

THE PRACTICE OF IRISH KINGSHIP IN THE CENTRAL MIDDLE AGES

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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April 2005

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ABSTRACT

The institution of kingship was a fundamental feature of medieval Irish society; if we can better understand kingship, we can similarly gain a greater appreciation of the distinctive features of that society. This thesis investigates the practices of Irish kings and dynasties in the Central Middle Ages (roughly, the ninth to twelfth centuries) as represented by the sources. Several kingdoms and dynasties of medieval Ireland are closely studied with reference to different aspects of royal practice. There are two particular elements of this methodology. The first is to trace the practices employed by the kings of those dynasties over time; this gives us a greater sense of how kingship changed through the centuries, and enables us to move away from the static and synchronic models of kingship which have informed much previous scholarship. The second is to focus closely on these kingdoms so that we may gain a better sense of regional variation within Ireland. The investigation proceeds with the belief that Irish conditions may be better understood by reference to parallels drawn from the wider European context.

This thesis demonstrates that the nature of Irish kingship and the practices of its kings are more sophisticated and varied matters than has been realised. The 'dynamic' model of kingship is validated, but it has become clear that we must allow for a greater degree of variation in the strategies and styles of Irish royal practice, both regionally, and as time progressed. Many features were common to the whole Irish polity; this is not surprising, for pre-Norman Ireland, as mediated to us through the sources, appears to possess a remarkably uniform culture. However, in different ways, the ruling dynasties of Mide, Ailech, Munster, Bréifne and Osraige innovated and contributed to the development of Irish royal practices, and arguably to the nature of Irish kingship itself. The thesis also re-examines the arguments which have been advanced that the nature of kingship had profoundly changed by *ca* 1200. The sources of the eleventh and twelfth centuries certainly allow us to discern a considerable extension in the powers of the greatest overkings. These sources also record for the first time a number of practices which hitherto had not been noticed; however, the extent to which such practices were new features of the period is difficult to determine. The proposition that local kings suffered a drastic decline in status (as opposed to power) in the same period is reappraised, and found to receive little support from the contemporary sources,

principally the chronicles. The thesis demonstrates that overall, we must think of Irish kingship as a dynamic institution, but one in which many different kings and dynasties, were significant, rather than the select few which have received the most scholarly attention. The medieval Irish polity was more complex, but therefore more interesting.

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Preface

Kings dominated medieval Irish society. Of all the elements of that society, kingship is the one that we may come to know the best, for the medieval Irish sources are predominantly concerned with royal elites. Yet there is still a great deal about kings and kingship that we do not know. I myself came to the study of the early medieval world almost a decade ago and was immediately attracted by the opportunities presented by the source-material of the medieval Insular world. In researching this thesis I have come to know that world considerably better, as well as gaining a greater appreciation of the wider European contexts in which Irish history and literature must be studied. I am confident that this thesis adds to our knowledge of medieval Irish kingship, and therefore medieval Irish society, and highlights some future directions for research; not so much unexplored vistas, as exciting trails leading to unknown destinations.

The journey thus far would not have been possible without an extraordinary level of help and encouragement from many quarters. In the first place, I owe a great debt to my supervisors, Thomas Owen Clancy and Stuart Airlie, for generously sharing their scholarship and insights; without their meticulous supervision and patient support this thesis would have been much the poorer. The examiners of the thesis, Dr Dauvit Broun and Dr Colmán Etchingham, were extremely thorough and constructive in their discussion, criticism and suggestions with regard to the material presented herein. I am also most grateful to the staff of the Department of Celtic, Sheila Kidd, Michel Byrne, Katherine Forsyth, Joina MacDonald and Cathair Ó Dochartaigh for their ideas and interest over the last few years. I would especially like to thank Bronagh Ní Chonaill for her comments and suggestions on drafts of the present work, and Carol Smith, for making the whole thing come together. Several other scholars in Glasgow and beyond have helped with advice and suggestions, particularly Stephen Driscoll, James Fraser and Alex Woolf.

The research for this thesis was facilitated by a generous three-year AHRB scholarship; thanks are also due to the AHRB for an award which allowed me to pursue research in Ireland in the summer of 2003. My home there was the School of Celtic Studies in the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, and I am most grateful to its then-director, Fergus Kelly, and to all its staff and scholars for making me welcome. Thanks also go to the Glasgow University Faculty of Arts, for a research support award in my second year, and for their customary administrative efficiency throughout.

Many friends in the University of Glasgow and elsewhere have given me great help and encouragement, especially Sheila Boll, Rachel Butter, Clare Downham, Nick Evans, Kathryn Forsythe, Alaric Hall, Craig Haggart, Andrew Hamilton, Matthew Hammond, George Hope, Lib Lynn, Katherine Macfarlane, Gilbert Márkus, Kimm Perkins-Curran and Mhairi-Claire Semple. Finally, I must thank Sara, who has been there whenever the going got tough; my brother Ian; and my parents Chris and Joe, who have done so much to help me over the years. This thesis is in many ways the fruit of their labours. I have been blessed with a daughter, Sorchu, who has immeasurably brightened the last days of writing; the thesis is dedicated to her and all her future journeys.

MJZ

The Feast of St Isidore of Seville, 2005

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is composed by me, is based on my own research and does not contain material which has been previously published or presented for a degree in this or any other university.

Abbreviations

AC	<i>Annals of Connacht</i> , ed. A.M. Freeman
AClon	<i>Annals of Clonmacnoise</i> , ed. D. Murphy
AFM	<i>Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters</i> , ed. J. O'Donovan
AI	<i>Annals of Inisfallen</i> , ed. S. Mac Airt
ALC	<i>Annals of Loch Cé</i> , ed. W.M. Hennessy
ARC	<i>Annals of Roscrea</i> , edd. D.F. Gleeson & S. Mac Airt
AT	<i>Annals of Tigernach</i> , ed. W. Stokes
AU	<i>Annals of Ulster</i> , edd. S. Mac Airt & G. Mac Niocaill (to 1131); edd. W.M. Hennessy & B. MacCarthy
BB	<i>The Book of Ballymote</i> , facs. ed. R. Atkinson
BkL	<i>The Book of Leinster</i> , edd. O. Bergin <i>et al.</i>
CEIS	<i>The Church in Early Irish Society</i> , K. Hughes
CCH	<i>Collectio Canonum Hibernensis</i> , ed. H. Wasserschleben, <i>Die irische Kanonensammlung</i>
CGH	<i>Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae</i> , ed. M.A. O'Brien
CIH	<i>Corpus Iuris Hiberniae</i> , ed. D.A. Binchy
CMCS	<i>Cambridge/Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies</i>
CS	<i>Chronicum Scottorum</i> , ed. W.M. Hennessy
DIL	<i>Dictionary of the Irish Language</i> , gen. ed. E.G. Quin
EC	<i>Études Celtiques</i>
ECI	<i>Early Christian Ireland</i> , T.M. Charles-Edwards
EIF	<i>Early Irish Farming</i> , F. Kelly
EIKS	<i>Early Irish kingship and succession</i> , B. Jaski
EIWK	<i>Early Irish and Welsh Kinship</i> , T.M. Charles-Edwards
FAI	<i>Fragmentary Annals of Ireland</i> , ed. J. Radner
FKTW	<i>From Kings to Warlords</i> , K. Simms
GEIL	<i>A Guide to Early Irish Law</i> , F. Kelly
IBTN	<i>Ireland before the Normans</i> , D. Ó Corráin
IBTV	<i>Ireland before the Vikings</i> , G. Mac Niocaill
IER	<i>Irish Ecclesiastical Record</i>
IKHK	<i>Irish Kings and High-kings</i> , F.J. Byrne
JCHAS	<i>Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society</i>
JRSAI	<i>Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland</i>
Lec.	<i>The Book of Lecan</i> , facs. ed. K. Mulchrone
LL	<i>The Book of Leinster</i> , facs. ed. R. Atkinson
MCB	<i>Mac Carthaig's Book</i> , ed. S. Ó hÍnnse, <i>Miscellaneous Irish Annals</i>
NHI	<i>A New History of Ireland</i> , ed. T.W. Moody <i>et al.</i>
PRLA	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy</i>
RC	<i>Revue Celtique</i>
UM	<i>The Book of Uí Maine</i> , facs. ed. R.A.S. Macalister
YBL	<i>The Yellow Book of Lecan</i> , facs. ed. R. Atkinson
ZCP	<i>Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie</i>

Map 1: Ireland – Major Territorial Divisions and Dynasties

Original in Colour



Scale = 1 : 2 600 000

0 100 km

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Chapter I: Introduction

‘All I say is, kings is kings, and you got to make allowances. Take them all around, they’re a mighty ornery lot. It’s the way they’re raised.’

Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, Ch. 23

Kingship was an essential feature of medieval Irish society, and of societies throughout medieval Europe and beyond. The source materials for medieval Irish history, though often different in kind from that found in the Anglo-Saxon or Frankish worlds, are voluminous and many of them have yet received little or no investigation. After a period in which the historiography of medieval Ireland was concerned mainly with questions of ecclesiastical and intellectual history, the subjects of kingship and politics, sometimes labelled ‘elite’ history by contrast with the more egalitarian histories of ideas, social structure, or gender, have made a comeback. The time will soon be ripe for a full reassessment of medieval Irish kingship, and it is hoped that some of the materials herein contribute in that direction. In considering possible avenues of research for a thesis, I initially focused on the question of the practical uses of various literary texts relating to kingship in Ireland. In what ways were the Irish texts of advice to kings, analogous to (and perhaps influencing) the European *specula principum* disseminated and used? How far could historicist texts like *Cocad Gáedel re Gallaib* and *Caithréim Cellacháin Chaisil* really influence perceptions of the dynasties they praised? In what ways did the performance of praise-poetry or genealogy highlight the status and distinctiveness of kings, and how did the audiences of those texts respond to them? It became apparent that to answer these questions required a more nuanced appreciation of the practice of Irish kingship, and in reviewing the available syntheses of the subject I gained the sense that we still have some way to go in understanding Irish kingship as it developed over time. This, then, became the object of investigation: to analyse the deeds of Irish kings and the texts relating to them, to understand more fully the important characteristics of royal practice and how they may have changed.

Aims and Objectives

This thesis is not an attempt to describe the nature of early Irish kingship as a whole; an attempt to do so within the limitations of doctoral research would be foolhardy. Instead the focus is on certain aspects of kingship, and in particular, the practice of kings as

represented by historical sources. The base hypothesis for what follows is that by focusing on particular aspects of royal practice over time, preferably in relation to particular kingdoms or dynasties, one may gain a better sense of how kingship worked and changed over time than might be gained by picking an assortment of examples from across Ireland and through the centuries. It is important to appreciate that our current understanding of Irish kingship is necessarily a composite model, in terms of evidential base, geographical scope and, with important exceptions, chronological sweep. The aim here is not to attempt to create a new model, for all models based directly upon the historical record would be broadly similar; instead, we shall examine the evidence in particular ways to help refine our understanding of kingship at a general level, as well as to provide additional historical detail. These overall aims may be defined further with reference to particular aspects for investigation.

The first is essentially geographical. Our current models of Irish kingship are, in a sense, universal in that they are based on evidence adduced from the records of all Irish dynasties. This is an acceptable approach, as pre-Norman Ireland displays a remarkable degree of uniformity in its social structures and political culture. On the other hand, various differences of practice between different dynasties may be obscured by such an all-encompassing model. Certain dynasties were innovative or successful in different ways, and a few of these, such as Uí Néill and Dál Cais, have been subject to a considerable amount of scholarly interest. However, other kingdoms and dynasties have not yet received a fair share of attention. Consequently, I concentrate on certain kingdoms and dynasties in particular, and attempt to assess the particular dynastic practices of each from the surviving materials pertaining to each dynasty. The merits of this case-study approach are obvious: it makes the broad subject of kingship more manageable, as well as assisting the regional study of kingship in Ireland, which has been inadequately pursued. Though all scholars of Ireland are aware of the plurality of kingdoms in the medieval period, the tendency is to focus on the biggest provincial polities for which there is the most evidence. This thesis cannot avoid this hazard, but in examining some of the lesser-studied kingdoms will attempt to show that Ireland was a more polycentric (and interesting) place than is sometimes allowed for. Of course, it will not be possible to discuss every piece of evidence with respect to every dynasty; in each case certain themes in dynastic practice will be highlighted, and where relevant, comparisons will be made.

The second aspect pertains to the question of historical development. Earlier approaches to kingship were often synchronic, combining evidence from eighth-century laws, chronicle-references from the centuries afterward, and motifs in literary texts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries in an attempt to define the nature of kingship. This procedure was in some sense a corollary of the geographical generalisation outlined above, and is in part a result of the extremely patchy distribution of available evidence for certain areas and periods. Unfortunately the model of kingship so generated was applicable in its entirety to no period or place in Ireland. Scholarship in more recent decades (which will be considered presently) has taken a more sympathetic view of the changes which may have taken place over time. It has to be said that accounts of these changes generally take the 'Ireland wide' stance outlined above, but at least the myth of pre-colonial Ireland as a 'static' and 'backward' society has been long dispelled. The aim here is to pursue each dynastic case-study by reference to political change as shown principally by the chronicles and genealogies. It is only into such detailed contexts that some of the undated or loosely dated literary or documentary texts relating to each dynasty may be placed, and it is a historical axiom that we need to place them as accurately as possible if we are to make best use of them.

