the dynasty disappears from history after the battle of Ard Maiccrime in 792 when the annals record that *nepotes Ailello prostrati sunt*. The victors are unnamed, but among the slain were Cathmug mac Flaithbertaig, king of Cairpre, and Cormac mac Duib-dá-Chrích, king of Bréifne. The latter is the first ruler of Bréifne to be noticed by the annals, though his name does not occur in the extant pedigrees of the Uí Briúin Bréifne. It is true that the *Annals of Tigernach* call Máenach mac Báethíne king of Bréifne at his obit in 653, but in view of the nature of this source we can be confident that the title is an anachronism: Máenach's nephew, Dub Dothra mac Dúnchado is merely called 'king of the Uí Briúin' by the *Annals of Ulster* in 743, although the *Annals of Tigernach* make him 'king of Uí Briúin and Conmaicne'—a common title of his descendants, the Ua Ruairc kings of Bréifne.

The Uí Briúin Aí must have regarded with some complacency victories of *fortuatha* such as the Luigni, Gailenga and Grecraige over the Uí Ailello: in the event it was they who reaped the profit, and a branch of Síl Muiredaig was later to possess Mag Luirg. The Uí Briúin fought a battle in 754 against the Cenél Cairpri at Ard Noíscan in Uí Ailello territory: the frequent appearance of the Uí Néill kings of Cairpre in Connacht wars of this period may be accounted for by their resistance to the wedge which the Uí Briúin Bréifne were about to drive between the Sligo-Leitrim and Longford divisions of their kingdom. In 762 we find the Cenél Cairpri victorious over the Luigni.

The Uí Briúin suffered a reverse during the reign of Ailill Medraige of Uí Fiachrach Muaide as king of Connacht. His soubriquet probably denotes that he was fostered by the *aithech-thuath* of the Medraige on the eastern shore of Galway Bay. In 758 he defeated the Uí Briúin at Druim Robaig (Dromrovay) in south Mayo; but the site of the battle in the lands of the Fir Chera indicates that the Uí Briúin were on the offensive. After Ailill's death in 764 the kingship was assumed by

Dub-Indrecht mac Cathail of Uí Briúin whose crushing defeat of the Conmaicne Cúile Tolad at Sruthair (Shrule, county Mayo) was yet another symptom of the ruthless westward advance of his dynasty. Dub-Indrecht's father was ancestor of the Síl Cathail who proved dangerous rivals of the Síl Muiredaig for over a century and who carved out lands for themselves in Roscommon at the expense of the Uí Maine: their ruling family in later times was Ua Flannacáin (O'Flanagan), but their last claimant to the kingship of Connacht was Mugrón mac Máele-Cothaid, and he is only allowed the title *leth-rí Connacht* by the annals at his death in 872.*

Having established themselves securely in the heartlands of Connacht the Uí Briúin next turned their attention southwards to the Uí Maine. These were practically an independent over-kingdom, but seem to have been on reasonably good terms with the Uí Fiachrach Aidne. Marcán mac Tomaine, contemporary and son-in-law of Guaire in the seventh century, is given by one source the title of king of Uí Maine and Medraige. With the decline of the Uí Fiachrach Aidne the traditional allegiance crumbled, and in 743 there was a battle between the two kingdoms. In 775 came the first pressure from the north when the Uí Maine were routed by the Uí Briúin at Achad Liac (Athleague). In 778 they were again defeated by the Síl Cathail king of Connacht, Artgal mac Cathail.

Tipraite mac Taidg, king of Connacht after Artgal abdicated in 782 to go on pilgrimage to Iona, ranged both south and north to inflict severe blows on the Uí Fiachrach Aidne at the historic battlefield of Carn Conaill in 784 and on their northern cousins at the Moy the following year. In 783 his accession was marked by the visit of Dub-dá-Leithe, abbot of Armagh: king and abbot established the Law of Patrick at Cruachu. The choice of site marked the mutual recognition of the claims of Armagh and of the Uí Briúin in Connacht, and the Cáin Phátraic was proclaimed by successive abbots of Armagh in the western province at frequent intervals during the next two generations: in 799, 811, 818, 825 and 836. Tipraite mac Taidg was so far forgotten by later ages (because of his failure to leave distinguished progeny) that many of the regnal lists omit his name. But his short reign—he died in 786—can be seen to have marked the final acceptance of the Uí Briúin as natural heirs to the kingship of Connacht in perpetuity. On his death the Uí Fiachrach attempted to reassert themselves and won two battles in 787. The first was pyrrhic in that the rival leaders,

* See Appendix II, Table 20.

Cathmug mac Duinn Çothaid, son of the last Uí Fiachrach king of Connacht, and Dub-Díbeirgg mac Cathail of Uí Briúin, both fell. The second resulted in the slaughter of the Uí Briúin Umaill (the first appearance of this sept by name) by the Uí Fiachrach Muirisci: its effects were not lasting.

In the closing years of the eighth century Connacht emerged as a power on the Irish scene under the rule of Muirgius mac Tommaltaig. Muirgius had first to establish the superiority of his own line, the Síl Muiredaig, among the proliferating septs of the Uí Briúin. His father Tommaltach had died in 774 as *rex Aí*, king of Mag nAí, but none of his ancestors back to his great-grandfather Indrechtach mac Muiredaig had held the kingship of Connacht. His first rival was Cináed mac Artgaile of Síl Cathail. Although Cináed's name is not admitted into the regnal lists, the annals date the beginning of Muirgius' reign from his slaying of Cináed at the battle of Sruth Cluana Argai (Cloonargid in Roscommon) in 792. Furthermore, the *Annals of Inisfallen* call Colla mac Fergusa of the Síl Cellaig king of Connacht at his death in 796, and Muirgius was defeated the same year at the battle of Áth Féne on the northern border of the Ciarraige Aí in his own territory. In 799 we read of a battle between the Connachta at Dún Gainiba in which many princes fell, but from which Muirgius came victorious over unnamed foes. In the same year Gormgal, abbot of Armagh, imposed the *Lex Patricii* on Connacht. In 802 Muirgius was sufficiently powerful to advance far south and destroy the crannogue of Loch Riach (Loughrea), and in 803 the Sogain revolted against their overlords of Máenmag, that section of the Uí Maine kingdom of which Loughrea was the centre.

A feature of Muirgius' reign is his aggression against the subject tribes of Connacht, showing that the Uí Briúin supremacy involved the active occupation of land. Muirgius had imposed his son Cormac as abbot on Baslick, a church of the Ciarraige Aí uncomfortably close to Cruachu. In 805 Cormac was slain by the Ciarraige and Muirgius laid waste their lands in revenge. In 810 two more of his sons, Tadg and Flaithnia, were slain by the Luigni of Corann just north of Mag nAi, who suffered a similar retribution. In 812 he was in action against the Calraige Luirg, and later that year he ravaged the south of Connacht.

Muirgius sought and won the favour of the church. In 811 Nuado, abbot of Armagh, visited Connacht with the relics of Patrick and his Law. Previously in 793 the Law of St Commán of Roscommon (Ros Commáin) was imposed upon the Three Connachta by Muirgius and

Aildobur, abbot of Roscommon. Roscommon seems to have been a daughter church of Clonmacnoise, and as early as 744 the Uí Briúin had added the support of the church to their dynastic claims when Forggus mac Cellaig imposed the Law of Ciarán (of Clonmacnoise) and the Law of Brendan (of Clonfert) on Connacht. These 'Laws', which entailed the payment of dues and of fines for their infringement, were overlapping and occasionally in rivalry. But Clonmacnoise, many of whose abbots were drawn from among the subject tribes of Connacht, and which was by far the richest and most prestigious of the churches within Connacht's sphere of influence (although it was not technically within the province), was an obvious moral ally to be wooed by the Uí Briúin. The Law of Ciarán was proclaimed officially again in 775, after the Uí Briúin had defeated the Uí Maine, and also in 788, and the Laws of Commán and Áedán in 772 and 780. Along with the secularisation which the formal imposition of these Laws implied, and which is reflected most luridly in the battles which Clonmacnoise undertook against Birr and Durrow in 760 and 764, a genuine respect for religion among the kings of Connacht in the eighth century is attested by the number who chose to end their days in monastic retirement.

In 814, the last year of his life, Muirgius took an important step in binding the fortunes of Clonmacnoise to those of his dynasty. Aughrim (Echdruim) was apparently a dependent church of Clonmacnoise in the territory of Uí Maine. In 814 its bishop and *airchinnech*, Máeldúin, was assassinated, and a joint expedition was led by Muirgius and by Foirchellach, abbot of Clonmacnoise, against the Uí Maine 'south of the river Suck'. The annalists say that in the course of this campaign many *innocentes* were slain: the *Cáin Adomnáin* or Law of Adomnán, which had been promulgated for the whole of Ireland at Birr in 697, and whose custodian was the abbot of Raphoe, had been specifically designed to protect the lives of women, children and clerics in war, and hence was known as the *Lex innocentium*. We do not know the causes behind the evident resentment that the Uí Maine felt against the person of Máeldúin, but we may suspect the usual mixture of dynastic and ecclesiastical politics. The last recorded act of Muirgius as king of Connacht at the end of this same year was the 'raising of the Law of Ciarán over Connacht'.

Muirgius had made the Síl Muiredaig dominant among the Uí Briúin Aí: the name 'Shilmorthy' was still applied to the O'Connor lands in Roscommon after the Anglo-Norman conquest of Connacht.

Although the Uí Briúin Bréifne and Uí Briúin Seóla in the persons of Ua Ruairc (O'Rourke) and Ua Flaithbertaig (O'Flaherty) were to be formidable contestants for the kingship of Connacht in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the family of Ua Conchobair (O'Connor), taking its name from Conchobar mac Taidg, king of Connacht from 967 to 973, eventually held the field. The Síl Muiredaig succession to the kingship of Connacht in the Middle Irish period is quite a remarkable phenomenon: sovereignty is passed directly from father to son for seven generations.* No new 'law' was thus evolved: dynastic feuds even within the kindred remained common; but such a *de facto* succession is unparalleled in Irish history. Nor were the O'Connors the only princely family of Síl Muiredaig: Muirgius mac Tommaltaig was also ancestor to Mac Diarmata (MacDermott) of Mag Luirg and Mac Donnchada (MacDonagh) of Tír Ailello.

Apart from these posthumous achievements, Muirgius had during his own lifetime felt strong enough to take a hand in the affairs of the Uí Néill high-kingship. He gave refuge and support to the Leinster king Fínsnechta Cetharderc during his exile in 805,† and in 808 he afforded more active aid to another rebel against Áed Oirdnide, Conchobar mac Donnchada, king of Mide. Muirgius led a hosting of the Connachta as far as the assembly grounds of Tailtiu. According to the *Annals of Ulster* the incident ended ingloriously enough when the high-king descended upon the allies after three days: they fled like goats and fawns (*eorumque fuga capris et hinnulis simulata est*). But it is noteworthy that Áed Oirdnide confined his vengeance to the territories east of the Shannon, ravaging the borders of Mide, and made no effort to chastise the western king. Connacht's first venture into the midlands was a sign that the province was about to enter a new phase of Irish history. Those who pretended to the high-kingship of Ireland would first have to ensure that they were lords of Leth Cuinn.

* See Appendix II, Tables 20, 21.

† Above, p. 160.



12

The High-Kingship of Ireland

In the course of the ninth century the consolidation of Uí Néill power proceeded apace, culminating in the general acceptance of the kings of Tara as high-kings of Ireland. Whatever the mystique that lay behind the title of king of Tara, and however vague the dominion exercised by its holder, it remains true that from their first appearance in the fifth century the Uí Néill had introduced a dynamism which disrupted the archaic hierarchy of the Five Fifths. Although tribal kingship never entirely disappeared, the new dynastic polity evolved by the Uí Néill relegated it to the position of a primitive survival. And as early as the seventh century the Uí Néill claimed to be kings of all Ireland.

Four texts, all of which may be dated to the last quarter of the seventh century, have already been noticed for the evidence they afford on the Tara kingship.* The earliest regnal list, *Baile Chuind*, does not explicitly state that the descendants of Conn Cétchathach down to Fínsnechta Fledach were actually kings of Ireland. The *Bech-bretha*, the only law tract to refer to Tara at all, alleges that its kingship had been held for a while by Congal Cáech, king of the Ulster Cruthin; but neither this nor any other legal text knows of a high-king of Ireland (though there are frequent references to such in the glosses and commentaries). Muirchú's *Life* of Patrick depicts fifth-century Tara as the Irish Babylon, a druidic centre which is a fitting stage-setting for his rhetorical narrative of the saint's confrontation with Lóeguire, that *rex quidam magnus, ferox, gentilisque imperator barbarorum regnans in Temoria,*

* See above, pp. 53, 58, 65, 91, 96f., 110 and 113.

quae erat caput Scotorum (a certain great, fierce, pagan emperor of the barbarians reigning in Tara, which was the capital of the Irish). He also asserts that Lóeguire's father Niall was 'founder of the royal line of almost all this island', (*origo stirpis regiae huius pene insulae.*) Muirchú's contemporary Adomnán categorically states that Niall's great-grandson Diarmait mac Cerbaill was 'ordained by God ruler of all Ireland', (*totius Scotiae regnatorem a deo ordinatum*), and he tells of the warning given by Colum Cille to Diarmait's son Áed Sláine against embruing his hands in the blood of his kindred, lest he lose 'the prerogative fore-ordained to you by God of the monarchy of the kingdom of all Ireland' (*tibi a deo totius Euerniae regni praerogatiuam monarchaie praedestinatam*).

Such high-flown language testifies to ambition rather than achievement. At this date neither the Ulaid nor the Laigin had acquiesced in subordinate status, and the kings of Cashel took little cognisance of northern affairs. Muirchú was writing in the interests of Armagh, perhaps to wean the Uí Néill from their attachment to the *paruchia* of their own saint Colum Cille, and certainly in order to link the mission of Patrick with their own ancestral figures. The primacy which Armagh won by the end of the seventh century was largely due to the success of this new alliance, but it would remain precarious until supported by a parallel secular institution. The prerogatives of the abbot of Armagh, as set out in the *Liber Angueli* were modelled on those of an as yet theoretical high-king of Ireland.

As for Adomnán, he was himself a member of the Uí Néill dynasty of Cenél Conaill. He was also anxious to propagate the idea of a specifically Christian high-kingship, as his silence concerning Tara with its pagan associations and his stress on the divinely ordained nature of Diarmait's rule indicate. That the half-heathen Diarmait had ever been formally consecrated by ecclesiastical authority is very unlikely. The first such occasion took place in Scotland when Colum Cille ordained Áedán mac Gabráin as king of Dál Riata, as Adomnán relates. He tells us that the saint personally wished to choose Áedán's brother, Eóganán, but that an angel showed him the names of all future kings of Dál Riata displayed in a *liber vitreus*—presumably a book with an enamelled cover, rather than a 'book of glass'.

In the event, all attempts to christianise Irish kingship were to amount to little more than enamelling. Even the kingship of Cashel retained many archaic features. It was a king of Cashel, Artrí mac Cathail in

793, who was the first we know to have been 'ordained' on Irish soil.* His contemporary, Áed mac Néill of Tara, was known as 'the ordained' (Áed Oirdnide), and in 993 the annals tell how Muircecán, abbot of Armagh, during a circuit of Tír nEógain (Tyrone—by now the centre of Cenél nEógain royal power) conferred the *grád ríg* or 'kingly orders' upon Áed mac Domnaill, who had been king for four years already, in the presence of the community of Armagh. By this date the Cenél nEógain kings of the North had to some extent made Armagh their city, though it was never strictly within their home territory. They maintained a permanent residence there, as well as a *mausoleum regum* which is mentioned by the annals in 935 and 1064. But ecclesiastical ordination was always no more than an optional extra to the age-old rites of inauguration. Even where clerics had elbowed the poets out of their position as rightful inaugurators of the king, the victory was a hollow one for the church, for after the twelfth-century reforms the new bishops were unable in turn to displace the now hereditary lay coarbs of the old monasteries from this function.†

At first reading the Irish annals appear full of references to high-kings of Ireland. The *Annals of the Four Masters*, compiled in the early seventeenth century, date all their entries not merely by anno Domini but by the regnal years of the kings of Ireland, in accordance with their original title *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann* 'The annals of the kingdom of Ireland'. But on closer examination it can be seen that the earlier annals, represented most reliably by the conservative *Annals of Ulster*, are notably reluctant to admit candidates for the high-kingship. In the early centuries they refer to the supposed high-kings simply by their name and patronymic, or with the addition of the title 'king of the Uí Néill' or 'king of Tara'. The later annalists, influenced by the doctrine of the Middle Irish schools (which reckoned well over forty high-kings between Niall Noígiallach and Brian Bóruma),‡ substitute the term 'king of Ireland' in most such instances. It is misleading to brand such a practice as forgery: it is rather what Wallace-Hadrill has called 'reasonable glossing of a text'. The original hand of the *Annals of Ulster* (not easily distinguishable from later interpolations in the printed edition) significantly restricts the title 'king of Ireland' to eight kings of the Uí Néill and four from other dynasties. These are Domnall mac Áedo (628–642), Loingsech mac Óengusso (695–704), Máelsechnaill mac Máele Ruanaid (846–862), Niall Glúndub mac Áeda (916–919), Congalach Cnogba mac Máelmithig (944–956), Domnall

* Above, pp. 159, 213. † Cf. pp. 21f., above. ‡ See Appendix I, pp. 275f..

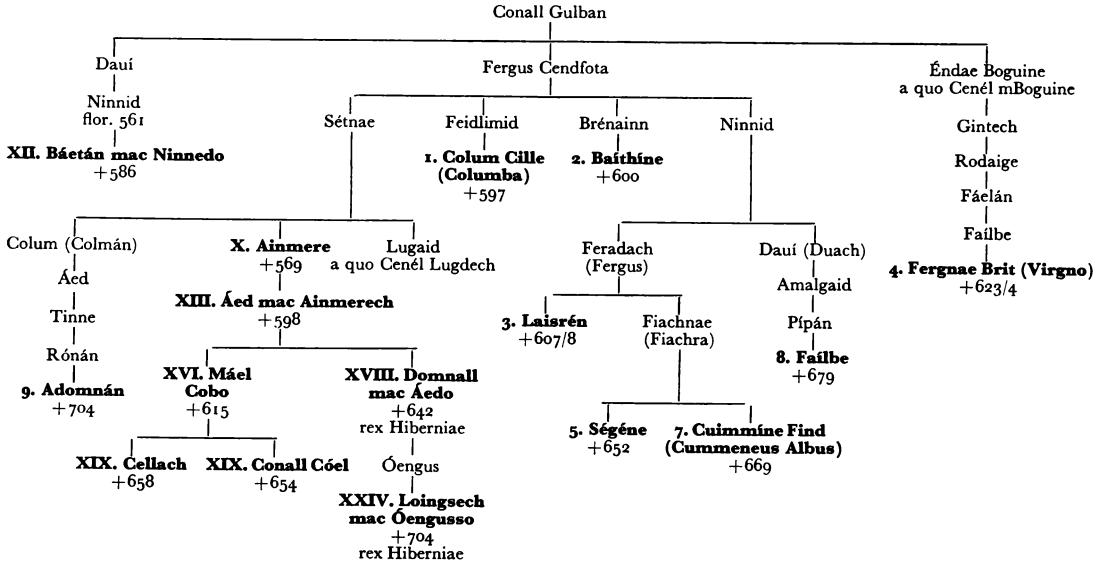
ua Néill (956–980), Máelsechnaill mac Domnaill (980–1002 and 1014–1022), Brian Bóruma mac Cennétig (1002–1014), Toirrdelbach ua Briain (1064–1086), Muirchertach Ua Briain (1086–1119), Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn (1156–1166) and the last high-king of Ireland, Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair (1166–1186; ob. 1198).

The obit of Domnall ua Néill in 980 is the first contemporary record of the term *ard-rí Érenn*, which was to be given a spurious significance by the men of learning who shaped the pseudo-history of Ireland from the eleventh century onwards. Brian Bóruma is called *ard-rí Gaidel Érenn 7 Gall 7 Bretan, August iarthair tuaiscirt Eórpa uile* 'high-king of the Irish of Ireland and of the Foreigners and the Welsh, the Augustus of the whole of north-west Europe': at this date the *Annals of Ulster* were being written at Armagh, where Brian on his visit in 1005 was acknowledged as *imperator Scotorum* according to the entry inserted in the Book of Armagh by his secretary Máel Suthain, and where his body was entombed after the battle of Clontarf.

The Uí Néill concept of high-kingship was first converted into political reality by Máelsechnaill mac Máele Ruanaid, styled *rí Érenn uile* 'king of all Ireland' at his obit in 862. But some explanation is required of the fact that the annals should confer the title *rex Hiberniae* on two seventh-century kings. Domnall mac Áedo had by his defeat of Congal Cáech and his ally Domnall Brecc of Dál Riata at the battle of Mag Roth in 637 marked an important step in the rise of the Uí Néill, effectively putting an end to Ulster pretensions.* The only surviving fragment of the *Liber de virtutibus Columbae* written by Cumméne Find, the seventh abbot of Iona (657–669), which has been incorporated into Adomnán's *Life* of Colum Cille, refers to this battle as having been disastrous for the fortunes of Dál Riata and the inevitable result of Domnall Brecc's folly in breaking the alliance forged by the saint between the Dál Riata and Uí Néill. Adomnán, who was ninth abbot (679–704), could have had clear boyhood memories of this battle: he was born in 624 or 628 and his grandfather was a third cousin of Domnall mac Áedo. He himself was an exact contemporary of Domnall's grandson, Loingsech mac Óengusso, his own fifth cousin: both king and abbot died in 704. When we recall that the early portion of our annals down to about the year 740 derives in whole or in part from an Iona chronicle, it will be clear that the annalistic testimony to the kingship of Ireland enjoyed by Domnall and Loingsech cannot be treated as independent of Adomnán's own ideas.

* Above, pp. 112–14.

Abbots of Iona and Cenél Conaill Kings of Tara



Arabic numerals denote succession to the abbacy of Iona, Roman numerals the official succession of high-kings: see Appendix, II, 4.

We know nothing of the descent of the sixth abbot, Suibne (652–657): he is not said to have been of the Cenél Conaill. The pedigree of the fourth abbot, Fergnae or Virgno, seems too long. His family, the Cenél mBoguine, ruled a sub-kingdom in south-west Donegal. Lugaid, son of Sétnae, is here included to show the descent of the O'Donnells of Cenél Lugdech: this branch of Cenél Conaill did not become prominent until the tenth century, and only in the thirteenth did Ó Domhnaill achieve permanent over-lordship of Tír Chonaill.

Note that the abbatial succession is not confined to so close a kindred group as the normal regnal succession. Before the eighth century the monastery of Iona, though controlled by members of the Cenél Conaill, cannot be said to have been 'secularised': all the early abbots were celibate.

Adomnán's description of Diarmait mac Cerbaill is echoed by his reference to Oswald of Northumbria (633–641) as *totius Britanniae imperator a deo ordinatus*. In neither case does the imposing title correspond strictly with reality. But it is the Irishman Adomnán who is the first to ascribe an *imperium* to an Anglo-Saxon Bretwealda, and the claim was reiterated by later English kings. The office of Bretwealda was at least as vague a concept as that of the Irish high-kingship, but did denote an acknowledged superiority among the heptarchy of greater kings and some claim to extended sway over the Celtic as well as the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of Britain. Such a high-king might conveniently be styled *imperator* that he might enjoy a more honorific title than that of mere *rex* which he shared with others less distinguished. Bede draws careful distinction between *regnum*, the authority of a king over his own immediate subjects, and *imperium*, his overlordship of other kingdoms and nations; and Alcuin says of Edwin of Northumbria (617–632) that he brought Saxons, Picts, Scots and Britons under his *imperium*. It has even been suggested that the Carolingian *imperium* owed as much to this barbarian concept of high-kingship as to the Roman model. It is Alcuin who first describes Charlemagne's rule as an *imperium*, and that before he was ever crowned emperor at Rome. It is therefore dangerous to say that Brian Bóruma was introducing some new notion of high-kingship when he used the title *imperator Scotorum*. The absence of any poetical encomia on Irish kings in the Latin language or of any Latin historiography in the years between Adomnán's writings and Brian's reign means that we cannot trace continuity or change in usage: the annals, when they write in Latin, are content with the title *rex* for all grades of king.

Relations between Ireland and Britain in the age of Colum Cille and Adomnán were not confined to the ecclesiastical sphere. Colmán Becc, son of Diarmait mac Cerbaill and founder of a Southern Uí Néill dynasty, accompanied Conall mac Comgaill, king of Dál Riata, on an expedition to the Hebrides in 567, while Máel Umai mac Báetán, son of a Cenél nEógain high-king, fought together with Áedán mac Gabráin at Degsastan in 600 or 603, slaying Eanfrith, brother of the victorious Æthelfrith of Northumbria. The Ulster king Fiachnae mac Báetáin is said also to have been an ally of Áedán's and may even have taken part in an attack on Bamborough in 623. Osric 'mac Albruit', called *rígdamnae Saxan*, and probably one of the Bernician princes in exile at the Dál Riatan court, fell in Ireland in a battle between the Dál Riata and the Ulster Cruthin in 629. The Cenél nEógain high-king,

Colmán Rímid mac Báetáin (598–604), brother of the warrior Máel Umai, is said by the Irish sources to have been the maternal grandfather of the Northumbrian king Aldfrith, whom Adomnán visited in 686 in order to ransom the prisoners taken by his brother and predecessor Ecgfrith on his raid on Brega in 684, and to whom he presented a copy of his recent work *De locis sanctis*, which was later heavily excerpted by Bede.* Aldhelm of Malmesbury, himself educated by the Irish monk Máeldub, addressed Aldfrith as *aquilonalis imperii sceptra gubernanti*, 'governing the sceptres of the northern empire'.

Nor should the Picts, on whose frontiers Iona was situated and whose conversion was in large part attributed to Colum Cille, be forgotten in any discussion of the concept of high-kingship. It is greatly to be regretted that a people whose art shows extreme sophistication and originality have left us little or no written records, save such as can be gleaned from the Iona annalists. It is not sufficiently appreciated that the Picts had established a unified kingship before any of the other nations of Britain. It suffered from the weakness of descent through the female line—several of the Pictish kings were by patrilinear descent Angles, Britons or Scots of Dál Riata—but the institution formed the basis of the medieval Scottish monarchy. Intercourse, both scholarly and warlike, with these and other British peoples must have contributed to the growth of Irish concepts of monarchy. The final establishment of an Irish high-kingship by Máelsechnaill mac Máele Ruanaid in the mid-ninth century coincided with the union of the Picts and Scots under Cináed mac Ailpín (843–858), who probably succeeded to the Pictish throne by mother-right and then altered the law of succession in favour of his father's dynasty. His reign marks the beginning of the historical kingdom of Scotland, but also the decline of the Scotto-Irish cultural unity of which Iona, now ravaged by the Vikings, had been the umbilical symbol. It was the danger posed by the Vikings that accelerated the tendencies which reached their culmination in the reigns of Cináed and Máelsechnaill.

If the concept of high-kingship originated in Iona and Armagh, its realisation was due to the prowess of the Uí Néill. By the beginning of the ninth century the kings of Tara were undoubtedly the most important in Ireland. The kingship alternated between the Cenél nEógain and the Clann Cholmáin, whose compact territorial overlordships dominated the North and the midlands, while the intervening area was

* See above, p. 111.

occupied by the vassal tribes of Airgialla. The effectiveness of Uí Néill power in Connacht might be disputed, but the historical traditions which bound them with that province allowed the whole of the northern Half to be called Leth Cuinn. True, the Ulaid still held out in the north-east, but Áed Allán had dealt them a decisive blow at the battle of Fochairt in 735, while his victory over the Laigin at Áth Senaig in 738 had asserted Uí Néill supremacy over the other traditional enemies, giving the lie to the king of Cashel's boasted hegemony over Leth Moga.*

Thus the area dominated by the king of Tara was larger than that of any traditional Fifth, and his occasional success in exacting *bóruma* tribute from the Laigin made nonsense of the legal doctrine that the king of Leinster, an undoubted *rí cóicid*, should have no superior. The law texts for some reason became fossilised early in the eighth century and took no account of subsequent developments in Irish society or politics. Here they stand in striking contrast to the Welsh laws, which while essentially similar to the Irish, were written in the twelfth century and have incorporated a great deal of innovation, notably in the space they allot to treatment of the king and his elaborate semi-feudal court. It is clear that by the twelfth century the greater Irish provincial kings had advanced their military and executive powers considerably, but no hint of this is apparent in the law tracts. However unreal they may have been, the fact that the Irish tracts allow no room for a high-king of Ireland was to be a serious hindrance to political progress. The high-kingship achieved by some Irish rulers from the ninth century to the twelfth remained without legal validity: it was never an institution, but merely a prize to be won. Thus Giraldus Cambrensis, while accepting the doctrine that the high-kingship had existed since the time of Éremón son of Míl, says quite realistically: 'These kings achieved the sovereignty of the whole island not through any ceremony of coronation, or rite of consecration or even right of heredity or order of succession, but only by force and arms. They became kings, each in his own way.' Elsewhere Giraldus refers to Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair as prince of Connacht and titular monarch of the whole island. But a generation earlier St Bernard in his *Vita Malachiae* knew nothing of any king of all Ireland: the contemporary 'high-king with opposition', Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobair, seems to have taken remarkably little interest in St Malachy's labours for the reform of the church. Towards the end of the eleventh century Pope Gregory VII, Lanfranc and Anselm had accorded both Toirrdelbach ua Briain and his son

* Above, pp. 117f., 147f.

Muirchertach the courtesy of addressing them as 'king of Ireland'.

Earlier foreign references to the high-kingship are few and ambiguous. A contemporary annalistic entry in the margin of an Irish manuscript of Bede now at Carlsruhe records that in 817 (rectè 819) *Aed rex Hiberniae moritur*, but Áed Oirdnide's high-kingship seems unknown to Einhard, who speaks vaguely of *reges Scotorum* in his *Life* of Charlemagne: 'By his munificence he had the kings of the Irish so disposed to court his favour that they never spoke of him otherwise than as Lord and themselves as his subjects and servants. Letters are in existence sent by them to him in which they express in this manner their regard for him.' Although we have no corroborative evidence, Einhard's statement is not in itself improbable. The Irish were used to an ascending hierarchy of kings and over-kings: it was this which made the idea of a high-king readily acceptable in spite of its constitutional non-existence. The concept of the Roman emperor as 'king of the world' was familar to Irish scholars, fed on Eusebian theories of the historical rise and fall of world kingdoms. The *Annals of Ulster* even apply this title, *rí in domain* (familiar still in the modern Irish folk-tale), to Henry II of Germany and his successor Conrad II in 1023 (recte 1024), and it has been surmised that when Henry II of England received the submission of Irish prelates and kings in 1171 his nickname of Fitzempress did his cause no harm.

The Frankish *Annales Bertiniani* for the year 848 record a legation sent to Charles the Bald with gifts from the *rex Scottorum*, announcing that the Irish had defeated and expelled the Norse and requesting free passage for himself to make a pilgrimage to Rome. It is possible that Sedulius Scottus arrived on the continent in connection with this delegation. There are certain indications that Sedulius and his circle of scholarly friends came from Leinster, and it is quite likely that Ólchobar mac Cináeda, abbot of Emly and king of Cashel, rather than Máelsechnaill mac Máele Ruanaid, may have been the king in question. The year 848 saw no less than four Irish victories over the Norse: one near Skreen won by the new high-king Máelsechnaill; one in the same district won by Tigernach, king of Lagore in south Brega; a third at Sciath Nechtain near Castledermot in Kildare, won jointly by Ólchobar of Cashel and Lorcán mac Cellaig, king of Leinster; and a fourth at Dún Máele Tuile near Cashel won by the Eóganacht Chaisil.

It is debatable whether the impact of the Viking wars accelerated the establishment of the high-kingship. Máelsechnaill had won acclaim in 845, the year before his accession, by drowning the Norse leader Turgéis in Loch Ennell, and after his defeat of the Dublin Norse in 848 he

succeeded in plundering the embryonic town the following year. These events were the first serious clashes between a major Irish potentate and the Vikings, although their raids had commenced some fifty years before. But in 837 large war fleets had arrived on the Boyne and Liffey and inaugurated an era of intense activity different in character to the hit and run raids on coastal monasteries which had been the dominant feature of the previous generation. Permanent bases were established along the eastern sea-board, some of which took root and grew into towns. There was a real danger of a Norse conquest of the country. In 831, 840 and 852 Armagh was raided by the Norse, and also in 852 Olaf set up the kingdom of Dublin. Viking fleets were cruising boldly on the inland waters: in 839 they were on Lough Neagh whence they ravaged the lands of the Northern Uí Néill, Airgialla and Ulaid; Turgéis had been based on the Shannon and Lough Ree.