The third aspect relates to the contexts of Irish kingship. Though these dynasties will be studied closely, they will not be studied in isolation, and examples from elsewhere in Ireland are employed where appropriate, though not to an extent which would render the geographical particularism of the case-studies pointless. What also seems essential is an appreciation of the wider Insular and European context. Decades of scholarship on the links between Ireland, Britain, and the Continent have shown the degree to which persons, texts and ideas could travel between them.¹ We cannot suppose that no matter how unusual or different early Ireland was perceived to be by outsiders (both medieval and modern) its society and institutions were isolated from the rest of Europe. This thesis does not attempt to make direct comparisons between structures and practices of kingship in Ireland and elsewhere; nor does it attempt to discern the kinds and levels of influence of external kingship on the indigenous Irish variety. What it does attempt to do is indicate relevant European comparanda and contexts, where appropriate, for particular Irish practices. Furthermore, it will be readily

¹ E.g., H. Löwe (ed.), *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter* (Stuttgart 1982); D.N. Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat: Scribe, Language and Culture in the Church of Viking-Age Europe* (Cambridge 1997); P. Ní Chatháin & M. Richter (edd.), *Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: Texts and Transmission* (Dublin 2002).

apparent that the aims and methodologies employed here have been used already by numerous historians of the continental middle ages, and it seems appropriate to test some of the insights provided by that historiography on Ireland.

The overall objectives of the thesis are direct products of these aims. The intention is to provide detailed information on kingship as practiced by particular dynasties. One may gain a sense of the ways in which models of kingship actually operated. The extent to which the nature of royal practice changed over time will be considered, which should highlight possible avenues for further research.

Methods and Parameters

In pursuing a methodology based on close attention to the historical and political contexts, we are faced with the problem that the amount of research which has been done on those contexts is extremely variable. The secondary works containing narratives and analysis of the political history have largely, because of their nature, been able to treat the material only in a fairly general way.² This situation should be in part rectified by the long-awaited appearance of *A New History of Ireland* Vol. I, which unfortunately has arrived too late for the present thesis to benefit from the detailed accounts of politics and society contained therein.³ Nevertheless, detailed studies of particular events, persons or problems are available in various journals and occasionally in monograph form, but less commonly have scholars compiled detailed histories focusing on particular dynasties or kingdoms over long durations. There are notable exceptions, for example Leinster and especially the Uí Néill.⁴ However, there are few historical studies of dynasties such as Clann Cholmáin, Eóganacht, Osraige or Uí Rúairc which cover the span of time we are concerned with here.⁵ For example, though F.J. Byrne's classic *Irish Kings and High-Kings* makes a number of references to historical developments and texts dating from after c. 900, the bulk of the material within is concerned with the earlier period. Donnchadh Ó Corráin's *Ireland Before The Normans* does cover the period, but because of the restrictions of its publication format is only

² Mac Niocaill, *IBTV*; Ó Corráin, *IBTN*; S. Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Houndmills 1997); D. Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland* (Harlow 1995)

³ D. Ó Cróinín (ed.), *A New History of Ireland*, i (Oxford 2005).

⁴ E.g., A.P. Smyth, *Celtic Leinster: Towards an Historical Geography of Early Irish Civilization AD 500-1600* (Dublin 1982); for the later period E. O'Byrne, *War, Politics and the Irish of Leinster 1156-1606* (Dublin 2003); F.J. Byrne, *The Rise of the Uí Néill and the High Kingship of Ireland*, O'Donnell Lecture 1969 (Dublin 1970); *idem*, *IKHK*, pp. 48-86.

⁵ Exceptions include J.V. Kelleher, 'Uí Maine in the Annals and Genealogies to 1225', *Celtica* 9 (1971), 61-112.

able to treat many matters in the briefest or most cursory manner. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín's *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200* suffers from being spread too thinly, and the section covering 800-1200 is a particular casualty in this regard. On the other hand, Thomas Charles-Edwards' *Early Christian Ireland* contains an admirable level of detailed synthesis and original research, but is essentially concerned with the pre-Viking period; its remarks on the ninth century are limited and included by way of a coda.⁶ As a consequence of this, I have had to prepare narrative histories myself to provide a context in which to place the various aspects of royal practice of each of the dynasties with which we are here concerned. These narratives were based principally on the chronicles and genealogies, supplemented by other texts where possible, and the secondary scholarship already available. With these *longue durée* historical frameworks established, it is possible to turn to the particular questions I wish to consider for each dynasty.

This procedure, has, however, led to a further issue. For very good reasons, modern theses do not have indulgent word-limits, and thus much of the historical and political analysis underpinning this work has been eliminated to make way for the particular issues upon which I wish to focus. It is not always necessary to burden the reader with detailed discussions of the intricacies of genealogical relationships, or what circumstances may have led to a king undertaking a particular hosting, or the slightly different ways in which chronicles may refer to the same person or event. In this thesis, I have retained narrative and detailed historical analysis where possible or when it is absolutely essential to the particular discussion at hand, and summarised or removed it elsewhere to lighten the boat. For example, the discussion of royal succession among Clann Cholmáin in Chapter II depends upon detailed use of annalistic obits and genealogical information, and much of this has been retained; but the detailed history of what each king did in his reign has been removed. Similarly, the account of Cenél nEógain history from the eighth century to the twelfth has been boiled down to two themes relating to their overkingship, which means that discussion of how an apparently less significant branch of that dynasty produced the powerful Mac Lochlainn family has had to give way. Again, considerations of what befell the Eóganachta between their displacement as kings of Munster by the Dál Cais and the rise of the Mac Carthaig family, an important question for Munster history, have had to be skated over as not directly relevant to the substance of Chapter IV. On the other hand, discussions

⁶ Charles-Edwards, *ECI*, pp. 586-99.

of the obscure early histories of Bréifne and Osraige have been mostly retained, as these two kingdoms, more than the others in the thesis, have had very little work done upon them. It is unfortunate that the histories of each dynasty considered in this thesis have had to be truncated, not because I believe them to be anything like definitive statements on the matter, but simply because they do not exist elsewhere. Some of the relevant information has been distilled into tables accompanying each chapter, and this compensates in some measure for the losses. I hope to undertake more work on these dynastic histories and if possible provide this in future publications.

There are certain other restrictions and parameters observed. Firstly, the period covered. The focus here is principally on the Central Middle Ages, that is the period from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, though there is a reasonable amount of matter concerned with the eighth century. There is plenty of evidence covering many parts of Ireland over this span, and this allows the detailed examination of the issues I wish to consider. As regards the date at which this study commences, the simple fact is that the bulk of scholarship has been on the earlier period, and with the appearance of Charles-Edwards' *Early Christian Ireland* and the relevant articles in the first volume of *A New History of Ireland* I feel justified in paying more attention to the later pre-Norman centuries. There is inevitably some overlap between Charles-Edwards' synthesis and material here, principally in the discussions of certain eighth-century texts and the nature of certain institutions, for although the ninth century has been taken as a rough starting-point it would be of little use not to consider the earlier social and political background to the historical developments considered here. At the other end of the chronological span, it will be observed that although some use is made of sources for the years immediately after the English invasions, developments in Irish kingship in the colonial period are set aside. I wholeheartedly agree with scholars in recent decades who have counselled against treating the Anglo-Norman *adventus* as a great divide; for scholars of either period to treat the other as *terra incognita* is to impoverish their bases of evidence and comparanda unduly, something no historian should be in the business of doing. Several studies have admirably straddled the central and later middle ages.⁷ The classic work on the historical development of Irish kingship in the later middle ages, Katherine Simms' *From Kings to Warlords* has in large measure stood the test of time, and though a reassessment of the period will be due before very long, it requires a specialist understanding of later medieval sources greater than that which the present writer

⁷ E.g., Duffy's general survey of the period from 1014 in *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, and Bart Jaski's *EIKS*, which makes useful reference to sources of the post-conquest period.

currently possesses. It is clear that a number of profound changes did take place in the practice of Irish kingship in the thirteenth and later centuries, caused at the most basic level by the presence of foreign lords holding very large tracts of land and reducing the power of the existing native dynasties (though these effects were of course variable in different areas). There was thus an uneven playing surface for the Irish kings, to say nothing of moved goal-posts. Many of them coped and indeed thrived under the new dispensations, but the nature of the Irish kingship in the later middle ages is a question beyond the scope of this thesis. One may argue that vikings had a similar effect on Irish society, but, regardless of the ongoing debate in this regard, that the Scandinavian settlements and the Ostmen themselves came to be assimilated to the existing (but evolving) Irish political structures makes it clear that they did not transform the fundamental natures of the Irish kingdoms nor the practice of Irish kingship to any great extent. No significant Irish dynasty was extirpated by Scandinavians, though many famous Irish kings fell fighting them.⁸

Themes and Questions

There are many unanswered questions concerning the practice of Irish kingship. Did Irish succession-practice change much over time, did dynasts become more or less violent, and were particular strategies used to secure succession? Did kings acquire and appropriate more land and resources as time went on, or is there even the source material to show this? Did the royal advice-texts actually have a royal audience, or any effect on kingly actions? How much did consensual politics play a role in royal power? Did kings use particular methods to accentuate/emphasize their kingliness or specialness to others? What methods did they use to project their authority onto people or the landscape? Were the lowest-scale kings really reduced to the scale of petty chieftains in nature and name by the twelfth century? In the following chapters we will address these and other questions. Rather than asking every question of every dynasty, the case-studies will be structured around a selection of these issues, though inevitably there will be some overlap.

Each of the chapters addresses itself to dynasties and themes as follows:

⁸ On Scandinavian matters, see the collection of papers in H.B. Clarke, M. Ní Mhaonaigh & R. Ó Floinn (edd.), *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age* (Dublin 1998).

Chapter II is concerned with the internal workings of a royal dynasty – succession, the royal family, resources, residences, private lands, patronage. The main dynasty investigated is Clann Cholmáin.

Chapter III is concerned with the interactions between kingdoms and particularly the workings of over kingship. The focus is on Cenél nEógain and the Eóganachta.

Chapter IV is concerned with the Christian characteristics of royal dynasties, and their distinctiveness, as well as possible effects of the Church on the nature of kingship. The object of investigation is again the Eóganachta.

Chapter V is concerned with the growth of dynasties; how they acquired territories, how they became important among Irish over kingdoms, how they represented their past to that end, and particularly how middle-ranking dynasties were able to prosper among more powerful neighbours. The kingdoms studied here are Bréifne and Osraige.

Chapter VI is concerned in a more general way with the development of Irish kingship in the period. It questions how titles, administration and military service changed over time, and considers whether the kingship of the late twelfth century was qualitatively, rather than just quantitatively, different to what had gone before. Because of its more synthetic nature this chapter will utilise evidence from across Ireland.

Though each chapter concentrates on one or two dynasties, examples from elsewhere in Ireland are introduced when necessary, to contextualise themes in the history of the dynasties studied here. Certain topics which might be considered important for the study of Irish kingship are also either treated in passing or are absent entirely. The most obvious omission is a discussion of the kingship of Tara. This subject alone would require a thesis rather larger than the present volume, and thus, though there are extended discussions of the two most important Uí Néill dynasties, Clann Cholmáin and Cenél nEógain, material relating to the nature and functioning of the kingship of Tara is kept to a minimum. This is partly because the kingship of Tara is very much a special case; a one-of-a-kind kingship which cannot be easily accommodated into general discussions. The only parallel is the kingship of Cashel, and that does not even come close in terms of the richness and quantity of the relevant primary material. There have been several recent scholarly works concerned with the kingship of Tara, and the forthcoming volume of essays on the subject will hopefully break new ground in several respects.⁹

⁹ E. Bhreathnach (ed.), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (forthcoming Dublin 2005).

Irish Kingship: the Development of a Model

In a paper originally delivered in 1995 Colmán Etchingham noted that there was no 'truly satisfactory' account of the nature of Irish kingship available.¹⁰ Several attempts at such an account exist, three of which have appeared since the publication of Etchingham's article.¹¹ The intention here is not to provide a full historiography of our understanding of Irish kingship, though what follows does provide a description of the current state of knowledge, as an awareness of this is assumed in the chapters which follow. The first thing to point out is that this understanding is a model of kingship, a relatively abstract edifice derived from a synchronic use of the available sources, informed by comparative anthropological and mythological interpretations. One striking thing about Irish historiography is that few commentators make it explicit that this description is in fact a construct. The same is probably true of studies of kingship in many parts of the early medieval west, but scholars of those regions have been more ready in recent decades to appreciate that models can be constructed in different ways, and that there may be considerable variation in the way institutions are interpreted. For example, one recent trend in the study of the Carolingian world has been an emphasis on the power of the aristocracy, and the consensual nature of many of the significant political developments.¹² This is a contrast to older scholarship, which was much concerned with the power and authority emanating from the kings and emperors, who could wage war against whole peoples or bring recalcitrant dukes to heel. Both views of the Frankish realms may be essentially correct, but much is to do with the interpretation and weight lent to the evidence. In the case of Ireland we can in fact talk about *two* models; one derived primarily from the law-tracts and saga literature on one hand, and one derived principally from the chronicles and genealogies on the other. It is notable that both models derive elements from the pioneering work of Eoin Mac Neill, but we shall concentrate on developments from the middle part of the last century onwards.¹³

¹⁰ C. Etchingham, 'Early Medieval Irish History', in K. McCone & K. Simms (edd.), *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies* (Maynooth 1996), pp. 123-53: 128.

¹¹ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, pp. 63-84 (which Etchingham rigorously reviewed in a section appended to the published version of 'Early Medieval Irish History'); Jaski, *EIKS*; Charles-Edwards, *ECI*, pp. 102-6, 124-36, 522-85.

¹² See, e.g., M. Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: the Middle Rhine Valley, 400-1000* (Cambridge 2000); J.L. Nelson, 'Kingship and Government', in T. Reuter (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, iii, c. 900-c. 1024 (Cambridge 1999), pp. 95-129.

¹³ The following section echoes Etchingham, 'Early Medieval Irish History', pp. 128-33, but here we are concerned with outlining the models of kingship in simple terms; for further detail on the historiographic developments in the subject, see Etchingham's article.

The first model is that of a king rooted in an archaic past. This was primarily developed by D.A. Binchy, and its essentials can be discerned in the opening chapters of Byrne's *Irish Kings and High-Kings* and numerous subsequent works which have followed the lead of Binchy and Byrne. This king had several characteristics which would seem more or less unusual from a Frankish or Anglo-Saxon point of view.¹⁴ Irish kings were not as rare as they were in other European societies. At a basic level, there were over a hundred small-scale local population-groups called *túatha*, and each of these normally had its own king, for which the normal term was *rí*, which has a respectable Indo-European etymology cognate with *rex*, *reich*, *raj* and so forth. Kingship itself must be a very ancient social institution in Ireland, dating from prehistory, but what other forms of leadership and social organisation may have existed then are not known with any certainty.¹⁵ Even if we discount Tacitus' account of an Irish *regulus* exiled to Britain in the first century AD, the earliest continuous prose sources from Ireland, the writings of Patrick, describe a society ruled over by various kings who were the acme of the social scale. Irish society, or at least descriptions of it in legal materials, are very concerned with class and status. The possession of wealth measured in various ways (goods, livestock, estate) gave one a higher status, but it was principally in possessing clients that gained an elevated position in society. The legal sources indicated a system of clientship (a contractual relationship wherein the lord advanced the client a fief in return for various renders and services) of remarkable complexity, unparalleled even in ancient Roman society. The natural effect of such a system was to concentrate increasing resources in the hands of fewer individuals as one progresses up the social scale. The kings were at the summit of this scale. Patrick himself did not allude to a hierarchy of kings, but later sources make it clear that some kings were of higher status than others, and that kings could enter into hierarchical relationships similar to (but in many ways different from) the lord-client relationship of the regular levels of society. In this way a kingdom could become subordinate to another, and just as a lord might have several clients, so a king could have several other kings in submission to him. Thus a number of kingdoms, though each with their own king, might have an overking also, though what relationship they had with this overking varied. Some of these hierarchical

¹⁴ The most concise statements of this model are D.A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, O'Donnell Lectures 1967-8 (Oxford 1970), and Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 7-47.

¹⁵ This, of course is a problem for the prehistoric archaeologist. See M.J. O'Kelly, *Early Ireland: an Introduction to Irish Prehistory* (Cambridge 1987); J. Waddell, *The Prehistoric Archaeology of Ireland* (Galway 1998); B. Arnold & D.B. Gibson (edd.), *Celtic Chieftdom, Celtic State: The Evolution of Complex Social Systems in Prehistoric Europe* (Cambridge 1995), esp. J. Collis, 'States Without Centres? The Middle La Tène Period in Temperate Europe', pp. 75-80.

relationships between kingdoms had a relatively stable and enduring existence, and thus we can speak of an overkingship of several *túatha*, the aggregate overkingdom sometimes referred to as a *mórtúath*. These overkings, normally called *ruiri* 'great king', might find themselves in more or less regular submission to even more powerful kings, *ríg ruirech* who had nominal status (but not necessarily authority) over considerable areas of Ireland; such kings are normally considered the provincial overkings of Munster, Leinster and the like.

Despite showing an awareness of this hierarchy, Binchy's model focused closely on the nature of the kingship of the *rí túaithe*, the king of an individual *túath*. Though of supreme status within his kingdom, he had limited functions. He could not make law or enforce public or private justice except in special circumstances. He was not an allodial landowner or *dominus terrae* except of the lands he or his family owned personally. His main powers were concerned with external relations, making war and peace with other *túatha*. Though not a judge, he has several quasi-judicial characteristics, encapsulated in the literary concept of *fir flathemon* 'ruler's truth': the king who makes wise decisions and pronounces correct judgements would prosper, and his land would prosper too, while the king who pronounced falsehood (*gáin*) had no right to rule, for if he did the land would decay. Kings had to be free from physical blemish and deformity, for again a king with these was unfit to rule. Other symbolic prohibitions (*gesti*) of actions by kings are found in a number of stories. In some measure these were indicative of the uniqueness and charisma of kings, what made them special and different from the rest, and such notions were in Binchy's view inherited from Indo-European concepts of the sacral functions of rulers and the relationship between them and the land they ruled. This was exemplified by royal inaugurations, which were supposedly symbolic of a marriage between king and realm, the sovereignty of which is in some stories personified as a goddess.

This description was in large part derived from Binchy's own analysis of the law-tracts, supplemented by a reading of sagas and other literature. The king thus presented seemed to be restricted in so many ways, though Byrne admitted to a historical development of kingly powers. Yet this archaic *rí túaithe*, characterised in Wormald's striking locution as a 'priestly vegetable' was taken as the basis for kingship from which all other developments proceeded.¹⁶ The overkings who competed for the

¹⁶ P. Wormald, 'Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship: some Further Thoughts', in P.E. Szarmach (ed.), *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture* (Kalamazoo 1986), pp. 151-83: 153.

kingship of all Ireland from the ninth century onward were, according to Binchy and Byrne, still fundamentally *ríg túaithe*.¹⁷

The other model of kingship, owing more to Mac Neill's approach, has been most developed by Ó Corráin. Though he gave a précis of the Binchy version in *Ireland Before the Normans*, in the same pages he outlined a description of a developing kingship which was argued more fully in a seminal paper titled 'Nationality and Kingship in pre-Norman Ireland'.¹⁸ For Ó Corráin, Irish kings in the historical record were aggressive and ambitious dynasts who wielded a considerable amount of power. His focus was primarily on the overkings who dominated Irish politics in the pre-Norman centuries, whose activities were documented in the chronicles and whose self-conscious articulations of their identity and image could be traced in genealogical and literary texts. These kings were men of action, who, as far as the annalistic record goes, signally failed to observe restrictions on their actions or niceties of the sacrality of their fellow-kings.

The existence of this model posed several problems. How could the dynamic kings observed in the historical record over its entire duration be reconciled with the static figure portrayed by Binchy? Ó Corráin asserted that the legal materials were out of step with reality from the very moment they were compiled, the pedantic and archaising schematics of jurists.¹⁹ On the other hand one could take the more pragmatic view that though some of the legal materials might not reflect historical reality at the time they were composed, others (including much of the gloss and commentary) did accurately reflect reality (for otherwise, what was the point of the law?), and that as our interpretation of the legal materials evolves, we will be better placed to judge their validity. A formidable problem is that our understanding of legal terminology is incomplete; the exact meaning of terms like *ruiri* remains obscure. Charles-Edwards' remark that the modern reader should not worry about such terms 'for some were probably just as obscure to Irishmen in the eighth century' may be fair but is not helpful.²⁰

Scholars were still left with two models of kingship that were at odds with each other. The obvious solution was place them in temporal sequence, to make the style of kingship apparently deducible from the annals follow chronologically the supposed

¹⁷ Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 40-7.

¹⁸ Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, pp. 28-42; D. Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship in Pre-Norman Ireland', in T.W. Moody (ed.), *Nationality and the Pursuit of National Independence [Historical Studies 11]* (Belfast 1978), pp. 1-35.

¹⁹ Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, p. 29; *idem*, 'Nationality and Kingship', p. 13.

²⁰ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 130.

archaic kingship of laws. As Nerys Patterson has pointed out, this solution proceeds from evolutionist historical assumptions.²¹ This argument unfortunately also re-opened the old debate about the development of Irish society and whether it progressed from a primitive 'tribal' stage to a 'dynastic' one and perhaps, ultimately to a 'feudal' state comparable with other European societies in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. For the purposes of this thesis, at least, such debates are secondary, for the simple reason that all the kings here are practitioners of 'dynastic' kingship (inasmuch as they were members of dynasties), so that questions of 'tribal kingship' become irrelevant. Etchingham himself questioned the validity of a difference between the two kinds of kingship and the evolutionary notions which underlie it.²² He might have gone further and rejected it out of hand as a chimera, for there is little evidence to sustain it.

A few further remarks may be made about our dual models of kingship. The analysis of the dynastic king as found in the chronicles has the benefit of incorporating a historical awareness, though as we have seen this has also led to a developmental view of Irish kingship. On the other hand, both models pay minimal attention to possible regional differences. There are several reasons for this. In the first place the source material is often so meagre, particularly for certain parts of Ireland, that attempts to discern qualitative differences in the nature of kingship between different areas are futile. More importantly, we have to allow for the fact that the written sources were produced by an educated Christian elite who, on the face of it, shared a very uniform literate culture, and a regularized written form of the Irish language. This militates against the detection of localised peculiarities. The only part of Ireland sometimes considered to be different is Munster, where the political hegemony of the Eóganacht was seen as being in some way archaic, while the alleged 'poetico-legal school' exemplified by *Bretha Nemed Toisech* and other texts is sometimes invoked as revealing a different attitude to kingship in that province.²³ These matters are unproven, and on the face of it Ireland presents us with a remarkably homogenous political culture and similar political structures from Malin Head to Cape Clear.

²¹ N. Patterson, *Cattle-lords and Clansmen: the Social Structure of Early Ireland* (2nd edn, Notre Dame 1994), pp. 5-6, 20-32.

²² Etchingham, 'Early Medieval Irish History', p. 130.

²³ E.g. Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 165-70. On this 'school', see D.A. Binchy, 'The Date and Provenance of *Uraicecht Becc*', *Ériu* 18 (1958), 44-54; L. Breatnach, 'Canon Law and Secular Law in Early Ireland: The Significance of *Bretha Nemed*', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 439-59, also argues for the Munster provenance of *Bretha Nemed*.

The Practice of Kingship

The purpose of this thesis is to examine kingships at a regional level over time and see what additions and refinements may be made to our understanding of royal practice. In the main, then, it is Ó Corráin's model of kingship which lies behind this methodology. This may seem inevitable, giving that both Ó Corráin's studies and those here proceed primarily from an examination of the chronicles; we, however, are concerned with deriving refined interpretations from the study of particular dynasties. A few more specific points of the model must be discussed. As noted above, the legal materials refer to an ascending hierarchy of kingship running *rí*, *ruiri*, *rí ruirech*, the last often equated with the *rí coicid*, king of a province. One might infer that the theoretical summit of this pyramid would be an overking of the provinces, a king of Ireland. Such a figure was a given in Irish historiography until the mid-twentieth century, even though the contemporary chronicles were rather sparing in their use of the title. Binchy famously noted that the king of Ireland was conspicuously absent from the law tracts (or rather, what he took to be the canonical early law tracts, rather than glosses and commentary), and endeavoured to link the concept more closely with the Uí Néill and the kingship of Tara, a baton smartly picked up by Byrne.²⁴ For him the kingship of Tara was of antiquity, but was appropriated by the Uí Néill as their special mandate, and the link with the kingship of Ireland was created by their endeavours in that direction. More recent debate on the subject has been much concerned with the question of whether the kingship of Tara did have associations with an Ireland-wide kingship that predated the Uí Néill or at least were not peculiar to them; the recent trend has been a slight reversion to the older view.²⁵ In Ó Corráin's estimation, a hierarchy of kings was a reality (and this can be seen from the annals), but the status of lowest grade of king, the *rí túaithe*, was gradually eroded by the encroachments of enterprising overkings.²⁶ He pointed to the use of titles such as *dux* and *taisech* for individuals whose predecessors in office had been called *rex* and *rí*. This matter will be considered in detail in Chapter VI, but at the outset it should be observed that any such degradation of titulature is not nearly so extensive as Ó Corráin has suggested, as has already been pointed out by Wendy Davies and Etchingham.²⁷

²⁴ Byrne, *The Rise of the Uí Néill*; *idem*, *IKHK* pp. 48-105.

²⁵ E.g. E. Bhreathnach, *Tara: a Select Bibliography* (Discovery Programme Reports 3, Dublin 1995); *eadem*, 'Temoria: Caput Scotorum?', *Ériu* 47 (1996), 67-88; Charles-Edwards, *ECI*, pp. 469-521.

²⁶ Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, pp. 29-31; *idem*, 'Nationality and Kingship', pp. 9-10.

²⁷ See below, p. 276.

As for the matter of a king of Ireland, apart from the chronicle-evidence it is clear that the law-tracts do sanction such a figure, for example *Miadslechte*.²⁸ As an example of recent advances in our understanding I would like to consider a Middle Irish law-text (probably tenth century) on *cró* and *díbad*, most recently edited, translated and discussed by Kevin Murray.²⁹ This tract is significant, though I am unaware that anyone has discussed the relevant passage at length. The text discusses *cró*, a body-fine paid for killing and fatal injury.³⁰ It is significant in two ways: it shows kings operating as legal enforcers for lower levels of society, and, as mentioned, it refers to a king of Ireland. Here is Murray's edition and translation of the relevant section:

§3 Rann ó bun céamus, .i. tét rí in chóicidh nó na mórthúaithe i tech rí Érenn. Mad rí cóicid mad rí mórthúaithe, tét i tegh rígh in chóicid nó ind ardrígh cena 7 gaibid gíall n-ann im chinaigh ind-í marbus a fer co n-éirren fris a cró 7 ranntair íaram in cró. Sechtmad as céamus do gíall frisi tobongar.