Against this background there took place in 851 a royal meeting (*rígdál*) at Armagh between Máelsechnaill and the nobles of Leth Cuinn on the one side and the king of Ulaid, Matudán mac Muiredaig, with the nobles of 'Conchobar's Fifth' on the other. Diarmait, abbot of Armagh, Fethgna the bishop, as well as Suairlech, abbot of Clonard, with the clergy of Mide, attended. Whatever agreement was arrived at did not prevent the ravaging of Armagh the following year, but the meeting evidently marks the first acknowledgment of Uí Néill high-kingship by the Ulaid. Shortly before Máelsechnaill had ruthlessly crushed a revolt by the rival Síl nÁedo Sláine. Cináed mac Conaing, king of Knowth and all Brega, had allied himself with the Norse of Dublin and the high-king had him drowned ignominiously 'in a dirty streamlet' (a form of execution probably borrowed from the Norse), 'in spite of the guarantees of the nobles of Ireland and of the coarb of Patrick in particular'.* This incident illustrates the ferocity of the dynastic feuds which plagued the Uí Néill even at the height of their power, the readiness of Irish kings to avail of the services of the heathen foreigners, and the arbitrary extension of royal powers which the Norse crisis made possible.

Cerball mac Dúnlainge of Osraige came now into prominence as an opportunist who defended both Munster and Leinster by skilfully playing off Norse mercenary forces one against the other. Between 870 and his death in 888 he even assumed the role of the protector of the Norse dynasty of Dublin, into which his daughters had married. His early successes in the 850s were due to his dominance of the Nore and

* This entry has been mistranslated in the published edition of the *Annals of Ulster*.

Barrow valleys. He thus seriously unbalanced the traditional hegemonies of Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga and constitued an obstacle to the ambitions of the Uí Néill. By a judicious mixture of force and diplomacy Máelsechnaill kept him in check and succeeded in making of Osraige his stepping-stone to the first real high-kingship of all Ireland. In 854 Máelsechnaill invaded Munster as far as the borders of the Déisi in south Tipperary and claimed their hostages.

Feidlimid mac Crimthainn had been succeeded by short-lived kings who had to contend, as he had never had, with dangerous Norse inroads into Munster. The *Three Fragments* (a late annalistic compilation from Osraige) state that Máelsechnaill had sent Cerball mac Dúnlainge to demand the hostages of Munster from Áilgenán mac Donngaile, king of Cashel; but the expedition of 854 occurred during an interregnum between Áilgenán's death in 853 and the accession of Máel Gualae in 856. In that year Máelsechnaill appeared once again in Munster, marching to Cashel and taking the hostages of the province. He was, however, momentarily distracted by 'a great war with the Gentiles'. Previously the word *cocad* 'war' had been rare in the annals, which use the Latin *bellum* as the equivalent of Irish *cath*—a mere battle. The Vikings were upsetting the ritual norms of Irish warfare.

Máelsechnaill was single-minded. The Eóganacht were weak, but Cerball mac Dúnlainge with Norse help might build a power block in the south much more dangerous to the Uí Néill than they had ever been. In 858 Máelsechnaill came to Munster 'with the men of Ireland'—a phrase which implies that he had contingents from all the other provinces; he encamped for the space of ten nights on the banks of the Blackwater, defeated the kings of Desmond at Carn Lugdach, and slew Máel Crón mac Muiredaig, *leth-rí* of the Déisi. He ravaged Desmond as far as the sea, the first Uí Néill king to reach the southern coast. He established the high-kingship of Tara over Leth Moga and exacted the hostages of Munster from Belach Gabrán on the Leinster border to Inis Tarbnai *iar nÉre* (Dursey Island 'west of Ireland'), and from Dún Cermnai at the Old Head of Kinsale to the Aran islands.

The *Three Fragments* allege as a contributory cause of his expedition the reduction of Cerball mac Dúnlainge, who was oppressing the Laigin, though they add that the depredations inflicted on Munster by the Gall-Gaídil, wandering bands of mixed Norse and Irish renegades, should in any case have afforded him sufficient pretext. In fact Máel Gualae, king of Cashel, was slain the next year by the Norse, but not before Máelsechnaill had consolidated his achievement. The *Annals of*

Inisfallen omit all mention of Máelsechnaill's activities in Munster, apart from a laconic notice of his hosting in 858, but they claim that in 859 Cerball mac Dúnlainge led the men of Munster against the Uí Néill and devastated as far as Sliab Fuait in south Armagh until the North submitted to him. If there be any truth in this record, it is ignored by the other annalists.

In 859 Máelsechnaill held a royal assembly at Ráith Áeda maic Bricc (Rahugh, county Westmeath, just within the border of Mide in that strategic area where the Uí Néill lands marched with those of Munster and the Laigin). Here too were Fethgna, now abbot of Armagh, and Suairlech of Clonard 'making peace and concord among the men of Ireland; and it is as a result of that assembly that Cerball, king of Osraige, submitted fully to the community of Patrick and to his coarb; and it is on that occasion that Osraige was alienated to Leth Cuinn and that Máel Gualae warranted this alienation.'* Osraige, like Leinster, to which kingdom its king had shown dangerous pretensions, was now to be reckoned part of the hegemony of Leth Cuinn. This loss to his recognised sphere of influence was warranted by the king of Cashel, whose overlordship of Osraige had never been more than nominal, and the guarantee was doubtless meant to outlive the merely personal high-kingship won by Máelsechnaill. A northern pedigree was accordingly forged for the kings of Osraige, linking them tenuously with the Laigin.

The success of Máelsechnaill in realising Uí Néill ambitions brought him immediate trouble from within his own dynasty. This paradox is symptomatic of the weakness of Uí Néill polity which was to prevent them establishing a true monarchy of Ireland. The alternation, now over a century old, of the kingship of Tara between the Cenél nEógain and Clann Cholmáin was a fragile convention, marked by watchful jealousy rather than friendly accord. There was a danger that the high-kingship which had so long been claimed, and which Máelsechnaill had now asserted, might become hereditary within Clann Cholmáin alone. The heir apparent to Tara, Áed mac Néill of Ailech, grew distinctly nervous and allied himself with Flann mac Conaing of Knowth, vengeful brother of the executed Cináed. The high-king's new access of power was strikingly demonstrated in 860 when he marched to Armagh against Áed with the forces not merely of the Southern Uí Néill but of Leinster, Connacht and even Munster.

* The true meaning of the technical legal terms in this entry has been elucidated by Dr Binchy.

Máelsechnaill was content with a show of force, remaining in his camp after a night attack by Áed and the Cenél nEógain had failed miserably. The next year, and again in 862, Áed raided Mide together with Flann mac Conaing and the heathen kings of Dublin. These exercises were mere feints: a gentle hint that the high-kingship should continue to alternate as before. Máelsechnaill died peacefully on Friday, 27 November 862, and Áed Findliath succeeded to the title of king of Tara.

It was now his personal responsibility to make himself high-king of Ireland, for Máelsechnaill's victories had established no legal rights. The *Annals of Ulster* only allow Áed the title *rex Temoriae* at his obit in 879, but in fact he was a successful king, particularly active in rooting out Norse strongholds in the north of Ireland, and we cannot ignore the possibility that the term 'king of Tara' may already have been regarded as the equivalent of 'king of Ireland'. Áed Findliath's brother-in-law, Cerball mac Dúnlainge of Osraige, was the second most powerful king in Ireland and was allowed a free hand in Munster. But Máelsechnaill's son, Flann Sinna (879–916) vindicated his rights as king of Ireland by his defeat of Cormac mac Cuilennáin at the battle of Belach Mugna in 908. Cormac's challenge was the last effective attempt by the Eóganachta to maintain their ancient status, and his defeat, followed as it was by a recrudescence of Viking activity in Munster, proved disastrous to their prestige within their own province. The monopoly which the Eóganacht Chaisil had gained of the kingship of Munster was illusory, based on the good-will of autonomous tribal kingdoms and rooted in archaic concepts of honorific primacy. The brutal new age demanded kings whose dynastic power rested on compact and strategically placed territorial lordship. It was not long before the Dál Cais, controlling Thomond and the Shannon, provided them.

Although a series of able princes maintained the Uí Néill high-kingship from the time of Máelsechnaill mac Máele Ruanaid to that of his great-great-grandson Máelsechnaill mac Domnaill, in the end it was Brian Bóruma who reaped the fruits of their efforts. In a meeting at Clonmacnoise with Cathal mac Conchobair in 900 Flann Sinna had secured the allegiance of Connacht to his dynasty, but the Uí Briúin Bréifne continued to expand in the course of the tenth century. Their failure to wrest the kingship of Connacht permanently from the grasp of the O'Connors in the end caused them to turn their faces all the more greedily to the inviting prospect of the midlands. Thus a wedge

was driven between the Northern and Southern Uí Néill. These had already grown apart: the great territorial overlordships of Cenél nEógain and Clann Cholmáin had few interests in common besides the sentiment of common ancestry. The able northern high-king, Domnall ua Néill, who during his reign between 956 and 980 introduced several military innovations that have generally been credited to Brian Bóruma, wished to displace the Clann Cholmáin and establish a dynastic monarchy of Ireland based in the midlands. When Máelsechnaill mac Domnaill of Mide nevertheless restored the alternate succession the disappointed Cenél nEógain refused to help him maintain his position against Brian.

Brian's glory has been enshrined in the *Cocad Gáedel re Gallaib*, 'The war of the Irish with the Foreigners', a saga based on annalistic and other historical sources, but written in the reign of his great-grandson Muirchertach Ua Briain and reflecting the ambitions of that modernising king, the patron of ecclesiastical reform and father-in-law of Arnulf of Montgomery and Sigurd Magnusson. It has too often been quoted as a contemporary source for the Viking wars and has succeeded in deceiving many historians into regarding Brian Bóruma as the first true high-king of Ireland. There is little evidence to suggest that Brian entertained any novel ideas of kingship, still less that his sway was any more effective than that of his Uí Néill predecessors. His success (usurpation is too harsh a word, since no one had a strict legal right to the high-kingship) brought chaos into an Irish polity which, anarchic though it may have seemed, followed certain inner laws of dynastic hierarchy. He showed that any provincial king might make himself king of Ireland by force of arms, and the next century and a half was troubled by eager attempts to learn the baleful lesson.

The fault of course was not Brian's: deeper forces of disintegration were at work. Chief among these was the effect of the Viking wars. While it can be argued that the stress of these invasions rallied the Irish for the first time to some sense of national unity and thus enabled Máelsechnaill mac Máele Ruanaid to win the high-kingship, it might equally well be said that the disturbance they caused ultimately ruined the structure of Irish politics which the Uí Néill had built up over the centuries. Máelsechnaill's success was but the logical culmination of a process which had begun with the very rise of the Uí Néill at the dawn of Irish history. The Norse impinged remarkably little on the course of Irish politics in the ninth and tenth centuries and never conquered any considerable territory in Ireland. Only on two or three occasions

was there a danger that they might overrun the country as they had done in England, but it was the fissiparous character of the multitudinous tribal kingdoms at least as much as the nascent high-kingship which made such a conquest impracticable.

It was rather the consequences of the continued Viking presence and the economic effects of the Norse towns that subtly changed Irish society in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and prepared the way for a new breed of kings. The failure of the Uí Néill to pick up the reins which fell from Brian's hands at Clontarf was due to their distance from the now beneficial influence of the Norse towns. The Norse kings were no longer a danger but had accepted a position analogous to that of the *ríg tuaithe* in the Irish polity, though their trading connections and the constant demands made on their war-fleets for mercenary service in Ireland and abroad made them infinitely wealthier. The Irish provincial king who could milk Dublin, Waterford or Limerick for tribute was far more powerful than his peers who extorted allegiance from twenty tribal kings.

Although there seems to have been considerable Norse settlement around the harbours of Antrim and Down, there were no towns north of Dublin. By their very success in wiping out Viking encampments in the North the Cenél nEógain, though powerful warriors, had relegated themselves to an economic backwater. Their indifference to the rise of Brian Bóruma was an indication of their increasing irrelevance. They remained strong enough to provide the 'opposition' characteristic of the twelfth-century high-kingship, but contributed little that was positive. They were hostile to St Malachy's reforms at Bangor and Armagh and showed little interest in the momentous events of the Anglo-Norman invasion.

The more startling collapse of the Southern Uí Néill left a power vacuum in the midlands which proved fatal to the development of a national monarchy. Although Máelsechnaill mac Domnaill had successfully raided Dublin on three occasions before his deposition from the high-kingship in 1002—characteristically imposing a tax of an ounce of gold on every garth in Dublin rather than expelling the foreigners—his successors failed to emulate him. Thus Mide, the natural hinterland of Dublin and the obvious seat of a centralised monarchy, lapsed into impotence. Máelsechnaill's achievement in crushing the rival Síl nÁedo Sláine of Brega (thereby extending the name of Mide into modern Meath) must have bred resentment against his dynasty in the east, which readily succumbed to the encroachments

of Dublin, Leinster, Bréifne and Airgialla. Furthermore, while the Clann Cholmáin in their rise to power in the eighth century had benefited from the support of Clonmacnoise, Clonard and Durrow, the price proved crippling. Mide and Brega contained more monasteries than any other Irish over-kingdom, and the greater houses owned large tracts of land for which extensive immunities were claimed as eagerly by the hereditary coarbs as by the new adherents of reform. Thus failure to secure overlordship of Dublin doomed the Ua Máelsechlainn kings to debility. Their kingdom was eaten into on every side, and the resultant whirlpool of conflicting interests in the rich central plains of Ireland was to give the twelfth century its character of peculiar chaos.

The years from 1014 to 1169 have been sadly neglected by Irish historians. They were neither a period of sorry decline from a golden age of sanctity and learning, nor a mere anarchic prelude to the Anglo-Norman invasion. The story of church reform has attracted specialist study, but it cannot be properly understood divorced from its political and social background. We can now see that the very chaos of the time, so far from representing a primitive state of tribal anarchy, was symptomatic of the change to a new order. Wars were prolonged and widespread because men had larger ambitions which broke the bonds of tribal and dynastic hierarchy; and these wars could only be maintained because the kings who waged them could draw on economic and military resources unknown to their ancestors. Birth-pangs are always painful, and were bound to be all the more so in a land so conservative and rooted in tradition, where so many classes in society, both clerical and lay, had ancient privilege and status, and where the only articulate public opinion was voiced by a caste whose learning was introverted and backward-looking. These years witnessed the emergence of a native feudal society out of one whose tribalism had only been modified by the gradual growth of dynastic power. The process was cut short by the Anglo-Norman invasion, though in different circumstances such an event might have brought it to fruition.

It was during the interregnum between 1022 and 1072 that the men of learning, both secular and monastic, developed the doctrine of an immemorial high-kingship of Ireland centred at Tara and held from the coming of Christianity until the usurpation of Brian Bóruma by the descendants of Niall Noígiallach. The antiquarian fiction served as a spur to novel ambitions. It was in pursuit of this chimerical high-kingship that the great provincial kings, Ua Briain, Ua Conchobair, Mac Lochlainn and Mac Murchada, marched and counter-marched

until Ireland became, in the well-known words of the annalists, 'a trembling sod'. The men of learning politely termed these rival claimants *rig Érenn co fressabra* 'kings of Ireland with opposition' and some pedants explained laboriously that if the claimant were from Leth Cuinn and held all Leth Cuinn together with one province in Leth Moga, he was entitled to be called king of Tara and of Ireland 'with opposition', but that if he were from Leth Moga he could not be styled king of Ireland unless he held all of Leth Moga and Tara with its surrounding *tuatha* and another province of Leth Cuinn. Few indeed of the twelfth-century high-kings were universally recognised for more than a year or two at a time. Yet the effective rule of earlier high-kings had hardly been wider, and it was only in comparison with a pseudo-historical theory of their predecessors' powers that men like Muirchertach Ua Briain or Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobair were 'kings with opposition'.

At no stage in Irish history did the high-kingship imply monarchy. Neither Brian Bóruma nor any other kings exercised governmental authority over the whole island. They reigned but did not rule. It never occurred to any high-king that he should abolish the provincial kingships or even the petty kingdoms, though these last had suffered a drastic decline in political importance. By the twelfth century the *tuath* had been reduced to a small local district under a *toísech* or chieftain; a *rí* still ruled the original tribal area, now known by the territorial name of *trícha cét*, or 'thirty hundreds' (identified by Giraldus with the Welsh *cantref* or cantred). More important were the mesne over-kings whose *mór-thuatha* formed the normal bases for the new dioceses, but they are often to be found serving their overlords as officers of a semi-feudal host rather than as independent leaders of a tribal levy. The provincial kings act in a more arbitrary manner towards them and even towards their own peers when the opportunity arises. They may attempt to impose their own relatives as 'strangers in sovereignty' over subject kingdoms, as often happened in the case of Dublin; they partition rival provinces, as was repeatedly the fate of Mide, or as Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobair divided Munster between Ua Briain of Thomond and Mac Carrthaig of Desmond, or as Mac Lochlainn unsuccessfully tried to split up Ulster between four 'lords' of the Ulaid. But a hierarchy of kings was accepted as normal, and tribal feeling was ignored at peril, as Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobair found when the men of Mide slew his son Conchobar whom he had imposed upon them. Primacy in Ireland was the goal of the aspirants to the high-kingship,

and their careers must be judged by the criteria set by their own ambitions rather than by notions of national monarchy which were foreign to them. Conversely, rebellion against their authority was rarely conceived of as treachery towards a natural lord, and never as treason to one's country.

The failure to establish a dynastic high-kingship has blinded historians to the remarkable extent to which the twelfth-century kings had made themselves masters of their own provinces. Their authority over their sub-kings, while never absolute, was considerable. Particularly in the south of Ireland new concepts of kingship were being assimilated. Progressive kings patronised art and architecture, built castles and bridges, supported the church reformers and the new episcopacy, presided over synods, welcomed the Cistercians and issued charters whose terms implied that they, unlike early Irish over-kings, were regarded as *domini terrae*. Diarmait Mac Murchada's massacre of the Uí Dúnlainge princes without engaging them in battle was indicative of his power and of his determination to be a real king of Leinster rather than a *primus inter pares*. Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobair carved out a central kingdom in Connacht unrelated to earlier tribal and dynastic territories, establishing his secular and ecclesiastical capitals at Dunmore and Tuam, and ringed this area around with strategic castles. More remarkably perhaps, as early as the eleventh century Toirrdelbach ua Briain had made the foreign town of Limerick his capital, and his son Muirchertach installed his brother Diarmait as *dux* in the town of Cork, thus temporarily pacifying his ambitions and extending Ua Briain direct rule into the heart of dissident Eóganacht territory. He himself had served for a space under his father's high-kingship as ruler of Dublin. For Dublin, rather than Tara, whatever the poets might say, was assuming the role of the metropolis of Ireland. Any claimant to the high-kingship must ensure control of Dublin, either directly or through a kinsman or by means of a subservient member of the local Norse dynasty—all of which expedients were tried with varying degrees of success.

Yet Dublin had become a petty state within Leinster, and the kings of that province were aware of the advantage they enjoyed. In the middle of the eleventh century a new dynasty had come to power—that of the Uí Cheinnselaig in the person of Diarmait mac Maíl-na-mBó.* His kingdom around Ferns was remote and unimportant in terms of the traditional polity, but the Vikings had given the coast a new

* See Appendix II, Table 10.

significance, and the prosperous Norse town of Wexford with its Bristol trade made the fortune of Uí Cheinnselaig, whereas the northern dynasty of Uí Dúnlainge had suffered from the beginning by its failure to repel either the Uí Néill or the Dublin Norse. The Dublin fleet saw frequent service in the internecine wars of the Welsh princes in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as well as in the Hebrides and western England. A vigorous slave trade grew up as a result, which must have seriously affected the structure of Irish society, hastening the process by which the free commoners were debased. A military aristocracy was growing in Ireland, as is attested by the semi-professional armies of cavalry or mounted infantry and the well-manned fleets (not all of Norse origin) which waged the wide-ranging campaigns of twelfth-century kings.

After the battle of Hastings the sons of Harald fled to Diarmait mac Maíl-na-mBó and in 1068 and 1069 brought the Norse-Irish fleets to harry the coasts of Devon and Somerset: among the treasures which Toirrdelbach Ua Briain obtained from Diarmait on his expedition to Leinster in 1068 was the standard of the king of the Saxons (presumably that of Edward the Confessor). A century later Henry II hired the Dublin fleet for six months on his abortive Welsh campaign of 1165. Diarmait's great-grandson and namesake, Diarmait Mac Murchada, was then overlord of Dublin and so established a claim to Henry's favour which he remembered the following year.

Diarmait mac Maíl-na-mBó fought for the high-kingship between 1040 and his death in 1072. He and his ally Niall mac Eochada, king of Ulaid, raided in Brega and Mide; he installed his own son Murchad (eponym of the Mac Murchada family) as king in Dublin; he assisted Toirrdelbach ua Briain to wrest the kingship of Munster from his uncle Donnchad; and he fell in an attempt to conquer Mide from Conchobar Ua Máelsechlainn.

His example was not lost on his great-grandson, whose reputation for brutality reflects his determination to create a modern kingship, and is therefore not in such strong contrast to his friendship with the reforming clergy as at first appears. Diarmait Mac Murchada was by no means indifferent to his ancestral traditions, as the Book of Leinster, compiled by men devoted to him, if not under his actual patronage, amply testifies. The men of learning might even regard the origin legend of his dynasty as a good precedent for his journey to Bristol and Aquitaine, for had not Labraid Loingsech suffered unjust exile and regained his kingdom with the help of allies from Gaul? Labraid, according to the

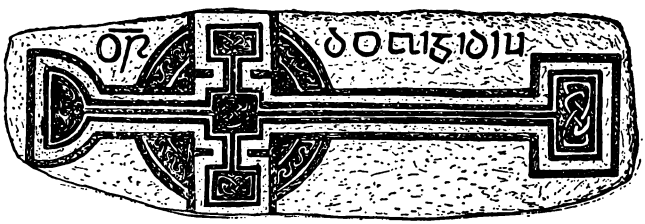
Book of Leinster, had not only established the royal line of the Laigin, but had won for himself the high-kingship of Ireland. Diarmait certainly had similar ambitions, but a less antique cast of mind.

The failure of Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobair to maintain his high-kingship despite his repeated victories in the field, and the sudden fall of his successor Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn had been followed by the accession of Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair in an access of goodwill from all except Mac Murchada. Diarmait could be expected to feel no bond of allegiance to a dynasty which had only emerged from the western wastes of Connacht in the previous generation, and while Ruaidrí was for the moment powerful enough to isolate Diarmait from any hope of assistance in Ireland, the essential weakness of his high-kingship was exposed by his failure to maintain the position of overlord of the Irish half of Ireland accorded to him by the terms of the Treaty of Windsor in 1175. Nothing short of a radical revolution could establish a national monarchy: a primacy which had to be won anew generation after generation and which depended on submission from kings potentially as powerful as their temporary overlord was unsuited to modern needs. Such seems to have been the conclusion reached by many of the reformed ecclesiastics who wrote black reports on the state of Ireland to Pope Alexander III: these men welcomed the arrival of Henry II in 1171 with considerable relief.

We cannot know Diarmait's mind, but he almost certainly had more imagination than Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair. While content to offer formal allegiance to Henry, he was intent on becoming king of Ireland. It was Ua Ruairc of Bréifne who insisted that Ruaidrí banish Diarmait totally from Ireland, and his enmity was occasioned less by Diarmait's abduction of Derbforgaill (who may have been fair, but was certainly forty) in 1151 than by long-standing rivalry over the plains of royal Mide of which she, the sister of one of the unfortunate and ephemeral Ua Máelsechlainn kings, was in some sense a symbol. Strongbow's attack on Waterford immediately after his landing in 1170 was in keeping with Diarmait's previous ambition to extend his power outside Leinster in that direction also. At Waterford Strongbow married Diarmait's daughter Aífe, his promised bride whose dowry was to be the kingdom of Leinster itself. Although in Wales kingdoms had often been united by marriage, no Irish kingdom could ever be inherited through the female line—a circumstance which had ensured that the grossly inflated number of petty kings had remained stable for centuries. Diarmait's readiness to overthrow Irish law in order to win Strongbow's

support—thereby ignoring the claims of his sons and agnatic kinsmen—can only be explained on the hypothesis that he was aiming at total innovation. By setting himself up as a feudal king and reserving the monarchy for his own dynasty he could well afford to infeudate his faithful Norman allies with his original demesne in Leinster and with the other kingdoms of his Irish enemies. That the Normans would have had little compunction in agreeing to such a bargain we may guess from the fact that Robert fitzStephen had been about to engage himself to serve his Welsh captor Rhys ap Gruffydd against Henry II until Diarmait's offer had released him from his dilemma.

Such an hypothesis would accord with the character of Diarmait as *li gentil reis* depicted by the Anglo-Norman *chanson de geste* which celebrates the invasion, though not with the rhetorical picture of a barbarian tyrant painted by the persuasive if venomous Giraldus. But Diarmait was too old for such an enterprise and died before he could ride the tiger he had mounted. He may be accused of naivety, but it is anachronistic to condemn him for treachery. Had he been successful the name of Diarmait na nGall might yet be revered as that of the true founder of the national monarchy.



Appendix I

King Lists

1. The High-Kings of Ireland*

I Niall Noígiallach mac Echach Mugmedóin
II Nath Í mac Fiachrach
III Lóeguire mac Néill (ob. c. 463)
IV Ailill Molt mac Nath Í (ob. c. 482)
V Lugaid mac Lóeguiri (ob. c. 507)
VI Muirchertach Mac Ercae mac Eógain (ob. c. 536)
VII Tuathal Máelgarb mac Cormaic Caích maic Coirpri (ob. c. 544)
VIII Diarmait mac Cerbaill (ob. c. 565)
IX Forggus mac Muirchertaig (ob. c. 566)
Domnall mac Muirchertaig (ob. c. 566)
X Ainmuire mac Sétnai (ob. c. 569)
XI Báetán mac Muirchertaig (ob. c. 572)
Eochaid mac Domnaill (ob. c. 572)
XII Báetán mac Ninnedo (ob. c. 586)
XIII Áed mac Ainmuirech (ob. c. 598)
XIV Áed Sláine mac Diarmato (ob. 604)
Colmán Rímid mac Báetáin (ob. 604)
XV Áed Allán (alias Áed Uaridnach) mac Domnaill (ob. 612)
XVI Máel Cobo mac Áedo (ob. 614)
XVII Suibne Menn mac Fiachnai (ob. 628)
XVIII Domnall mac Áedo (ob. 642)
XIX Cellach mac Máele Cobo (ob. 658)
Conall Cáel mac Máele Cobo (ob. 654)
XX Diarmait mac Áedo Sláine (ob. 665)
Blathmac mac Áedo Sláine (ob. 665)
XXI Sechnussach mac Blathmaic (ob. 671)
XXII Cenn Fáelad mac Blathmaic (ob. 674)

* See below, Appendix II, Tables 1–5, 17, 21.

XXIII Fínsnechta Fledach mac Dúnchado (ob. 695)
XXIV Loingsech mac Óengusso (ob. 704)
XXV Congal Cennmagair (ob. 710)
XXVI Fergal mac Máele Dúin (ob. 772)
XXVII Fogartach mac Néill (ob. 724)
XXVIII Cináed mac Írgalaig (ob. 728)
XXIX Flaithbertach mac Loingsig (ob. 734)
XXX Áed Allán mac Fergaile (ob. 743)
XXXI Domnall Midi mac Murchado (ob. 763)
XXXII Niall Frossach mac Fergaile (ob. 770)
XXXIII Donnchad Midi mac Domnaill (ob. 797)
XXXIV Áed Oirdnide mac Néill (ob. 819)
XXXV Conchobar mac Donnchada (ob. 833)
XXXVI Niall Caille mac Áeda (ob. 846)
XXXVII Máelsechnaill mac Máele Ruanaid (ob. 862)
XXXVIII Áed Findliath mac Néill (ob. 879)
XXXIX Flann Sinna mac Máelsechnaill (ob. 916)
XL Niall Glúndub mac Áeda (ob. 919)
XLI Donnchad Donn mac Flainn (ob. 944)
XLII Congalach Cnogba mac Máelmithig (ob. 956)
XLIII Domnall ua Néill (ob. 980)
XLIV Máelsechnaill mac Domnaill (ob. 1022)
XLV Brian Bóruma mac Cennétig (ob. 1014)

XLVI Tairrdelbach ua Briain (ob. 1086)
XLVII Muirchertach Ua Briain (ob. 1119)
Domnall Ua Lochlainn (ob. 1121)
XLVIII Tairrdelbach Ua Conchobair (ob. 1156)
XLIX Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn (ob. 1166)
L Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair (ob. 1198)

2. Kings of Tara according to the Baile Chuind*

[Conn Cétchathach]
Art
Mac Con moccu Lugde Loígde
Corbmac
Corpre

* See above, pp. 91, 104, 110, 254.

Fiechri
Dáire Drechlethan
Fécho
Muiredach Tírech
Crimthand
Níell
Loígaire
Corpri
Ailill
Lugid
Mac Ercéni
Óengarb
Aíd Olláin
Diermait
Féachno
Suibne
Domnall
Blathmac, Diarmaid auae alaili*
Snechta Fína
? Níell
Flann Asail
Furbaide
Cailech
Glúnsalach

3. Kings of Cashel and Munster

1 Conall Corc
2 Nad Froích mac Cuirc
3 Óengus mac Nad Froích (ob. 490/2)
3a Dauí Iarlaithe mac Maithni [L]
4 Eochaid mac Óengusso
4a Feidlimid mac Óengusso [C]
4b Dub-Gilcach mac Óengusso
5 Crimthann Srem (Feimin) mac Echdach [G]
6 Coirpre Cromm mac Crimthainn (ob. 579/80) [G]
7 Fergus Scandal mac Crimthainn Airthir Chliach (ob. 583) [AG]

* 'grandson of the other [Diarmait]'.

8 Feidlimid mac Coirpri [G]
8a Feidlimid mac Tigernaig (ob. 590/3) [R]
8b Amalgaid mac Éndai [Á]
8c Garbán (Gabrán) mac Éndai [Á]
9 Fíngen mac Áedo Duib (ob. 619) [C]
9a Áed Bennán mac Crimthainn (ob. 619/21) [L]
10 Cathal mac Áedo Flaind Chathrach (ob. 628) [G]
11 Faílbe Fland mac Áedo Duib (ob. 637/9) [C]
12 Cúán mac Amalgado (ob. 641) [Á]
13 Máenach mac Fíngin (ob. 662) [C]
14 Cathal Cú-cen-máthair mac Cathail (ob. 665/6) [G]
15 Colgú mac Faílbi Flaind (ob. 678) [C]
16 Finguine mac Cathail Con-cen-máthair (695/6) [G]
16a Ailill mac Cathail (ob. 698/701) [G]
17 Eterscél mac Máele Umai (ob. 721) [Á]
18 Cormac mac Ailello (ob. 713) [C]
19 Cathal mac Finguine (ob. 742) [G]
20 Cathussach mac Eterscélai [Á]
20a Máel Dúin mac Áedo (ob. 786) [L]
20b Ólchobar mac Flainn (ob. 796/7) [F]
? Ólchobar mac Duib-Indrecht (ob. 805) [Á]
21 Artrí mac Cathail (ob. 821) [G]
21a Tuathal mac Artroig [G]
22 Tnúthgal mac Donngaile [C]
23 Feidlimid mac Crimthainn (ob. 847) [C]
24 Ólchobar mac Cináeda (ob. 851) [L]
25 Áilgenán mac Donngaile (ob. 853) [C]
26 Máel Gualae mac Donngaile (ob. 859) [C]
27 Cenn Fáelad hua Mugthigirn (ob. 872) [AC]
28 Dúnchad mac Duib-dá-Bairenn (ob. 888) [C]
29 Dub Lachtna mac Máele Gualae (ob. 895) [C]
30 Finguine Cenn nGécán mac Lóegairi (ob. 902) [C]
31 Cormac mac Cuilennáin (ob. 908) [C]
32 Flaithbertach mac Inmainén (ob. 944)
33 Lorcán mac Coinlígáin [C]
34 Cellachán Caisil mac Buadacháin (ob. 954) [C]
35 Máel Fathardaig mac Flainn (ob. 957) [C]
36 Dub-dá-Bairenn mac Domnaill (ob. 959) [R]
37 Fer Gráid mac Clérig (ob. 961) [C]
38 Donnchad mac Cellacháin (ob. 963) [C]

39 Mathgamain mac Cennétig (ob. 976) [D]
40 Máelmuad mac Brain (ob. 978) [R]
41 Brian Bóruma mac Cennétig (ob. 1014) [D]
41a Dúngal mac Máelfothartaig Hua Donnchada (ob. 1025) [C]
42 Donnchad mac Briain (ob. 1064) [D]
42a Murchad mac Donnchada (ob. 1068) [D]
43 Tairrdelbach hua Briain (ob. 1086) [D]
44 Muirchertach Ua Briain (ob. 1119) [D]
44a Tadg mac Tairrdelbaig Ua Briain (ob. 1086) [D]
44b Domnall mac Taidg Ua Briain (ob. 1115) [D]
45 Diarmait mac Tairrdelbaig Ua Briain (ob. 1118) [D]
46 Tairrdelbach mac Diarmata Ua Briain (ob. 1167) [D]
46a Brian mac Murchada Ua Briain (ob. 1118) [D]
46b Tadg Gláe Ua Briain (ob. 1154) [D]
46c Tadg Mac Carrthaig (ob. 1124) [C]
46d Cormac Mac Carrthaig (ob. 1138) [C]
47 Domnall Mór Ua Briain (ob. 1194) [D]

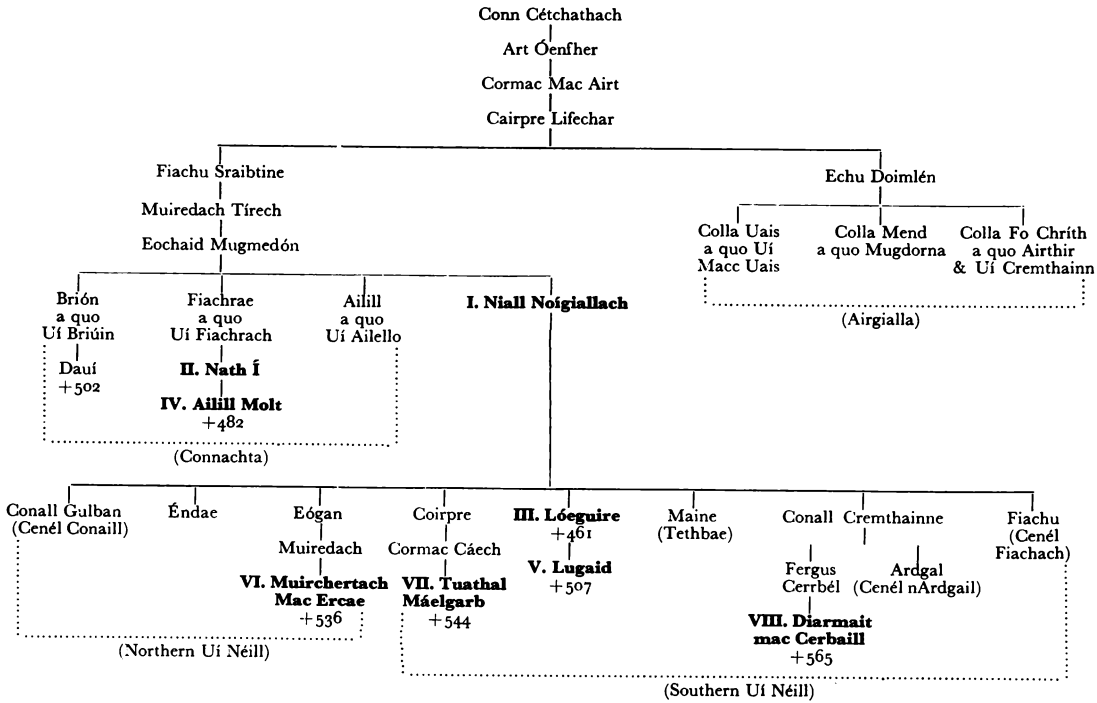
See Appendix II, Tables 11–17. No pedigree has been preserved for Flaithbertach mac Inmainén (No. 32): he is said to have been of the Múscraige.