[There are three ways *cró* is to be divided, depending on the circumstances:]

A division from the bottom first, i.e. the king of the province or of the major *túath* goes into the house of the king of Ireland. Whether provincial king or king of a major *túath* he goes into the house of the king of the province or the high-king on the other hand and he takes a hostage there for the crime of the one who kills their man, until he pays them their *cró* and it is then divided. One seventh of it in the first place for the hostage who is taken for it.

The process described seems straightforward enough. A king looks to his overking to enforce the payment of *cró*. In this case the king of a province or an overkingdom within a province submits to the superior king, the king of Ireland or the provincial king respectively.³¹ A hostage (*gíall*) is handed over, and the king then acts to enforce the collection of the *cró*, of which one seventh goes to the hostage for his trouble. The text goes on to state that the enforcing king keeps a third of the remainder of the *cró*, the family of the deceased gets a third and the lords (*flaithi*) get the remaining third.

²⁸ *CIH*, ii, 583.7-12; for discussion see L. Breatnach, 'Varia VI.3: *Airdri* as an old compound', *Ériu* 37 (1986), 191-3: 193; Etchingham, 'Early Medieval Irish History' p. 131 and n. 9.

²⁹ K. Murray (ed. and transl.), 'A Middle Irish tract on *cró* and *díbad*', in A.P. Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin 2000), pp. 251-60.

³⁰ For discussion see Kelly, *GEIL*, 125-6; Charles-Edwards, *EIWK* 491, 505-7; D. Greene, 'Cró, crú, and similar words', *Celtica* 15 (1983), 8.

³¹ As an example of the problems of terminology we have here the instance of *mórthúath* which Murray translates literally as 'major *túath*'. But does this mean 'a big (or important) *túath*' (which is what Murray's translation seems to imply), or rather 'a group of *túatha*, a mesne overkingdom' (which is how the term seems to be used in other texts)?

There are various other nuances and complexities to the procedure which are discussed by Murray.³² For our purposes we can note the complex operation of law-enforcement by both kings and overkings, a feature of Irish society to which too little heed has been paid. A lord would normally only have to ask a king to intervene to levy *cró* if it was required of someone beyond the boundary of the *túath*, for relations with other *túatha* was a king's prerogative. In this case the other *túath* might be one with which a *cairde* 'treaty' was in force, a situation which shall be considered in Chapter III. Similarly, if the king of a *túath* or *mórtúath* has to seek redress from an overking, it would normally be because the *cró* was required from a foreign group.³³ This text in particular is a good illustration of the complex patterns of overlordship and territorial relations which could exist between Irish kings. Further, it seems to show that by the ninth century the concept of a king of Ireland who had rights of legal enforcement over even provincial kings had gained some currency, even though the earlier legal materials do not mention such a king.

Certain other themes relating to royal practice have been examined in recent years. I do not intend here to give even an ersatz recent historiography of Irish kingship, but simply to highlight a few works containing valuable information and thought-provoking ideas which have stimulated discussions in this work. In the first place is Bart Jaski's *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, a rewritten version of his PhD thesis, expanded with additional material on what he termed 'dynastic kingship' and other matters. The book necessarily focuses on the question of succession, though the new matter, including sections on the expansion and segmentation of dynasties, and the uses of 'political propaganda', does much to round out the general kingship aspect of the title.³⁴ Succession leads to inauguration, and the work of Elizabeth FitzPatrick has done much to elucidate this subject. Her new monograph, *Royal Inauguration in Gaelic Ireland c. 1100-1600*, explains several important ways in which Irish kingship was connected with significant sites in the landscape, and the use made of those sites.³⁵ Katherine Simms' *From Kings To Warlords*, though also concerned mainly with the later middle ages, made many important points about the nature of royal resources and administration which will be considered here. Many more works will be referred to in the course of the

³² Murray, 'A Middle Irish Tract', 256-59.

³³ Kelly, *GEIL*, p. 23 points out that this would only be possible in cases where both kingdoms owed allegiance to the same overking.

³⁴ Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 191-228.

³⁵ E. FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration in Gaelic Ireland c. 1100-1600: a Cultural Landscape Study* (Woodbridge 2004).

following chapters, and they are testament to the growth in the study not just of medieval Irish kingship but of medieval Irish history, archaeology, literature, language and learning as a whole. In what has become a vast field it becomes ever more crucial to return again and again to the primary sources, for so many of them are yet to be properly exploited. Kings are the objects upon which so many of these primary texts are fixated, in so many different ways, and in what follows we shall return Irish kings and their practices to centre stage.

Use of Sources and Conventions

(i) *Quotation and translation of primary sources*

Quotations from primary sources are given as in the original, be it edition or manuscript, though in some cases I have regularised the use of length-marks. Due to space constraints, it has not always been possible to cite the original in full, for example for annal-entries where interpretation of the Irish is unproblematic. Where editors have provided translations I have given these without further comment when I consider them to be accurate; if I have endeavoured to provide my own translation this is indicated in each case. The exceptions to this policy are quotations from chronicles, where all the translations are my own (except for a couple of instances which are labelled thus). Where my translations are given, they employ the orthographic conventions outlined below.

(ii) *The Use of Chronicles*

According to the methodology above, much of the material presented here is directly based on annalistic compilations. When references are made to annal-entries, the principal source used is *AU*. This is not due to a belief in the superior veracity of the information in *AU*, but simply because corrected *AU* dates have been long used as a chronological reference. Of course, *AU* dates are not necessarily correct, either within the framework provided by the Irish chronicles as a whole, nor as an indicator of the

true date.³⁶ Synchronisms of dates may be found at Daniel McCarthy's website, <http://www.cs.tcd.ie/Dan.McCarthy/chronology/synchronisms/annals-chron.htm>.

Where references are given to *AU* and other chronicles, it is normally because the others contain additional or contradictory information on the same events or people; in the latter case there is normally discussion of the discrepancy in the main text or footnotes. Naturally, events which are not included in *AU* are referred to the chronicle(s) which do include them. The reader will particularly note this for Munster events found only in *AI*, or Leinster ones found only in *FAI*, but for the period in the twelfth century where there are gaps in several of the principle chronicles (*AU* 1132-1154, *AI* 1130-1159, *ALC* 1138-1170), the burden falls mainly upon *AT* and *AFM*.

References are all to the published editions given in the table of abbreviations and the bibliography. The editorial policy of *AI* (ed. Mac Airt) and *AU* (ed. Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill) was to divide entries within a year by reference number (e.g. 955.1, 955.2 etc.). In some recent examples (e.g. Dumville, *Councils and Synods*; Ó Corráin, 'Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn') this system of referencing is extended to other chronicles such as *AFM*; this editorial policy has also been adopted by the CELT database of texts, where it has been applied to the electronic editions of chronicles which are not divided thus in their printed editions. Although the methodology is most useful, there are problems in determining what constitutes a single entry or event, and within the electronic version of *AFM* there seems to be some inconsistency in policy.³⁷ As the standards used by CELT and other scholars are in a state of evolution, references to *AT*, *CS*, *ALC* and *AFM* are to year only, as per the printed editions; references to *FAI* are to the entry-number in Radner's edition.

(iii) *Legal Materials*

References to law-texts which have been edited/translated are normally to the most recent edition; unedited matter contained in *CIH* is referred there by volume, page and line numbers (though *CIH* pagination is continuous through the volumes). All translations of text from *CIH* are my own.

³⁶ See D.P. McCarthy, 'The Chronology of the Irish Annals', *PRLA* 98 C (1998), 203-55; N.J. Evans, 'The Textual Development of the Principal Irish Chronicles in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries' (unpubl. PhD diss., University of Glasgow 2003).

³⁷ Corpus of Electronic Texts, <http://www.ucc.ie/celt>. On these and other issues see D.N. Dumville, 'On Editing and Translating Medieval Irish Chronicles: The Annals of Ulster', *CMCS* 10 (Winter 1985), 67-86.

(iv) *Orthography*

A perennial difficulty for the historian, linguist and literary scholar of early Ireland is the lack of a standard orthography of early Irish. For a work such as this, this issue resolves itself primarily into the orthography of proper names and technical terms. Here I have based the orthography upon the written language of the sources produced during the greater part of the period covered by the thesis, conventionally known as Middle Irish. This stage in the history of Irish is normally considered to cover the tenth to the twelfth centuries.³⁸ It is important to note that Middle Irish was undergoing the numerous changes which transformed it from its Old Irish predecessor to its Early Modern Irish successor. Thus, though Middle Irish forms are employed here, complete consistency is impossible. Additionally, in discussion of texts from the Old Irish period the relevant forms are employed.

One matter about which greater sensitivity has been shown in recent years is the marking of length on vowels and diphthongs, something which was done sporadically and inconsistently by the scribes of the earliest manuscripts. Where scholars once employed the forms *tuath*, *Ua*, *Mael*, more recent secondary works have *túath*, *Úa*, *Máel*. Nevertheless, there is still considerable variation. For the sake of complete consistency, I have supplied here length-marks on all long vowels and diphthongs, even where later and Modern Irish usage no longer employs them. This is most obvious for the diphthong *ía* seen in names such as *Níall*, *Cíarán*, *Brian* for modern Niall, Ciarán, Brian, also seen in the names of peoples such as the Cíarraige and Uí Fíachcrach Aidne.

(v) *A note on particular names*

In names compounded from *Máel* + another element, the name is treated as a loose compound, with *máel* as masc. causing no mutation in the nominative but causing lenition in its genitive form *maí*.³⁹ The name *Máel Sechnaill*, popular in the ninth to eleventh centuries, has its own set of problems. *Sechnaill* (derived ultimately from *Secundinus*) gradually gave way via metathesis to an alternative form *Sechlann*. From

³⁸ L. Breatnach, 'An Mhéan-Ghaeilge', in K. McCone *et al.* (edd.), *Stair na Gaeilge in Ómós do Phádraig Ó Fiannachta* (Maynooth 1994), pp. 221-333; Cf. K.H. Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glénne* (Dublin 1990), pp. 73-140.

³⁹ In the early language *máel* was also treated as feminine (leniting in nom.) with gen. *máele/maíle*, though here only found as *Máel Muire*, daughter of Cináed I mac Ailpín of Scotland.

this form the royal dynasty of Mide descended from Máel Sechnaill mac Maíl Rúanaid (d. 862) took their surname in the later middle ages, Úa Maíl Sechlainn (modern Ó Maoilsheachlainn, anglicized O'Melaghlin). To avoid confusion I have consistently used the forms Máel Sechnaill, mac/Úa/Uí Maíl Sechnaill.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries names compounded of Gilla + another element became more popular. Here *gilla* (Old Irish *gillae*) is masc., with genitive *gillai* causing lenition. In Middle Irish usage the spelling (and quality) of the final vowel varied; generally the nom. and gen. had fallen together as *gilla*, but I have retained the older genitive here to aid clarity in names such as Gilla Pátraic Mac Gillai Phátraic.⁴⁰ The differing quality of the final vowel (in most cases palatal or non-palatal /ə/) gave rise to the variation seen in Modern Irish *giolla*, Scottish Gaelic *gille*.

vi. *Forms of Place-names*

Where modern Anglicized place-names are given they are in the form adopted by Ordnance Survey Ireland/Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland for their official publications, e.g. Clonmacnoise, Tullyhogue, rather than Clonmacnois, Tullahoge. The maps have been prepared using public domain GIS datasets from the Free GIS Project at <http://freegis.org>.

⁴⁰ For consistency I have also used this older form for *io/iā* stems in nouns such as *rígdamna*, *comarba*.

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Original in Colour

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Chapter II: Dynasty and Kingdom

The first issues we shall focus on are those closest to the centre of power: the king, his family, his household, his lands. As we have seen in the introduction, an attempt to separate these areas of concern from other aspects of kingship would be unhelpful, and so the methodology employed is to examine the history of one particular dynasty in detail to provide the context for these areas to be highlighted. The dynasty chosen here is Clann Cholmáin of Mide, who were, with a few exceptions, the dominant Southern Uí Néill dynasty from the late eighth century to the twelfth, providing several kings of Tara. There has been surprisingly little work done on their history in this period, and it is hoped that the present discussion will indicate some avenues for further research. Clann Cholmáin have been chosen not only for their political significance on the wider Irish stage, but also because there is a considerable body of evidence on which we may draw.

The Rise of Clann Cholmáin

Early sources, beginning with the *Collectanea* of Tírechán, show that Mide and neighbouring Brega were under the dominance of Southern Uí Néill dynasties well before the end of the seventh century.¹ These dynasties are represented in the genealogies as a single unit down to the reign of Diarmait mac Fergus Cerrbél (d. c. 565), after which the lands were divided between his sons: Brega ruled by Áed Sláine and his descendants (Síl nÁeda Sláine) and Mide under Colmán Mór and his progeny (Clann Cholmáin). The standard genealogical scheme states that there were two sons of Diarmait with the same name: Colmán Mór, and Colmán Bec, ancestor of the less significant dynasty Caille Follamain; Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin has argued that one was originally a doublet of the other, the distinction reflecting later political developments.² Síl nÁeda Sláine enjoyed supreme power among the Southern Uí Néill for over a century afterwards, though it was some time before they intruded into the overkingship of the Uí Néill.³ Not a great deal is known of the doings of the kings of Mide in the later sixth or seventh centuries, or where the centre of their power was. The most

¹ Ed. & transl. L. Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979), pp. 123-39. Cf. Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, pp. 19-21; Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 87-8.

² A.S. Mac Shamhráin, 'Nebulae discutiuntur? The Emergence of Clann Cholmáin, Sixth-Eighth Centuries', in Smyth, *Seanchas*, pp. 83-97.

³ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, pp. 21-2, 571-2.

significant early site in Mide was the hill of Uisnech, the 'navel' of Ireland and probably a ritual site of some importance in the Iron Age.⁴ The kings of Clann Cholmáin sometimes styled themselves *ríg Uisnig* 'kings of Uisnech'; there has been no conclusive evidence to prove that they dwelt there in the seventh and eighth centuries, though there is a strong possibility that there was later occupation at the site.⁵ The heartland of Clann Cholmáin was the midland areas around Loughs Owel and Ennell towards the Shannon, and southwards toward the Slieve Bloom mountains incorporating land in modern Co. Offaly. As well as lying at the strategic junctions of several waterways, by the seventh century this area incorporated a number of important churches, most notably Durrow, Clonard and Clonmacnoise. The area also dominated the important north-south and east-west land-routes across Ireland. It is possible that in the eighth or ninth century Clann Cholmáin made their base the area around Lough Ennell, centred on the fortified site of Dún na Sciath and the adjacent crannog of Cró-inis.⁶ The kings of Clann Cholmáin probably dwelt there for much of the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries and if there had been a move, access to and control of the midland waterways may have been a strong motive.⁷ Another possible factor was the increasingly-felt presence of Vikings, though their activities on the midland waterways did not get underway until the middle part of the ninth century.⁸

A significant problem of Clann Cholmáin's history is how they were able to come from relative obscurity to become dominant in the midlands and exclude Síl nÁeda Sláine from the kingship of Tara. I am not sure that the problem has been satisfactorily solved, but recent studies have emphasised a combination of factors.⁹ Síl nÁeda Sláine split into branches normally termed 'northern' and 'southern', the former basing itself at the prehistoric complex of Knowth, the latter at Lagore with their seat at

⁴ R.A.S. Macalister and R.L. Praeger, 'Report on the Excavation of Uisneach', *PRLA* 38 C (1928-9), 69-127; Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 87.

⁵ B. Wailes, 'The Irish "Royal Sites" in History and Archaeology', *CMCS* 3 (Summer 1982), 18-29 has a useful summary of the information from Macalister and Praeger's 'Report'.

⁶ C.E. Karkov and J. Ruffing, 'The Southern Uí Néill and the Political Landscape of Lough Ennell', *Peritia* 11 (1997), 336-58: 337.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 338. Radiocarbon dating of timbers from Cró-inis indicate that site almost certainly dates from after c. 850; see R. Warner, 'On Crannogs and Kings (part 1)', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 57 (1994), 62-3.

⁸ C. Doherty, 'The Vikings in Ireland: a Review', in Clarke, Ní Mhaonaigh & Ó Floinn, *Ireland and Scandinavia*, pp. 288-330 at 295.

⁹ Mac Shamhráin, '*Nebulae discutiuntur?*'; T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743: the Rise and Fall of Dynasties', *Peritia* 16 (2002), 396-418.

Lagore crannog itself.¹⁰ The northern branch were the more powerful, eventually monopolizing the overkingship of Brega, yet Clann Cholmáin were able to take advantage of the internal feuding of Síl nÁeda Sláine to become the dominant kings of the Southern Uí Néill. The Southern Uí Néill were only half of the picture. In a parallel transition of power, the Northern Uí Néill dynasty of Cenél nEógain successfully excluded the rival Cenél Conaill from supreme kingship in the north of Ireland after the middle of the eighth century.¹¹ The most important result of these developments was that there was a single dominant Uí Néill dynasty in the north, and one in the south. Both had claims to the overkingship of all the Uí Néill dynasties, the kingship of Tara. The stability of this institution was maintained for almost three centuries by alternating (with a few exceptions) the overkingship between the kings of Cenél nEógain and those of Clann Cholmáin.¹²

Donnchad Midi mac Domnaill (d. 797) was the first king of Clann Cholmáin to successfully stamp his authority on Leth Cuinn, the northern half of Ireland. He quickly secured his position in Mide, invaded Munster, and joined with the Leinstermen to crush northern Brega.¹³ He demonstrated his power over Cenél nEógain in 779, taking the hostages of Áed *rex aquilonis* 'king of the north'.¹⁴ Donnchad's main allies seem to have been the Leinstermen. He married one of his daughters to the king of Leinster; he also came to the aid of Leinster against Munster.¹⁵ In the north Áed mac Néill of Cenél nEógain eventually emerged as dominant representative of Uí Néill; he was defeated by Donnchad in a battle at Tailtiu, possibly even at the *Áenach Tailten*, the great assembly of the various branches of Uí Néill.¹⁶ In ecclesiastical affairs, Donnchad followed his father in associating with the churches of Colum Cille. Domnall had patronised the Columban church of Durrow and he was buried there.¹⁷ In 778 the abbot of Iona came to Ireland and re-promulgated the Law of Colum Cille (*Lex Coluim Cille*) in association with Donnchad; this law had already been promulgated in the reigns of his father and

¹⁰ F.J. Byrne, 'Historical note on Cnogba (Knowth)' [appendix to G. Eogan, 'Excavations at Knowth, Co. Meath 1962-65'], *PRLA* 66 C (1968), 383-400; G. Eogan, 'Life and Living at Lagore', in Smyth, *Seanchas*, pp. 64-82.

¹¹ Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743'; see further below, Chapter III.

¹² G.F. Dalton, 'The Alternating Dynasties 734-1022', *Studia Hibernica* 16 (1976), 46-53.

¹³ *AU* 775.5.

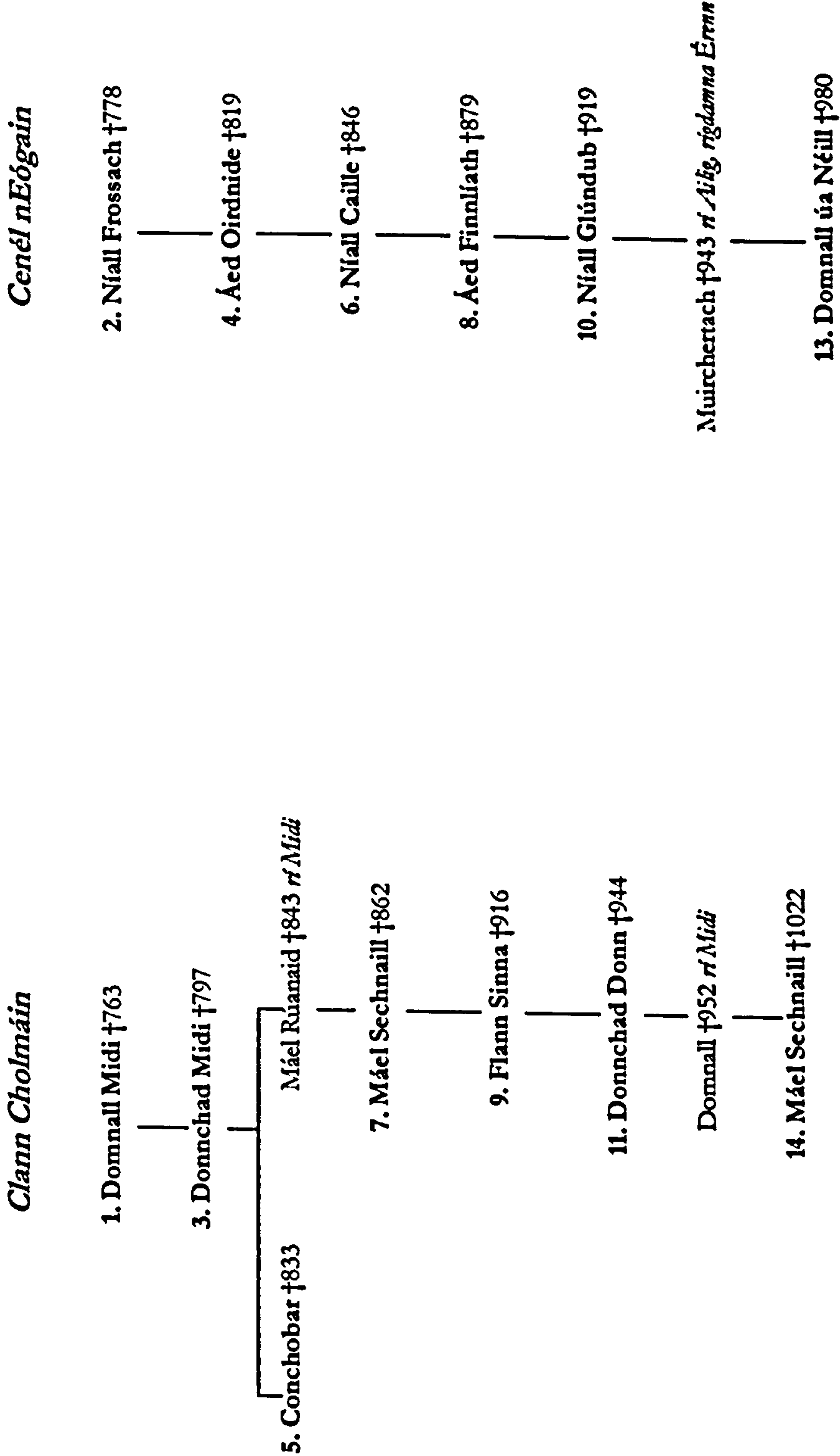
¹⁴ *AU* 779.10.

¹⁵ *AU* 795.1, 794.6. These alliances reflect a general tendency for Clann Cholmáin to be more positively-disposed to the Leinstermen than were the northern Uí Néill.

¹⁶ D.A. Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara', *Ériu* 18 (1958), 52-85; B. Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 61-2.

¹⁷ M. Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry: the History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford 1988), pp.65-66.

Table 1: Succession to the kingship of Tara, 743-1022



Alternation interrupted by 12. Congalach Cnogba mac Maíl Múthig †956 of Síl nÁeda Sláine (N. Brega)

grandfather.¹⁸ This association between the heads of the Columban churches and the Clann Cholmáin kings of Tara allowed Iona to exercise its influence in Ireland to a considerable extent.¹⁹ Donnchad was probably responsible for the *congressio senodorum* of 780.²⁰ Donnchad died in 797. His father (and grandfather) had played a considerable part in the rise of Clann Cholmáin fortunes, but Donnchad consolidated these gains and ensured that the dynasty had considerable power on a very wide scale. As we shall see, certain aspects of his policy recur in the reigns of his successors.

Dynastic History and Succession among Clann Cholmáin

The first theme I wish to examine in detail is dynastic succession. It was noticed at the outset that Clann Cholmáin had made themselves sole masters of Mide at an early date, and thus competition for the over kingship came not from other dynasties but from within the dynasty itself. It will be useful to examine the circumstances surrounding the succession to the kingship to see if any patterns are discernible, though this necessarily will involve the recapitulation of a certain amount of historical narrative. The theoretical models of succession have been recently elucidated in great detail by Jaski, and the discussions which follow are informed by his valuable work.²¹ Where Jaski attempted to define the rules for Gaelic succession (both royal and noble) over the entire middle ages, in what follows we shall attempt to examine the practice of succession as it operated among Clann Cholmáin in the period 800-1200. This will necessarily involve the summary of a good deal of political history, but it is important not to divorce the matter of succession from its historical context. Studies of the sequence of alternating kings of Tara emphasize that in the case of both Clann Cholmáin and Cenél nEógain the succession to the Tara kingship was essentially patrilinear (Table 1). It is important to grasp, however, that the succession to the Mide kingship was far less straightforward, with kings from several different branches succeeding as *ríg Uisnig*. The fact that a regular succession to the Tara kingship emerged from this variation is striking, and might even suggest that some particular mechanism operated which restricted succession to the Tara kingship to what some later genealogies call the 'main line' of

¹⁸ *AU* 753.4, 778.4.

¹⁹ Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, pp. 66-67.

²⁰ Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 158; D. Ó Corráin, 'Congressio Senadorum', *Peritia* 10 (1996), 252. For an alternative interpretation of the *congressio* with respect to church organisation see C. Haggart, 'The *céli Dé* and Ecclesiastical Government in Ireland in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries' (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow 2003), pp. 142-70.

²¹ Jaski, *EIKS*.

Table 2: Kings of Mide, 766-1184

This list may be compared with that in *NHI*, ix, pp. 195-7.