The dynasties of the Munster kings have been indicated thus:

[Á] Eóganacht Áine (see Table 13)
[AC] Eóganacht Airthir Chliach (see Table 13)
[C] Eóganacht Chaisil (see Table 12)
[D] Dál Cais (see Table 17)
[F] Uí Fidgeinti (see Table 16)
[G] Eóganacht Glendamnach (see Table 13)
[L] Eóganacht Locha Léin (see Table 15)
[R] Eóganacht Raithlind (see Table 14)

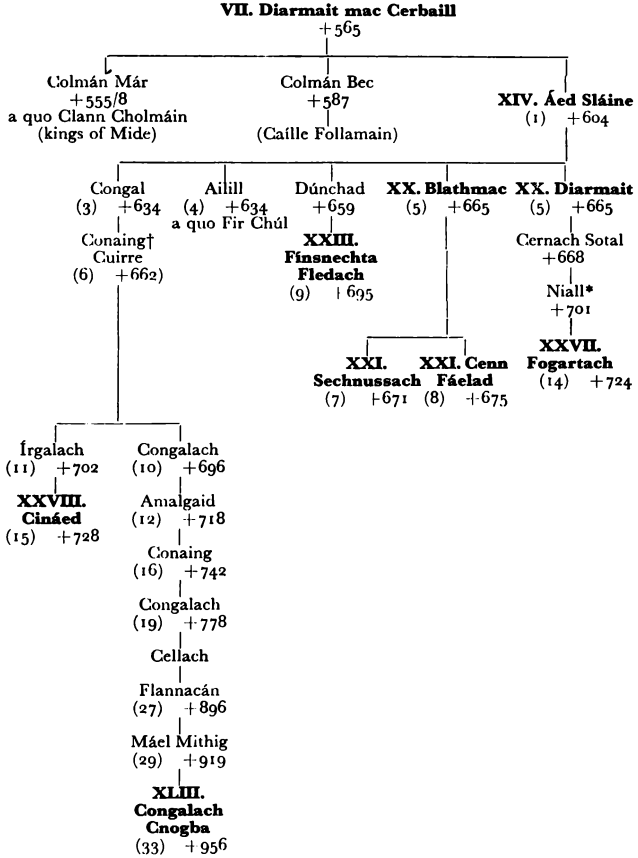
Appendix II *Genealogical Tables*

1: Connachta and Uí Néill



Uí Néill

2: High-Kings of Síl nÁedo Sláine



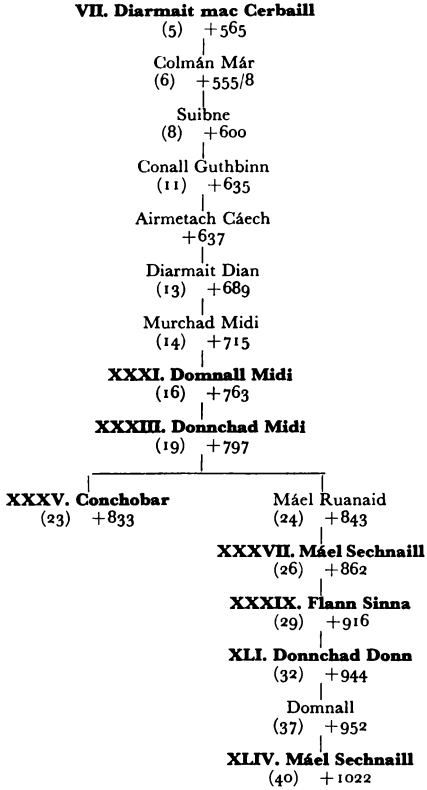
Arabic numerals (1) to (33) indicate succession to the kingship of Brega. A much extended genealogical tree would be required to show the complete succession.

* From Niall descend the kings of Lagore or South Brega.

† From Conaing descend the kings of Knowth or North Brega.

Uí Néill

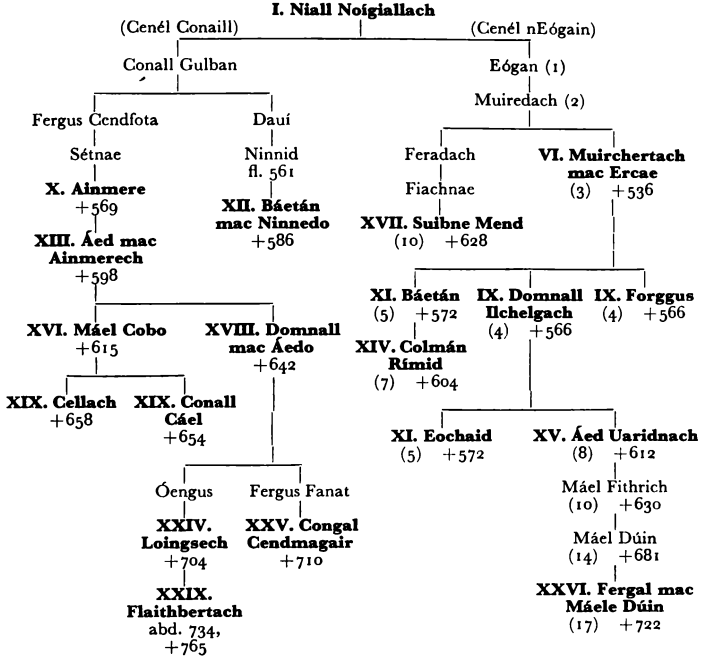
3: High-Kings of Clann Cholmáin



Arabic numerals (5) to (40) indicate succession to the kingship of Mide, the full ramifications of which are not given here. According to the official regnal lists the first four kings were Conall Cremthainne and Fiachu, sons of Niall, Ardgal son of Conall Cremthainne, and Maine mac Cerbaill (+538), brother of Diarmait mac Cerbaill.

Uí Néill

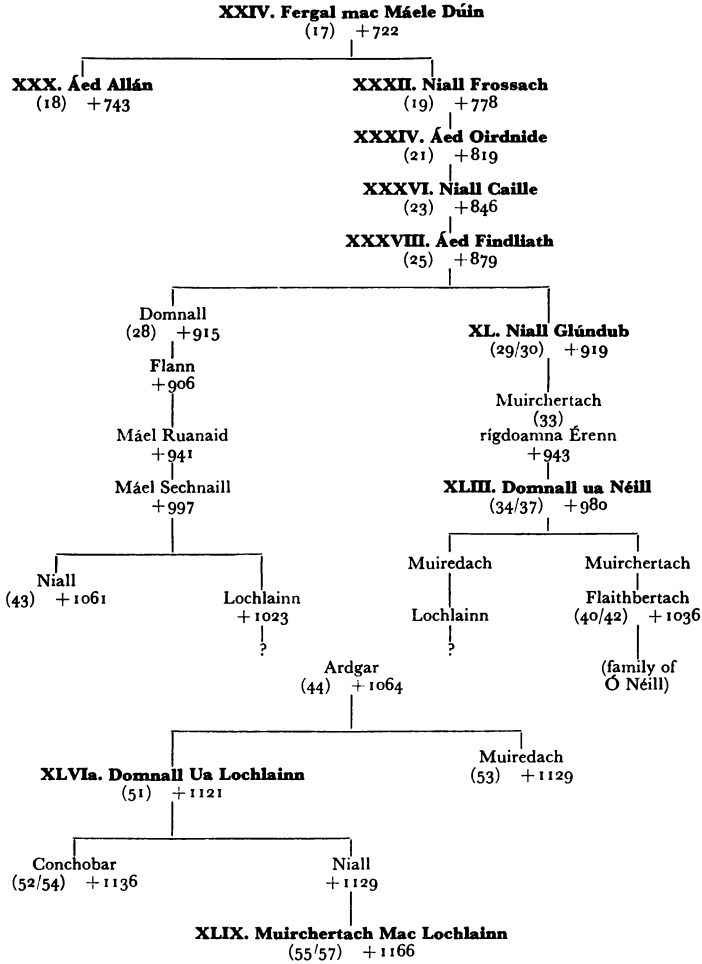
4: High-Kings of Northern Uí Néill



Arabic numerals (1) to (17) indicate the succession to the kingship of Ailech. Not all the kings of Ailech are included in this table.

Uí Néill

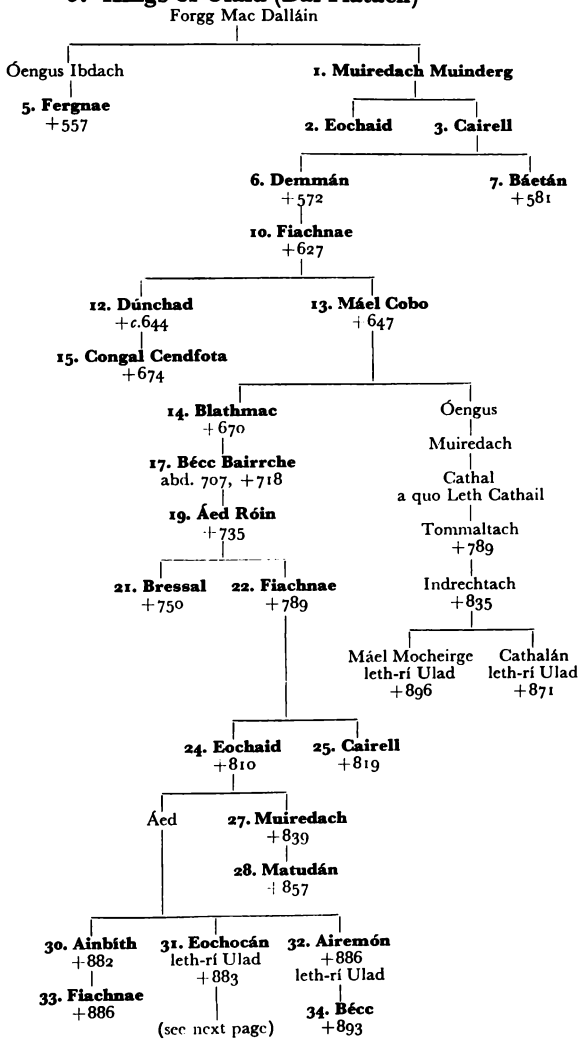
5: High-Kings of Cenél nEógain



Arabic numerals (17) to (57) indicate the succession to the kingship of Ailech, according to the tables in James Hogan, 'The Irish law of kingship', *R.I.A. Proc.*, xl C. 3 (1932). Double figures indicate resumption of an interrupted reign.

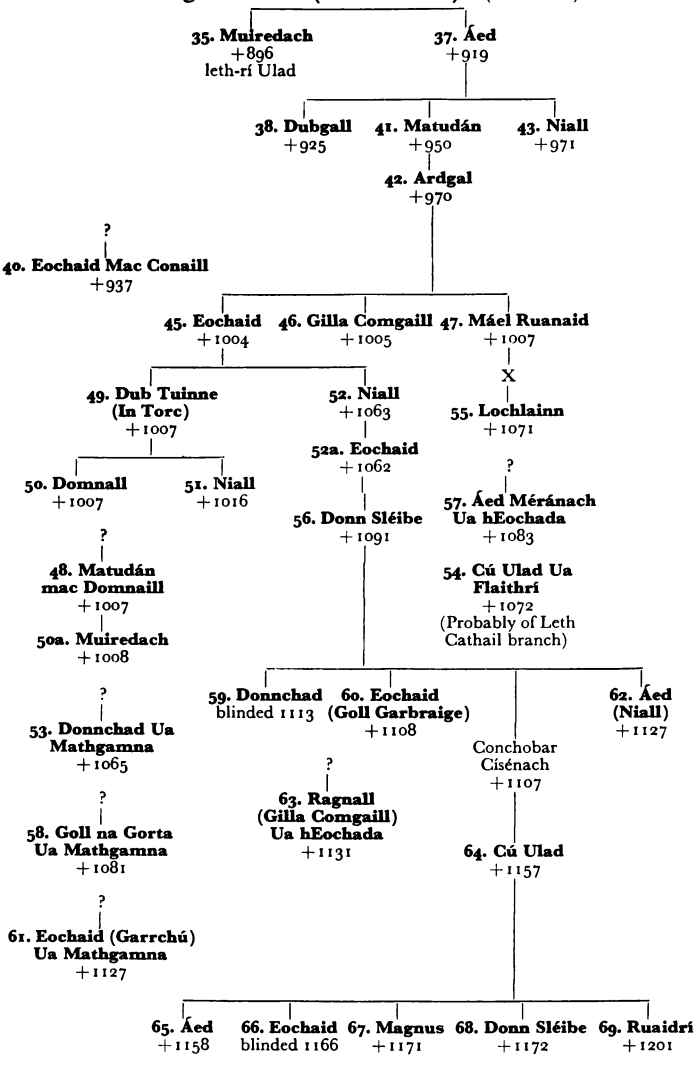
ULSTER

6: Kings of Ulaid (Dál Fiatach)



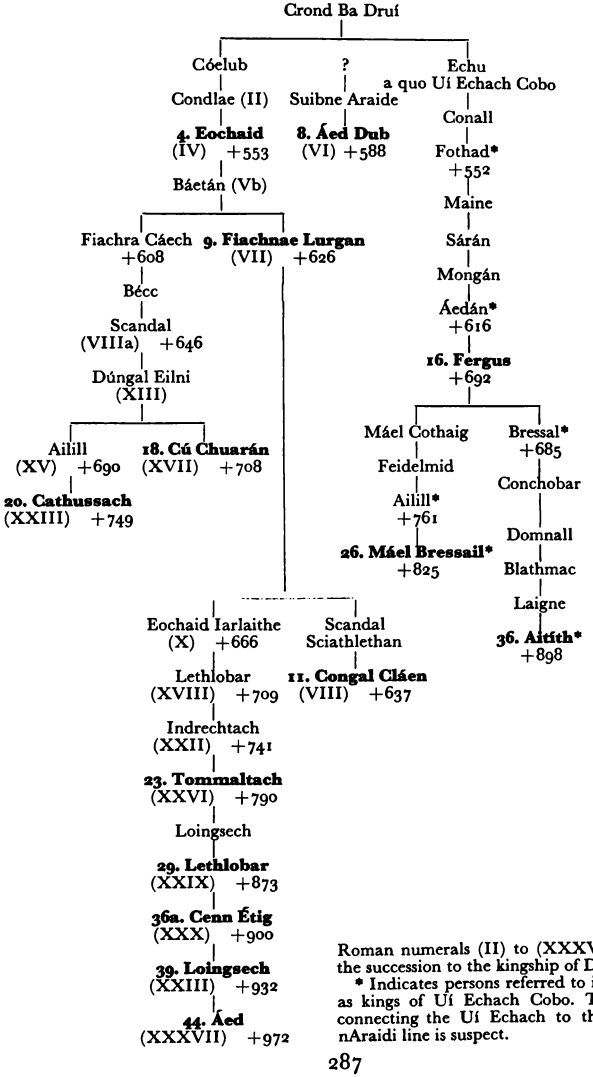
ULSTER

6. Kings of Ulaid (Dál Fiatach)—(*continued*)



ULSTER

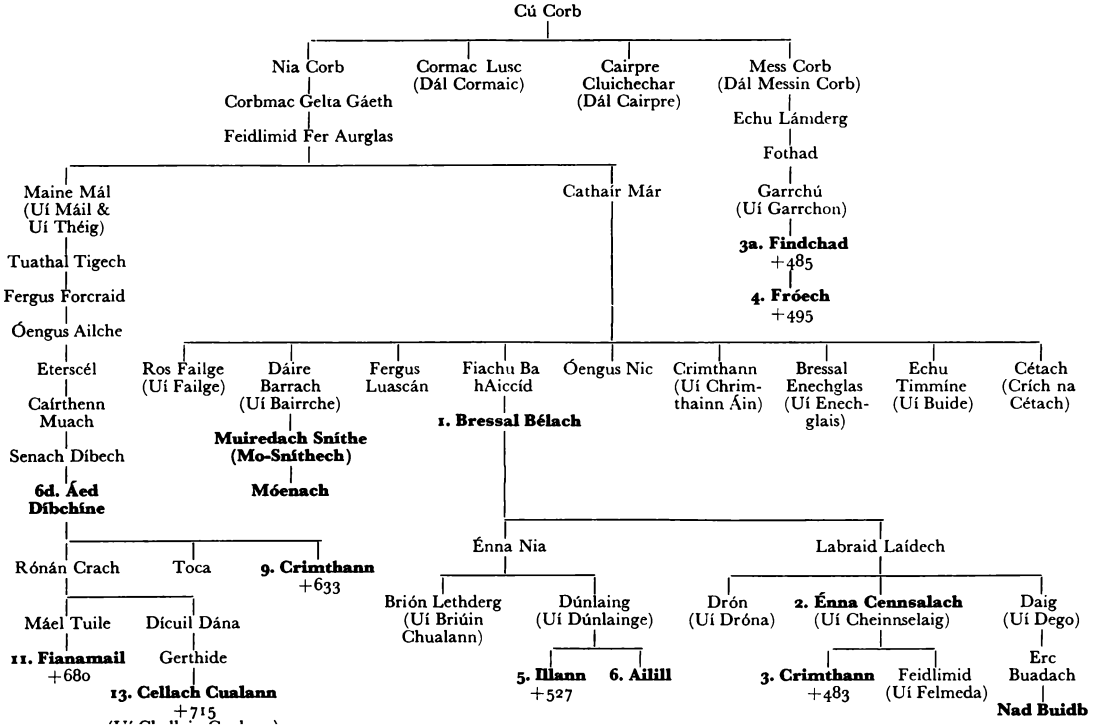
7: Kings of Ulaid (Cruthin)



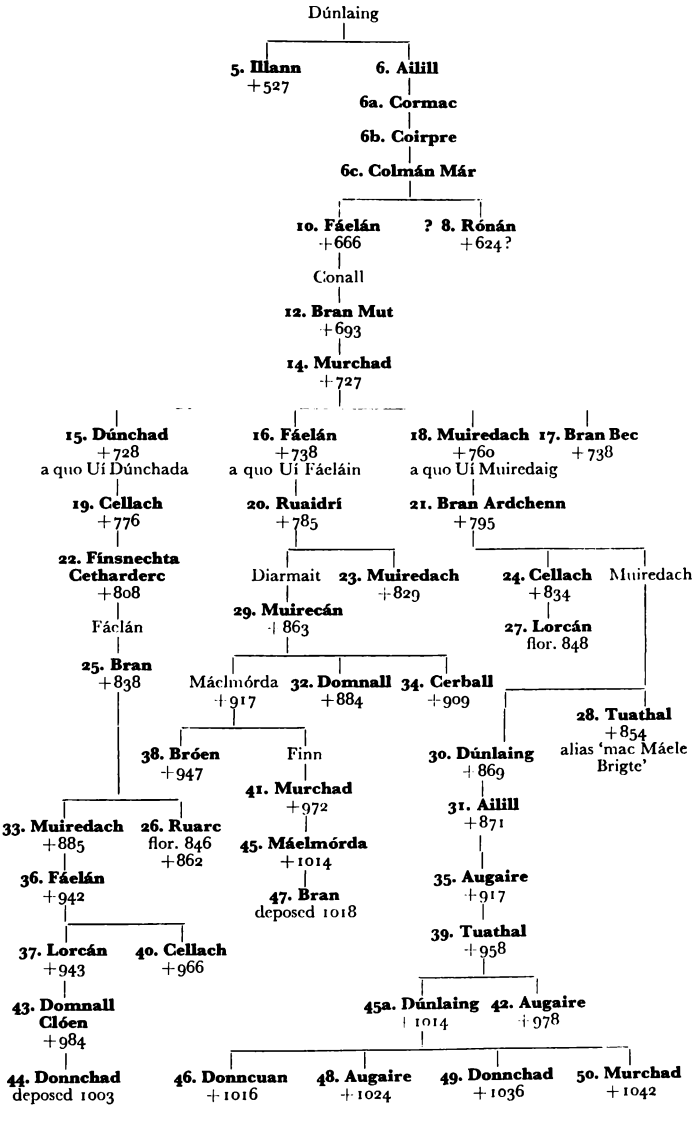
Roman numerals (II) to (XXXVII) indicate the succession to the kingship of Dál nAraidi.

* Indicates persons referred to in the annals as kings of Uí Echach Cobo. The pedigree connecting the Uí Echach to the main Dál nAraidi line is suspect.

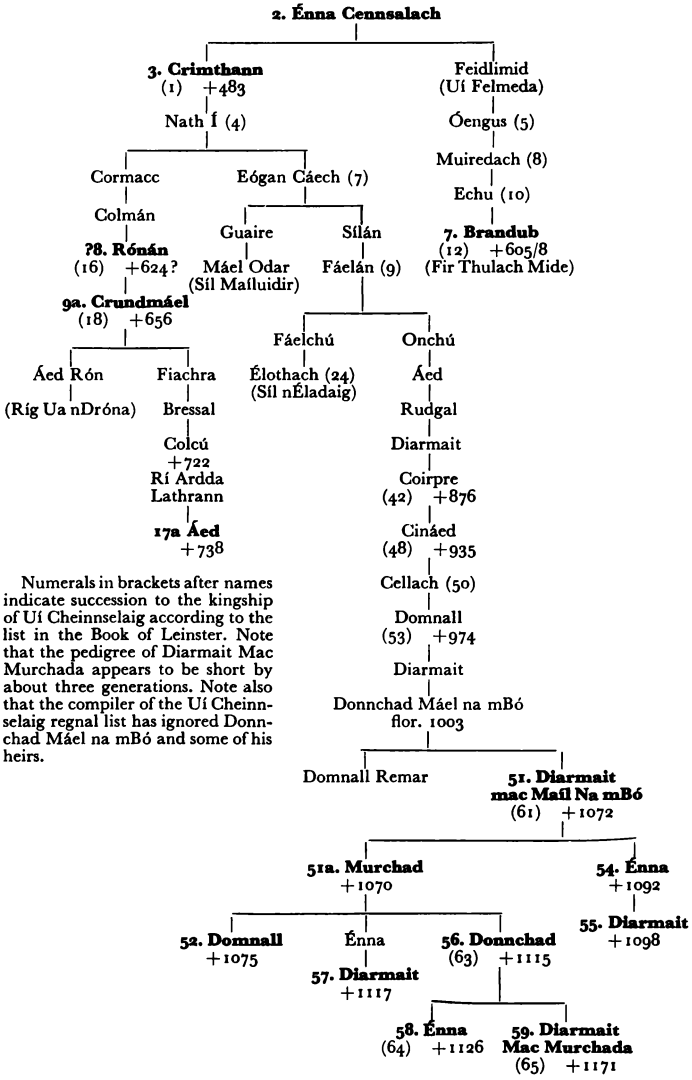
8: Early Leinster Kings and Dynasties



LEINSTER 9: Uí Dúnlainge Kings of Laigin

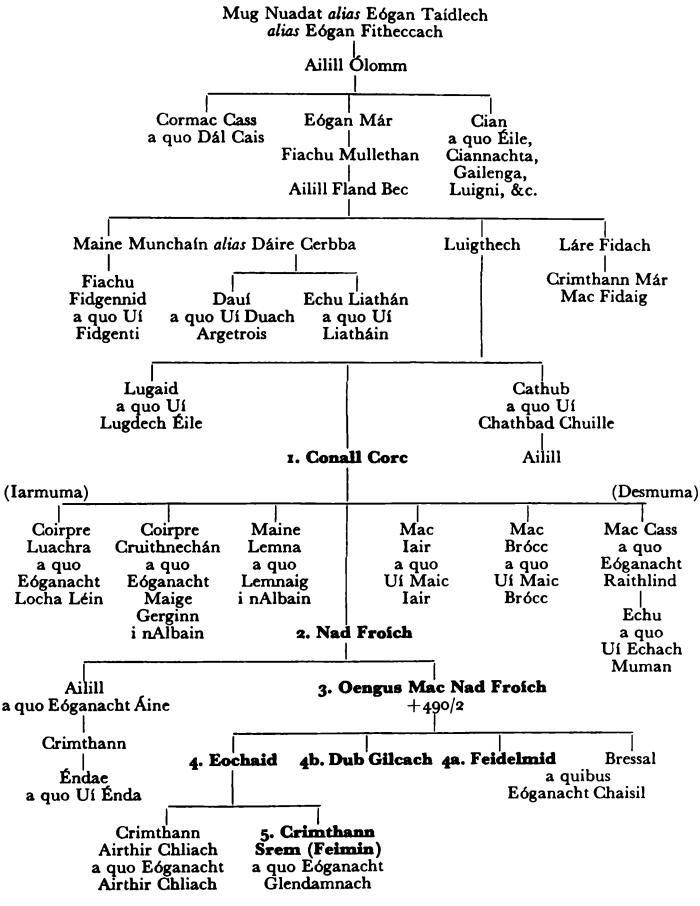


10: Uí Cheinnselaig Kings of Laigin

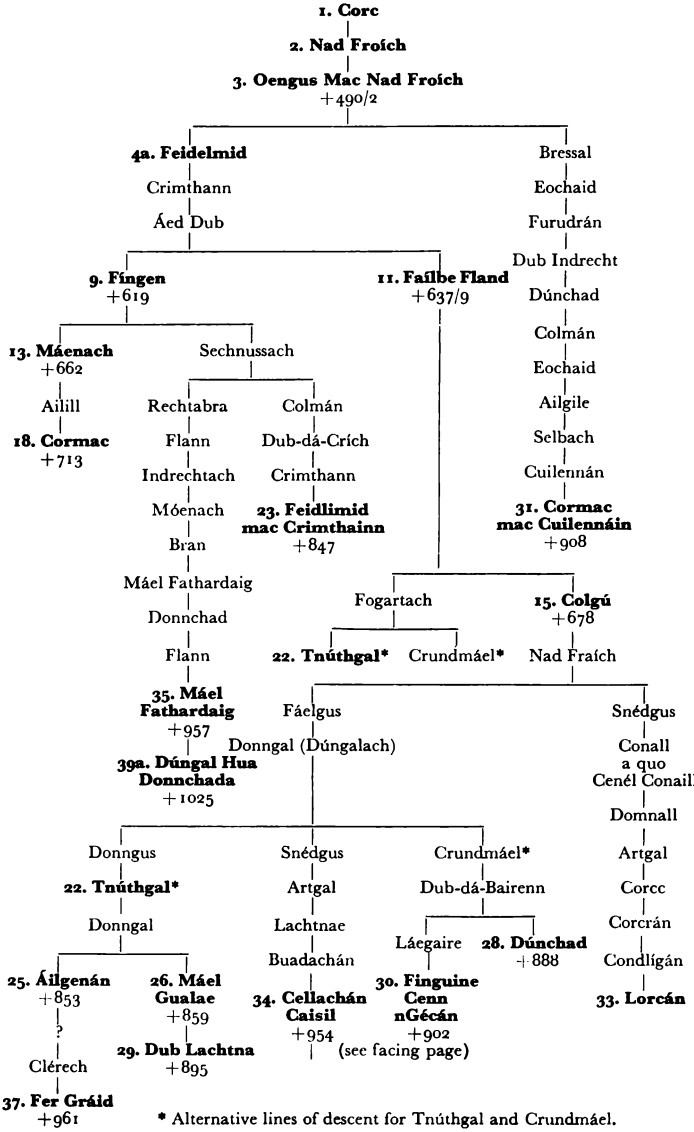


Numerals in brackets after names indicate succession to the kingship of Uí Cheinnselaig according to the list in the Book of Leinster. Note that the pedigree of Diarmait Mac Murchada appears to be short by about three generations. Note also that the compiler of the Uí Cheinnselaig regnal list has ignored Donnchad Máel na mBó and some of his heirs.

11: The Eóganacht Dynasties of Munster



12: Kings of Munster-Eóganacht Chaisil



* Alternative lines of descent for Tnúthgal and Crundmáel.

12: Kings of Munster-Eóganacht Chaisil (*continued*)

from page 292

38. Donnchad
+963
Sáerbrethach
Carrthach
Muiredach

46c. Tadg Mac Carrthaig
+1124
Rí Desmuman

46d. Cormac Mac Carrthaig
+1138
Rí Desmuman

13: Kings of Munster - Eóganacht Áine, Eóganacht Airthir Chliach and Eóganacht Glendamnach

1. Corc
2. Nad Froích

(Eóganacht Áine)
Ailill
Crimthann
Éndae
a quo Uí Énda
8b. Amalgaid **8c. Garbán**
12. Cúán
+641
Máel Umai
Uisnech
Cathussach
Dub Indrecht
?20b. Ólchobar
+815
rígdamna Muman
17. Eterscél
+721
20. Cathussach

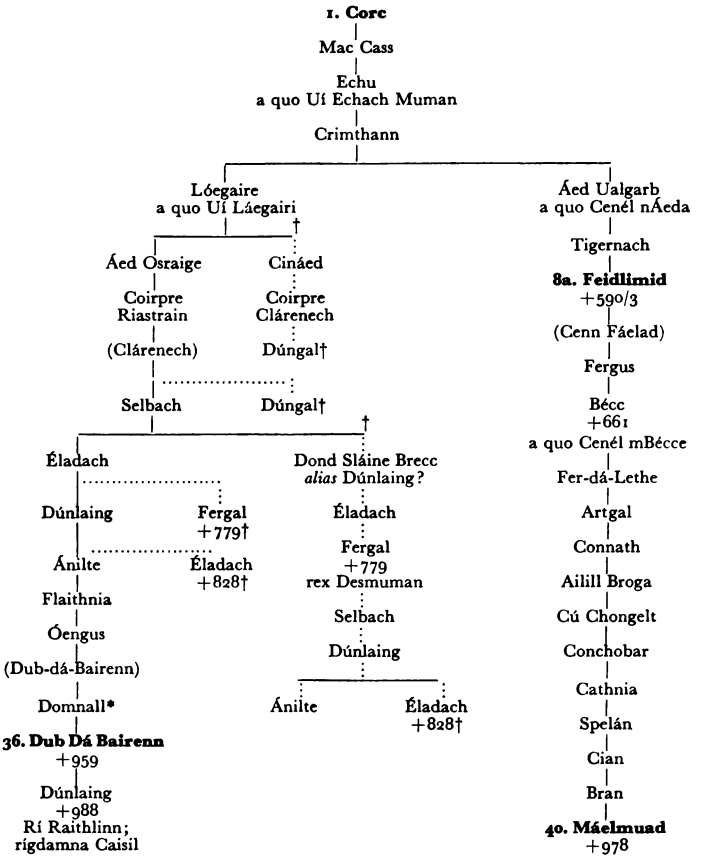
3. Óengus mac Nad Froích
+490/2

4. Eochaid
Crimthann
Airthir
Chliach
a quo Eóganacht
Airthir Chliach
Cormac
Sriabderg
Crundmáel
Cellach
Mugthigern*
Murchad
27. Cenn Fáelad hua Mugthigirn
+872
Abb Imlecha
Ibair
Eógan
+890
Abb Imlecha
Ibair
7. Fergus Scandal
+583
Rechtabra
+819
Abb Imlecha
Ibair

Feidlimid
(Eóganacht Chaisil)
Bressal
(Eóganacht Glendamnach)
5. Crimthann (Srem Feimin)
6. Coirpre Cromm
+579/80
Áed Fland
Cathrach
10. Cathal
+628
14. Cathal Cú cen máthair
16. Finguine
+695/6
19. Cathal Mac Finguine
+742
21. Artrí
+821
21a. Tuathal
16a. Ailill
+698/701
8. Feidlimid

* Pedigree evidently faulty here.

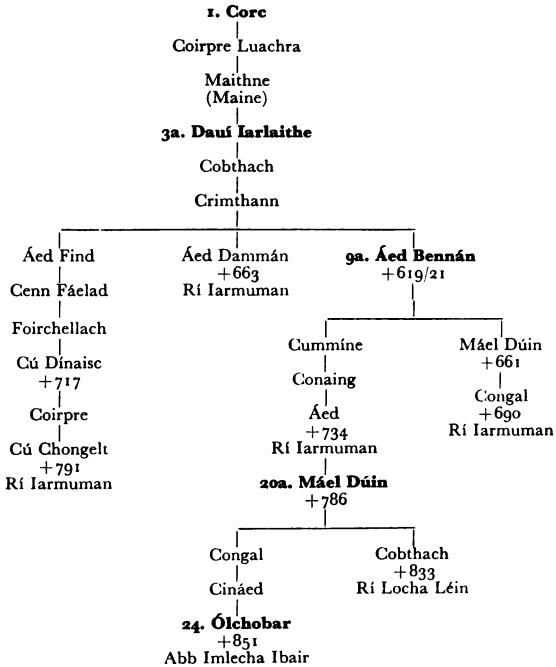
14: Kings of Munster - Eóganacht Raithlind



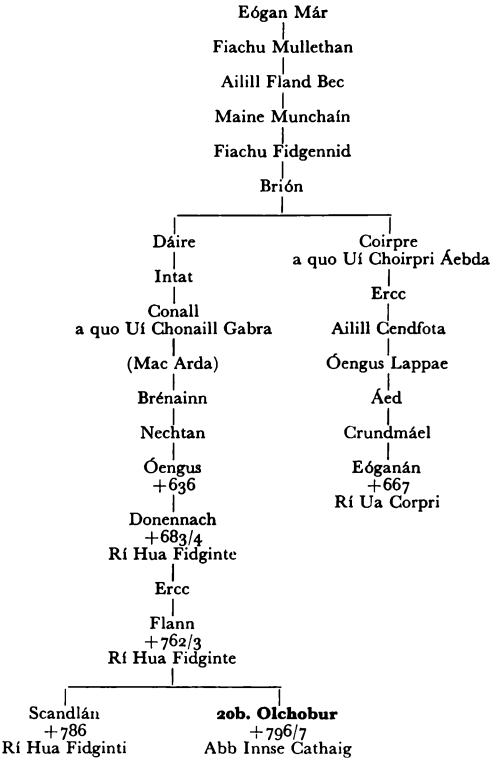
* Cf. the obit of Domnall mac Óengussa, rí Ua nEchach, 958; but this might refer to a king of the Ulster Uí Echach, a brother of the Áed (mac Óengussa) ua hAitíd who was slain in 967.

† I have little confidence in this attempt to restore a hopelessly confused pedigree, but have indicated several possible alternatives by dotted lines of descent.

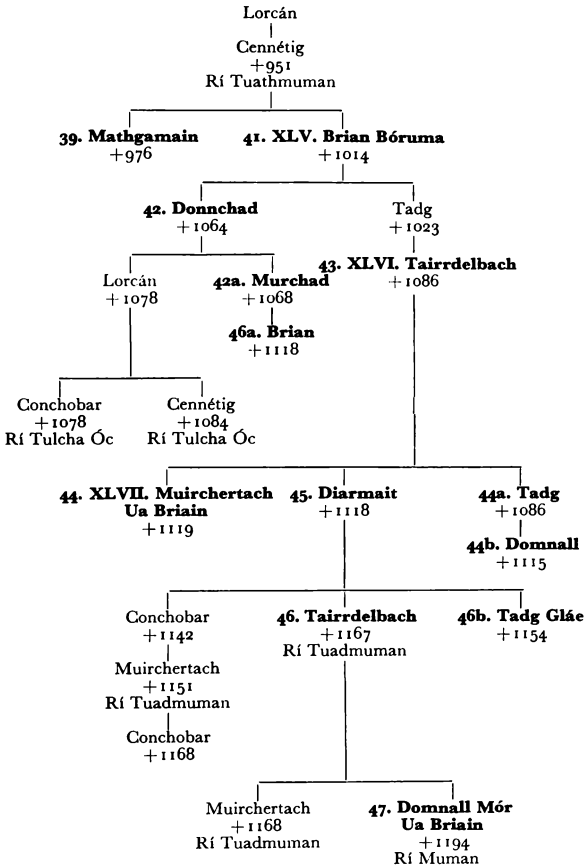
15: Kings of Munster - Eóganacht Locha Léin



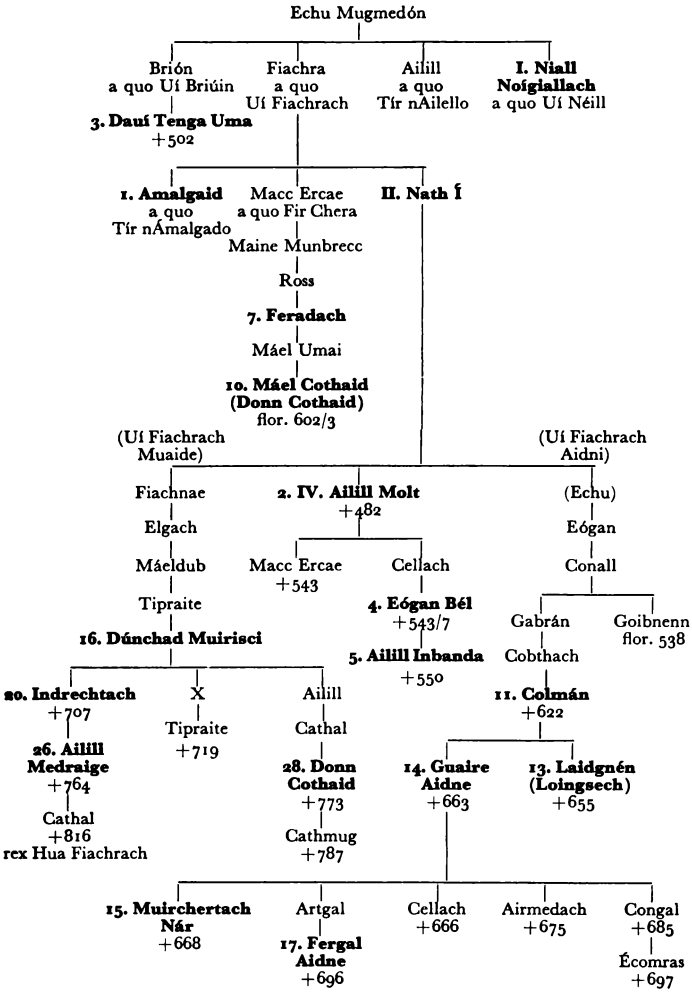
16: Kings of Munster - Uí Fidgeinti



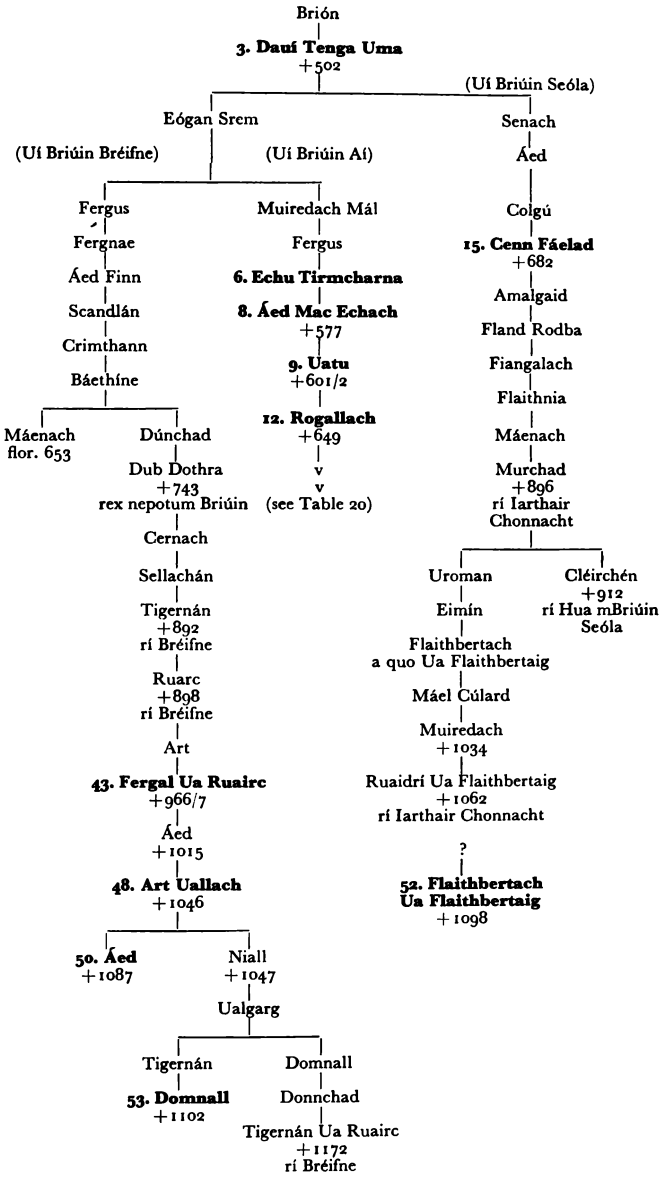
17: Dál Cais Kings of Munster and Thomond



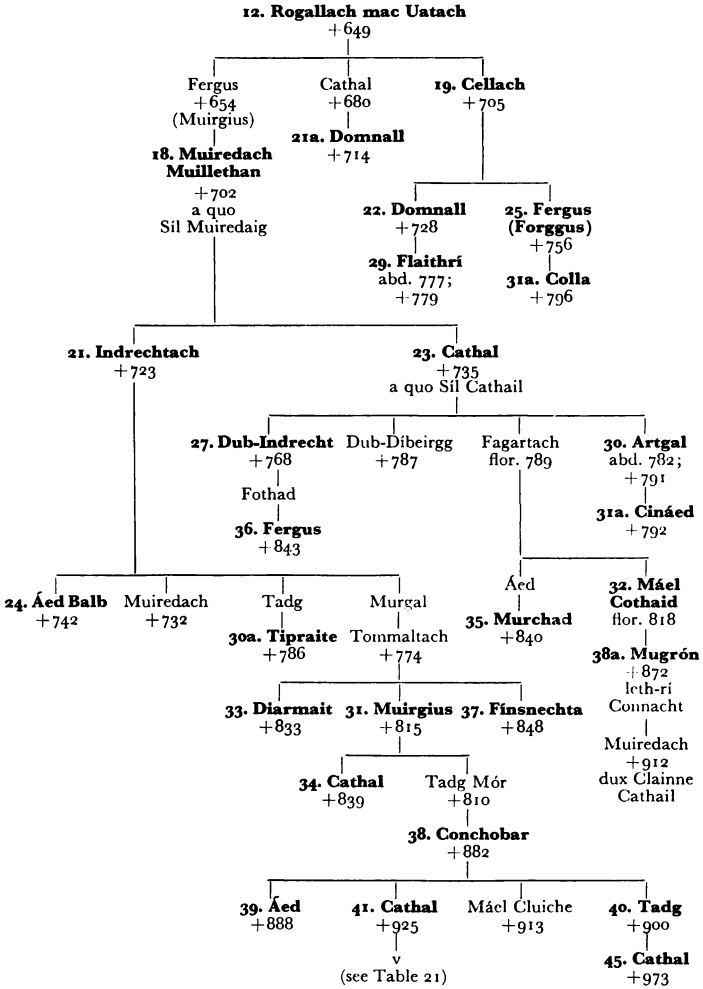
18: Early Kings of Connacht (Uí Fiachrach)



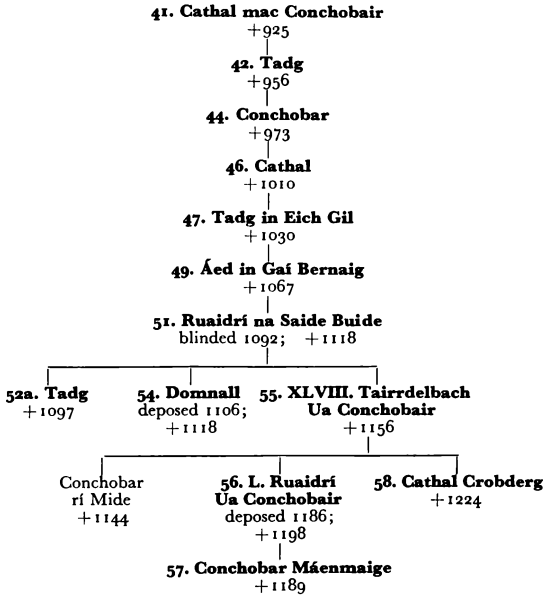
19: Uí Briúin Kings of Connacht



20: Kings of Connacht (Uí Briúin Aí)



21: Ua Conchobair Kings of Connacht



Appendix III

The Pronunciation of Old Irish Names

Old Irish is the language of the period from *c.* A.D. 700 to *c.* 900; earlier documents are said to be in archaic Old Irish. Middle Irish covers the period from *c.* 900 to 1200. Classical Modern Irish was the literary language common to Ireland and Gaelic Scotland until the middle of the seventeenth century, after which the various Modern Irish and Scottish Gaelic dialects first appear in writing.

Irish phonetics are not simple, and Old and Middle Irish are bedevilled by a peculiar orthography based on the British pronunciation of Latin in the fifth century.* Thus *-c-*, *-p-* and *-t-* (between and after vowels) were generally pronounced [g], [b], [d]. For example, the name *Patricius* was borrowed into Irish as *Pátraic*, but pronounced [pādrig]—cf. Modern Irish *Pádraig*. Similarly, *-b-*, *-d-* and *-g-* were spirants [β], [δ], [γ], as was *-m-* (a nasalised [v] or [w]).

As in Russian, each consonant has two distinct phonemes, palatal and non-palatal. Roughly speaking, palatal consonants have a *y* colouring: in the transcription offered here they are indicated in *italics*, except for palatal spirant *-g-*, which is transcribed merely as [y]. Palatal *s* is similar to English *sh* without lip-rounding and has been transcribed as [*sh*]. The distinction between [ch] and palatal [*ch*] is similar to that in German between the *ch* sounds in *ach* and *ich*.

An important phenomenon which is only partially recognised in Old Irish orthography is the mutation of initial consonants in certain grammatical constructions by either lenition (spirantisation) or eclipsis (either voicing or nasalisation). Lenition of *c*, *t* and *p* is indicated by the digraphs *ch*, *th* and *ph*. Lenition of *s* and *f* (which thereby become [h] and zero respectively) is only sporadically shown by a suprascript dot, and has here normally been omitted in the case of proper names.

* For a detailed study see Kenneth H. Jackson, *Language and history in early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), pp. 68–72 and 122–48.

Lenition of the other consonants has no regular orthographic representation, though Modern Irish indicates it throughout by writing *sh, fh, bh, dh, gh, mh*. However Modern Irish spelling takes no account of the distinction between lenited and unlenited *l, n, r* in initial position: the unlenited forms are tenser and stronger, as are *ll, nn* and *rr*, but no attempt is made in the present transcription to indicate these or other more subtle aspects of pronunciation. Modern Irish shows eclipsis by prefixing to a consonant the consonant which is to be pronounced in its stead: *mb-* [m], *gc-* [g], *nd-* [n], *bhf-* [v], *bp-* [b], *dt-* [d] (but *ng-* is not [n] but [ng] as in *sing*). Old Irish spelling merely indicates *mb-*, *nd-*, *ng-* and the prefixing of *n-* to initial vowels.

The following common elements in place and population names (being neuter nouns) cause eclipsis of the following initial: *Cenél* 'race', *Dál* 'division; assembly; territory', *Loch* 'lake; fjord; estuary', *Mag* 'plain', *Síl* 'seed; descendants', *Tír* 'land'; while the following (being either feminine singular or masculine plural) cause lenition: *Clann* 'children; descendants', *Corco* 'seed', *Uí* 'grandsons; descendants'.

These and other words such as *mac* 'son' and *ua* (archaic *aue*) 'grandson' are of course followed by the genitive, and differences between older and later inflections account for some inconsistencies in the text: thus *Áed* (archaic *Aid*) had the genitive *Áedo* (*Aido*), later *Áeda* (Modern Irish *Aodh*, genitive *Aodha*). It has not been possible to achieve complete uniformity in the spelling of proper names, but a norm has been aimed at for those referring to the Old Irish period and a classical norm adopted for Modern Irish names after *c.* 1200. Those readers familiar with Irish or Scottish Gaelic may well prefer to pronounce in the modern fashion, and occasionally I have indicated this in the transcription where it is simpler or where a name is still in common use.

In the transcription long vowels are marked with the macron [ā] [ē] etc., and palatal consonants are *italicised*. The following symbols used need explanation:

[ch] as in Scots *loch;* palatal [*ch*] as in German *ich*.
[dh] as English *th* in *there*.
[gh] as Spanish *g* in *rogó*; it is a guttural spirant, the voiced equivalent of [ch], representing nonpalatal lenited *g*.
[th] as English *th* in *think*.
[y] when representing palatal lenited *g* is a strongly consonantal English *y*.*

* The two pronunciations of lenited *g* have their equivalents in the Modern Greek pronunciation of *γ* before palatal and non-palatal vowels.

In Modern Irish *dh* has fallen together with *gh* and *th* is simply [h]. Often *dh* and *gh* (and occasionally *bh* and *mh*) are silent or have become vocalised so as to form a diphthong with the preceding vowel. Furthermore an intrusive vowel often appears between old consonant clusters. Thus the names *Donnchad* and *Murchad* [donchadh] [murchadh] are now [donacha] [muracha], and the surnames derived from them, *Ó Donnchadha* and *Ó Murchadha* are pronounced [ō donachū] [ō murachú] (anglicised as O'Donoghue and Murphy, the latter preserving a variant of the spirant pronunciation of *-d-*).*

In early Irish all words had a strong stress accent on the first syllable. Vowels are not lengthened by stress, thus *Cú Chulainn* has a long [ū] in the first (pretonic) element, but a short stressed [u] in the second [kū chulin]. Long vowels are marked with the acute accent: *á, é, í, ó, ú*. In the southern dialects of Modern Irish a long vowel in a later syllable may attract the stress.

An approximately correct pronunciation will be achieved by giving all vowels, short and long, their 'continental' values. Thus in the transcription the diphthongs [ai] and [au] represent English *ai* in *aisle* and *ou* in *house*. Short *e* followed by a non-palatal consonant has become *ea* in Modern Irish and is pronounced as English *a* in *hat:* so Old Irish *ben síde* is Modern Irish *bean sídhe* 'banshee'.

The Old Irish diphthongs *áe, aí* were pronounced as [ai] and *óe, oí* as [oi]; but they fell together in Middle Irish, and in Modern Irish are written *ao* (*aoi* before palatal consonants), and variously pronounced in the dialects: [ē] may be taken as a norm, with [ī] before palatals. The diphthong *au* early became simply *ú*. The main stress in the diphthongs *ia* and *ua* falls on the first element, but in the case of *uí* on the *í*. *Éo* was originally stressed on the first element, but the spelling *eó* is here adopted (pronounced as [ō] with palatalisation of a preceding consonant.)

These diphthongs are to be distinguished from the digraphs *ái, éi, ói, úi*, which merely represent the long vowel followed by a palatal consonant (with an evanescent glide-vowel). So too *ai, ei, oi* and *ui* are short vowels coloured by a following palatal.† In Old Irish final *-ae* and *-ai* indicate that the short palatal vowel is preceded by a nonpalatal

* By modern scholarly convention patronymics are distinguished from surnames by the capitalisation of *mac* and *ua* (later Ó) in the latter. Thus Tairrdelbach Ua Briain was in fact the grandson of Brian Bóruma, but his son Muirchertach Ua Briain was the first to bear the surname O'Brien.

† It is nevertheless possible that *ai* at least was a short diphthong. In the transcription the slight distinction in pronunciation between short *a* and *ai* (similar to that between German *Mann* and English *man*) has not been indicated.

consonant: by the Middle Irish period these inflections had died out, so that nominative *Fiachnae*, genitive *Fiachnai* fell together as *Fiachna*.

The sound [h] existed in Old Irish in certain grammatical contexts when it might be prefixed to an initial vowel (thus *ua hÁedo* 'grandson of Áed'—cf. Modern Irish *Ó hAodha*, Hayes), but in writing it was more often than not a mere orthographical ornament: so *ua*, *Uí* are often written with a meaningless initial *h-*.

Transcription of selected Irish names and words

Adomnán [a-dhov-nān]
Áed [aidh; ēdh; ē]
Airgialla [a*r*-yīala]
aitire [a-*di*-*re*]

Báetán [bai-dān; bē-dān]
bóruma [bō-ru-wa; bō-rū]
Brigit [*bri*-yi*d*; *brīd*]

Cathal [ka-thal; ka-hal]
Cenél Conaill [*ke*-*nēl* go-ni*l*]
Cenél nEógain [*ke*-*nēl nō*-ghi*n*]
Cerball [*k*er-val; *k*a-rūl]
Ciarán mac int saír [*kīa*-rān mak in tī*r*]
Ciarraige [*kīa*-ra-ye; *kīa*-rī]
Cóemgen [koi*v*-ye*n*; kī-*vīn*]
cóiced, *cúigeadh* [kō-*g*edh; kūi-*ge*]
Coirpre, Cairpre [ko*r*-*bre*; ka*r*-i-*bre*]
comarba [kō-war-ba]
Conchobar [kon-cho-var; kon-a-chūr; kro-chūr]
Corcu Baiscind [kor-ku va*sh*-*kin*]
Corcu Duibne [kor-ku dhu*v*-*ne*; kor-ka ghī-*ni*]

Dál Cais [dāl ga*sh*]
Dál Fiatach [dāl *vī*a-tach]
Dál Riata [dāl rīa-da]
derbfhine [*der*-*vi*-*ne*]
Diarmait [*dīar*-mi*d*]
dindshenchas [*din*-*h*en-chas; *din*-*h*yan-a-chas]
Domnall [dov-nal; dō-nal]

Eochaid [ech-i*dh*; o-chī]
Emain [e-vi*n*; au-i*n*]
Eóganacht [ō-gha-nacht; ō-nacht]
Étaín [ē-dī*n*]

Feidlimid mac Crimthainn [*fedh-li-midh* mak *kr*iv-thi*n*; *fē-li-mī* mak *kr*i-fi*n*]
frithfholaid [*fr*ith-ol-i*dh*]

geilfhine [*gel*-i-*ne*]

Iarmumu [īar-wu-wu]

Labraid Loingsech [lav-ri*dh* lo*ng-sh*ech; lau-rī]
Laidcenn [la*dh-g*en]
Laigin [la-yi*n*; lai*n*]
Lebor Gabála [*l*e-vor ga-vā-la; *l*aur ga-wā-la]
Lóeguire, Láegaire [loi-ghu-*re*; lē-ghi-*re*; lī-*re*]
Lugaid [lu-ghi*dh*; lū-ī]

Máedóc [mai-dhōg; mē-ōg]
Máel Sechnaill [mail *sh*ech-ni*l*; mēl *h*yach-ni*l*]
Mathgamain mac Cennétig [math-gha-wi*n* mak *ke-nē-d*iy; ma-hū*n*]
Medb [*m*edhv; *mēv*]
Muirchertach [mu*r-ch*er-tach; mwi*r-h*yar-tach]

nemed [*nev*edh]
Niall Noígiallach [*n*īal noi-yīal-ach]

Óengus [oin-ghus; ēn-īas]
ollam [ol-av]
Osraige [os-ra-ye; os-a-rī]

rí tuaithe [rī tūe-*th*e]
rígdamnae [rīgh-dhav-ne; rī-ghau-na]
Ruaidrí [rūe*dh-r*ī; rū-*r*ī]

Samain [sa-vi*n*; sau-i*n*]
senchaid [*sh*en-chi*dh*; *sh*an-a-chī]
Sétnae [*shēd*-ne; *shē*a-na]
Síl nÁedo Sláine [*shī*l nai-dho slā-*ne*]
Suibne [su*v-ne*; swī-*ni*]

Tadc mac Céin [tadhg mak *kēn*; taig]
Tairrdelbach [ta*r-dh*el-vach; te*r*-yal-ach; trē-lach]

Temair [*t*e-vi*r*; *t*au-i*r*]
Tethbae [*t*eth-ve; *t*e-fa]
toísech, taoiseach [toi-*sh*ech; tī-*sh*ach]
Tuadmumu [tūadh-wu-wu; tūa-wūa]

Ua Cellaig [ūa *k*el-iy; ō *k*al-ī]
Ua Flaithbertaig [ūa fla*th*-*v*er-tiy; ō fla-har-ta]
Ua Máelsheçhlainn [ūa mēl *h*yach-li*n*]
Uí Briúin [ī *vr*iū*n*]
Uí Failge [ī a*l*-ye; ī fa*l*-ye]*
Uí Máil [ī wā*l*]
Uí Maine [ī wa-*n*e]
Uí Néill [ī *nēl*]
Ulaid [ul-i*dh*; ul-ī]

* It is possible that in such a combination the initial *F* may have resisted lenition.

Bibliographical Note

There is no adequate textbook on early Irish history. The present work is partly a synthesis of various specialist studies and partly based on material either as yet unpublished or relatively inaccessible.*

Early Irish history was established as a scientific discipline by Eoin MacNeill (see *Eoin MacNeill, scholar revolutionary, 1867–1945*, edited by F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne [Shannon, 1972]), and his three books, *Phases of Irish history* (Dublin, 1919), *Celtic Ireland* (Dublin, 1921) and *Early Irish laws and institutions* (London, n.d. [1935]), though inevitably out-dated in many respects, form the best introduction to the subject. They consist, however, of essays rather than of a consecutive narrative. The only full-scale attempt at the latter is Alice Stopford Green's *History of the Irish state to 1014* (London, 1925), which is marred by the anachronistic nationalism betrayed by its title, but which has some useful information, often misinterpreted. T. F. O'Rahilly's *Early Irish history and mythology* (Dublin, 1946) is a work of formidable scholarship, indispensable to the serious student, but not a book for the uninitiated and one which deals only marginally with the documentary period. A very stimulating work on Irish mythology is *Celtic heritage* by Alwyn and Brinley Rees (London, 1961): its methods are not those of the textual critic nor of the historian, but it provides many original insights into the early Irish conceptual world, and also contains copious references to the source material and secondary literature. A shorter work, elaborately illustrated, is Proinsias Mac Cana's *Celtic mythology* (London, 1970).

Early Irish literature is very rich and far more abundant than the strictly historical documentation. One of the aims of the present book has been to show how such material can be of value to the historian. Good anthologies are Cross and Slover, *Ancient Irish tales* (London, 1937) and Kenneth Jackson, *A Celtic miscellany* (London, 1951). A very useful survey of prose and poetry is Myles Dillon's *Early Irish literature* (Chicago, 1948). A volume with the same title was edited by James Carney (London, 1966), consisting of a re-print of two booklets by Gerard Murphy, *Saga and myth in ancient Ireland* and *The Ossianic lore and romantic*

* Since this was written the gap has been largely filled by the appearance of Gearóid Mac Niocaill's *Ireland before the Vikings* and of Donnchadh Ó Corráin's *Ireland before the Normans*, the first two volumes of the *Gill History of Ireland* (Dublin, 1972).

tales of medieval Ireland and of Eleanor Knott's *Irish classical poetry* (originally published Dublin, 1955, 1955 and 1957 respectively), with an introduction by the editor.

Early Irish poetry has been well served by editors and translators since the appearance of Kuno Meyer's classical *Selections from ancient Irish poetry* (London, 1913). Here it is sufficient to cite Gerard Murphy, *Early Irish lyrics* (Oxford, 1956), James Carney, *Medieval Irish lyrics* (Dublin, 1967) and David Greene and Frank O'Connor, *A golden treasury of Irish poetry*, A.D. *600 to 1200* (London, 1967).

The standard scholarly work on the Ulster saga cycle, comprising the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* and related tales is Rudolf Thurneysen's *Die irische Helden- und Königsage* (Halle, 1921). The twelfth-century version of the *Táin* has recently been edited and translated by Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cuailgne from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin, 1967), and the earlier version has been translated by the poet Thomas Kinsella, *The Táin* (Dublin, 1969).

I have drawn heavily upon Myles Dillon's collection of the king sagas of the historical cycle, *The cycles of the kings* (London, 1946). Several other important king sagas will be found edited and translated in the two volumes of Standish H. O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica* (London, 1892).

More discursive treatment of specific topics occurs in James Carney's *Studies in Irish literature and history* (Dublin, 1955) and in a booklet edited by the same scholar, *Early Irish poetry* (Cork, 1965), as well as in *Irish sagas*, edited Myles Dillon (second edition, Cork, 1968) and in *Seven centuries of Irish learning*, edited Brian Ó Cuív (Dublin, 1961).

In the absence of an historical narrative the following works are valuable for certain aspects of early Ireland: *Early Irish society*, edited Myles Dillon (Dublin, 1954); Máire and Liam de Paor, *Early Christian Ireland* (London, 1958); Ludwig Bieler, *Ireland, harbinger of the middle ages* (London, 1963); Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick, *The Celtic realms* (London, 1967); the early chapters of *The course of Irish history*, edited T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin (Cork, 1967), and the introductory chapter by Kathleen Hughes to A. J. Otway-Ruthven, *A history of medieval Ireland* (London, 1968). E. R. Norman and J. K. St Joseph, *The early development of Irish society* (Cambridge, 1969), publish new evidence revealed by aerial photography.

Ecclesiastical history is in a better position. J. F. Kenney's monumental *The sources for the early history of Ireland*, of which only the first, ecclesiastical, volume appeared (New York, 1929), is excellent and contains very full bibliographical information as well as valuable

essays on the hagiography and other texts in Latin and Irish. The standard work on the monastic church is John Ryan, *Irish monasticism* (Dublin, 1931). Kathleen Hughes, *The church in early Irish society* (London, 1966) is a very readable and learned history of the Irish church which takes particular account of the political and social background, especially from the seventh century to the tenth.*

Most of the hagiographical sources used in this book will be found in Charles Plummer, *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford, 1910) and *Bethada náem nÉrenn* (Oxford, 1922), and in W. W. Heist, *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae ex codice olim Salmaticensi* (Bruxelles, 1965), as well as in the *Félire Óengusso*, for which see Whitley Stokes, *On the calendar of Óengus* (Dublin, 1880). Important early texts are Adomnán, Muirchú and Tírechán. See *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, edited and translated A. O. and M. O. Anderson (Edinburgh, 1961) and *The tripartite Life of Patrick*, edited Whitley Stokes, two volumes (London, 1887), which contains the Latin texts of Muirchú and Tírechán and an edition and translation of the late ninth-century Irish *Life* of Patrick known as the *Vita Tripartita*; a modern edition of the text of the latter is Kathleen Mulchrone's *Bethu Phátraic* (Dublin, 1939). These Patrician texts have been studied by Eoin MacNeill in various articles, the most important of which have been re-printed in the second edition of his book *St Patrick*, edited John Ryan (Dublin, 1964).

Apart from the literature the secular documentation consists mainly of annals, genealogies and laws. For our purposes the first two volumes of the *Annals of Ulster*, edited Hennessy (Dublin, 1887) and MacCarthy (Dublin, 1893); the *Annals of Inisfallen*, edited Mac Airt (Dublin, 1951); the *Annals of Tigernach*, edited Stokes, *Revue celtique*, XVI-XVIII (1895–7); the *Chronicum Scotorum*, edited Hennessy (London, 1886); the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, edited Murphy (Dublin, 1896), and the *Annals of the Four Masters*, edited O'Donovan (Dublin, 1851) are the most important. The *Annals of Inisfallen* exist in a late eleventh-century manuscript and are the only collection to be available in a good modern edition, but the early portion of the late fifteenth-century *Annals of Ulster*, when stripped of secondary accretions, is the most reliable historical source.† The *Three fragments of annals*, edited O'Donovan (Dublin, 1860), and the *Mionannála*, edited by O'Grady in *Silva Gadelica*, partake of a distinctly literary character.

* See now Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: introduction to the sources* (London, 1972).

† See now A. P. Smyth, 'The earliest Irish annals: their first contemporary entries, and the earliest centres of recording', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, lxxii (1972).

The bulk of the genealogies and origin legends are still in manuscript or untranslated. The earliest compilation, contained in two twelfth-century manuscripts, Rawlinson B 502 (Bodleian Library, Oxford) and the Book of Leinster (Trinity College, Dublin), have been edited without translation or commentary by M. A. O'Brien, *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae*, i (Dublin, 1962). Another early collection comprising some archaic material and interesting Munster texts is in the fifteenth-century Bodleian manuscript, Laud miscellany 610, and has been edited by Kuno Meyer in the *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, viii (1912); again there is no translation, but the same volume contains an article by MacNeill analysing the text. The seventeenth-century Ó Cléirigh collection has been edited by Séamus Pender in *Analecta Hibernica*, xviii (Dublin, 1951), and T. Ó Raithbheartaigh has edited and translated for the Irish Manuscripts Commission the introduction written by Mac Firbhisigh to his collection of 1650 in *Genealogical tracts I* (Dublin, 1932), which contains some other miscellaneous genealogical material from fifteenth-century manuscripts. For some discussion of the nature and value of the genealogies see my review of O'Brien's *Corpus* in *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, xxix (1964) and John V. Kelleher, 'The pre-Norman Irish genealogies,' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xvi (1968).