1. Donnchad Midi mac Domnaill r. 766-797.
2. Domnall mac Donnchada r. 797-799.
3. Muiredach mac Domnaill (brother of 1) r. 799-802.
4. Ailill mac Donnchada r. 802-3 (joint-king with Conchobar, 6).
5. Níall mac Díarmata r. ?-826 (nephew of, and probably sub-king under Conchobar, 6).
6. Conchobar mac Donnchada r. 802-833.
7. Máel Rúanaid mac Donnchada r. 833-843.
8. Máel Sechnaill I mac Maíl Rúanaid r. 843-862.
9. Lorcán mac Cathail r. 862-64 (joint-king with Conchobar, 10).
10. Conchobar mac Donnchada r. ?-864 (joint-king with Lorcán, 9).
11. Donnchad mac Áeducáin (Eochocáin) r. 864-877.
12. Flann Sinna mac Maíl Sechnaill r. 877-916.
13. Conchobar mac Flainn r. 916-919.
14. Domnall mac Flainn r. 919-921 (probably joint- or sub-king with Donnchad, 15).
15. Donnchad Donn mac Flainn r. 919-944.
16. Áengus mac Donnchada r. 944-945.
17. Donnchad mac Domnaill r. 945-950 (nephew of Donnchad, 15).
18. Fergal Got mac Áengusa r. 950 (killed Donnchad, 17).
19. Áed mac Maíl Ruanaid r. 950-1 (nephew of Donnchad, 15).
20. Domnall Donn mac Donnchada r. 951-52 (killed Áed, 19).
21. Carlus mac Cuinn r. 952-60 (nephew of Domnall, 20).
22. Donnchad Finn mac Áeda r. 960-974 (probably joint-king with Muirchertach 23).
23. Muirchertach mac Áeda r. ?960-974.
24. Máel Sechnaill II Mór mac Domnaill r. ?974-1022.
25. Máel Sechnaill III Got mac Maíl Sechnaill r. 1022-25 (great-great grandson of Flann 12).
26. Ráen mac Muirchertaig r. 1025-27 (probably nephew of Máel Sechnaill III 25).
27. Domnall Got mac ?Maíl Sechnaill r. 1027-30 (probably brother of Máel Sechnaill III 25).
28. Conchobar mac Domnaill r. 1030-73 (grandson of Máel Sechnaill II 24).
29. Murchad mac Flainn r. 1073 (nephew of Conchobar 28).
30. Máel Sechnaill IV Bán mac Conchobair r. 1073-1087.
31. Domnall mac Flainn r. 1087-1094.
32. Conchobar mac Maíl Sechnaill r. 1094-1105 (king of eastern Mide; son of Máel Sechnaill 30).
33. Donnchad mac Murchada r. 1094-1105 (king of western Mide).
34. Muirchertach mac Domnaill r. 1105-1106.
35. Murchad mac Domnaill r. 1106-53 (deposed and restored several times).
36. Máel Sechnaill V mac Domnaill r. 1115 (joint-king and brother of Murchad 35; killed by him).
37. Domnall mac Murchada r. 1127.
38. Díarmait mac Domnaill r. 1127-30 (son of Domnall 31; king of eastern Mide).
39. Conchobar mac Tairdelbaig r. 1143-44 (son of Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair of Connacht).
40. Donnchad mac Muirchertaig r. 1144-? (son of Muirchertach 34; king of western Mide).
41. Máel Sechnaill VI mac Murchada r. 1152-55 (ruler of western Mide 1152; ruler of all Mide 1153-55).
42. Donnchad mac Domnaill r. 1155-60 (was deposed several times, alternating with Díarmait 43).
43. Díarmait mac Domnaill r. 1155-69 (alternated with Donnchad 42; sole ruler 1160-1169).
44. Domnall Bregach mac Maíl Sechnaill r. 1169-73 (son of Máel Sechnaill VI 41).
45. Art mac Maíl Sechnaill r. 1173-1184 (killed his half-brother Domnall 44; king of western Mide).

Clann Cholmáin. As a full re-examination of the kingship of Tara is beyond the scope of this study we shall mainly focus on the succession in Mide; a list of its kings will be found in Table 2.

Donnchad Midi was succeeded as king of Tara by Áed mac Néill of Cenél nEógain. Áed invaded Mide in 797 and then in 802, he installed two of Donnchad's sons, Ailill and Conchobar, as joint-kings of Mide.²² In the following year Conchobar defeated his brother in battle at Ruba Conaill and became sole king.²³ This is one of the earliest recorded divisions of an Irish overkingdom. As we shall see, dividing Mide between different rulers as a tool of subjugation became almost common in the twelfth century (although then the division was often between Mide proper and Brega, which by then was incorporated into Mide), but on this occasion the result was temporary; Conchobar made himself sole ruler within twelve months. One wonders whether Áed's invasions and divisions were attempts to assert his power as Uí Néill overking, or indeed a sign of relatively limited power outside the North. It is interesting that he settled on both Donnchad's sons (rather than any other candidates). We shall return to the question of dividing kingdoms and installing rulers in Chapter VI.

Conchobar died in 833.²⁴ He was succeeded, apparently peacefully, by his brother Máel Rúanaid, but it was Máel Rúanaid's son Máel Sechnaill who went on to great prominence. Máel Sechnaill had taken an active role in the affairs of Mide during his father's reign, defending the interests of Clann Cholmáin and eliminating several of Máel Rúanaid's enemies.²⁵ Whether or not Máel Sechnaill was being groomed as successor to the kingship of Mide, he secured his position soon after his father's death by killing his brother Flann and his cousin Donnchad.²⁶ In 846 Níall Caille of Cenél nEógain died and after a short interval Máel Sechnaill succeeded to the kingship of Tara.²⁷ Máel Sechnaill became the first Uí Néill king to assert his overlordship of Munster successfully, taking hostages there on three occasions in the 850s.²⁸ Perhaps the summit of his achievements was the *rígdál mór* 'great royal conference' held at Ráth Áeda

²² AU 802.2

²³ AU 803.5.

²⁴ AU 833.1, CS 832.

²⁵ E.g. AU 839.6, 841.2.

²⁶ AU 845.7, CS 845.

²⁷ AU 847.1, 847.2.

²⁸ AU 854.2, 856.2, 858.4.

meic Bricc (Rahugh, Co. Offaly) in 859 which transferred Osraige from the overkingship of Cashel to that of Uí Néill.²⁹

Máel Sechnaill's own reign came to an end in peaceful circumstances on 30th November 862.³⁰ He was succeeded in turn by two grandsons of his paternal uncle Conchobar: Lorcán, who was blinded by Áed Finnliath, king of Tara in 864, and Donnchad. Donnchad was succeeded by Máel Sechnaill's son Flann in circumstances tersely related in *AU*: *Donnchad m. Aedhaccain m. Concobuir o Flaunn m. Maelsechnaill per dolum occisus est.*³¹ Although *per dolum* is here translated by the editors as 'deceitfully', in *AU* the phrase is used most often for a kinslaying. Two years later Áed Finnliath died, and Flann took the kingship of Tara, along with Áed's widow Máel Muire.³² His path to this position had already been smoothed by his marriage to one of Áed Finnliath's daughters, reflecting a trend for the Uí Néill queens to marry (and re-marry) between the alternating branches of the dynasty, which helped to provide an element of continuity.³³

It is clear that during Flann's reign several of his sons played important political roles. Máel Rúanaid, called *rígdamna Érenn* 'royal heir of Ireland', along with the king of the kingdom of Láegaire, were killed in 901 by a son of Lorcán and the men of the kingdom of Luigne.³⁴ This incident throws interesting light on politics within Mide, and suggests that scions of Clann Cholmáin kings had interests in common with different sub-kingdoms. In 903 Flann ordered an execution to be carried out at the church of Trevet by another son, Áengus, along with Máel Mithig, king of Brega (indicating either acknowledgement of Flann's overlordship or an alliance between Mide and Brega), though no chronicles tell us who the victim was.³⁵ Flann's most famous son, Donnchad, was less dutiful, as *AU* 904.2 report: 'Kells was profaned by Flann mac Maíl Sechnaill against Donnchad, i.e. his own son'. The circumstances behind this episode escape us, but some reasons why Donnchad might have been at Kells are discussed below. In 913 Donnchad joined with the king of northern Brega to defeat southern Brega and the

²⁹ Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 265; E. FitzPatrick, 'The Landscape of Máel Sechnaill's *Rígdál* at Ráith Áeda, 859 AD', in T. Condit, C. Corlett & P. Wallace (edd.), *Above and Beyond: Essays in Memory of Leo Swan* (forthcoming).

³⁰ *AU* 862.5.

³¹ *AU* 877.2.

³² For an analysis of Flann's career see A. Woolf, 'View from the west: an Irish Perspective on West Saxon Dynastic Practice' in N.J. Higham & D.H. Hill (edd.), *Edward the Elder, 899-924* (London 2001), pp. 89-101.

³³ A. Connolly, 'The Banshenchas and the Uí Néill queens of Tara' in Smyth, *Seanchas*, pp. 98-108. For discussion of this process with specific regard to Flann, see Woolf, 'View from the west'.

³⁴ *AU* 901.1.

³⁵ *AU* 903.4. Máel Mithig's predecessor and brother Máel Finnia died in the same year.

Leinstermen, perhaps another indication of some kind of accommodation between Clann Cholmáin and northern Brega, though it is not clear whether he was an agent of Flann's will or acting on his own initiative.³⁶

In the north Níall Glúndub mac Áeda had consolidated his position as king of Ailech and could now assert his position as heir to the kingship of Tara. Accordingly, he invaded Mide in 914, but was driven off by Flann's son Áengus. Áengus however was killed in the following year, and was given the title *rídamna Temrach* 'heir of Tara' by the annalists, an interesting contrast with the title awarded to his brother Máel Rúanaid noted above; perhaps the difference reflects a reduction in Flann's perceived power at the time.³⁷ Flann's sons Máel Rúanaid and Áengus, possibly groomed as his successors, were now gone; his other sons Donnchad and Conchobar rebelled against him immediately afterwards. Níall mac Áeda, who did not want Donnchad either taking the kingship of Tara which was Níall's by virtue of the north-south alternation, or asserting independence when Níall secured the kingship, brought an army down from the north and forced Donnchad and Conchobar to promise to obey their father.³⁸ Flann's power was clearly diminished by this time, and he died the following year.³⁹

It is not clear who then became king of Mide. Conchobar, titled *rídomna Temrach* by *AU*, was killed alongside Níall Glúndub and many of the nobles of Leth Cuinn in the Battle of Dublin in 919.⁴⁰ By surviving (or avoiding) the battle, Donnchad ensured a swift succession to the kingship of Mide and Tara. He made sure of this by killing another of his brothers, Áed, soon thereafter.⁴¹ Donnchad committed another kinslaying two years later, of another brother Domnall, though *AU* add that this murder *aptum erat*.⁴² The list of Mide kings in the *Book of Leinster* includes Domnall, who may therefore have been a joint-king or sub-king alongside Donnchad in the years 919-21.⁴³ Certainly several of Domnall's descendants (*In Goit*) went on to acquire the kingship of Mide.⁴⁴ Donnchad's reign was in some ways overshadowed by Muirchertach mac Néill of Cenél nEógain, who would almost certainly have succeeded to the kingship of Tara had he not predeceased Donnchad. Muirchertach famously 'disturbed' the Fair of

³⁶ *AU* 913.4, *CS* 913.

³⁷ *AU* 915.1, *CS* 914.

³⁸ *AU* 915.3.

³⁹ *AU* 916.1. The overall assessment in Woolf, 'View from the west', is more positive.

⁴⁰ *AU*, *AI* 919.3.

⁴¹ *AU* 919.2.

⁴² *AU* 921.2.

⁴³ *LL* 42 a 1 – 42 b 60, ed. in *B&L*, i, pp. 196-8.

⁴⁴ Additionally, Domnall is named in the *Bansenchas* as a son of Flann Sinna and Máel Muire, which shows he had posthumous fame. See Figure 5 below.

Tailtiu, *Áenach Tailten* in 927; peace was made between the two parties, but the fair was not held again for 79 years.⁴⁵

After the death of Donnchad in 944 there were several short-reigning kings of Mide. This much is clear from the king-list in both the *Book of Leinster* and the metrical list by Flann Mainistrech, *Mide magen clainne Cuinn*.⁴⁶ Several kings succeeded, but not all of their obits and few of their activities are recorded in the chronicles. For some of this period there may well have been a succession conflict between the sons of Donnchad Donn and other branches of the dynasty represented by the descendants of his brothers; several of these other branches provided kings of Mide in the decades following his death. During this period Clann Cholmáin and Cenél nEógain were overshadowed by capable dynasts of Síl nÁeda Sláine and Cenél Conaill, principally Congalach Cnogba of Síl nÁeda Sláine, though after that interlude Domnall úa Néill succeeded to the kingship of Tara and extended his position in the midlands by building garrisoned forts in Mide and campaigning against Brega. By basing himself in this region (and leaving the rule of Ailech to a relative) Domnall seems to have been attempting to make his claim to the kingship of Ireland into a reality.⁴⁷ Domnall however ran into serious opposition in 970; he was heavily defeated by Domnall mac Congalaig of Brega (the latter in concert with the Dublin Norse) in that year, and in 971 he was 'driven from Mide by Clann Cholmáin'.⁴⁸ Domnall died at Armagh in 980 and was succeeded as king of Tara by Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, king of Mide.⁴⁹ The alternation between Cenél nEógain and Clann Cholmáin in the kingship of Tara had thus been restored; this however was the last gasp of that process. Máel Sechnaill had already been king of Mide for a few years, but we do not know the exact circumstances of his accession there. The central years of Máel Sechnaill's reign were dominated by his struggles with the king of Munster, Brían Bóraime of Dál Cais, for supremacy in Ireland, a contest ultimately won by Brían in 1002. After Brían's death at Clontarf in 1014 Máel Sechnaill was able to recover the supreme position for himself for a further eight years.

⁴⁵ *AU* 927.4. See below for the restoration of the fair in 1007.

⁴⁶ Ed. & transl. J. MacNeill, 'Poems by Flann Mainistrech on the dynasties of Ailech, Mide and Brega', *Archivium Hibernicum* 2 (1913), 35-99; re-ed. P. Smith, 'Mide maigen Clainni Cuind', *Peritia* 15 (2001), 108-144.

⁴⁷ F.J. Byrne, 'The Trembling Sod: Ireland in 1169', *NHI*, ii, pp. 1-42 at 8.

⁴⁸ *AU* 970.4, 971.2. For discussion see B. Jaski, 'The Vikings and the kingship of Tara', *Peritia* 9 (1995), 310-51.

⁴⁹ *AU* 980.2.

Byrne characterized the history of Mide after the death of Máel Sechnaill in 1022 as one of dissent, division and dismemberment, with Mide continuously fought over by more powerful neighbours. He ascribed the decline of Mide to the incompetence of Máel Sechnaill's successors (including their failure to secure the overlordship of Dublin), to resentment and rebellion on the part of the Brega kingdoms, and especially to the fact that 'Mide and Brega contained more monasteries than any other Irish overkingdom, and the greater houses owned large tracts of land for which extensive immunities were claimed'.⁵⁰ We shall consider this problem further below, but it is an interesting question whether dynastic strife played a part in this perceived decline; several branches of the dynasty must have retained enough land and power to regain the kingship of Mide after several generations when they had been excluded.

The first of these took power in 1022, in the person of another Máel Sechnaill, known as *In Got* 'The Stammerer', a descendant of Domnall son of Flann Sinna. His succession may have been principally facilitated by the lack of an obvious heir to Máel Sechnaill II, who outlived several of his sons.⁵¹ The Stammerer's reign seems notable only for internal feuding within the dynasty between his family (later known as Na Gutta, 'the stammerers') and another branch (Uí Charraig Calma) descended from Áengus son of Flann Sinna. Máel Sechnaill Got died in 1025.⁵² The next king was one Ráen (a nickname meaning 'rout' or 'victory') mac Muirchertaig, though the exact provenance of his father Muirchertach is unclear.⁵³ Ráen's successor Domnall (a brother or son of Máel Sechnaill In Got) was challenged by Conchobar, grandson of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, who expelled him from the kingship and banished him to an island on Lough Ree.⁵⁴ Conchobar's own father was an abbot of Clonard who died in 1019; this branch of the Clann Cholmáin dynasty had close ties with that church at the time, and in fact all later kings of Mide descended from Domnall of Clonard.⁵⁵ Several

⁵⁰ Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 268-69. In his more recent statement on the matter ('The Trembling Sod', p. 9), Byrne again stresses the importance of the great number of churches in Mide: 'The unexpected collapse of Meath can most plausibly be explained by the extraordinary number of wealthy monasteries concentrated in the province'.

⁵¹ P. Walsh, 'The Ua Maelechlainn Kings of Meath', *IER* 57 (1941), 165-83: 167.

⁵² *AU* 1025.3.

⁵³ For discussion of Ráen, see S. Duffy, 'Ostmen, Irish and Welsh in the Eleventh Century', *Peritia* 9 (1995), 378-96: 382-3; D.E. Thornton, 'Who was Rhain the Irishman?', *Studia Celtica* 34 (2000), 131-46: 136-41.

⁵⁴ *AT* 1030.

⁵⁵ Walsh, 'The Ua Maelechlainn Kings', 167.

of Domnall's other descendants were ecclesiastics of Clonard, and descendants of Conchobar mac Flainn Sinna are also recorded at Clonard in the eleventh century.⁵⁶

Conchobar reigned until 1073 and was reckoned by Byrne to be 'the last able king of this dynasty'.⁵⁷ He consolidated his power in familiar fashion by blinding his brother Flann in 1037, and then his uncle Murchad in 1039.⁵⁸ He killed another uncle, Muirchertach in 1039 'to the profanation of God and men' according to *ALC*. More relatives were killed in 1058 and 1071, the first a descendant of Flann Sinna, the second another one of Na Gutta. Both are termed *rigdamna*.⁵⁹ It is interesting that Conchobar killed relatives not just in the first years of his reign but right through almost to the end; this practice may indeed have been a cause of the dissensions among Clann Cholmáin after his death. The fundamental problem is to what extent kinslaying either stabilized power by eliminating rivals, or led to further strife by creating enemies. Many claimants (some successful) to kingship were descendants of dynasts who had been killed or blinded, and in this respect at least it seems that kinslaying was often an ineffective tool for 'streamlining' the dynasty, inasmuch as the eliminated rivals may already have had offspring.

Conchobar was overshadowed by his neighbours, mainly Diarmait mac Maíl na mBó of Leinster who made himself for a time the most powerful king in southern Ireland.⁶⁰ Ultimately Diarmait was to fall by Conchobar in the Battle of Odba in 1072.⁶¹ This might have been a prime opportunity for Conchobar to regain some kind of position beyond Mide, but dynastic strife took a hand and Conchobar's past caught up with him. He was slain by his nephew Murchad 'despite the protection of the staff of Jesus'.⁶² Murchad's father was Flann, blinded by Conchobar in 1037.

After Conchobar's death there was a struggle between his son Máel Sechnaill and his killer Murchad, so that Mide was 'desolated' between them.⁶³ Murchad was killed in the bell-tower at Kells in 1076 by Amlaíb, king of Gailenga, who was killed in turn by Máel Sechnaill, the chronicles remarking that this fate was the vengeance of

⁵⁶ Loingsech, *fer léiginn* *AFM* 1042, and his son, *comarba Finnéin 7 Coluim Cille* *AU* 1055.4. For discussion see P. Byrne, 'The Community of Clonard, Sixth to Twelfth centuries', *Peritia* 4 (1985), 157-73.

⁵⁷ Byrne, 'The Trembling Sod', p. 8.

⁵⁸ Walsh, 'The Ua Maelechlainn Kings', 169-70.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶⁰ Hence the claim in *LL* that Diarmait was king of Ireland 'with opposition'. See Byrne, 'The Trembling Sod' p. 7. Cf. D. Ó Corráin, 'The Career of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, King of Leinster', *Journal of the Old Wexford Society* 3 (1970-71), 26-35.

⁶¹ *AU* 1072.4.

⁶² *AU* 1073.2.

⁶³ *AFM* 1073.

Colum Cille.⁶⁴ *AT* state at 1055 that Murchad was abbot of Clonard and Kells, and Byrne takes his murder by the Gailenga to be a response to his intended usurpation of the abbacy of Kells.⁶⁵ This is possible; Murchad may have inherited the position of his grandfather as abbot of Clonard, but perhaps his activities at Kells are analogous to those of Donnchad Donn discussed above. It is clear that in the time of Conchobar and afterwards that Clann Cholmáin maintained close ties with Kells, as well as Clonard; perhaps Murchad had made his power base here in contention with Máel Sechnaill in western Mide; or possibly, given Máel Sechnaill's prompt retribution, the two rivals had reached some kind of agreement and divided Mide between them. Máel Sechnaill (IV, if we are counting continuously) was now the unchallenged king of Mide. He was killed by the men of Tethba (in western Mide) *i mebail* 'treacherously' at Ardagh in 1087 and was given the title 'king of Tara' at his death; this title was now effectively the prerogative of the kings of Mide.⁶⁶

Domnall, brother of Murchad of Kells bell-tower fame, succeeded to the kingship. In his reign Mide played a significant role in the cross-Ireland warfare which erupted after the death of Tairdelbach úa Bríain of Munster. In these conflicts Domnall changed sides more than once, and perhaps as a consequence of this vacillation Muirchertach Úa Bríain of Munster killed him, possibly at Dublin, in 1094.⁶⁷ Muirchertach partitioned Mide between Conchobar, son of Máel Sechnaill IV, and Donnchad, son of Murchad. This was the first effective partitioning of Mide by an external power since 802, and if, as then, one of the kings had quickly asserted his dominance over the other, and assumed sole kingship, Mide might have quickly regained a position of importance. As it was, 'the Meath princes were too busy hacking one another to pieces to offer any resistance for another decade'.⁶⁸ While they were involved in relatively small-scale fighting in Mide, the contest for a 'kingship of Ireland' was proceeding apace on an ever-increasing scale around them, but this was a drama in which they played only supporting roles.

Conchobar Úa Mail Sechnaill was killed in 1105 by the Uí Briúin (of Bréifne, according to *CS*); he is called *rídomna Tembrach* in *AU* but 'king of eastern Mide' in *AI*. Donnchad was unable to capitalise on Conchobar's death, for Muirchertach Úa Bríain

⁶⁴ *AI, AT*.

⁶⁵ Byrne, 'The Trembling Sod' p. 9 and n. 2; *AT* 1055, 1076.

⁶⁶ *AU* 1087.4.

⁶⁷ *AU* 1094.2.

⁶⁸ Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, p. 146.

came north and deposed him *a ríghi iarthair Mide* 'from the kingship of western Mide'.⁶⁹ Muirchertach went on to raid the Uí Briúin of Connacht, so it is possible that Donnchad had allied with his neighbours to eliminate Conchobar.⁷⁰ Domnall úa Lochlainn attempted to intervene on Donnchad's side, taking an army to western Mide in 1106, but Donnchad was killed whilst on a raid *a suis* 'by his own people'.⁷¹ There followed a second partition of Mide, presumably again the handiwork of Muirchertach, between the sons of Domnall Úa Maíl Sechnaill. The first, also called Muirchertach, was deposed in 1106 and *ríghe Mide do Murchadh* 'the sovereignty of Mide was given to Murchad'.⁷² The latter was his brother, who now held the kingship of all Mide and 'ruled' for almost fifty years, the most eventful reign since that of Conchobar mac Domnaill Úa Maíl Sechnaill.⁷³

Murchad was deposed and restored several times in his reign, and Mide was divided again and again between both Clann Cholmáin dynasts and external overlords. Together with the other kings of Leth Cuinn, Murchad submitted to Domnall úa Lochlainn at Rathkenny, Co. Meath in 1114 and was involved in the truce made that year.⁷⁴ In the following year Murchad submitted to Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair, whose wife, Arlaith, a member of the Úa Maíl Sechnaill family, had died about the same time. Mide was divided again, between Murchad and another brother of his, Máel Sechnaill (V), whom he promptly killed.⁷⁵ In 1120 Tairdelbach used his newly-built Shannon bridges to attack the west of Mide, and according to CS expelled Murchad to the north for a time; all this happened despite the terms of the earlier treaty and the guarantees of the coarb of Patrick.⁷⁶ In 1124 Murchad joined with the rulers of Leinster and Desmond (south Munster) in a 'southern alliance' against the ever-increasing power of Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair, but they were soundly defeated. Tairdelbach deposed Murchad again and banished him to Munster, attempting to install three kings in his place.⁷⁷ A brief period of fighting between the members of the dynasty ended with Murchad's return in the following year.⁷⁸ Another deposition, by persons unknown, but probably Tairdelbach, was attempted in 1127; initially Murchad's son Domnall was elected, and

⁶⁹ AU 1105.6.

⁷⁰ AU 1105.6, AI 1105.11.

⁷¹ AU 1106.1, AI 1106.3

⁷² CS 1102 [=1106]; CS and AFM state that Muirchertach was king of western Mide; he died in 1143.

⁷³ For a detailed sketch see Walsh, 'The Ua Maelechlainn Kings', 172-76.

⁷⁴ AU 1114.4.

⁷⁵ CS 1111 [=1115]; AU 1115.9, where he is called *rídomna Temrach*.

⁷⁶ AI 1120.5; CS 1116 [=1120] states that the hostages were given under the protection of the coarb.

⁷⁷ AU 1125.3.

⁷⁸ CS 1122 [=1126].

then after a month Murchad's brother Díarmait was put in his place.⁷⁹ Díarmait seems only to have been king of eastern Mide; he is called *rí Airrthir Midhi* at his death in 1130 at the hands of Tigernán Ua Rúairc.⁸⁰

In 1143 Murchad was again taken prisoner by Tairdelbach, despite guarantees against this; Tairdelbach showed his imagination in dealing with the situation by banishing Murchad to Munster. This time however, Tairdelbach had given up on installing members of the Uí Maíl Sechnaill dynasty into the Mide kingship and took the unprecedented step of placing his own son Conchobar on the throne of Mide 'from the Shannon to the sea'.⁸¹ The Meathmen did not take kindly to a foreigner being made king and Conchobar was dead within six months, killed by a *choccar Fer Midhe uile co b-incleithe* 'secret conspiracy of all the men of Mide'.⁸² Tairdelbach invaded to avenge his son, and his settlement was another division of Mide; this time, the western part was to be given Murchad's nephew Donnchad; the east was to be divided between Tigernán Ua Rúairc of Bréifne and Díarmait Mac Murchada, king of Leinster. Murchad, despite his advancing years, continued the good fight with the help of another son called, helpfully, Máel Sechnaill. They apparently recovered the kingship of western Mide, and raided Bréifne and Airgíalla.⁸³ Finally, in 1153, 'Murchad Ua Maíl Sechnaill, overking of Mide with its *fortúatha*, and for a time of the greater part of Leinster and Airgíalla, rested in Durrow of Colum Cille'.⁸⁴

The kingship then passed to Murchad's son, Máel Sechnaill (VI). He was a follower of family tradition if nothing else, and promptly blinded his nephew Conchobar.⁸⁵ Máel Sechnaill submitted at Loch Ennell to Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn of Cenél nEógain, the most powerful king in Leth Cuinn, and Muirchertach was able to use the midland-base of Mide as a springboard for attacks in Leinster and Connacht. Máel Sechnaill died of a poisoned drink in 1155 at Durrow, and Muirchertach was quick to install his own candidate as king, this being Máel Sechnaill's nephew Donnchad.⁸⁶ The men of Mide promptly deposed him, supposedly for his profanation of Clonard; his brother Díarmait took the kingship and inflicted a defeat on him in 1156.⁸⁷ The two engaged in a struggle for the kingship over the next few years, first one then the other

⁷⁹ *AFM* 1127.