The most difficult and specialised of secular sources, of prime importance for the social history of the archaic period, are the law tracts, several of which were poorly edited and badly translated in the six volumes of the Rolls Series, *Ancient laws of Ireland* (Dublin, 1865–1901). Some texts have been edited in various journals since; for a full discussion and bibliography see D. A. Binchy, 'Ancient Irish law,' *The Irish jurist*, i (Dublin, 1966) and the same scholar's Rhys memorial lecture, 'The linguistic and historical value of the Irish law Tracts,' *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1943).

Chapters 1–3

The *chanson de geste* known as *The song of Dermot and the earl* was edited and translated by Goddard Orpen (Oxford, 1892). For the fabulous prehistory of Ireland see the great twelfth-century compilation *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, edited in five volumes for the Irish Texts Society by R. A. S. Macalister (London, 1938–56).

The nature of early Irish kingship has been recently dealt with by D. A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon kingship*, O'Donnell lecture, 1968 (Oxford, 1970). For the succession laws see James Hogan, 'The Irish

law of kingship,' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, xl (1932). The whole concept of a regular 'law' of royal succession confined within the *derbfhine* has recently been challenged by Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Irish regnal succession: a reappraisal,' *Studia Hibernica*, xi (1971), pp. 7–39, and Gearóid Mac Niocaill has argued that the term *rígdamnae* is in fact equivalent to *tánaise*, denoting the heir designate or at least presumptive ('The "heir-designate" in early medieval Ireland,' *The Irish Jurist*, iii (1968), pp. 326ff.)—a point which I think is still debatable. On the question of tribalism see Eoin MacNeill, 'Early Irish population groups,' ibid., xxix (1911), and F. J. Byrne, 'Tribes and tribalism in early Ireland,' *Ériu*, xxii (1971).

The law tracts *Críth Gablach* and *Uraiccecht Becc* were translated and commented upon by MacNeill in 'Ancient Irish law: the law of status or franchise,' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, xxxvi (1923), and *Críth Gablach* has been newly edited with notes and glossary, occasionally correcting MacNeill's translation, by D. A. Binchy (Dublin, 1941).

The role of the poets in early Irish society is treated of by Osborn Bergin, *Irish bardic poetry*, edited Greene and Kelly (Dublin, 1970); the unfriendly comment on their sycophancy may be found in T. F. O'Rahilly, *Measgra Dánta*, i (Dublin, 1927). For the inauguration of O'Connor see Myles Dillon in *Medieval studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn*, edited Watt, Morrall and Martin (Dublin, 1961), and for the gifts to the poet see Proinsias Mac Cana's article in *Celtica*, viii (1968). Spenser's account of inauguration and of the tanist is taken from his *A view of the present state of Ireland*, written in 1598. The information on the rites practised in Bréifne will be found in Plummer's edition of 'Betha Máedóc Ferna (II)' in *Bethada nàem nÉrenn*. Giraldus's story is taken from John J. O'Meara's translation of his *Topography of Ireland* (Dundalk, 1951), and the extract from *Táin Bó Fraích* from James Carney, *Studies in Irish literature and history*. Carney has also edited and translated *The poems of Blathmac mac Con Brettan* for the Irish Texts Society (Dublin, 1964).

The *Audacht Moraind* was edited with German translation by Thurneysen in *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, xi (1917), but he did not translate the so-called B-text, which has been shown to be even more archaic and totally pagan. Part of the English translation here quoted is taken from Myles Dillon, 'The archaism of Irish tradition,' Rhys memorial lecture, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xxxiii (1947). The *Tecosca Cormaic* have been edited and translated by Kuno Meyer in the Todd lecture series of the Royal Irish Academy (volume xv), *The instructions of King Cormac mac Airt* (Dublin, 1909).

For the *Book of rights* see the new edition by Dillon for the Irish Texts Society, *Lebor na cert* (Dublin, 1962), and also his paper 'The taboos of the kings of Ireland,' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, liv (1951).

Chapter 4

On Knowth see George Eogan, 'Excavations at Knowth,' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, lxvi (1968).

For Tara see R. A. S. Macalister, *Tara, a pagan sanctuary of ancient Ireland* (London, 1931); Ó Riordáin, *Tara* (Dundalk, 1957); and the articles by Baudiš, *Ériu*, viii (1916); Ó Máille, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, xvii (1928); Thurneysen, ibid., xix (1932), xx (1936); O'Rahilly, *Ériu*, xiv (1943); Mac Cana, *Études celtiques*, vii (1955), viii (1959); Binchy, *Ériu*, xviii (1958).

De shil Chonairi Máir has been edited and translated by Gwynn in *Ériu*, vi (1912): for the saga traditions about Conaire see Thurneysen, *Heldensage*.

Gerard Murphy has edited and translated the *Baile Chuind* in *Ériu*, xvi (1952).

A good bibliography of the voluminous literature on St Patrick has been compiled by F. X. Martin for John Ryan's edition of MacNeill's *St Patrick* (Dublin, 1964). The most notable of recent works are T. F. O'Rahilly, *The two Patricks* (Dublin, 1942), James Carney, *The problem of St Patrick* (Dublin, 1961), D. A. Binchy's devastating but somewhat too negative article 'Patrick and his biographers: ancient and modern', *Studia Hibernica*, ii (1962), and R. P. C. Hanson, *Saint Patrick: his origins and career* (Oxford, 1968). In spite of Hanson's learning and lucidity, I still feel that the later dating for St Patrick, supported by O'Rahilly and modified by Carney, is most consonant with the Irish evidence and is difficult to explain away.

Chapters 5–6

The relevant legends are given in Myles Dillon, *The cycles of the kings* and O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*. See also Alwyn and Brinley Rees, *Celtic heritage*, F. J. Byrne, *The rise of the Uí Néill and the high-kingship of Ireland*, O'Donnell lecture, 1969 (Dublin, 1970), and Paul Walsh, 'Meath in the Book of rights,' in *Féilsgríbhinn Eoin Mhic Néill*, edited John Ryan (Dublin, 1940).

Chapter 7

The section on the Ulaid is based on my own unpublished M.A. thesis for the National University of Ireland, while for that on the Airgialla I have greatly benefited from reading another unpublished thesis, by an tAth. Tomás Ó Fiaich.

The genealogical tracts on the Ulaid have been edited and translated by Margaret E. Dobbs in *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, xiii (1921), xiv (1923). See also F. J. Byrne, 'Clann Ollaman uaisle Emna,' *Studia Hibernica*, iv (1964).

The early poem on the Airgialla has been edited and translated by Máirín O Daly in *Ériu*, xvi (1952).

For the general situation in the North between the fifth and seventh centuries see F. J. Byrne, 'The Ireland of St Columba,' in *Historical studies*, v, edited McCracken (London, 1965), and for the Northern Uí Néill in particular James Hogan, 'The Ua Briain kingship of Tulach Óc,' in *Féilsgríbhinn Eoin Mhic Néill*, and Séamus Ó Ceallaigh, *Gleanings from Ulster history* (Cork, 1951).

The diagram on the structure of the *fine* on p. 122 is based on Liam Ó Buachalla's reconstruction, *Journal of the Cork historical and archaeological society*, lii (1947), pp. 43-54.

Chapter 8

The early dynastic struggles and the geographical basis of the Leinster polity have recently been elucidated by Mr Alfred P. Smyth in an unpublished M.A. thesis for the National University of Ireland. See also Paul Walsh, 'Leinster states and kings,' in *The Irish ecclesiastical record*, xxiv (1924), liii (1939).

For the saga of Labraid Loingsech see Dillon, *The cycles of the kings* and O'Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*. The legends of the *bóruma* and of Brandub mac Echach will be found in Dillon and in *Silva Gadelica*. Gearóid Mac Eoin has recently thrown doubt on the historicity of the *bóruma* claim in an article in *Studia Hibernica*, viii (1968).

The archaic poems were edited and translated into German by Kuno Meyer, 'Ueber die älteste irische Dichtung,' in *Abhandlungen der königlichen preussischen Akademie*, (1913, 1914), and are discussed by Dillon, *Early Irish literature* and more recently by Carney, *Ériu* xxii (1971), pp. 63–73. For the translation of the *Timna Chathaír Máir* see Dillon's edition of the *Book of rights*.

The *Life* of Colmán mac Luacháin was edited and translated by

Kuno Meyer as volume xvii of the Royal Irish Academy's Todd lecture series in 1911. The emended translation is taken from Paul Walsh, *The place-names of Westmeath* (Dublin, 1957). The reference to the Kavanaghs in the seventeenth century is from the *Civil Survey*, cited in *Dinnseanchas*, iv, 2 (Dublin, 1970).

Chapters 9–10

I have been greatly helped in the writing of these chapters by discussion with my colleagues Professor Proinsias Mac Cana and Mr Donnchadh Ó Corráin. The theories expressed by Alwyn and Brinley Rees in *Celtic heritage* are of particular value in understanding the Munster situation.

The early history of the Munster dynasties has been treated by Liam Ó Buachalla in the *Journal of the Cork historical and archaeological society*, lvi (1951), lvii (1952) and lxi (1956), who has there discussed the significance of the *Frithfholaid* texts, which remain untranslated: one has been edited in *Irish texts*, i (1934), others are still in manuscript. The tracts on 'Mac Arddae's synod' and *De bunad imthechta Eóganachta* are both in the Laud collection of origin tales edited by Kuno Meyer in *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, viii.

The quotation from the 'Hag of Beare' poem is taken from Carney, *Medieval Irish lyrics*. That from the saga of Mór Muman is from O'Nolan's translation in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, xxx (1912), as quoted and paraphrased by Mac Cana in his article on 'Aspects of the theme of king and goddess in Irish literature,' *Études celtiques*, vii (1955).

The saga of the Expulsion of the Déisi has been edited by Kuno Meyer in *Y Cymmrodor*, xiv (1901) and in *Ériu*, iii (1907). Cormac's Glossary has been edited and translated by Stokes, *Three Irish glossaries* (London, 1862).

The story of Corc was edited from the Laud collection by Meyer in *Anecdota from Irish manuscripts*, iii (1910), and has been translated with notes by Vernam Hull in *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*, lxii (1947), with addenda and corrigenda in the *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, xxvii (1959). Hull also edited the later saga of the Exile of Conall Corc in *PMLA*, lvi (1941). The story of the Finding of Cashel has been edited and translated by Dillon in *Ériu*, xvi (1952).

For the Munster law tracts see D. A. Binchy, 'The date and provenance of *Uraicecht Becc*,' in *Ériu*, xviii (1958).

For the career of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn see Kathleen Hughes,

The church in early Irish society. The poem of 'Advice to a prince' has been edited and translated by Tadhg Ó Donnchadha in *Ériu*, ix (1923), who also edited the *Leabhar Muimhneach*, without translation, for the Irish Manuscripts Commission (Dublin, 1940). The poem on Archbishop John Cantwell has been edited and translated by Anne O'Sullivan in *Éigse*, x (1962).

Chapter 11

See Paul Walsh, 'Early kings of Connacht,' in the *Journal of the Galway archaeological and historical society*, xvii (1939), and 'Connacht in the Book of rights,' ibid., xix (1940), as well as O'Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*.

For the *Life* of St Cellach see *Silva Gadelica* and Dillon, *The cycles of the kings*. These works also contain most of the other relevant legendary material used in this chapter. For *Tromdámh Ghuaire* see Dillon, *Early Irish literature*. The stories about Guaire have been collected and rendered into Modern Irish by Cormac Ó Cadhlaigh, *Guaire an Oinigh* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1939).

Most of the poems discussed will be found in Murphy, *Early Irish lyrics*; see also Carney's articles in *Éigse*, xiii (1970).

The topographical and other evidence from Tírechán and the *Vita Tripartita* has been analysed by MacNeill, *St Patrick*.

Chapter 12

For the changes brought about by the impact of the Norse on Irish society see D. A. Binchy, 'The passing of the old order,' in *Proceedings of the International congress of Celtic studies 1959*, edited Ó Cuív (Dublin, 1962).

For the political history of the twelfth century see the introduction and first chapter of Edmund Curtis, *A history of medieval Ireland* (London, 1923); John Ryan, 'The O'Briens in Munster after Clontarf,' in the *North Munster antiquarian Journal*, ii (1941), iii (1942), and *Toirdelbach Ó Conchubair*, O'Donnell lecture (Dublin, 1966).

For church affairs see Aubrey Gwynn, *The twelfth-century reform*, volume ii, fascicule 1 of the *History of Irish catholicism*, edited P. Corish (Dublin, 1968), and the early chapters of D. Gleeson and A. Gwynn, *A history of the diocese of Killaloe*, volume i (Dublin, 1962).

Index

Achad Ablae, 249
Achad Liac (Athleague), 250
Achad Úr (Freshford), 171, 216
Achall (Hill of Skreen), 55, 262
Achonry, diocese, 233
Achtán, 66–7
Adam, 48, 101, 135, 179
Adomnán, 18, 90, 146, 258, 260; *De locis sanctis*, 111, 260; Law of (*Cáin Adomnáin*, *Lex innocentium*), 252; on high-kingship, 53, 97, 99, 159, 255, 257; *Vita Columbae*, 96–7, 99, 104, 108–10, 116, 257
'Advice to a prince', 211
Áed, king of Múscraige, 186
Áed Airdd, 117
Áed Allán mac Coirpri, 219
Áed Allán mac Fergaile, 114, 117–18, 147–8, 156, 208–10, 247, 261, 276, 284
Áed Bennán, 166, 179, 204, 207, 219, 278, 295
Áed Dub mac Colmáin, 152
Áed Dub mac Suibni (Aidus Niger, Black Áedh), 95–7, 99, 109, 111, 287
Áed Find mac Colmáin, 152
Áed Findliath mac Néill, 265–6, 276, 284
Áed Guaire, 95
Áed mac Ainmuirech, 106, 110–11, 115–16, 142, 145, 258, 275, 283
Áed mac Brénainn, 91–2, 95
Áed mac Colggen, 144, 147–8, 150, 157, 209, 290
Áed mac Crimthainn, 134
Áed mac Echach Tirmcharna, 95, 244–5, 299
Áed mac Eochocáin, 119, 127, 286
Áed Oirdnide mac Néill, 34, 148, 159–62, 253, 256, 262, 276, 284
Áed Róin mac Bécce Bairrche, 117, 119, 145, 285
Áed Rón mac Cathail, 153–4
Áed Sláine mac Diarmato, 87, 90, 96–8, 104, 115–16, 154, 168, 255, 275, 281
Áed Uaridnach (Áed Allán, Aíd Olláin), 104, 115–16, 275, 277, 283
Áed ua Néill, 127, 256
Áedán, law of, 252
Áedán, bishop of Glendalough, 145
Áedán mac Gabráin, 110–12, 159, 255, 259
Aedui, 39, 46
Áengus Nic (Óengus), 140, 288
áer 'satire', 15
áes dána 'men of art', 13–14
Aethelbert, king of Kent, 30
Aethelfrith, king of Northumbria, 111, 259
aetheling, 38
Aethelred, king of Wessex, 38
Agamemnon, 59, 70
agon regale, 90
Agricola, 40
Aíbell, 166
aided 'death-tale', 97, 103
Aided Muirchertaig Meic Erca, 100
Aided Nath Í ocus a adnacol, 77–8
Aidne, 242
Aífe daughter of Diarmait, 273
Ailbe, St, of Emly, 72, 177, 184, 206, 210, 216; Law of, 209
Aildobur, abbot of Roscommon, 252
Ailech, 47, 83, 94, 114, 117, 125, 141, 159, 220, 265, 283–4
Ailén, 55
Ailenn (Dún Ailinne, Knockawlin), 49, 71, 83, 130, 141, 150, 156–8
Áilgenán mac Donngaile, 188, 264, 278, 292
Ailill Céthech, 140, 142
Ailill Inbanda, 102–3, 244, 298

Ailill mac Áedo Róin, 153–4
Ailill mac Buain, 201
Ailill mac Cathail, 188, 278, 293
Ailill mac Cathbad, 178, 291
Ailill mac Donnchada, 160
Ailill mac Dúnlainge, 151, 288–9
Ailill mac Echach Mugmedóin, 74–6, 84, 280, 298
Ailill mac Máta, 18–19, 51, 133, 175, 231
Ailill mac Nad Froích, 190, 293
Ailill Medraige, 249, 298
Ailill Molt mac Nath Í, 75, 82, 85, 102, 231–2, 245, 275, 277, 280, 298
Ailill Ólum, 177, 182, 192, 202, 291
Aímend, 166, 193
Áine, 166, 182
Ainmere mac Sétnai, 95, 102, 244, 258, 275, 283
airchinnech 'erenagh' (*princeps*), 124, 160–2, 216, 224, 252
aire dése, 175
airecht, oireacht, 41–2
Airechtach, *sacerdos* of Armagh, 118
Airgetros, 141
Airgialla (Oriel, Clann Chonla), 47, 66, 90, 127–8, 210, 237, 262, 269; origins of, 72–4, 81, 280; relations with Armagh, 82–3, 117–18, 124–6; with Cenél nEógain, 73–4, 114–15, 117, 124–6, 220; with Connachta, 85, 231; with Uí Néill, 67, 73, 92, 108, 115–17, 217, 260; with Ulaid, 74, 107–8, 124–6
Airmedach mac Guairi, 243, 298
Airther Femin, 207
Airther Liphi, 150, 163
Airthir (*Orientales*), 115–18, 125
Aislinge Meic Conglinne, 210–11
aithech 'rent-payer, churl', 45–6
Aithechdae, 147
aithech-thuath 'unfree tribe', 45, 171, 180–81, 198, 231, 246, 249
Aithirne, 171
aitire 'hostage', 31
Ál, 116
Alba, 75–7, 83, 112, 183
Albion, 77
Alcuin, 259
Aldfrith (Flann Fína), king of Northumbria, 104, 111, 260
Aldhelm of Malmesbury, 260
Alexander the Great, 83, 132
Alexander III, pope, 273
Alfred the Great, 30, 38
Alkinoos, 15
Almain (Hill of Allen), 141; battle of, 144, 146–7, 208; Bog of Allen, 153
Alps, *Elpa, Sliab nElpa*, 77
Altraige, 170–71
Amairgein mac Amalgado, 176
Amalgaid mac Éndai, 179, 278, 293
Amalgaid mac Nath Í, 78
Amazons, 200
Amra Coluim Cille, 14
Anatolia, 27
Anderson, Alan Orr and Marjorie Ogilvie, 97n.
Áne, Áine, 136, 205, 210, 219
Angles, 29, 260
Anglo-Normans, 7, 12, 18, 37, 69, 85, 127, 130, 151, 166, 228, 238, 252, 268–9, 274
Anglo-Saxons, 10, 32–3; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 159; kingship, 29–30, 41, 159–60, 259; language and literature, 14, 29, 38, 111–12
Annaghdown, *Enach Dúin*, 245
Annales Bertiniani, 262
Annals of Clonmacnoise, 164, 226
Annals of Connacht, 16–17
Annals of the Four Masters, 41, 73, 80, 163, 222, 237, 256
Annals of Inisfallen, 80, 137, 151, 161, 174, 206, 208–9, 213, 215–16, 218, 221, 224, 226, 237, 245, 251, 264–5
Annals of Tigernach, 92, 95, 118, 148, 150, 154, 206, 209, 246, 248–9
Annals of Ulster, 65, 80–81, 85, 95, 100, 108, 114, 129, 148, 151, 154, 158–9, 163, 178, 209, 213, 218, 222, 225–6, 237, 239, 245–7, 249, 253, 256–7, 262–3, 266
ánruth, 176
Anselm, St, 261
Antrim, *Óentreib*, 97, 108
Anu, 166
Aquitaine, 272
Arabic, 168
Arada Chliach, 178, 181, 198, 217n., 219
Arai (?), 217
Aran islands, *Ára*, 178, 194, 264
Ardagh, diocese, 236
Ardee, *Áth Fhirdiad*, 117
Ardfert, 224; diocese, 165
Ardgal mac Conaill Cremthainne, 81, 87, 90–91, 280, 282
Ard Ladrann, 141n., 148–9
Ard Maiccrime, 249
Ardmore, 72, 180
Ard na Riag, 238
Ard Noíscan, 249
Ardpatrick, 223
ard-rí 'high-king', 42
Ards, 90, 108
Argyll, 9, 77, 83, 107; bishop of Argyle, 20

Arklow, 130, 132, 138
Armagh, *Ard Macha*, 46, 53, 114, 190, 211, 223, 263, 265, 268; abbacy of, 117–18, 124–5, 208, 220, 222–3; annals written at, 257; diocese, 126–7; foundation of, 50, 82; *máer* of, 118–19; *mausoleum regum* at, 125, 256; *oeconomus* of, 118; *paruchia* and *terminus* of, 83, 117–19, 126, 233; Patrician hagiography, 78–9, 82, 233; policy on high-kingship, 35, 220, 255, 257, 260; primacy of, 35, 50, 117, 152, 187, 189, 192, 209, 229, 250–1; relations with Airgialla, 82, 117–18, 124–5; with Brian Bóruma, 257, 259; with Connacht, 220, 238, 250–1; with Leinster, 152; with Munster, 187, 189, 192, 209–10, 212, 220, 222–3, 226; with Uí Néill, 50, 82, 117, 124–5, 220, 255–6, 268; with Ulaid, 82, 117; *sacerdos* of, 118
Arnulf of Montgomery, 267
Arrian, 83
Art Óenfer mac Cuinn, 62, 66–7, 202, 276, 280
Artgal mac Cathail, 250, 300
Arthur, 135
Artrí mac Cathail, 159, 181, 190, 213, 215, 255–6, 278, 293
Artrí mac Conchobair, 125, 220–21
Asser, 38
Assyria, 10
Áth-dá-Ferta, 161
Athens, 61
Áth Féne, 251
athgabáil 'distraint', 31, 46
Áth Goan, battle of, 151, 154
Áth Maigne, 23
Áth Rois, 249
Áth Senaig (Uchbad), battle of, 147–8, 209, 261
Audacht Moraind, 24–5, 174
Aughrim, *Echdruim*, 252
Augustine, St, of Canterbury, 30
Augustine, St, of Hippo, 26
Augustus, 65
Aurmumu, *see* Ormond
Auteinoi, 194

Baal, 64
Babylon, 65, 254
bachall 'crozier', 226; *Bachall Ísa*, 222
Badb, 155
Báetán (Boetan) mac Cairill, 109–11, 114, 285
Báetán mac Muirchertaig, 110–11, 114, 275, 283
Báetán mac Ninnedo, 110, 114, 258, 275, 283
baile 'town', 119
Baile Chuind, 54, 80, 91, 102, 104–5, 110, 112, 254, 276–7
Baile in Scáil, 54, 64
Baile Uí Dhubhda, 238
Ballina, 238
Baltinglass, *Belach Con Glaiss*, 149
Bamborough, 112, 259
banais 'wedding', 17
Banbán, Banbhán, 97–9
Bangor, *Bennchor*, 10, 82, 119, 124, 136, 146, 170, 268
Bann, river, 46, 95, 109, 114–15, 125–6, 161
bard, Welsh *bardd*, Greek *bardoi*, 13, 242
Barrex, *Barrekios*, *Barrekī*, 155
Barrow, *Berba*, river, 130–32, 141, 149, 157, 160, 162, 264
βασιλεύς, *basileus*, *βασίλισσα*, *basilissa*, 61
Baslick, *Baslecc*, *basilica sanctorum*, 247, 251
Bavaria, *Bayern*, 46, 236
Beare, *Bérre*, 167; Beare Island, 67
Bécc mac Cuanach, 166
Bécc mac Dé, Beg, 97, 99
Bech-bretha 'Bee-judgments', 58, 112–13, 254
Bede, 29, 39, 112, 259–60, 262
Behistun inscription, 24–5
Belach Éile, 209
Belach Febrat, 171
Belach Gabráin, 169, 264
Belach Mugna, battle of, 164, 266
Belfast Lough, *Loch Lotg*, 108
Bellerophon, 185
Beltaine, 23, 64
Benbulben, *Benn Gulban*, 84, 95
bendacht (*benedictio*), 188
Benedictines, 191
Benjamin, 81
Benna Bairrche (the mountains of Mourne), 128
Benntraige, 132
ben síde 'banshee', 20, 207
Bernard of Clairvaux, St, *Vita Malachiae*, 125, 261
Bernicians, 111–12, 259
Betha Chellaigh, 244–5
Bethel, 186
Bethra, 23
Bible, 81; Old Testament, 138, 158–9; *Genesis*, 138; *Kings*, 64–5; *Proverbs*, 65; *Psalms*, 189n.; New Testament, 158
bile 'sacred tree', 27
Binchy, Daniel A., 28, 42, 82, 155, 159, 174, 176, 208, 265n.
binsin luachra, 239
Birr, *Biror*, 93, 133, 169–70, 221, 225, 252
Blackstair mountains, 131

Blackwater, river (Munster), 177, 264
Blathmac mac Áedo Sláine, 105, 275, 277, 281
Blathmac mac Con Brettan, 29, 44–5, 118
Blathmac mac Máele Cobo, 123, 285
Blocc and Bluigne, 63–4
bóaire, 36–7, 175
Bodb, 166
Bódumbir, 195
Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae*, 26
Bóinda, 194
Bóindrige, 198
Bolce Banbretnach, 186
Boniface, St, 159–60
Book of Armagh, 79–80, 222, 257
Book of Kells, 40
Book of Leinster, 48, 56, 134, 139n., 142, 146, 160, 163, 210, 272, 290
Book of rights, *Lebor na cert*, 43–5, 47, 73, 107, 118, 126, 138n., 153, 174, 192, 197–8
bóruma 'cattle-tribute', 83, 144–6, 151, 198, 261
Bóruma Laigen (the Bóruma tract), 144–6
Boudicca, 51
βουκολεῖον, *boukoleion*, 61
Boyle, 249
Boyne, *Boand*, river, 52, 54–5, 88, 100–101, 107, 118, 125, 137, 199; goddess, 18–19, 55; as border of Ulster, 52, 68–9, 83, 107, 113, 119; megalithic necropolis of, 54, 56, 115n., valley, 57
bráithirse 'brotherhood, alliance', 139n., 216
Bran Ardchenn mac Muiredaig, 158, 161, 289
Bran Becc mac Murchado, 147–8, 150, 209, 289
Brandub mac Echach, 142–5, 148–9, 290
Bran Find mac Máele Ochtraig, 180
Bran mac Fácláin, 162, 223, 289
Bran mac Máelmórda, 151, 289
Bran (Mut) mac Conaill, 156, 289
bráthair 'kinsman', 123
Brecc Máedóc, 21
Brega, 60, 63, 124, 137, 269; Ecgfrith's raid on, 111–12, 260; extent of, 46, 68, 147, 268; Munster raids on, 207, 221, 225; northern Brega, 54, 111, 281; relations with Laigin, 137, 142, 157, 161, 272; southern Brega, 161, 262, 281; Southern Uí Néill kingdoms, 87–9, 94, 98n., 118, 154, 263, 268, 281; tribes of, 69, 88, 117, 237
Bregmuine, 92
Bregon, 167–8
Bréifne, 21–2, 84, 91–2, 107, 232, 249, 269, 273
Brendan, St, of Birr, *Brénaind Birra*, 95, 171, 216–17
Brendan, St, of Clonfert, *Bréndán moccu Altai*, 171, 216–18, 224, 245; Law of, 252
brenin, *breenhin*, *brentyn*, 155
Bressal Bélach, 137, 145, 288
Bressal Enechglass, 139, 288
Bressal mac Áedo Róin, 126, 285
Bressal mac Ailello Thassaig, 177
Bressal mac Déin, 156
Bretha Étgid, 'Book of Aicill', 174
Bretha Nemed, 171, 174–6
Bretwealda, 41, 259
Brí Léith, 23, 61
Brí mac Taidc, synod of, 126
Brian Bóruma (Brian Boru), 47, 70, 109, 128, 146, 168, 225n., 279, 297; ancestry of, 11, 181, 214, 227; battle of Clontarf, 163, 165–6, 243, 268; high-kingship, 203, 208, 256–7, 259, 266–7, 269–70, 276; reputation of, 47, 70, 109, 146, 267
Bricriu, 57
Brigantes, 155
Brigantī, *Brigantia*, goddess, 155
Brigantia, in Spain, 200
Brigantinos, 155
Brigit, St, of Kildare, 131, 144, 152, 154–6; *Life* of, 33, 152, 155
Brigit, goddess, 155
Brión mac Echach Mugmedóin, 17, 74–5, 80, 84, 102, 232, 245–6, 248, 280, 298–9
Bristol, 271–2
Britain, 9, 49–52, 71, 108, 111, 186, 259–60; Britons, 30, 76, 83, 112, 133, 259–60; British language, 62, 183; Irish in Britain, 9, 72, 75–6, 83, 135, 183–4; Roman Britain, 12, 55, 71–2, 75–7, 79, 83, 155, 182–4, 194
brithem, pl. *brithemain* 'brehon', 8, 13–14, 34, 49, 174, 180, 198; *brethemnus*, 180
Brittany, 76; Bretons, 10; Breton language, 9
briugu 'hospitaller', 36–7, 56, 62, 97–9
Bróen mac Ruadrach, 161
Brosnach, 23
Brug na Bóinne, 56–7, 77, 115
brug rig, 196
bruiden 'hostel', 62
Bruidge mac Eógain, 153–4
Bruree, *Brug Rig*, 196
Brutus, 10
Brycheiniog (Brecknock), 183
Brythonic languages, 9
buada, 22–3, 153, 189–90
Buaigne (Tolka river), 116–17
Buan mac Lóegairi Birnd, 201
Buchet, 62

Buí, 167
Burren, 178
Bush, river, 109
Butler, family, 228

Caer Siddi, 135
Caesar, Julius, 12–13, 37, 39, 49, 55, 58, 77, 182
Cahir, 195
Cailb, 101
Caílle Follamain (Clann Cholmáin Bicc), 90, 111, 116, 208, 281
Caillech Bérri (the Hag of Beare), 166–8, 205n., 211
Caillín, St, of Fenagh, 22
Cáimmín, St, of Inis Celtra, 242
cáin 'law, tax', 218
Cáin Fuithirbe, 176
Cairell mac Fiachnai, 124, 285
Cairenn (*Carina*), 74, 76
Cairnech, St, of Dulane, 101
Cairpre (*see also* Coirpre), kingdom of, 84, 87, 91, 133, 239, 249
Cairpre Droma Cliab, 233, 244
Cairpre Mór, 91
Cairpre mac Cathail, 149
caisel (*castellum*), 72, 184
Caisléan Conchabhair (Castleconnor), 238
caithréim 'triumphant career', 102
Calann, river, 221
Caledonians, 49
Calpurnius, 192
Calraige, 92, 233; Calraige Luirg, 249, 251
Cambyses, 25
Canaan, 41
Cano mac Gartnait, 105, 243
Canterbury, 191
cantref 'cantred', 270
Cantwell, John, archbishop of Cashel, 228
Canu Aneirin, 113
Cara na Trí Tuath (Carranadoo), 236
Cardiff, 184
Carlisle, 155
Carlsruhe, 162, 262
Carman, 141, 225
Carn Conaill, battle of, 239–41, 250
Carney, James, 17, 19, 79–81, 135, 167n., 179, 205n., 242
Carn Feradaig (Cahernarry), 189, 239
Carnfree, *Carn Frotch*, *Carn Fraoich*, 16–18
Carn Lugdach, 264
Carn Tighernaigh, 196
Carnutes, 58
Carolingians, 159, 259; empire, 27, 158; renaissance, 26
Carraic Brachaide, 223
Carrick, in Westmeath, 143
Cartismandua, 51
Cashel, *Caisel Muman*, 56, 137, 239, 241, 262; as ecclesiastical site, 191–2; Christian associations, 72, 184, 188–92, 220; diocese, 165, 191–2; 'Finding of', 176n., 177, 184–9, 192, 198; hegemony of, 9, 43–5, 131, 162, 164–5, 168, 261, 264–6; kingship of, 165–229 *passim*, 255, 277–9, 291–6; synod of, 191–2
cassal (*casula*), 64
Castledermot, *Dísert Diarmata*, 124, 145–6, 157–8, 226, 262
Castlejordan, 141
cath (*bellum*) 'battle', 264
Cathair Étain Tairb, 187
Cathaír Már, 131, 137–42, 155–6, 288; 'Testament of', *Timna Cathaír Máir*, 138–42, 154
Cathal Cú-cen-máthair, 179, 188, 278, 293
Cathal mac Áedo, 188, 205–8, 278, 293
Cathal mac Ailella, 222, 298
Cathal mac Bruidgi, 153–4
Cathal mac Conchobair, 266, 300–301
Cathal mac Dúnlainge, 149
Cathal mac Finguine, 150, 176, 188–9, 203, 205–11, 219, 278, 293
Cathal mac Muiredaig, 119, 285
Cathal mac Muirgiussa, 222, 300
cathbarr 'helmet', 22
Cathbarr (CATABAR MUCO VIRICORB), 182
Cathmug mac Duinn Cothaid, 250, 298
Cathmug mac Flaithbertaig, 249
Cathnia ua Guairi, 242
Cathnio mac Bécce, 157
Cathussach mac Eterscélai, 219, 278, 293
Cathuulfus, 25
Catuvolcus, 182
céle, pl. *céli* 'companion, client', 28, 31, 43, 157; in personal names, 188; *céle giallnai*, 28
Céle Petair, abbot of Armagh, 118
Celestine, pope, 79
Céli Dé, 'Culdees', 53, 124, 145, 157–8, 162, 170, 211, 213, 223–4, 226–7, 229, 241
Cell Cúle Dumai, 158
Cell Mo-Laisse (Kilmolash), 214
Cell Mór Enair (Kilmore, county Armagh), 161
Cellach, St, of Killala, 244–5
Cellach Cualann, 138, 288
Cellach mac Bleidíni, 109
Cellach mac Brain, 161, 223, 289
Cellach mac Dúnchada, 157, 160, 289
Cellach mac Fáelchair, 209
Cellach mac Fogartaig, 161

Cellach mac Ragallaig, 247–8, 300
Cellachán Caisil, 146, 178, 292
Celts, 49, 54, 64, 71, 132, 259; 'Celtic church' 10–11, 170; Celtic institutions, 7, 13, 23, 27, 49, 51, 83, 136; invasions, 10–11, 45, 132, 182; languages, 7–10, 50, 155; mythology, 9–10, 35, 52, 55–6, 99–100, 155, 182, 186; pre-Celtic peoples, 10, 45, 56, 236
cenél, pl *cenél, cenéla* (Welsh *cenedl*), 'kindred', 36, 41, 166, 216
Cenél nAeda (Kinalea barony), 177, 294
Cenél nAngse, 196
Cenél nArdgail, 88, 90, 94, 280; *see also* Ardgal
Cenél mBécce (Kinelmeaky barony), 177, 194
Cenél mBoguine, 258
Cenél Coirpri, 239, 248–9; *see also* Cairpre
Cenél Conaill, '*Kenelcunill*', Tír Conaill, 17–18, 20, 84, 90, 107, 116, 126; Adomnán of, 18, 255, 257–8; Colum Cille of, 18, 95, 162, 258; genealogy, 258. 280. 283; relations with Cenél nEógain. 94, 113–14, 208, 247; with Connacht, 102–3, 244, 247
Cenél Conaill Caisil, 245
Cenél nEógain, 27, 95, 102, 116, 248, 267; control Airgialla, 73, 115, 117, 124–6; control Armagh, 124–5, 220, 256, 268; expansion of, 73–4, 114, 125–6, 247; families of, 127; high-kingship, 57, 90, 94, 104, 110, 114, 127, 146, 156, 180, 259–60, 265–6, 283–4; relations with Cenél Conaill, 94, 113–14, 208, 247; with Ulaid, 107, 112, 114, 124, 127–8, 146, 148
Cenél Feradaig, 126
Cenél Fiachach, 87, 93, 169, 225
Cenél Lugdech, 258
Cenél Maic Ercae, 102, 232, 246
Cenél Maine, 87, 92–3, 236; *see also* Maine
Cenél nÓengusso maic Nad-Froích, 196
Cend Fáelad mac Colgan, 243, 247
Cenn Currig, 207
Cenn Buga (Cambo), 246
Cenn Fáelad hua Mugthigirn, 178, 188, 214, 215, 278, 293
Cennselach mac Brain, 157
Cera (Carra barony), 84, 102, 239, 244
Cerball mac Dúnlainge (Kjarvalr Írakonungr), 162–3, 263–6
Cerball mac Muirecáin, 163–4, 289
Cerdraige, 198
Cernae (Carnes), 60
Cétach mac Cathaír Máir, 140, 288
Chanson de Roland, 48
Charlemagne, 25, 159, 259, 262
Charles the Bald, 262
Chartres, 58
Christ, 29, 44, 50, 59, 118, 152
Christian ua Morgair, bishop of Clogher, 126
Chronicum Scotorum, 80, 222, 226, 243
Cian, 68, 291
Ciannachta, 68–9, 88, 101n., 114, 132, 200, 291; Ciannachta Breg, 118; Ciannachta Glinne Geimin, 126
Ciarán mac int saír, St Queran, of Clonmacnoise, 91, 171, 212, 216–17, 226, 237; Law of, 252
Ciarán, St, of Saigir, 72, 171, 180, 210, 217
Ciarraige, 67, 170, 174, 179, 236; Ciarraige Aí, 236, 251; C. Aidne, 236; C. Airtich, 236; Ciarraige Connacht, 160, 236, 246–7, C. Cuirche, 244; C. Luachra, 171, 199, 207, 216–20; C. Uachtair (Iartharach, Locha na nAirne; *Ciarrichi Superni*), 236
Cináed mac Ailpín (Kenneth Mac Alpin), 260
Cináed mac Artgaile, 300
Cináed mac Conaing, 263, 265
Cináed mac Cummascaig, 88
Cináed mac Flainn, 157
Cináed mac Írgalaig, 87, 276, 281
Cináed (mac Maic Odarmaic), 123
Cináed ua hArtacáin, 77
Cistercians, 271
Cláenloch, 92
Clann Aodha Bhuidhe (O'Neills of Clandeboy), 129
Clann Cholmáin, 87–8, 90–91, 93, 114, 116, 142, 154, 156, 160, 180, 221, 260, 265, 267, 269, 281–2
Clann Óengussa, 214
Clann Sínaig, 125, 223
Claudian, 76
Clear Island, 180
Cleitech, Clettech, 23, 56, 100–1
Clew Bay, 236, 246
Clóenferta, 'Sloping Trenches', 67
Clogher, *Clochar Maic Daimíni*, 125–6
cloigthech 'round tower', 243
Clonalvy, 60
Clonard, *Cluain Iraird*, 116, 124, 147–8, 157, 202, 263, 265, 269
Clones, *Cluain Auis*, 125
Clonfert, *Cluain Ferta Brénainn*, 169–71, 211, 213, 224, 233, 241–2, 245, 252; diocese, 85
Clonfertmulloe, *Cluain Ferta Mo-Lua*, 170–71, 216
Clonmacnoise, *Cluain moccu Nóis*, 216n., 217, 266; annalists, 92, 226, 237; foundation of, 91; relations with Connacht, 171, 221, 233, 237, 240–42, 248, 252; with Munster, 171,

Clonmacnoise (*cont.*)
211, 221–2, 224, 226, 228–9; with Uí Neill, 82, 91–2, 95, 171, 221, 240–41, 269; situation of, 170–71, 202, 237
Clontarf, battle of, 151, 163, 166, 243, 257, 268
Cloone, 22
Cloyne, *Cluain Uama*, diocese, 165
Cluain Comarda, 223
Cluaine Conaire (Cloncurry), 225
Cnoc Áine (Knockaney), 177, 182
Cobthach mac Mácle Dúin, 218, 295
cocad 'war', 264; *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh*, 267
Cogitosus, *Vita Brigitae*, 33, 152, 155
Cóic Conara Fugill, 174, 176
cóiced, pl. *cóiced*, *cóiceda* '"Fifth", province', 42, 45–7, 51, 58–9, 69, 72–4, 76, 82, 107–8, 130, 153, 165, 175, 191, 231–2, 244, 254, 261, 263
coirm Chualann 'the ale of Cualu', 152
Coirpre Clárenech, 179, 294
Coirpre (Cairpre) Cromm mac Crimthainn, 188, 195, 206, 277, 293
Coirpre Dam Aircit, 116
Coipre (Cairpre) Lifechar, 26, 145, 211, 276, 280
Coirpre Luachra (Cruithnechán), 193–4, 291, 295
Coirpre mac Diarmata, 149, 290
Coirpre mac Néill, 81, 90–91, 94, 244, 280
Coirpre Músc, 166, 183, 198
Colcú mac Failbi Flaind, 188, 278, 292
Colgan, John, 190
Colgu mac Bressail, 148, 290
Colla mac Fergusa, 251, 300
Collas, the Three, 72–3, 77, 107, 115, 280; Colla fo Chrí(th), Colla-dá-Chrích, 66, 92, 280
Colmán, bishop of Lindisfarne, 34
Colmán, St, of Lynn, 142
Colmán Bec mac Diarmato, 90–91, 111, 115–16, 259, 281
Colmán mac Cobthaig, 240, 246, 298
Colmán mac Duach, St, of Kilmacduagh, 242
Colmán mac Néill, 162
Colmán Már mac Diarmato, 87, 90–1, 104, 115–16, 281–2
Colmán Rímid, 104, 111, 260, 275, 283
Colum Cille, St Columba of Iona, 14, 91–2, 144, 257–60; Columban churches, 18, 83, 95, 162; of Cenél Conaill, 18, 95, 165, 258; relations with Áedán mac Gabráin, 110–11, 159, 255; with Diarmait mac Cerbaill, 95–7, 99, 104
Colum (Colmán) mac Cormaic, 137
Colum mac Crimthannáin, St, of Terryglass, 134, 140, 242
Columbanus, St, 104, 146, 170
comarba 'coarb', 21–2, 134, 216, 256, 263, 265, 269; *comarba Pátraic* (abbot of Armagh), 125, 190, 192
Comgall, St, of Bangor, 119, 136, 146
Comgán, *comarba* of Ailbe, 216–17, 242
comitatus, 28
Commán, St, of Roscommon; Law of, 251–2
Compert Mongáin, 112
Conailli, 90; Conailli Muirtheimne, 90, 107, 110, 118, 123, 125
Conaing, of Uí Failgi, 154
Conaing mac Congaile, 111–12, 281
Conaire Már mac Etarscélae, 23, 53, 59–63, 97, 101n., 174, 183
Conall Cernach, 14
Conall Corc, *see* Corc of Cashel
Conall Cremthainne (Crimthann), 81, 90–91, 94, 115, 280, 282
Conall Gulban mac Néill, 73, 84, 90, 94, 258, 280, 283
Conall mac Comgaill, 111, 259
Conall mac Nenta Con, 188–9
Conall (Guthbinn) mac Suibni, 154, 282
Conall Menn, 248
Conall ua hAithechdai, 147
Conchad mac Cuanach, 117
Conchenn, battle of, 219
Conchobar mac Donnchada, 125, 160, 221, 253, 276, 282
Conchobar mac Muiredaig, 161
Conchobar mac Nessa, 32, 50–51, 53, 85, 106, 145; Conchobar's Fifth (Ulster), 263
Conchobar mac Taidg, 253
Conchobar Macha, 117
Conchrad mac Duach, 168
Condmach, abbot of Armagh, 159
Confucius, *Analects*, 194
Congal Cáech (Cláen), 58, 112–13, 254, 257, 287
Congal Cennfota, 123, 285
Congal mac Máele Dúin, 176
Congalach Cnogba, 87, 256, 276, 281
Conláed, St Conleth of Kildare, 152
Conmaicne, 68, 107, 230, 236–7, 249; Conmaicne Cúile Tolad, 236, 247, 250; C. (Maige) Réin, 92, 236; C. Mara, 68, 236
Conn Cétchathach (Conn of the Hundred Battles), 54, 58, 63–4, 66, 73, 200–2, 254, 276; ancestor of Airgialla, 72, 85, 232; of Connachta, 11, 46, 51, 231–2; of Dál Cuinn, 200, 231–2, 280; of Uí Maine, 85, 232; of Uí Néill, 147, 231–2; eponym of

Conn Cétchathach (*cont.*)
Leth Cuinn, 168, 202; historicity, 52–3; 'Vision of', *see Baile Chuind*
Connacht, *Cóiced Connacht*, 'Fifth of the Connachta', 7, 46, 56, 58–9, 76, 94, 98, 141, 230–53 *passim*; Clonmacnoise and, 92, 171; Connachta distinguished from Uí Néill, 71, 83, 86, 91–3, 231–2; Connachta in Ulster sagas, 18, 48, 50–1, 71–2, 132; Connachta, the Three, *Teóra Connachta*, 85, 231, 248, 251; extension into Bréifne, 91, 249, 266–7; high-kingship, 86, 109–10, 115, 128, 261, 265–6, 273; kings, 95, 102, 105, 144, 160, 298–301; kingship of Connacht, 15–17, 42, 68, 80, 84–5, 175, 232, 237–53 *passim*, 266, 271; Laigin in Connacht, 51, 132–3; origin of Connachta, 9–11, 23, 46, 51, 66–9, 71, 85–6, 106, 144, 168, 280; relations with Cenél Conaill, 103, 114, 129; with Munster, 170, 210, 220–5; with Thomond, 76, 169, 180, 218, 227; St Patrick in Connacht, 80, 82, 232–3; subject tribes, 194, 230–1, 233, 236–7
Connemara, 68, 236
Connla mac Taidg, 200
Connor, *Coindire*, diocese, 126
Conrad II, emperor, 262
corann (*corona*) 'tonsure', 22
Corann (Corran barony), 67, 233, 247, 249, 251
Corc Duibne mac Coirpri Músc, 166
Corc of Cashel, Conall Corc, Corc mac Láire, Corc mac Luigthig; ancestor of Eóganachta, 72, 166, 177–8, 193–6, 198, 206–7, 277, 291–5; birth, 183–5; contemporary with Niall Noígiallach, 75, 202; finds Cashel, 186–9
Corco Athrach, 198
Corco Auloimm, 171
Corco (Corcu) Baiscind, 63, 170, 174, 207, 218, 241, 243
Corco Chullu, 246
Corco Daula, 185
Corco (Corcu) Duibne, 63, 166–7, 170–71, 174, 176, 183, 207, 216, 219
Corco Fir Thrí, 67, 231, 233
Corco Loígde, 166, 170–71, 176, 178, 180–81, 191, 193, 197, 202, 207, 217–18, 224
Corco Moga, 230
Corco Mruad, 67, 198, 207, 218, 242–3
Corco Óchae, 171, 178, 184, 198, 216
Corcu Ochlann, 102, 232
Corcu Roíde, 69
Corco Thrí, 218
Cork, *Corcach Mór Muman*, 176–7, 212–13, 224, 271; diocese, 165
Cormac, king of Mag Fuitthirbe, 176
Cormac Cáech (the One-eyed) mac Coirpri, 101, 280
Cormac mac Airt; ancestor of Uí Néill and Connachta, 23, 65–7, 72, 231, 280; birth, 66–7, 170, 202; death, 23, 56, 85, 100; defeats Ulaid, 52, 68, 200; high-king of Tara, 52–9 *and* 62–9 *passim*, 73, 113, 145, 182, 276; historicity, 52–3, 65–6; 'Instructions of', *Tecosca Cormaic*, 26, 62, 65, 211; marriage, 62
Cormac mac Cuilennáin, 146, 200, 202–3, 211–15, 278, 292; aims at high-kingship, 203, 266; compiler of Psalter of Cashel, 174; 'Cormac's Glossary', *Sanas Cormaic*, 75, 155, 183, 197, 243; death, 164, 266
Cormac mac Diarmata, 136
Cormac mac Duib-dá-Chrích, 249
Cormac mac Mothla, 214–15
Cormac mac Muirgiussa, 251
Cormac ua Cillín, 242
Cormac hua Máenaig, 188–9
'Corne-cam-more', 153
Cornwall, 72, 183–4; Cornish language, 155
corón (*corona*), 'crown', 22
Coroticus, 83
Cothraige, *see* Patrick
Cráeb Tulcha, 27, 127
Craig Liath, 166
crannóg 'crannogue', 126, 143
Cratloe Hills, 75
Cregraige, 67; *see also* Gregraige
Créide daughter of Guaire, 241, 243
Crích na Cétach, 141, 288
Crimthann Airthir Chliach, 219, 291, 293
Crimthann Án mac Cathaír Máir, 140, 288
Crimthann mac Áedo, 151, 288
Crimthann mac Cobthaig (Crimthann Odor?), 216–17, 219, 295
Crimthann mac Feidlimthe, 217, 219, 292
Crimthann Már mac Fidaig, 75, 183, 185, 277, 291
Crimthann Srem (Femin), 219, 277, 291, 293
Crínán (mac Gormlada), 123
Crinna, battle of, 52, 68, 200
Críth Gablach, 32–3, 38, 41–2, 175
Cró-inis, 87, 143
Crónán moccu Loígde, 217
Crond ba Druí, 142, 287
'Cross of the Scriptures', 91
Cruachu, Cruachain (Rathcroghan); ancient capital of Connacht, 18–19, 27, 71; burial site, 78; Ciarraige at, 236, 251; expansion of Uí Néill from, 83–4; in heroic sagas, 18–19, 49, 51; Otherworld site, 19; site of, 83, 230; Uí Briúin of, 232, 236, 248, 250–51

Crundmáel Bolg Luatha mac Áedo, 151
Crundmáel Erbuilg mac Rónáin, 137, 151, 290
Cruthin, Cruithni, 9–11, 39, 200; affinities with Picts, 8, 39, 108; Loígis, 39; Ulster Cruthin, 39, 58, 94–5, 97, 107–9, 111–14, 119, 142, 200–2, 217, 254, 259, 287; Sogain, 236
Cú Brettan mac Congusso, 118
Cú Chaille mac Dublaide, 143
Cú Chongelt mac Coirpri, 218–19, 295
Cú Chulainn, 19, 32, 50, 55, 62, 72, 106
Cualu, 152–3, 161
Cúán mac Amalgado, 179, 188, 205, 278, 293
Cúán mac Conaill, 241
Cúán mac Éndai, 241
Cúán ua Lothcháin, 23, 153
Cuanu, abbot of Louth, 162
Cúiléne mac Forindáin, 154
cuindelc, 195
Cuircni, 69, 92, 236
Cuirigi, 216
Cuirirán, 187–9
cuirn buaball, 152; *cuirn Cualann*, 153
Cúl Conaire, 102–3, 244
Cúl Dreimne, battle of, 81, 95–6, 102–3, 244
Cúl Uinsen, 95
cumal, pl. *cumala* (*ancilla*) 'bondmaid', 33, 41–2, 44, 188–9, 197–8
Cumman, wife of Coirpre, 195, 206
Cummascach mac Áedo, 145
Cummascach mac Cathail, 124
Cummascach mac Congalaig, 88
Cumméne Ailbe (Find), *Liber de virtutibus Columbae*, 111, 257–8
Cumméne Fota (Cuimíne), St, of Clonfert, 169, 224, 241–2
Cumscrad, king of Fir Maige Féne, 176
cumtach 'protection', 198
Cunedda, 83, 135
Curlew mountains, *Corrsliab*, 233
Curnán mac Áedo, 95
Curragh, the, *Cuirrech Liphi*, 152, 156, 158, 160
cursus, 56–7, 64
cyning, 112
Cyprian, St, 26
Cypselus, 66
Cyrus, 44

Dá Derga, 23, 62, 101
Dagdae, 155
Daig mac Conaill Cuirc, 193
Dáire Barrach mac Cathaír Máir, 139, 155, 288
Dáire Cerbba, 177, 291
Daire Ednech, 227
Dáirine, 178, 180, 182, 193, 197
Dáirine, daughter of Tuathal Techtmar, 144
dál, *dáil* 'assembly, meeting, portion', 41, 209
Dál nAraidi: decline of, 125–7; dynasty of Ulster Cruthin, 39, 97, 107–9, 119, 200–201, 217; kings, 85, 111–13, 117, 127–8, 287
Dál Cairpri Arad, 133, 288
Dál Cais; kings, 27, 182, 203–4, 212, 214, 297; origins and rise, 180–81. 203–4, 215, 218, 242–3, 266; spurious pedigree, 11, 180, 213, 228, 291
Dál Cuinn, 200–202, 231
Dál Fiatach; kings, 27, 109, 111, 119, 122–3, 126–8, 285–6; dynasty of Ulaid, 107–8, 161, 201; territory, 109, 118–19, 124, 126
Dál Mugaide, 198
Dál Riata, 9–10, 63, 77, 107–14; Colum Cille and, 83, 110–11, 159, 255; kings, 102, 126, 110–13, 257, 259–60
Dallán mac Móre, 164
dám 'retinue', 28
dán 'gift, art, poetry', 65
Dan, 81
Dan of Denmark, 104
Dane's Cast, the, 74, 107
Daniel, 64
Danp, 104
Danu, 9
Danube, 83, 100
Darius, 24–5
Dauí Galach mac Briúin, 80, 245
Dauí Iarlaithe mac Maithni, 194, 277, 295
Dauí Tenga Umai mac Briúin, 245–6, 280, 298–9
De bunad imthechta Eóganachta, 199
De Burgo, family, 128
De Courcy, John, 128
De duodecim abusivis saeculi, 25, 170
De shíl Chonairi Máir, 63
dechelt 'garment', 186
Declán, St, of Ardmore, 72, 180, 210
Degsastan, battle of, 111, 259
Deirgtine, 180
Déis Becc, 178, 180–81, 212, 239; Déis Deiscirt, 180, 214; Déis Tuaiscirt, 176, 180–81, 189, 218, 227, 239, 243
Déisi, 55, 176, 180; 'Expulsion of', 178, 181, 183–4; Déisi Muman, 72, 155, 171, 181–3, 198, 207; kings, 180, 197, 205, 210, 214–15, 264; Déisi Temro (of Tara), 78, 88, 117, 181
Delbna, 69, 101, 199, 230, 237; Delbna Bethra, 92, 169, 171, 220–21, 223, 225, 237; D. Nuadat, 92, 237; Delbna Tíre-dá-Locha, 237

Demetae, 183
Demmán mac Con Roí, 123
Denmark, 100, 104; Danes, 30; Danish language, 104; *see also* Norse
deórad 'outlaw, exile', 28
derbfhine, 35, 37, 93, 108, 119, 122–3, 127, 139
Derbforgaill (Dervorgilla), wife of Tigernán Ua Ruairc, 273
derbráthair 'brother', 123
Dercco, Dercomanath, 217, 219
Derry, diocese, 126
Desmond, *Desmumu*. 7, 47, 165, 177, 193, 218, 224, 264, 270
Devenish, *Daiminis*, 96
Devon, 133, 272
Diabul-Laigin, 131
Diambad messe bad rí réil, 111
Diarmait (*Dirmicius*), abbot of St James, 191
Diarmait mac Áedo Sláine, 105, 239–41, 246, 275, 277, 281
Diarmait (Dermot) mac Cerbaill, 81, 87–105 *passim*, 111–12, 115–16, 168, 244, 275, 277, 280–82; as Christian high-king, 96, 159, 255, 259; cursing of Tara, 53, 95–6, 104, 192; death, 95, 97–100, 103, 109–10
Diarmait mac Cerbaill, king of Osraige, 163
Diarmait mac Máel-na-mBó, 143, 146, 163, 271–2, 290
Diarmait mac Ruadrach, 160
Diarmait ua hÁedo Róin, St, of Dísert Diarmata, 124, 145, 226
Diarmait ua Tigernáin, 222–3, 263
Dícuill mac Echdach, 109
Dillon, Myles, 24, 60n., 135, 136n., 138n., 145n., 188n., 192n.
Dind map Lethain, 183
dindshenchas 'topographical lore', 54, 56, 65, 77–8, 144, 238
Dínertach, 242
Dinn Ríg, 131–2
Dinn Tradui, 183
Diomedes, 64
Dionysus, 61
díre 'honour-price', 175
Dísert Máedóc, 22
dóer, *dáer* 'ignoble, unfree', 175; *dóer-nemed*, 175; *dóer-chéle*, 28, 175; *dáer-thuatha*, 45, 180
dóescur-sluag 'commoners, rabble', 200
Dolphin's Barn, *Carn Ua nDúnchada*, 150–1
Domnach Mór Pátraic, 90
Domnainn, 132, 134, 231
Domnall Brecc (*Dyfnwal Vrych*), 111–13, 257
Domnall mac Áedo, 112–14, 151, 256–8, 275, 277, 283
Domnall mac Fiachrach Sraibtini, 92
Domnall mac Gilla Chríst, 123
Domnall mac Murchada, 153
Domnall mac Muirchertaig, 95, 102, 244, 275, 283
Domnall Midi mac Murchado, 118, 156–7, 208, 276, 282
Domnall ua Néill, 256–7, 267, 276, 284
Donennach, king of Uí Fidgenti, 176, 296
Donn, 166
Donn Bó mac Con Brettan, 118
Donn Cothaid mac Cathail, 247, 298
Donn Dige, 168
Donn Fiach, 211
Donnchad mac Briain, 272, 279, 297
Donnchad Midi mac Domnaill, 124, 157–8, 160, 215–16, 276, 282
Donnchad ua Loingsig, 127
Donngus mac Donngaile, 215
Dorchester-on-Thames, 64
Dovinia, 167
Down, dioccse, 109
Downpatrick, *Dún-dá-Lethglass*, 50, 82, 108, 119, 124
Dream of the Rood, 29
Drowes, *Drobais*, river, 244
drut, pl. *drutd* (*druides*, *magi*) 'druids', 13, 23, 26, 29–30, 58–9, 72, 74, 95, 97, 175, 184, 186, 194, 198n.; as ancestor figures, 66–7, 142, 177, 197–8; at Tara, 50, 55–6, 62–5
Druim Abrat, 227
Druim Cett, convention of, 13, 106, 110–11
Druimm Derge, 81
Druimne Breg, 83
Druim Robaig (Drumrovay), 249
Drumcliff, *Druim Cliab*, 95, 244
Drumlane, *Druim Lethain*, 21
Drunemeton 27
drúth 'fool', 198n.
Dub-dá-Bairenn mac Domnaill, 215, 278, 294
Dub-dá-Chrích mac aui Chellaig, 147
Dub-dá-Leithe, abbot of Armagh, 250
Dub-dá-Thuath, of Luigni, 249
Dub-dá-Thuath mac Stéléne, 211
Dub-Díbeirgg mac Cathail, 251, 300
Dub-Dothra mac Dúnchado, 249, 299
Dub-Indrecht mac Cathail, 250, 300
Dub-Lachtna mac Máele Gualai, 188, 278, 292
Dublin, *Áth Cliath*, 60, 150, 157–8, 168, 192; Anglo-Norman capture of, 151; battle of (Islandbridge), 126; diocese, 130; Henry II in, 57; kings, 151, 263, 266, 270–72; Norse, 130–31, 158, 162, 164, 262, 268–9, 271–2
Dublitter of Finglas, 158

Dub-Rois, 212
Dubsloit, 94
Duibgilcach mac Óengusso, 188, 277, 291
Duirdriu, 187–9
Duma Selga, 232; Selga, 246
Dumézil, Georges, 59
Dumnonii, 133
dún 'fortress', 32
Dún Bolg, battle of, 116, 142, 144–6, 148
Dunboyne, *Dún Buaignige*, 117
Dún Ceithirnn, 112
Dún Cermnai (Old Head of Kinsale), 264
Dúnchad mac Duib-dá-Bairenn, 188, 278, 292
Dúnchad mac Murchado, 150, 289
Dúnchad Muirisci, 239, 247–8, 298
Dún Cuair, 159–61
Dundalk, *Dún Delgan*, 117
Dundrum Bay, *Loch Rudraige*, 108
Dún Echdach (Duneight), 119
Dún Gainiba, 251
Dúngal Raithlind, 179, 294
Dungannon, 27, 125
Dúnlaing, king of Uí Echach Muman, 176, 294
Dúnlaing mac Cathussaig, abbot of Cork, 224
Dúnlaing mac Éndai Niad, 145, 288–9; son of, 65, 151, 194
Dúnlaing mac Muiredaig, 161, 289
Dún Máele Tuile, 262
Dunmore, 236, 271
Dún na Cairrge, 143
Dún na Sciath, 87
Durrow, *Dairmag*, 91–2, 156–7, 269–70, 211, 216, 221, 225, 229, 252, 269
Dyfed, *Demed*, 183, 186

Easter, 64–5; Easter house, *Tech Cásca*, 57; 'Celtic Easter' and paschal controversy, 34, 169–71, 217
Eadwulf, king of Northumbria, 159
Eanfrith brother of Aethelfrith, 111, 259
Éber son of Míl, 168, 182, 199, 202
Eburones, 182
Ecgfrith, king of Northumbria, 111, 260
Ecgfrith son of Offa, 159
Echros (Aughris Head), 239
echtar-thuatha 'extern tribes', 207
Echu, Eochaid, 52
Echu (Eochu), king of Leinster, 144
Echu Doimlén, 117, 280
Echu Liathán, 177, 291
Echu mac Éndai Chennselaig, 77, 80
Echu mac Maic Caiss, 195, 291, 294
Echu (Eochaid) mac Óengusso, 188, 195, 208, 219, 277, 291, 293
Echu Muinremor, 77
Echu (Eochu) Timmíne, 140, 288
Echu Tirmcharna, 245, 299
Écomras mac Congaile, 243, 298
Edda, 104
Edward the Confessor, 272
Edwin, king of Northumbria, 112, 259
Egypt, 10, 25, 34, 54, 199, 201
Eilne, 109, 125
Einhard, *Vita Caroli*, 262
Eithne, 63, 140
Eithne, daughter of Donnchad Midi, 158
Eithne, wife of Diarmait mac Cerbaill, 168
Éladach aue Máel Uidir, 147
Éladach mac Dúnlainge, 224, 294
Éli, Éile, 69, 133, 169, 180–1, 187–9, 198, 207, 291; Éili Deiscirt, 188n.
Elijah, 64
Emain Macha, 10, 27, 118, 129, 132, 141; destruction of, 46, 50, 68, 71–4, 81–2, 107; in Ulster sagas, 14, 32, 46, 49–52, 106
Emly, *Imlech Ibair*: chief church of Éoganachta, 176, 180, 206; abbots, 178, 213–14, 216–17, 242, 262; diocese, 165; pre-Patrician claims, 177, 210; *see also* Ailbe
Énboth Breg, 219
Éndae, St, of Aran, 194
Éndae Cennselach, 77, 288, 290
Éndae mac Néill, 73, 84–5, 94, 280
England, *Saxain*, 64, 72, 112, 183, 268, 272; English, 25, 76; kings, 30, 37, 159, 262, 272; *see also* Anglo-Saxons
Eochaid Airem, 61
Eochaid Allmuir mac Artchuirp, 183
Eochaid Láeb (*Echodius Laib*), 109
Eochaid mac Ardgail, 127, 286
Eochaid mac Domnaill, 110, 275, 283
Eochaid mac Fiachnai, 119, 285
Eochaid (Echu) Mugmedón, 74–6, 280, 298
Eógabal, 182
Eógan Bél, 102, 244–5, 298
Eógan Mainistrech, abbot of Armagh, 124–5, 220, 222
Eógan mac Cinn Fáelad, 178, 213
Eógan mac Néill, 73, 81, 84, 94, 280, 283
Eógan mac Nialláin, 116
Eógan Már (Eógan Taídlech, Fitheccach), 11, 66–7, 168, 177, 199–202, 291, 296
Eógan Srem, 245, 299
Eóganachta, 8, 166–229 *passim*, 291–5; decline of, 180, 203, 264–6, 271; descent from Conall Corc, 75, 166, 177, 190, 193–6; from Míl, 9, 199–202; from Mug Nuadat (Eógan Már), 66–7, 168, 177, 199–201; hegemony of, 67, 133, 157, 201–

Eóganachta (*cont.*)
2, 220; origins, 10–11, 71–2, 181–4; revival, 191–2; territorial distribution, 176–9, 203–4, 207; the seven Eóganachta, 178, 227; the three Eóganachta, 178; Eóganacht Áine, 166, 177–9, 190, 204–5, 207, 214, 291, 293; Eóganacht Airthir Chliach, 177–8, 190, 195, 206, 219, 291, 293; Eóganacht Árann (Ninussa), 178; Eóganacht Chaisil, 176, 178–9, 190, 195, 203–5, 214–5, 219–20, 262, 266, 291–3; Eóganacht Glendamnach, 177–9, 190, 195, 204–7, 213, 215, 219, 291, 293; Eóganacht Maige Geirginn, 194, 291; Eóganacht Locha Léin, 165, 177–9, 193, 197, 204, 207, 214, 216–20, 224, 291, 295; Eóganacht Raithlind, 177–9, 193, 195, 206, 215, 218, 224, 291, 294; Eóganacht Ruis Argait, 178
Eóganán mac Crundmaíl, 179, 296
Eóganán mac Gabráin, 255
Epona, 52
éraic, 'blood-fine, wergild', 35, 144, 181, 197
Érainn (*Iverni*), 8–11, 108; Lugaid Mac Con of, 66–7, 182, 202; of Munster, 72, 74, 174, 176, 180; descent from Conaire Már, 23, 63, 174; from Lugaid Loígde, 74; from Óengus Bolg, 55, 193–4
Erc daughter of Loarn, 102
Ercc mac Echach Muinremair, 77, 80
Éremón son of Míl, 135, 168, 199, 202–3, 261
Ériu, gen. *Érenn* 'Ireland', 75, 83, 109, 264
Esker Riada, 202
Esnada Tige Buchet, 62
Étaín, 61, 66
Etarscélae, Eterscél Már, 60–61, 63
Eterscél mac Áedo, 157
Eterscél mac Máele Umai, 188, 207, 278, 293
Ethelbald, king of Mercia, 160
Etruscans, 56
Eusebius, 10, 132
Eve, 101
Evernia, 'Ireland', 96, 255

Fáelán mac Colmáin, 151–2, 154, 289
Fáelán mac Cormaic, 215
Fáelán mac Murchado, 150, 209, 289
Fáelgus mac Nad Froích, 179
Fahan, *Othan Mura*, 157
Faílbe Flann mac Áedo, 151, 154, 188, 198, 205, 215, 239, 278, 292
fáith (*vates*) 'prophet), 13, 29, 199
Fallach, king of Conailli, 118
familia 'monastic community', 12, 22n., 34, 149, 162, 192, 233
Fán Commair, 23
Faramund, 78
Fedelm daughter of Móethair, 184–5
Feidlimid mac Coirpri, 206, 278, 293
Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, 162, 171, 188–9, 191, 203, 208–9, 211–29, 264, 278, 292; 'Unity of', 227
Feidlimid mac Óengusso, 188, 195, 277, 291–3
Feidlimid mac Tigernaig, 188, 195–6, 206, 278, 294
feis, 17; *see also* Tara
Félire Óengusso 'Martyrology of Óengus', 53, 227
Femen (Feven), 137, 166–7, 184–5, 194
Fenagh, *Fidnacha*, 22n.
fénechas 'legal tradition of the Féni', 8, 35, 176
Féni, 8–9, 33, 36–7, 42, 106, 113
Fennor, *Finnabair*, 221
Feradach Find Fechtnach, 24
Fer Cerb, 182
Fer-dá-Chrích, abbot of Armagh, 118
Ferdomnach, scribe of Armagh, 222
Fer Fí, 182
Fergal Aidne, 243, 298
Fergal mac Loingsig, 248
Fergal mac Máele Dúin, 144, 146–8, 207–8, 248, 276, 283–4
Fergnae (Virgno), abbot of Iona, 258
Fergus Cerrbél mac Conaill Cremthainne, 90, 280
Fergus Fogae, 52, 72
Fergus Luasgán mac Cathaír Mair, 140, 288
Fergus mac Bodbchada, 223
Fergus mac Echach Mugmedóin, 74–5
Fergus mac Leite, 52
Fergus mac Móenaig, 147
Fergus mac Muiredaig, 245
Fergus mac Roích, 32, 51–2, 171, 179, 244
Fergus Scandal mac Crimthainn, 178, 181, 277, 293
Fernmag (Farney barony), 117, 125, 237
Ferns, *Ferna Mór Maedóic*, 21, 131, 144, 149, 214, 271; diocese, 130
ferp cluiche (*verpa*), 64
Fertai Chonaill, 284
Fethgna, bishop and abbot of Armagh, 263, 265
Fiacc mac Buain (mac Imchado?), 201
Fiachnae Find, 169
Fiachnae mac Áedo Róin, 118–19, 122–4, 285
Fiachnae (Féachno), mac Báetáin 106, 111–12, 259, 277, 287
Fiachnae mac Demmáin, 111, 123, 285
Fiachrae Cassán, 66

Fiachrae mac Echach Mugmedóin, 74–6, 84, 280, 298
Fiachu Araide, 200
Fiachu ba hAiccíd, Fiacha Baicced, 137, 141–2, 288
Fiachu mac Néill, 81, 84, 93–4, 133, 280, 282
Fiachu Munlethan (Muillethan), 67, 200, 202, 291
Fiachu Sraibtine (Fécho), 72, 277, 280
Fiangalach ua Máele Aithcen, 147
Fidarta (Fuerty), 232–3
fili, pl. *filid* 'poet', 13–16, 20–1, 136, 174, 186
Fín daughter of Colmán Rímid, 104, 111
Fínán Cam, St, of Kinitty, 171, 216
Find Fili, 135, 142
Findabair daughter of Medb, 18
fine 'joint family', 8, 12, 28, 34–6, 119, 122–3, 127
fingal 'kin-slaying', 29, 36, 96
Fíngen, poet, 211
Fíngen (Finguine) mac Áedo Duib, 188, 205–7, 215, 278, 292
Finglas, 158
Finguine Cenn nGécán mac Láegaire, 190, 278, 292
Finguine mac Cathail, 176, 188, 278, 293
Finley, M. I., 43
Finn mac Cumaill and the Fianna (Fenians), 49, 55, 112, 141n., 144–5
Finnbarr, St, of Cork, 224
Finnchad, bishop of Killarga, 22
Finnchad mac Garrchon, 138, 288
Finnian, St, of Clonard, 147
Finnian, St, of Mag Bile, 95, 98n., 168
Fínsnechta Cetharderc mac Cellaig, 158, 160–1, 253, 289
Fínsnechta Fledach (Snechta Fína), 91, 104, 146, 254, 276–7, 281
Fintan (Munnu), St, of Taghmon, 136
fintiu 'family land', 93
Fir Alban, 77
Fir Ardda Ciannacht, 88, 118, 125
Fir Bolg, 9, 55, 193
Fir Chell, 93, 225
Fir Chera, 84, 102–3, 239, 244, 249, 298
Fir Chraíbe, 115, 126
Fir Chúl Breg, 88, 104, 281
Fir Domnann, *see* Domnainn
fír flathemon, fírinne flatho 'the Prince's Truth', 24–5, 115, 187–9
Fir Lí, 115, 126
Fir Maige Féne (Fermoy), 176–7, 197, 207
Fir Ól nÉcmacht, 231
Fir Rois, 29, 117–18, 125
Fir Thulach Midi, 142–3, 290
Fir Umaill, 236
Fisher King, 55
fithecc 'souterrain', 199
Fithir daughter of Tuathal Techtmar, 144
FitzGerald, family, 228
Fjolni, 103
flaith 'prince, lord , 28, 35
Flaithbertach mac Inmainén, 204, 214–15, 278–9
Flaithbertach mac Loingsig, 114, 208, 247, 276, 283
Flaithnia mac Muirgiussa, 251
Flann aue Congaile, 147
Flann mac Conaing, 265–6
Flann mac Eircc, 213, 296
Flann mac Flaithbertaig, 222
Flann Sinna mac Máelsechnaill, 91, 163–4, 266, 276, 282
Flannán, St, of Killaloe, 182
Fled Bricrend 'Bricriu's Feast', 49, 57
fo-aid 'to spend the night, cohabit', 17
Fochaill (Foghill), 78
Fochaird, Fochairt Muirtheimne (Faughart), battle of, 117–18, 148, 200, 210, 261
foederati, 78
Foir, 221
Foirchellach, abbot of Clonmacnoise, 252
folad, pl. *folaid* 'substance, grant', 218; *cobfolaid* 'counter-obligations', 44–5; *see frithfolaid*
Follaman mac Con-Congelt, 116, 208
Follaman mac Donnchada, 221
Fomoire (Fomorians), 134
Fore, *Fobar*, 90, 221
Forggus mac Cellaig, 252, 300
Forggus mac Muirchertaig, 95, 102, 244, 275, 283
Forindán, abbot of Armagh, 222–3
Forménus, 78
forsloinnti 'alien families', 218
fortuath, pl. *fortuatha* 'alien tribes', 45, 131–2, 198–9, 207, 216, 218–19, 221, 232, 236–7, 249; Fortuatha Laigen, 130, 138
Fothairt, Fotharta, 45, 50, 131, 147, 154–5, 157; Fothairt Fea *and* Fothairt Mara, 131
Fourknocks, 6on.
France, 37; medieval French, 239
Franks, 26, 76–8; Frankish annals, 262
Frazer, Sir James, 23
Fredegar, 78
Freestone Hill, 169
Frey, 30
frithfolaid 'mutual obligations', 45; *Frithfolaid rig Caisil fria thuatha*, 174, 177, 196, 201, 204
Fróech mac Findchado, 138, 288
Fróech mac Idaith, 18–19

Furudrán, 217

gabair 'watershed', 130
gáe bolga, 55
Gaelic language, 8–10
Gaesati, 132
Gailenga, 68–9, 88, 101n., 132–3, 231, 233, 249, 291
Gáileóin, Gáilni, Gáiliáin, 8, 51, 106, 132–3, 135, 139, 231
Gaill 'Foreigners', 257, 268; *Gall-Gaidil*, 264; 'Gentiles', 264; *see also* Norse
Galatians, 27
Gallen, *Galinne na mBretan*, 170, 211, 220–21
Galway Bay, 168, 230, 249
Gamanrad, 68, 231
Garbthrian Connacht, 86
Garmisch- Partenkirchen, 236
Garranes, 196
Garryhill, *Garrchoill*, 153
Gaul, 12, 39, 52, 58, 77n., 78–9, 132, 159, 272; Gauls, 12–13, 49, 58, 72, 136, 182; Gaulish language, 41, 46
geilfhine, 122–3, 139n.
Geinemain Áeda Sláine, 98n.
geis, pl. *gessa* 'taboos', 22–3, 59–60, 101n., 153
gell 'pledge', 31
Germany, 10, 37, 160, 191; German emperor, *Int Impire Almánach*, 191, 262; Germans, 28–30, 46, 59
giall, 'hostage', 31; *giallaid*, pret. *giallais*, 'gives hostages, submits', 208; *giallad fri claideb*, 241
Gilla- in personal names, 168
Gilla Críst mac Con Cuailgne, 123
Giraldus Cambrensis; *Instructio principis*, 26; on Diarmait Mac Murchada, 274; on high-kingship, 212, 261; on inauguration, 17–18, 20; on Kildare, 155; on *tricha cét*, 270; on Ulster, 47, 107; *Topographia Hiberniae*, 17, 47
Glastonbury, *Glasimpere na nGáedel*, 183
Glasnevin, *Glas Noíden*, 69
Glendalough, *Glenn-dá-Locha*, 145, 151–2, 161; diocese, 130
Glendamain (Glanworth), 177, 205–7, 219
Glenn Rige, 72, 74, 107
Gloucestershire, 55
gó flatho, 24–5
Gobbán, 195
Goibnenn mac Conaill, 92, 239, 298
Goídil 'Goidels, Gaels', 8–10, 199, 202
Golden Vale, 177–8
Gorey, 141n., 149
Gormgal, abbot of Armagh, 251
Gormlaith, daughter of Donnchad, 225
Gormlaith, daughter of Flann Sinna, 164
Gormlaith, daughter of Murchad, 225n.
Gort, 92, 240
Gougane Barra, 224
gráda (*gradus*) 'orders', 190; *grád ríg*, 256; *grád-bendacht*, 188
Granard, 81, 91, 236
Grec mac Arod, 67
Greece, Greeks, 8, 10, 70, 106, 132; Greek authors, 49
Gregory VII, pope, 261
Grecraige, Gregraige, 67, 185, 231, 233, 249; *see also* Cregraige
Guaire Aidne, 84, 105, 239–46, 250, 298
Gundestrup Cauldron, 100
gwrthrychiad, 38
Gwyddyl, 8
Gwynn ap Nudd, 55
Gwynn, Lucius, 63n.

Hadrian I, pope, 159
Hákon the Good, 18
Hallstatt, 10
Hamlet, 185
Harald Godwinson, 272
Hastings, battle of, 272
Headford, 248
Hebrides, the Isles, 20, 69, 77, 111, 259, 272
Heimdall, 104
Heimskringla, 103
Hel, 103
Helvetians, 37
Henry II, emperor, 262
Henry II, king of England, 262, 272–4
Henry VIII, 37
ἱερὸς γάμος, *hieros gamos* 'sacred marriage', 16, 61, 103
Hippolytus, 64
Hittites, 56, 83
Hogan, James, 36, 284
Homer, 15, 49, 72, 106, 144; *Iliad*, 72; *Odyssey*, 15
Hughes, Kathleen, 227
Hull, Vernam, 185n., 193n.
hundred, 270

iarfine, 122
iarmua 'great-grandson', 122
Iarluachair, Irluachair, 177, 193, 197, 242
Iar-Chonnacht, 230
Iarmumu, Irmumu (West Munster), 165–7, 169–71, 176–7, 179, 193–4, 207, 216–19
Iarthar Liphi, 150–1
ibur 'yew', 182

Iceland, 30, 162, 194
Ictis insula, 77n.
Illann mac Dúnlainge, 151, 288–9
Illyrians, 286
Imbolc, 155
Imlech Pích, battle of, 118
imperium, 259–60
Inber Colpthai, 199
Inber Domnann, 132
indarrad 'grant', 197
Inde Mór, 207
indfhine, 119, 122–3
India; *asvamédha*, 18; brahmans, 20, 59; Guptas, 136; Hindu 'joint family', 35; law schools, 8; mythology, 62; Sanskrit literature, 24, 49, 59, 136; *sudra* caste, 59, 165; *Sūryā* hymn, 20; *Vedas*, 15, 20
Indo-Europeans, 18, 49, 136
Indrechtach mac Dúnchado, 248, 298
Indrechtach mac Muiredaig, 248, 251, 300
indua 'great-great-grandson', 122
Ine, king of Wessex, 30
ingnea ar méraib, 122
Inis Cathaig (Scattery Island), 178, 213–14
Inis Celtra, 242
Inis Eógain (Inishowen), 73, 114, 157, 223
Inis na Ríg, 124
Inis Sibtonn (Limerick), 242n.
Inis Tarbnai (Dursey Island), 264
Inny, *Eithne*, river, 91
Iona; abbots of, 258; Adomnán, 96, 257–8; annals, 169–70, 257, 260; Columban *paruchia*, 83, 95, 162; Colum Cille, 14; pilgrimage to, 156, 250; policy on high-kingship, 257–60
Ír son of Míl, 202
Irish Sea, 9, 83
Irrus Domnann (Erris), 132, 231
Isamnion (Emain Macha), 50
Iseult, 243
Isidore of Seville, 9–10, 26, 135, 170; *Etymologiae*, 244
Islandbridge (Dublin), battle of, 126–7, 164
Isle of Wight, 77
Israel, 138
Italy, 76, 132
Ithaca, 41
Iverni, 8

Jackson, Kenneth, 48
Jacob, 138, 186
Japhet, 135
Jarl, 104
Jews, 29, 44
Joseph, 201
Joseph, bishop and abbot of Armagh, 190–91
Joshua, 41
Juda, 81
Jutes, 29

Karl, 104
Kavenagh, family, 153
kavi, 136
Keating, Geoffrey, 209
Kells, *Cenannas*, 62, 77, 90, 101n., 118; synod of, 126
Kenney, J. F., 26
Kent, 30
Kerry, diocese, 165
Kevin, *Cóemgen*, St, of Glendalough, 151–2
Kilcock, 158
Kilcullen, 147; Old Kilcullen, 158
Kildare, *Cell Dara*, 131, 152–6, 158, 160, 211, 214, 222–3, 229; diocese, 130
Kilfenora, diocese, 165
Kilian, St, of Würzburg, 191
Killala, 78, 244
Killaloe, diocese, 165, 182
Killarga, 22n.
Kilmacduagh, *Cell Cholmáin*, 242; diocese, 84
Kilmacrenan, 18
Kinitty, *Cenn Eitig*, 171, 199
Kinsale, 27, 177
Kintyre, *Cenn Tíre*, 113
Knockaney, *Cnoc Áine*, 166, 177
Knocklayd, 109
Knocknarea, 244
Knowth, *Cnogba*, 54, 56, 87–8, 162, 265, 281
Krishna, 62

Labraid Loingsech, 11, 131–3, 135–6, 142, 272
Lachtna (mac Cuircc), 227–8
Ladru, 141
Lagore, *Loch nGabor*, 87, 262, 281
Laichtíne, Mo-Lachtóc, St, of Achad Úr, 171, 216
Laidcenn mac Bairchedo, 135, 179
Laidcnén mac Colmáin, 158, 240, 298
Laigin, *see* Leinster
Láir Derg, 184
Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury, 261
Lann Léire (Dunleer), 118
Laon, 55
La Tène, 10, 49–50, 71
Latharna (Larne), 109–10, 217
Latin, 108, 147, 182–3, 259; authors, 49; church, 12; Hiberno-Latin, 13, 65n., 160, 264; learning, 13, 40, 170, 244; words, 15, 20, 27–8, 64, 104, 135, 149, 160, 184, 188
Laud Misc. 610 (manuscript), 174, 199, 208, 216

Leabhar Muimhneach, 227
Lebor Gabála Érenn, 9–10, 199
Lecan, 238
lecc 'flagstone', 27, 57, 186; *Lecc Cothrigi, petra Cothrigi*, 190–91
Lee, river, 177, 181
Leighlin, *Lethglenn*, 140; diocese, 130
Leighlinbridge, 131, 164
Leinster, *Cóiced Laigen* 'Fifth of the Laigin', 7, 22, 46–7, 56, 59, 91, 98, 105, 112, 130–66 *passim*, 170–71, 183, 185, 222, 242, 269; archaic regnal poems, 134–7, 142, 179; Céli Dé, 157–8; kings, 65, 77, 80, 85, 115, 134–64 *passim*, 214, 225n., 253, 262; kingship of, 42, 51, 71, 94, 123, 130–31, 271–4, 288–90; Laigin, 8, 10, 106, 145–6, 255; claims to Tara, 58, 62–3, 142, 148; hostile to Uí Néill, 34. 65, 77, 81, 83–4, 94, 106, 142–7, 151, 207–8; Laigin in Connacht, 51, 132–3, 231; lose Mide, 93, 102, 133, 142, 154; origins, 11, 46, 71, 131–5, 272–3; relations with Munster, 131–3, 151, 158, 162, 164, 168–9, 181, 192, 198, 207–10, 216, 221, 225; with Osraige, 130–33, 162–3, 169, 181, 263–5; with Ulaid, 8, 106, 145–6, 272; subject tribes, 39, 45, 51, 130–32, 154; Uí Néill ascendancy over, 154, 157–62, 202, 209, 223, 261, 265; Laigin Desgabair (South Leinster), 21, 130, 137, 150–51, 209; Laigin Tuathgabair (North Leinster), 130, 137, 150–51, 154
Leixlip, 107, 157
Lemnaig, Lennoxes, 194, 291
Letha, 76
Leth Cam, battle of, 117, 124–5, 220
Leth Cathail (Lecale), 119, 124, 285–6
Leth Cuinn, 229; extent of, 168, 231, 253, 261, 263; hegemony of Tara, 9, 157, 194, 197, 201–2, 211, 215, 217, 220, 229, 270; Laigin and, 202, 225; mythological origins, 67, 168, 199; Osraige attached to, 202, 264–5
Leth Moga: hegemony of Cashel, 9, 157, 201–2, 210, 220, 264, 270; kings of, 146, 211, 221, 270; Leinster in, 151, 157, 168–9, 207–9, 214, 221, 225, 261; mythological origins, 67, 168, 199
leth-rí 'joint-king', 36, 119, 160–61, 182, 250, 264
Leyden, 55
Lia Ailbe, 60n.
Lia Fáil, 27, 52, 57, 63–4
Liamain (Castlelyons), 151
Liath Mancháin (Lemanaghan), 221, 241
Liber Angueli (*Angeli*), 83, 255
Liffey, *Ruirthech*, river, 130, 150, 161, 263
Limerick, *Luimnech, Inis Sibtonn*, 76, 171, 181, 216n., 223, 242, 268, 271; diocese, 165
Liphe, Mag Liphi (Liffey plain), 60, 83, 130, 141n., 149–52, 156, 221
Lismore, *Less Mór*, 170–71, 210, 214; diocese, 165
Lisnalinchy, 126
Lis na nUrlann, 191
liss 'court, ring-fort', 205
Lleyn peninsula, 135
Ludd, 55
Llydaw (Brittany), 76n.
Loarn, king of Dál Riata, 102
Loch Cal (Loughgall), 116
Loch Cime (Lough Hacket), 248
Loch Cré, 170
Loch Fén (Loughfane), 241
Loch Léin (Killarney), 165, 177, 216–19
Loch Riach (Loughrea), 251
Lóegaire, Uí Lóegairi, 87, 93–4
Lóegaire Lorc, 135–6
Lóeguire mac Néill, 94; descendants of, 81, 87, 90, 93; high-king, 65, 91, 192, 208, 254–5, 275, 277, 280; relations with St Patrick, 50, 53, 64–5, 80, 82, 90, 151, 192, 232, 254–5; war with Laigin and death, 65, 83, 103, 145, 151, 194
Loígis, 39, 45, 51, 130–33, 199, 236
Loingsech mac Fiachnai, 124
Loingsech mac Óengusso, 114, 247–8, 256–8, 276, 283
Loire, river, 77
London, 55
Lorcán mac Cellaig, 262
Lorcán mac Lachtna, 214, 297
Lorrha, *Lothra*, 95, 170, 192, 211
Lothair II, emperor, 26
Lough Beg, 126
Lough Corrib, *Loch nOirbsen*, 230, 236, 245
Lough Derg, 133, 157, 194, 242
Lough Ennell, 57, 87, 93, 143n., 262
Lough Erne, 93, 96
Lough Foyle, *Loch Febail*, 115–17
Lough Gill, *Loch Gile*, 244
Loughinsholin, 126
Lough Mask, 236
Lough Neagh, *Loch nEchach*, 109, 119, 126. 263
Lough Ramor, 69
Lough Ree, 91, 222, 263
Louis II, 26
Louth, *Lugmad*, 162; see of, 126–7
Luachair Dedad, 207, 216; *see also* Sliab Luachra
Luan 'Doomsday', 146
Luccreth moccu Chérai, 174, 179

Ludgate, 55
Lug, 54–5, 58, 68
Lugaid Laígde, 74
Lugaid Láigne, 182
Lugaid Laígse, 51
Lugaid Mac Con (moccu Lugde Loígde), 66–8, 182, 197, 202, 236, 276
Lugaid mac Ítha, 202
Lugaid mac Lóeguiri, 81, 85, 90, 103, 275, 277, 280
Lugaid mac Sétnai, 258
Lugaid Reóderg, 62
Lugnae Fer Trí, 66–8
Lugnasad, 58
Lugudunum, 55
Luibnech, 23
Luigni, 67–9, 88, 101–2, 231, 233, 249, 251, 291
Luigthech mac Ailello Flaind Bic, 184, 291
Luimnech (Shannon estuary), 242
Lydney, in Gloucestershire, 55
Lynally, *Lann Elo*, 170, 225
Lyons, 55

Mabinogion, 186
Macalister, R. A. S., 64
Mac an Bháird, Conchobhar Ruadh, 15; Fearghal mac Domhnaill Ruaidh, 15
Mac an Ulltaigh (Macnulty), 128–9
Mac Arddae mac Fidaig, 216, 228, 242
Macbeth, 99
Mac Brócc, 193, 291
Mac Caírthinn mac Cóelbad, 137, 142
Mac Cana, Proinsias, 205n.
Mac Cárrthaig (MacCarthy), family, 47, 165, 192; Christian, 191; Cormac, 191–2, 213, 270, 279, 292; Cormac's Chapel, *Tempoll Mór Cormaic*, 191–2, 213
Mac Cass, Mac Caiss, 193, 195, 291, 294
Mac Conglinne, 211
Mac-dá-Cherda, 217, 242
Mac Diarmata, Mac Diarmada (MacDermott), 17–18, 253
Mac Donnchada (MacDonagh), 253
Mac Duinnshléibe (Donleavy), 127–8, 286; Cú Ulad, 128, 286; Donnchad, 128, 286; Eochaid, 128, 286
Mac Eochada, Donnsléibe, 107, 128, 286
Macc Ercae, 102–3, 232
Macc Ercae mac Ailello Muilt, 102, 144, 298
Macc Ercae mac Fiachrach, 102–3, 298
Mac Firbhisigh, family, 21, 238; Dubhaltach, 35, 37, 68, 238
Mac Gilla Mo-Cholmóc (FitzDermot), 151
Mac Gilla Pátraic. Donnchad, 163
Mac Huí Threódáin, king of Conailli, 123
Mac Iair, 193, 291
Mac Lochlainn, Ua Lochla nn (MacLoughlin), family, 127–8, 269–70; Conchobar, 128, 284; Domnall, 107, 128, 146, 276, 284; Muirchertach, 128, 257, 273, 276, 284
Mac Loingsig, abbot of Armagh, 220
Mac Murchada (MacMurrough), family, 150, 153, 269, 290; Diarmait (Diarmait na nGall, Dermot MacMurrough), 11, 143, 271–4, 290
MacNeill, Eoin, 37, 45, 69, 73, 76, 82–3, 150, 168, 175n., 182
MacSweeney, *Mac Suibhne*, 69
Macha, 52, 155
Mácdóc, St, of Ferns (Áed mac Sétnai), 21–2, 131, 144
Máel- in personal names, 168
Máel-Bressail mac Máele-Dúin, 116
Máel-Brigte mac Mothlacháin, 246
Máel-Cobo mac Fiachnai, 123, 285
Máel-Cothaid mac Máele-Umai, 239, 298
Máel-Craíbe mac Duibsinaig, 126
Máel-Crón mac Muiredaig, 264
Máel-Díthruib, St, of Terryglass, 226
Máeldub of Malmesbury, 260
Máel-Dúin, bishop of Echdruim, 252
Máel-Dúin, of Uí Failgi, 154
Máel-Dúin mac Áedo, 217–19, 278, 295
Máel-Dúin mac Cinn Fáelad, 162
Máel-Fothardaig mac Máele-Duib, 117
Máel-Gualai mac Donngaile, 188, 264, 278, 292
Máelmórda mac Murchada, 163, 289
Máel-Muru Othna, 117
Máel-Odrán ua Dímma Chróin, 105
Máelruain, St, of Tallaght, 157–8, 226; 'Unity of', 213, 226
Máelsechnaill mac Domnaill, 6on., 256–8, 276, 282
Máelsechnaill mac Máele-Ruanaid, 114, 127, 163, 201, 223, 256, 260, 262–7, 276, 282
Máel-Suthain, 257
Máel-Umai mac Báetáin, 111, 259–60
Máenach mac Baíthín (Báethíne), 243, 249, 299
Máenach mac Fíngin, 188, 278, 292
Máenmag, 251
Mag nAdair, 27
Mag nAí, 83–4, 222, 230, 245, 247–9, 251
Mag nAilbe, 34, 169
Magauran, family, 22
Mag Bile (Moville), 98n., 168
Mag mBreg, 23, 63, 207
Mag Cobo, battle of, 128

Mag Conaille, 161
Mag Cuilinn, 23
Mag Femin, 185
Mag Fuithirbe, 176
Mageoghegan, Connell (Conall Mag Eochagáin), 76, 164, 226
Magilligan's Point, 114
Mag Léna, 34, 169
Mag Line, 108–9, 126
Mag Luirg, 233, 249, 253
Mag Muccrime, battle of, 66, 202
Mag nÓchtair, 225
Mag Réin, 232, 236
Mag Roth (Moira), battle of, 58, 112–14, 257
Mag Seóla, 221
Mahābhārata, 49
Maine mac Cerbaill, 92, 239, 282
Maine mac Coirpri, 194
Maine mac Néill, 81, 84, 87, 91, 93–4, 280
Maine Munchaín, 177, 291, 296
Maistiu (Mullaghmast), 65, 141, 150–51, 194
Malachy, St (Máel-Máedóc ua Morgair), 12, 125–6, 261, 268
Malmesbury, 260
Man, Isle of, *Manu*, 109–10, 112
Mana, 23
manach, pl. *manaig* 'monk, monastic tenant', 157
Manannán mac Lir, 112
Männerbund, 30
Marbán, 240, 243
Marcán mac Tomaini, 243, 250
Mark, king, 243
Mars Barrekios, 155
Martin, *Description of the western Isles*, 20
martra 'martyrdom', 215
Martyrology of Donegal, 229
Mary, 29
Mathgamain mac Cennétig, 181, 204, 279, 297
Matudán mac Muiredaig, 127, 223, 263, 285
Mearns, the, 194
Medb of Cruachu (Queen Meave), 18–19, 32, 51, 133, 171, 231
Medb Lethderg, 51, 62, 139n.
Media, 25
Mediterranean, 170, 196
Medraige, 249–50
Meilge, 182
Mendraige, 185
Mercia, 159–60
Merovingians, 36, 78, 159
Merriman, Bryan, '*The midnight court*', 166
Mess Buachalla, 60–61, 63
Mes Delmonn, 134
Meyer, Kuno, 26, 135–6, 153, 156, 163
Miadslechta, 41, 175–6
Mide, 'Meath', 7, 90, 92, 223, 225, 266, 269–70, 272–3; Clann Cholmáin of, 87, 114, 116, 154, 267; extent of, 46, 87, 94, 209, 211, 265, 268; kingdom of Tara, 45–6, 58; kings, 143, 160, 163, 208, 221, 241, 253, 267–8, 273, 281–2; tribes, 69, 92–3, 117, 233, 236–7; won from Laigin, 77, 93, 133, 142
Midir, 61
Míl Espáne (Milesius), sons of, 9–11, 48, 166, 168, 199, 201–2, 261; 'the second Míl Espáne', 200–201
Mimir, 100
mind, *mionn* 'diadem, halidom, relic, oath', 22
Mochtae, St, of Louth, 162
Mo-Chutu Rathin (Carrthach), St, of Rahan, 171, 216–17
Móenach mac Muiredaig, 137, 288
Móin Chruinneóice, battle of, 107
Móin Dairi Lothair, battle of, 95, 109, 114
Mo-Laisse (Laisrian), St, of Devenish, 96
Mo-Ling, St, of St Mullins, 132, 144, 146
Mo-Lua (Lugaid moccu Óchae), St, of Clonfertmulloe, 171, 216
Monasterboice, *Mainistir Búite*, 124
Monchae daughter of Treth, 67
Mongán mac Fiachnai, 112
Mongfind, Mongfhionn, 74–5, 183
Moonc, *Máen Coluim Chille*, 158, 162
Mór Muman, 166, 204–7, 218
Morand, 24
Morrígu, 155
mór-thuath, 41, 270
'Mound of the hostages', 54, 57, 64
Mountjoy, Lord, 27
Moy, *Muaid*, river, 84, 230, 238–9, 250
mug 'slave', 168–9; *Mug-* in personal names, 168, 186; *mugain* 'female slave', 168, 186
Mugain, Mughain, 98n., 168–9, 186
Mugain daughter of Fiachnae Find, 168–9
Mug Corbb, 182
Mugdorna, 115–16, 125, 128, 280; Mugdorna Breg, 88, 117; M. Maigen, 117
Mug Éime, 183
Mug Láma, 186
Mug Néit, 186
Mug Nuadat, 168, 177, 186, 199, 202, 291
Mug Roith, 177, 186
Mugrón mac Flainn, 158
Mugrón mac Máele-Cothaid, 250, 300
Muirchertach Macc Ercae (Mac Ercéni), 81, 85, 90, 100–103, 275, 277, 280, 283
Muirchertach 'of the Leather Cloaks' mac Néill, 146, 284

Muirchertach Nár mac Guairi, 243, 298
Muirchú moccu Machthéni, 50, 53, 64–5, 78, 80, 82, 97, 254–5
Muirecán, abbot of Armagh, 256
Muirecán mac Diarmata, 163, 289
Muiredach mac Brain, 160, 289
Muiredach mac Brain Ardchinn, 160–61, 289
Muiredach mac Eochada, 124, 285
Muiredach mac Eógain, 102, 280, 283
Muiredach mac Eógain Bél, 245
Muiredach mac Ruadrach, 160–61, 289
Muiredach mac Murchado, 150, 289
Muiredach Mál, 245, 299
Muiredach Mo-Sníthech, 137, 142, 288
Muiredach Tírech, 72, 92, 277, 280
Muirenn daughter of Cellach, 160
Muirenn wife of Ragallach, 246, 248
Muirenn wife of Senchán, 243
Muiresc, 238–9
Muirges mac Tommaltaig, 160, 251–3, 300
Muir nIcht (Ictian Sea, the English Channel), 75, 77, 183
Mullingar, 143n.
Mungret, *Mungairet*, 216–17
Munster, *Mumu, Cóiced Muman*, 7, 42, 46, 56, 58–9, 69, 75–6, 93, 98, 109, 130, 132, 141, 165–229 *passim*; divisions of, 47, 58, 94, 165, 191, 207, 270; Eóganacht dominance in, 8–9, 11, 66, 71–2, 133, 176–9, 193–6, 199–207, 213–15, 266; Érainn of, 63, 72, 74, 108, 174, 180, 182, 193–4; high-kingship, 63, 107, 128, 146, 163, 185, 192, 200–203, 208, 211–12, 220–6, 229, 264–6; kings, 80, 115, 159, 174–229 *passim*, 277–9, 291–7; relations with Connacht, 76, 180, 222, 239, 241–3; with Leinster, 130–4, 137, 150–51, 158, 162, 164, 181, 207–9, 216, 221, 223, 225–6; with Osraige, 133, 180–81, 201, 263–5; with Uí Néill, 157–8, 162–4, 200–203, 207–11, 215–16, 220–6; subject tribes, 45, 63, 67, 155, 170–1, 180–1, 196–9, 207, 216–20; East Munster, *see* Ormond; North Munster, *see* Thomond; South Munster, *see* Desmond; West Munster, *see* Iarmumu
Murchad mac Brain, 150, 207, 289
Murchad mac Diarmata, 272, 290
Murphy, Gerard, 240n., 242n.
Múscraige, 167, 171, 181, 204, 214; descent of, 63, 166, 174, 183n.; relations with Eóganachta 45, 181, 186–7, 189, 197–9, 216; Múscraige Breguin, 168, 207; M. Mittine, 181, 224; M. Tíre, 181, 222; M. Treithirne, 168

Naas, *Nás*, 23, 138, 141, 150, 152, 163
Nad-Buidb, 137, 288
Nad-Froích, 188, 193, 196, 208, 277, 291–3
Nagnatae, 231
naidm 'surety', 31
Nath Í mac Fiachrach, 75, 77–8, 80–82, 85, 103, 231–2, 275, 280, 298
Navan, 77, 93
Nebuchadnezzar (Nabcodonossor), 64–5
Nechtan, 55
nemed, 27, 36, 174–5
Nemed, 9
nemeton, 27
Nenagh, 181, 222
Nennius, 112
Neptune, 55
Nessán, Mo-Nessóc, St, of Mungret, 216–17
Nestor, 41
Newgrange, 54, 56
Newry, 72
Nia mac Lugna, 68
Nia Noí nGráinne, 68
Nia Segamain, 182
Niall Caille mac Áeda, 124, 162, 220–21, 223–6, 276, 284
Niall Frossach, 156–7, 276, 284
Niall Glúndub, 127, 164, 156, 276, 284
Niall mac Eochada, 146, 272, 286
Niall Noígiallach ('of the Nine Hostages') mac Echach, 50, 65, 69–86 *passim*, 90, 92–3, 127, 143, 183, 202; birth, 64; date, 78–81, 93; death, 77, 80; destroys Ulster Fifth, 51, 73–4, 81; epithet, 68, 73–4, 76–7, 81; genealogy, 280, 283, 298; high-kingship, 53, 58, 75, 112, 142, 185, 192, 155–6, 269, 275, 277; historicity, 52, 70; 'Testament of', *Timna Néill*, 94, 138
Nibelungenlied, 48
Ninnid mac Duach, 81, 95, 102, 258, 283
Noah, 10, 135
Nodens, 55
Nore, river, 263
Norse: of Dublin, 131, 157–8, 162, 164, 262–3, 266, 268–9, 271–2; of Limerick (Danes), 171, 181, 223, 268; of Waterford, 132, 215, 268; settlements and towns, 20, 130, 224, 238, 263, 268, 271–2; Viking bases, 211, 263, 266, 268; Viking raids, 124, 157, 162, 211, 222, 224, 228, 263; Viking wars, 27, 30, 108, 112, 149, 163–4. 166, 262–4, 266–8; impact on Ireland, 23, 40, 149, 169, 212, 214, 260, 262–4, 266–8, 272
North, the, *in Fochlae*, 47, 84, 94, 115, 203, 247; dominated by Cenél nEógain, 94, 107, 114, 127–9, 148, 210, 256, 260, 268; relations with Connacht, 103, 244

Northumbria, 30, 34, 97, 104, 111–12, 159, 259–60
Norway, 18
Nuado, abbot of Armagh, 251
Nuadu Argatlám, 55, 168, 237
Nuadu Necht, 55
Nudd, 55
Numa, 194

Ó hÁgáin (O'Hagan), 21
O'Brien, *see* Ua Briain
Ó Caomhnáin, 21
O'Cassidy, 22
Ó Connachtáin, 16
O'Connaghty, 22
O'Connor, *see* Ua Conchobair
O Daly, Máirín, 116n.
Ó Donnchadha, Tadhg, 211n.
O'Donnell, *see* Ua Domnaill
O'Driscoll, 180
Ó Dubhda (O'Dowd), 21, 238
O'Duffey, 22
O'Duigenan, 22
O'Farrelly, 22
O'Fergus, 22
O'Flaherty, *see* Ua Flaithbertaig
Ó Frighil (O'Friel), 18
Ó Gallchobhair (Gallagher), 18
O'Gara, 233
O'Grady, Standish Hayes, 97
O'Hara, 233
O'Kelly, 85
Ó Maolchonaire, 16, 20; Torna, 15
O'Meara, John J., 17n.
O'Neill, *see* Ua Néill
O'Nolan, 205n.
O'Rahilly, T. F., 10, 66, 73, 76, 79–81, 83, 133, 135, 155, 166, 171
O'Rourke, *see* Ua Ruairc
O'Shallow, 22
O'Sullivan, Anne, 228n.
Ochae, battle of, 85, 232
Ochan (Faughan Hill), 77
Óchtar Cuillend (Cullen), 178
Odin, Woden, 30, 100
Odysseus, 15, 41, 43
oeconomus, 118
Oedipus, 59
óenach, aonach 'assembly, fair', 23, 30–31, 36, 41, 43, 58, 66; Óenach Carmain, 141n., 163, 225; Óenach Locha Gile, 244; Óenach Tailten, 'Fair of Teltown', 31, 34, 58, 90–91, 162–3, 208
Óengus Bolg, 55, 166, 193
Óengus Céle Dé, 53, 226–7
Óengus Gaíbuaibthech, 55
Óengus mac Áedo Find, 152
Óengus mac Buain, 201
Óengus mac Mugróin, 160
Óengus (Áengus) mac Nad Froích, 181, 188–91, 194–5, 208, 217, 277, 291–3
Óengus mac Nechtain, 179, 296
Óengus Osraige mac Imchado, 201
Offa, king of Mercia, 159
Olaf, king of Dublin, 263
Olc Aiche, 66
Ólchobur mac Cináeda, 188, 190, 213–14, 219, 262, 278, 295
Ólchobur mac Duib-Indrecht, 213, 220, 278, 293
Ólchobur mac Flainn, 178, 213, 278, 296
ollam 'ollave', 13, 34, 175, 198; *ollam rig* 'high-king', 42, 175
Orbraige, 198, 218
ordan (*ordinatio*) 'primacy, succession', 94, 139, 185, 187; *ordbendacht* 'rank-blessing', 176n., 188; *Ordbendacht Aimirgin do rigaib Muman*, 176
Orgetorix, 37
Oriel, *see* Airgialla; 'English Oriel', 127
Orkneys, 135, 163
Ormazd, 25
Ormond, *Aurmumu* (east Munster), 134, 165, 178, 198
Orosius, 9
Orthanach ua Coílláma Cuirrich, 156
Osraige (Ossory), 130, 168, 171, 178; diocese, 165; forfeited to Leth Cuinn, 201–2, 264; relations with Leinster, 131, 141, 162–3, 181, 209, 263–4; with Munster, 131, 133, 169, 180–81, 198, 201, 207, 263, 266
Osric 'mac Albruit', 259
Oswald, king of Northumbira, 97, 159, 259
Ox Mountains, 233

Palladius, 78–81
Paps, the, 166
Partholón, 9
Partraige, 230, 236
paruchia, 152, 224, 255
Parzifal, 55
pastourelle, 239
Patrick, St, *Cothraige*, 25, 34, 70, 110, 183, 189, 191; and Armagh, 50, 82–3, 119, 208; and Cashel, 188–92, 194, 228; and Connacht, 78, 82, 232–3, 245, 247; and Leinster, 138; and Munster, 178, 189; and Tara, 50, 64–5, 90–91, 151, 192, 232, 254–5; and Ulaid, 50, 82–3; bell of, 222; 'Breastplate of', 66; chronology, 12, 50–51, 78–82; *Confession*, 34, 78–9; druids and, 13, 64–5; *Epistle to Coroticus*, 78, 83; gospels of,

Patrick, St (*cont.*)
222; 'heir of', *comarba Pátraic*, 192, 223, 232, 263, 265; Law of (*Cain Phátraic, lex Patricii*), 189, 209, 211, 220, 222–3, 228, 250–1; pre-Patrician saints, 72, 177, 180, 209; shrine of, 161, 223; *Vita Tripartita*, 80, 102, 138, 178, 189–91, 211, 232, 245
P-Celts, 9–10
Pelops, 64
Pendaran Dyfed, 186
Persia, 10, 24–5, 44, 59
Phrygia, 78
Picts, *Cruithni, Picti, Prydyn*, 8, 39, 77, 108, 132, 185, 193–4, 259–60
Pippin, king of Franks, 159
Pirmin, St, 78
Plummer, Charles, 22
pope, 159
Portus Itius, 77n.
Poseidonios of Apamea, 13, 49, 136
Presbyter Fráech, of Cloone, 22
Pritani, Priteni, 108
Procne and Philomela, 144
Prosper of Aquitaine, 79
Proteus, 185
Pryderi son of Pwyll, 186
'Psalter of Cashel', 174, 208
Ptolemy of Alexandria, 8, 50, 155, 194, 231
Pylos, 41

Q-Celts, 9, 108

Ragallach (Rogallach) mac Uatach, 239, 246, 248, 299–300
Rahan, *Rathen*, 170–71, 217, 225
ráith, ráth 'rath, ringfort', 228, 238
Ráith Áeda maic Bricc (Rahugh), 265
Ráith Oirthir (Oristown), 87
Ráith Bressail, synod of, 126, 191
Ráith Bec (Rathbeg), 97–8
Ráith Bile (Rathvilly), 131, 149
Ráith Commair, 116
Ráith Guali, 112
Ráith Imgáin (Rathangan), 153–4, 160
Ráith Inbir, 138
Raithlend, 178, 196–7
Ráith Luraig, diocese, 126
Ráith Mór Maige Lini, 97, 108
Ráith na nIrlann, 189
'Ráith na Ríg', 62, 64
Ráith Ua Fiachrach, 244
Raphaind (Knockgraffon), 200
Raphoe, *Ráith Both*, 85, 162, 252; diocese, 126
rath 'fief, grant, stipend', 44–5, 139n., 177, 197–8, 218n.
'Rath Maeve', 54
Rathmulcah, *Ráth Maoilcatha*, 238–9
'Rath of the synods', 54
Rebachán mac Mothla, 214
Rechtabra mac Áedo, 123
Rechtabra mac Mughigirn, 178, 293
Rechtabra ua Guairi, 242
rechtaire 'steward', 31, 55, 186, 194, 218; *rechtaire for blicht, r. tobaig*, 198; *rechtairecht*, 194
Rees, Alwyn and Brinley, 47, 59–60, 100, 103, 142, 165, 186, 194
Regensburg, 191
Remi, 39
réthe 'high-king', 42, 194
Reuben, 140
Rhiannon, 52
Rhineland, 191
Rhys ap Gruffydd, 274
rí, gen. *ríg*, pl. *ríg* 'king', 23, 41, 104, 169, 270; *rí benn*, 42; *rí buiden*, 44; *rí bunaid cach cinn*, 42; *rí cóicid*, 42, 261; *rígan, rígain* 'queen', 169; *rígdál* 'royal conference', 221, 225, 263; *rígdamnae* 'royal heir', 35–6, 119, 123, 127–8, 213, 220, 259; *ríg Érenn co fressabra* 'high-kings with opposition', 270; *rí in Chóicid*, 108; *rí ríg*, 41; *rí ruirech*, 42; *rí tuaithe*, 41–2, 268; *rí tuath*, 41
Ríg, *Rígsthula*, 104
Rinn Seimne (Island Magee), 110
Robert fitzStephen, 274
Roger of Howden, 57
Rome, 76, 159; Roman Empire, 9–12, 54, 76–80, 83, 135, 259, 262, *see also* Britain; mythology and religion, 52, 55–6, 59, 68, 155, 194; Romanisers, 34, 169–70
Romulus, 68
Rónán, abbot of Clonmacnoise, 222
Rónán mac Colmáin, of Uí Cheinnselaig, 137, 290
Rónán mac Colmáin, of Uí Dúnlainge, 137, 289
Rónán Mór, 167–8
Roscommon, *Ros Commáin*, 242, 251–2
Roscrea, 170
Ross, diocese, 165, 180; Ross Carbery, 191
Rossinver, 22
Ruadán (mac Óengusso), St, of Lorrha, 34, 53, 95, 97, 192, 211
Ruadrí mac Fáeláin, 158, 160–61, 289
Ruarc mac Brain, 163, 289
ruiri, gen. *ruirech* 'over-king', 41, 210
Ruithchern, 206
Rus Failge, Ros Failgech mac Cathaír Máir, 139, 141, 288

Sadb daughter of Conn, 202
Saigir (Seirkieran), 72, 170–71, 180
Saint-Denis, 159
St Michael's Mount, 77n.
St Mullins, *Tech Mo-Ling*, 132, 144, 158
Saitne, 69, 88, 101n.
Saltair na rann, 201
Samain, Samhain, 23, 55, 75, 98, 101
sanas 'council, counsel', 197
Sárnat daughter of Eochu, 154
Saul, *Saball Pátraic*, 50, 82
Saxo Grammaticus, 185
Saxons, *Saxain*, 29, 76–7; (English), 259, 272; Old Saxons, *Allsaxain*, 10, 76
Scandinavia, 12, 30, 103–4
Scandlán mac Flainn, 213, 296
Scéla Mucce Maic Dá Thó, 49
Schottenklöster, 191
Sciath Nechtain, battle of, 262
Scotland, 69, 96, 133–4, 193; *Alba*, 76–7, 260; Dál Riata, 9–10, 63, 77, 108–10, 112, 255, 260; Gaelic, 8, 10; Picts, 8, 39, 77, 132, 185, 194, 260; Scots, 77, 259–60
Scotti (Irish), 9, 48, 65, 76–8, 184, 225–6, 255, 257, 259, 262
Scotia (Ireland), 53, 96, 183, 255
Scythia, 10, 199
Sechnassach mac Fíngin, 205
secnap, secundus abbas, 38, 149, 214, 222; *secnapóite*, 222
secundarius, 38
Sedulius Scottus, 262; *De rectoribus christianis*, 26
Segomo, 182
selaidecht 'alternate succession', 180
Senchán Torpéist, 243–4
senchas 'lore, tradition, history', 13; *Senchas Már*, 34, 174; *senchaid* 'historian', 14
Septimius Severus, 49
Sequani, 39, 46
Serglige Con Culainn, 62
Sescenn Uarbeóil, 22
sét, pl. *séta* 'chattel, valuable', 199
Sétantae, *Setantii*, 50
Sétnae, father of Mes-Delmonn, 134
Shannon, *Sinann*, gen. *Sinna*, river, 132–4, 157, 181, 221–2, 241–2; boundary of Connacht, 51, 84, 91–2, 230–3, 236–7, 246, 253; of Southern Uí Néill, 94; strategic importance, 169–71, 263, 266
síd, gen. *síde*, pl. *síde* 'Otherworld dwelling', 9, 19–20, 62–3, 115, 166
Sidney, Sir Henry, 18, 36
Sigurd the Stout, earl of Orkney, 163
Sigurd Magnusson, 267
Síl nÁedo Sláine, 60n., 87–8, 90, 93–4, 98n., 104, 118, 154, 263, 268, 281
Síl mBrain, 132
Síl Cathail, 248, 250–51, 300
Síl Cellaig, 248, 251
Síl nÉladaig, 148, 290
Síl Máeluidir, 147, 149, 157, 290
Síl Muiredaig, 'Shilmorthy', 248–53, 300
Silva Vocluti, 78
Simon Magus, 177
Sín, 101–2
Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight, 49
Sitric (Sigtryggr) Silkbeard, king of Dublin, 151
Skye, 105, 109, 243
Slane, 65, 87, 90, 93, 137, 221
Slaney, river, 130
Slébéne, king of Corco Duibne, 176
Slemish, *Sliab Mis*, 78
Sliab Aideda ind Rig, 75
Sliab mBladma (Slieve Bloom), 93, 133, 169
Sliab Fuait (the Fews), 14, 119, 265
Sliab Luachra, 177, 193
Slicech (Sligo), battle of, 102, 244
Slievenamon, *Síd ol Femun, Sliab na mBan Finn*, 166
Slige Dála, 169–70
sloinned, pl. *sloinnti* 'kindred, surname', 249
Snorri Sturlason, 103–4
sóer, sáer 'free, noble', 175; *sóer-chéle*, 28, 197; *sóer-nemed*, 175; *sáer-thuatha*, 45, 227, 246
Sogain, 230, 236–7, 251
Solomon, 65
Somerset, 272
Song of Dermot and the earl, 7, 47, 274
Spain, 11, 199–200
Spenser, Edmund, 38–9
Sperrin mountains, 115
sruith 'senior', 228
Sruthair (Shrule), 250
Sruth Cluana Argai (Cloonargid), 251
Stewarts, family, 194
Stokes, Whitley, 183
Stilicho, 76
Stone of Scone, 27
Stonehenge, 64
Stowe Missal, 12
Strabo, 27
Strangford Lough, *Loch Cuan*, 161
Strathclyde, 112
Strongbow, 273
Suairlech, abbot of Clonard, 263, 265
Suck, *Succa*, river, 92, 236–7, 252
Suibne, abbot of Armagh, 118
Suibne, abbot of Iona, 258
Suibne Geilt ('Wild Sweeney'), 113
Suibne mac Colmáin, 97, 282

Suibne mac Fiachnai, 123
Suibne Menn mac Fiachnai, 112, 275, 277, 283

Tabernacles, feast of, 61
Tadc mac Céin, 68–9, 101n.
Tadc mac Diarmata, 149
Tadg mac Muirgiussa, 251, 300
Taghmon, *Tech Munnu*, 136, 149
Tailtiu (Teltown), 31, 58, 90, 96, 115, 208, 253; *see also* Óenach Tailten
táin bó 'cattle raid', 46; *Táin Bó Cuailgne*, 14, 19, 32, 48, 51, 59, 72, 106, 133, 231, 244–5; *Táin Bó Frotch*, 18
Talamnach (Tolomnach) mac Laidcind, 241
Tallaght, *Tamlacht Máelruain*, 34, 157, 161–2, 223, 226–7
tánaise, tánaise rig 'tanist, heir-designate', 37–9, 149, 180; *tánaise abb* 'vice-abbot, prior', 38
Tara, *Temair Breg*, gen. *Temro*, 48–69 *passim*, 78, 88; 'bull-feast' (*tairbfheis*), 60, 62; cursing and desertion of Tara, 34, 49, 53, 95–7, 192, 211; Connachta, 51, 62, 68, 71, 75, 80–6, 200, 231–2; Feast of (*Feis Temro*), 17, 57, 61, 65, 80, 85, 95, 98; high-kingship, 9, 14, 41, 43, 47, 52–4, 57–8, 63–6, 71, 86, 94, 164, 166, 168, 171, 201, 217, 220, 247, 254–6, 260–61, 266, 269–71; kings of Tara, 24, 31, 77, 80, 102, 159, 198, 208, 210, 221, 223–4, 240, 244, 246–7, 256, 258, 276–7; Laigin, 58, 63, 139–42, 144–5, 148, 151; sacral kingship, 23, 51, 54–65, 72, 75, 86, 103–4, 111, 255; *sentuatha Temra*, 102; site, 27, 54, 56–7, 64–5, 67, 87; synods at, 54, 158; Uí Néill, 46–7, 50–51, 53, 57–8, 65–9, 71–5, 80–6, 90–2, 94, 104, 162, 180, 185, 194, 204, 247, 260, 264–6, 265; Ulaid, 38, 68, 112–14, 200; 'vassal-peoples', *see* Déisi Temro
Tarsus, 44
Tech Duinn (Dursey Island), 166, 192
Tech Máelchonóc, 223
Tech Midchuarta, 'Banqueting Hall', 56, 62, 64–5
tecosca 'instructions', 26, 62, 65
Teist Cathail meic Finguine, 210
Telach Garraisc, battle of, 117
Temair Eimín, 187
termonn (*terminus*), 'termynlands', 34, 83, 162, 221, 226
Terryglass, *Tír-dá-Glass*, 134, 140, 170, 209–10, 226, 242
Tethbae, 23, 87, 91–2, 95, 233, 236, 280
Tewdws ap Rhein, 183
Theodosius, 72
thing, 30
Thomond, *Tuadmumu*, 166, 197, 210; Dál Cais, 180, 218, 227, 242–3, 266; O'Brien kingdom, 47, 70, 165, 270, 297; won from Connacht, 76, 169, 180, 227, 239, 241
Thrace, 64, 78
Thrall, 104
Three fragments of annals, 264
tigerna, tighearna 'lord', 41, 128
Tigernach mac Áedo, 196, 294
Tigernach mac Fócartai, 262
Tipraite mac Taidg, 250, 300
Tír nAilello (Tirerrill), 84–5, 253, 298
Tír nAmalgado (Tirawley), 78, 232–3, 238, 298
Tír Conaill (Tyrconnell), 15, 17–18, 57, 85, 103, 128, 258
Tírechán, 50, 65, 78, 80, 82, 90, 151, 189–90, 245; *Breviarium*, 232–3
Tír nEógain, Tír Eóghain (Tyrone), 114, 128, 256
Tír Fhiachrach (Tireragh), 21, 238
Tlachtga, 23, 58, 208
Tnúthgal mac Donngaile, 215, 278, 292
Tochmarc Étaine, 61
Togail Bruidne Dá Derga, 23, 59–60, 62–3
Toirrdelbach, ancestor of Dál Cais, 182
Toirrdelbach ua Briain, 107, 257, 261, 271–2, 276, 279, 297
tolsech, taoiseach, 41, 270
Tolomnach, king of Uí Liatháin, 241
Tommaltach mac Cathail, 119, 122–3, 285
Tommaltach mac Murgaile, 251, 300
Torna Éices, 74
Tortan, battle of, 102
Toynbee, Arnold, 12
Trácht Delossath, 200
Tralee, 219
Treth moccu Creccai, 67
Trian, son of, 147
triath 'high-king', 42
trícha cét 'cantred', 270
Trim, *Áth Truim*, 93
trimoda necessitas, 32–3, 160
Tristan, 243
Tromdámh Guaire, 243
Troy, 10, 72; Trojans, 106
Tuaim Gréine (Tomgraney), 214, 242
Tuam, 15, 230, 271
tuarastal 'stipend, wages', 44–5, 107, 153
tuath, gen. *tuaithe*, pl. *tuatha* 'people, tribe, kingdom', 7–8, 14, 27–8, 31–2, 35–9, 41–3, 46, 73, 166, 195–7, 211, 216–18, 270
Tuatha Dé Danann, 9–10, 55, 166
Tuathal mac Artrach, 215, 278, 293
Tuathal mac Augaire, 151, 289

Tuathal mac Máele-Brigte, 161, 163, 289
Tuathal Máelgarb (Óengarb), 81, 90–92, 101, 275, 277, 280
Tuathal Techtmar, 11, 58, 144
Tudors, 14
Tuilén (Dulane), 101n.
Tulach Liss (Tullylisk), 161
Tulach Óc (Tullaghogue), 21, 27, 125
Tulach Ua Felmeda (Tullow), 143
Turgéis (Turgesius), 262–3
Twelve Tables, 15

Ua Brain (O'Byrne), 130, 151
Ua Briain (O'Brien), family, 11, 47, 70, 165, 182, 227, 269–71; Diarmait, 271, 279, 297; Domnall Mór, 182, 279, 297; Muirchertach, 128, 146, 191–2, 257, 261, 267, 270–71, 276, 279, 297
Ua Bricc, 215
Ua/Ó Catháin (O'Kane), 21, 126–7
Ua Cerbaill (O'Carroll), 125; Donnchad, 73, 126, 128
Ua/Ó Cléirigh (O'Clery), 15, 129
Ua Conchobair, Ó Conchobhair (O'Connor), family, 17n., 18, 20, 85, 230, 252–3, 266, 269, 301; O'Connor Sligo, 15; Conchobar, 270, 301; Fedhlimidh mac Aedha, 16–17; Féilim, 15; Ruaidrí (Rory O'Connor), 128, 257, 261, 273, 276, 301; Toirrdelbach (Turlough), 230, 261, 270, 273, 276, 301
Ua Domnaill, Ó Domhnaill (O'Donnell), family, 15, 18, 129–30, 258; Conn, 18; Sir Hugh (Aodh, 'Red Hugh'), 18
Ua Dublaige, 143
Ua hEochada, Mac Eochada, *q.v.* (Haughey, Hoey, McCaughey), 127, 286
Ua Fácláin, 215
Ua Flainn (O'Flynn, O'Lynn), 125–6
Ua Flaithbertaig (O'Flaherty), family, 230, 237, 253, 299; Roderick O'Flaherty, *Ogygia*, 41, 73
Ua Flaithrí, Cú Ulad, 119, 286
Ua Flannacáin (O'Flanagan), 250
Ua Gairmledaig (Gormley), 127
Uaithni, 194, 198
Ua Loingsig, 126
Ua Máelshechlainn (O'Melaghlin), family, 87, 143, 269, 273; Conchobar, 143, 163, 272
Ua Mathgamna, 127–8, 286
Ua Néill, Ó Néill (O'Neill), family, 21, 27, 47, 127, 129, 284; Áedh Mór, 129; Flaithbertach, 119, 284; Niall, 129
Uarcraide ua hOsséni, 118
Ua Ruairc (O'Rourke), family, 21, 84–5, 92, 236, 249, 253, 299; Donnchad, 107; Tigernán, 273, 299
Uasal daughter of Suibne, 154
Uatu mac Áeda, 246, 299
Ua Tuathail (O'Toole), 130, 151
Uí Ailello, *nepotes Ailello*, 85, 231, 249, 280
Uí Bairrche, 124, 131, 136–9, 142, 146, 155, 288
Uí Beccon, 93
Uí Bressail, 118
Uí Brigte, 155
Uí Briúin, 84–5, 160, 231–3, 236–7, 239, 243, 245–52 *passim*, 280, 298–9; Uí Briúin Ai, 85, 230, 232–3, 236–7, 246, 249, 252, 299–301; Uí B. Bréifni, 84–5, 91, 230, 232, 236, 244, 246, 249, 253, 266, 299; Uí B. Seóla, 221, 230, 246–8, 253, 299; Uí B. Sinna, 232, 246; Uí B. Umaill, 246, 251
Uí Briúin Chualann, 147, 149, 288
Uí Buide, 140, 288
Uí Chairpri Áebda, 179, 227, 296
Uí Chathbad Cuille, 178, 291
Uí Cheinnselaig, 21, 130–31, 137–8, 141–4, 147–51, 153, 157–8, 161, 163, 271–2, 288, 290
Uí Chernaig, 214
Uí Chéithig, 140
Uí Chonaill Gabra, 179, 213, 227, 296
Uí Chremthainn, 90, 115–18, 124–5, 280
Uí Chrimthainn Áin, 140, 288
Uí Chuanach, 178
Uí Dego, 137, 288
Uí Dróna, 149, 288, 290
Uí Duach, 168
Uí Duirdrenn, 188–9, 198
Uí Dúnchada, 150–51, 157, 289
Uí Dúnlainge, 123, 130–31, 136–8, 141, 148–52, 154, 156, 162–3, 271–2, 288–9
Uí Echach Arda, 108
Uí Echach Cobo, 39, 107–9, 117, 119, 128, 161, 287
Uí Echach Muman, 176–7, 195, 218, 224, 291
Uí Echdach, 118, 125
Uí Echthigirn, 214
Uí Enechglaiss, 130, 132, 137–9, 142, 149, 288
Uí Fáeláin, 150–51, 160–3, 289
Uí Failgi, 81, 139, 142, 147, 149, 152–4, 156–7, 160, 169, 209, 288
Uí Felmeda, 143, 149, 288, 290
Uí Fiachrach, 21, 84–5, 103, 231–3, 237–9, 244–5, 247, 250, 280, 298; Uí Fiachrach Aidne, 84, 92, 129, 218, 237, 239, 241–3, 250, 298; Uí F. in Tuaisceirt, 84, 237–9; Uí F. Muaide, 84, 248–9, 298; Uí F. Muirsce, 239, 251

Uí Fiachrach Arda Sratha, 115
Uí Fidgeinte, 171, 176–9, 181, 197, 213, 218–19, 223, 241–3, 291, 296
Uí Forga, 222
Uí Fothaid Aiched, 215
Uí Garrchon, 130, 138, 142, 149, 152, 157, 288
Uí Liatháin, 72, 177–8, 184, 197, 227, 241, 291
Uí Lóegairi, Uí Láegaire, 177, 294
Uí Macc Uais, 114–18, 126, 280; Uí Moccu (Macc) Uais Breg, 88, 117; Uí Macc Uais Midi, 117
Uí Máele Caích, 152
Uí Maic Brócc, 193, 291
Uí Maic Caille (Imokilly barony), 197
Uí Maic Caírthinn, 115, 117
Uí Maic Iair, 193, 291
Uí Maic Láire, 184, 198
Uí Máil, 130, 138, 149, 151, 288
Uí Maine (Hy Many), 85, 92–3, 95, 170, 222, 224, 230–3, 236–7, 239, 243, 250–52
Uí Muiredaig, 150–51, 160, 289
Uí Méith, 115, 125
Uí Nadsluaig, 125
Uí Néill, *nepotes Néill*, 8, 70–1, 80–105 *passim*, 132, 171, 199, 233; conquer Fifth of Ulster, 46, 51, 74, 84; decline, 266–9; descent from Cormac mac Airt, 23, 65–6, 200; high-kingship, 47, 52–3, 57–8, 66, 74, 82, 96–7, 111, 114, 127, 144, 162, 192, 201, 208, 220, 224–5, 254–7, 260–7; kings, 80–81, 87–8, 90–105 *passim*, 110–11, 159, 280–4; monopolise Tara kingship, 85–6, 113, 231–2; originally Connachta, 9–10, 51, 67, 83, 168, 230–1, 237, 280; relations with Airgialla, 47, 73, 82, 92, 115–17, 124–6, 217, 220; with Armagh, 82, 117, 124–5, 220–1, 255–6; with kings of Connacht, 239–41, 244, 247–9, 253, 261, 265–6; with Laigin, 131, 133–4, 137–8, 141–8, 151, 154, 156–64, 181, 198, 207–9, 261, 265, 272; with Munster, 169, 200–204, 207–11, 215–16, 220–21, 223–6, 261, 264–7; with Ulaid, 106–14, 117–19, 124, 127–9, 210, 261, 263; Northern Uí Néill, 69, 73–4, 91, 94–5, 107–8, 113–15, 117–18, 124–9, 148, 239, 244, 247–8, 263, 265–8, 280, 283–4; Southern Uí Néill, 54, 60n., 68–9, 84, 87–94, 104–5, 125, 142–3, 147, 221, 223, 239, 259, 265, 267–9, 280–82
Uí Nialláin, 116, 118
Uí Ségáin, 118
Uisnech, 58, 64, 87, 92–3
Uí Theig, 157, 288
Uí Thoirrdelbaig, 182, 214, 227
Uí Thuirtri, 115, 117, 125–6
Ulster, *Cóiced nUlad*, Fifth of Ulaid, 7, 10, 46, 56, 58–9, 83, 98, 106–29, 115, 132, 165, 210, 217, 270; ancient extent of, 47, 68–9, 107–8, 113, 118, 131, 244; connotation of name 'Ulster', 47, 107–8, 128–9; destruction of ancient Fifth, 46, 50–51, 72–4, 82, 84, 107; earls of, 128; in heroic saga, 14, 32, 48–52, 62, 71–2, 106, 171, 243–4; kings, 27, 42, 58, 80, 95, 99, 106–7, 109–14, 117–19, 124, 126–8, 144, 223, 254, 259, 272, 285–7; polity, 90, 107–9, 118–19; Ulaid, 8, 10, 46, 106, 108, 202; acknowledge high-kingship, 127, 223, 263; *fir-Ulaid*, 108; hostility to Uí Néill, 68, 94, 106, 111–14, 117–18, 124, 127–8, 148, 161, 201, 210, 255, 257, 261; in alliance with Laigin, 145–6, 272; *Ulidia*, 128; *Ultonia*, 17, 107
Uppsala, 103
Uraicecht Becc, 41, 175–6
ur-rí, pl. *ur-ríg*, *oirríogh* 'urraght', 42

vates, 13, 70
Vectis Insula, 77n.
Victor, angel, 192
Vikings, *see* Norse
Voluntii, *Οὐολουντιοι* (*Ouolountioi*), 50; *see* Ulster, Ulaid

Wales, 72, 135, 183, 272–3; Welsh, *Bretain*, 10, 12–13, 112, 257; Welsh language, 8–9, 13, 155, 183; laws and institutions, 20, 38, 261, 270, 273; mythology, 52, 55, 134–5, 186; princes, 83, 135, 183, 272–4; *see also* Britain
Wallace-Hadrill, J. M., 256
Ware, Sir James, 238
Wars of the Roses, 228
Waste Land, 55
Waterford, 132, 215, 268, 273; diocese, 165
Wessex, 30, 38
Wexford, 130, 271–2
Whitby, synod of, 30, 34
Wicklow mountains, 130, 149
Wife of Bath's Tales, 74
Wilfred, St, 34
Windsor, treaty of, 273
World Chronicle, 10, 80, 132, 135
Würzburg, 191

Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 44

Yeats, W. B., *The king's threshold*, 243; *The only jealousy of Emer*, 62
Ynglingasaga, *Ynglingatál*, 103–4
York, 30, 159

Irish Kings and High-Kings

Irish Kings and High-Kings is an analysis of the nature of early Irish kingship. Using annalistic and genealogical material to interpret Irish saga and legend Professor Byrne examines the unique blend of pagan tribalism and Christian monasticism which characterizes the political landscape of early Ireland, exploring the nature of the traditional Five Fifths of Ireland, the mythology of Tara, and the growth of the high-kingship of Ireland. Numerous maps and genealogical tables illustrate the development of the great over-kingships of Ulster, Leinster, Connacht, and Cashel. The confrontation of St Patrick with the Irish kings, the relations between St Colum Cille and his royal cousins, and the ecclesiastical politics of Armagh, Kildare and Clonmacnoise are described and analysed.

This new edition includes an essay on the emergence of Irish surnames, additional notes and corrigenda to the first edition and review of recent work in the field.

More than twenty years after its original publication, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* remains unsurpassed as an overview of this central theme in Irish history.

Francis J. Byrne is Emeritus Professor of Early Irish History at University College, Dublin, and is an editor of the Royal Irish Academy's *A New History of Ireland.*

Cover design:Terry Foley

FOUR COURTS PRESS

ISBN 1-85182-196-1

9 781851 821969

FOUR COURTS HISTORY CLASSICS