⁸⁰ *AT* 1130; *CS* 1126.

⁸¹ Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, p. 169; *CS AT* 1143.

⁸² *CS, AT* 1144.

⁸³ *CS* 1145.

⁸⁴ *AFM, AT* 1153.

⁸⁵ *AFM* 1153.

⁸⁶ *AFM* 1155.

⁸⁷ Walsh, 'The Ua Maelechlainn Kings', 176; *AU, AFM* 1156.

being banished by Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn until in 1159 he eventually settled on Donnchad, his original choice, as the preferred candidate. Unfortunately Donnchad lived for only one more year.⁸⁸

With the support of Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair of Connacht Díarmait Úa Maíl Sechnaill regained the kingship of Mide, though he appears to have been subject to the authority in turn of both Rúaidrí and Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn.⁸⁹ Díarmait was deposed by the Meathmen but bought back the throne of western Mide from Muirchertach for a hundred ounces of gold; to this level had sunk the kingship of Clann Cholmáin.⁹⁰ Díarmait subsequently joined Tigernán Úa Rúairc on the famous expedition which expelled Díarmait Mac Murchada of Leinster from Ireland.⁹¹ In 1169 Díarmait Úa Maíl Sechnaill was involved in the initially successful military actions against Díarmait Mac Murchada and his new-found foreign friends. He did not live to build on his success however: Díarmait 'king of Mide and much of Leinster', and *adbar rí Éirenn* 'the makings of a king of Ireland' was killed by his cousin, Domnall Bregach.⁹² Domnall himself had only four years in which to enjoy the kingship; in his time came the interventions of Robert fitz Stephen and Henry II of England. Henry granted much of Mide to Hugh de Lacy in 1172. Domnall was killed by his half-brother Art at Durrow in 1173; Art was left with the lordship of part of western Mide, and his descendants held a rump of territory roughly equivalent to the old Clann Cholmáin heartlands until its incorporation into the newly-formed county of Westmeath after 1542.⁹³

Analysis of the fortunes of a dynasty over a period of four centuries leads us to consider the processes whereby one king succeeded another, and where we might discern the theoretical models of Jaski (and earlier scholars) being put into practice. For a Clann Cholmáin dynast to be successful, he first and foremost had to consolidate his position in Mide, primarily by eliminating rival claimants to the kingship. This is seen most readily in the tenth century and afterwards, when many dynasts were blinded or in other ways liquidated, but as we have seen there are many examples from throughout the period. A brief glance abroad also provides several examples: Offa of Mercia ruthlessly suppressed his opponents, but in the end was only briefly outlived by his son Ecgrith; Norman dukes were also not squeamish of removing relatives (though this

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁹⁰ *AU, AFM* 1163.

⁹¹ *AU* 1166.

⁹² *AU, AFM* 1169.

⁹³ For a more detailed consideration of the later Uí Maíl Sechnaill, see Walsh, 'The Ua Maelechlainn Kings', 177-180.

was often done in less violent ways, such as placing them in monasteries).⁹⁴ The plurality of claimants to the Mide throne is a testament to the functioning of the segmentation of dynasties into septs and the role that process played within the working of Irish royal succession itself. The comparison with Offa leads us to ponder to what extent Irish kings tried to secure the succession for a particular son. Though son occasionally directly followed father the customs of succession were not altered; the title of *rígdamna* does not necessarily imply that a person so-titled was bound to succeed.⁹⁵ One might suppose that the elimination of rivals was an attempt to maximise the chances of one's own offspring succeeding, but there was no guarantee of this.

Under normal circumstances one had to be a member of the *derbfine* (the four-generation agnatic kin-group) of a king in order to be eligible for kingship, or to put it more crudely unless one were at least the great-grandson of a previous king one was normally ineligible.⁹⁶ As far as the genealogical material goes, all Clann Cholmáin kings in the period under consideration fit this criterion, with the possible exception of Ráen, whose ancestry is not entirely clear. When thinking of the dynastic struggles as contests between branches, it may be useful for us to consider the situation in Ó Corráin's terms of 'segmentary opposition'.⁹⁷ Table 3 is a genealogical chart of Clann Cholmáin which shows the sequence of succession. It is easy to see that there was a considerable amount of competition between different branches of the dynasty. In terms of the relationship between a king and his immediate predecessor, it is clear that semi-regular alternation between branches often would lead to cousins (of the first degree or greater) following each other directly, which is indeed the case 55% of the time. Of course, though the successor might be cousin of his immediate predecessor, he would still be son (58%), grandson (23%) or great-grandson (16%) of a previous king. Brothers succeeded each other directly 19% of the time, sons and nephews both 10% with uncles the remaining 6%.

What do these figures show? In comparison with Ó Corráin's study of succession among Uí Chennselaig, some figures are remarkably similar: there 54% of

⁹⁴ F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (3rd edn, Oxford 1971), pp. 218-20; E. Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power* (Berkeley 1988), pp. 93-7, 131-48.

⁹⁵ Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 236-47.

⁹⁶ Charles-Edwards holds that normally one had to be at least grandson of a previous king to be qualified, a variation of the 'three-generation rule' (*ECI*, pp. 90-3). He explains the numerous instances of great-grandsons succeeding by suggesting that as long as an ancestor in the intervening three generations had attained the status of *rígdamna/tánaise* the lineage retained royal status.

⁹⁷ D. Ó Corráin, 'Irish Regnal Succession – a Reappraisal', *Studia Hibernica* 11 (1971), 7-39.

kings were the sons of kings, and 16% were grandsons.⁹⁸ He calculated a rather lower proportion of great-grandsons succeeding (3%), but a correspondingly higher percentage of even more distant descendants acquiring the kingship.⁹⁹ The succession among Clann Cholmáin is essentially an affirmation of Ó Corráin's conclusion that to a great extent succession is a competition between branches, but that having a royal father and/or grandfather greatly increased one's chances.¹⁰⁰ Jaski has done more than anyone to elucidate the practicalities which lay behind this rather abstract model. Beyond the bare genealogical qualification, the main factors were seniority among candidates (based on age, and the status of the mother), general worth (*fébas*, derived from wealth, number of clients, and also more abstract notions), and if all else was equal 'tie-breakers' based on alternation between septs or even the casting of lots.¹⁰¹ The main difference between Jaski and Charles-Edwards, the other scholar who has recently worked on the principles of succession in detail, is that Jaski views seniority as a basic principle which was only rejected if less senior candidates were obviously better-qualified in other respects, whereas Charles-Edwards views it as one of the tie-breakers.¹⁰² Seniority among sons of the same king depended on two factors: age and maternity. As a general rule, older sons were more senior, and sons of a first or chief wife (*cétmuintir*) were more senior than sons of secondary wives or concubines. In attempting to assess how this might have worked in practice for Clann Cholmáin we are hamstrung by our lack of knowledge of the relative ages or status of the sons of kings. As we shall see when we come to examine queenship below, though we do know the identity of several royal mothers, there are considerable gaps in our information. Conchobar and Máel Rúanaid were both sons of Donnchad Midi by different mothers, and succeeded each other as kings of Mide, but only Conchobar attained the kingship of Tara. Donnchad Donn was son of Flann Sinna's wife Gormlaith, and his half-brother Domnall was a son of Máel Muire. Domnall apparently reigned jointly with Donnchad or as a sub-king for two years. Was Donnchad's superior position down to his seniority? His brother Conchobar, apparently king of Mide before him, is of unknown maternity. In all these cases evidence is lacking which would help us decide how much of a role in succession was played by seniority.

⁹⁸ Ó Corráin, 'Irish Regnal Succession', 28.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

¹⁰¹ Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 124-27, 137-40, 143-52, 155-62.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70; Charles-Edwards, *EIWK*, p. 100; *ECI*, p. 92.

One additional question relates to the use of names. The royal lineage of Clann Cholmáin were one of the first Irish dynasties to adopt a surname, with its members being called 'Úa Máil Sechnaill' (deriving from Máel Sechnaill I) in the tenth century.¹⁰³ It is first used of the sons of Flann Sinna, and we have noted that all the kings after him were his sons or their descendants. It might be suggested that the use of Úa Máel Sechnaill was intended to exclude other segments of the dynasty. Byrne has drawn attention to Gallbrat Úa Cerbaill, *rídomna Temrach* who died in 1058 (*AU*) and Cerball Úa hÁeda, *sinnsior Cloinne Colmáin* who died in 1091 (*AFM*).¹⁰⁴ These apparently have different family surnames yet have important titles. *Sinnser* 'senior' is a term given to the chief of the kindred, and in the case of a royal kindred the *sinnser* is normally considered to have automatically been the king; a poem on Máel Sechnaill II and his contemporaries metaphorically calls him *sinnser Gaoidhel*.¹⁰⁵ In the case of Cerball Úa hÁeda we do not know his ancestry and cannot make further deductions, though Byrne suggests he descended from Flann Sinna's son Áed or his like-named nephew.¹⁰⁶ The contemporary king of Mide, as we have seen, was Domnall mac Flainn Úa Máil Sechnaill (d. 1094); how one may square the existence of a *sinnser Clainne Colmáin* with his reign is a matter for future investigation, but on this single piece of evidence it may be suggested that the king was not automatically *sinnser* for all business affecting the kindred (especially as different branches of the dynasty competed with each other), and in this instance the *sinnser* was of a family who did not compete (and were not eligible) for the throne. Surnames are only half of the story, of course. The granting of forenames was of significance in many European dynasties, and Ireland was not an exception.¹⁰⁷ Different dynasties favoured different names, and a glance at Table 3 indicates that certain names, especially Donnchad, Domnall, Máel Sechnaill and Conchobar were much-used. We must ask the significance of this: did the granting of a particular name signify preference or intended seniority? There is not the evidence to answer this question. It is clear that Irish families were unable to restrict the granting of

¹⁰³ Byrne, *IKHK* (2nd edn), p. xxxiv. Though it could be suggested that the name derives from Máel Sechnaill d. 1022, there are several earlier instances of 'Úa Máil Sechnaill' being used of family members, e.g. Donnchad Carrach Calma *CS* 967, Muirchertach mac Áeda *AFM* 974, Donnchad mac Donnchada Finn *AI* 1013.2. None of these individuals had paternal grandfathers named Máel Sechnaill so it seems reasonable to accept that 'Úa Máil Sechnaill' was being used as a surname in these cases.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ J.G. O'Keefe (ed.), 'On Máel Sechlainn, King of Ireland, †1022, and his Contemporaries', in J. Fraser, P. Grosjean & J.G. O'Keefe (edd.), *Irish Texts* (Fasc. iv, London 1934), pp. 30-2, l. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Byrne, *IKHK* (2nd edn), p. xxxiv.

¹⁰⁷ On naming strategies among Irish dynasties, see D. E. Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies, and Genealogies: Studies in Political History in Mediaeval Ireland and Wales* (Oxford 2002), pp. 42-4.

certain names in the manner of the Carolingian dynasty; Cenél nEógain dynasts were also called Máel Sechnaill, and names such as Conchobar were common throughout Ireland.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand the far more inclusive nature of Irish kinship (and therefore possibility of royal succession) may have played a role in making certain names more common, if various branches of the dynasty wished to assert their eligibility for kingship in this fashion. It is striking that there are very few instances of kings of Mide with names not borne by other kings of the dynasty.¹⁰⁹

It is unfortunate that we simply do not know how candidates actually set about securing the kingship. As well as the material and genealogical qualifications, allies within the dynasty and among the sub-kingdoms must have played a very important role, this being part of what Ó Corráin referred to as simply 'power' and Charles-Edwards considered to be a component of *fébas*.¹¹⁰ Jaski is somewhat dismissive of this notion, presumably because it is the most invisible in our sources, but I suspect that it was the most important in practice.¹¹¹ It is a shame perhaps, that there are no proper accounts of the politicking, horse-trading and intriguing which must have accompanied a competition for succession. But there are several examples in the chronicles which may offer glimpses of these processes. For example, when the unnamed son of Lorcán mac Cathail and the Luigne killed Máel Rúanaid, *rígdamna Érenn* and the king of Láegaire in 901 we are surely seeing a snapshot of dynastic politics: the son of a former king and his allies in a sub-kingdom in conflict with the son of the current king and his (or his father's) own allies. Similarly, when Máel Sechnaill VI killed his nephew Conchobar and the sub-king of Saitne in 1153 a most probable deduction is that the king of Saitne was a supporter of Conchobar in the contest for the Mide kingship. The poisoning of Máel Sechnaill VI at Durrow in 1155 hints at hidden intrigues and machinations. Who was responsible? Were they backed by external factions? The chronicle-evidence does not allow us to decide for sure.

The exact mechanisms of succession, be they tacit agreement, election, or simple bloody triumph would have normally concluded with some form of inauguration, a topic which has attracted a certain amount of attention over the years, and which has been given full treatment in the important new monograph by Elizabeth

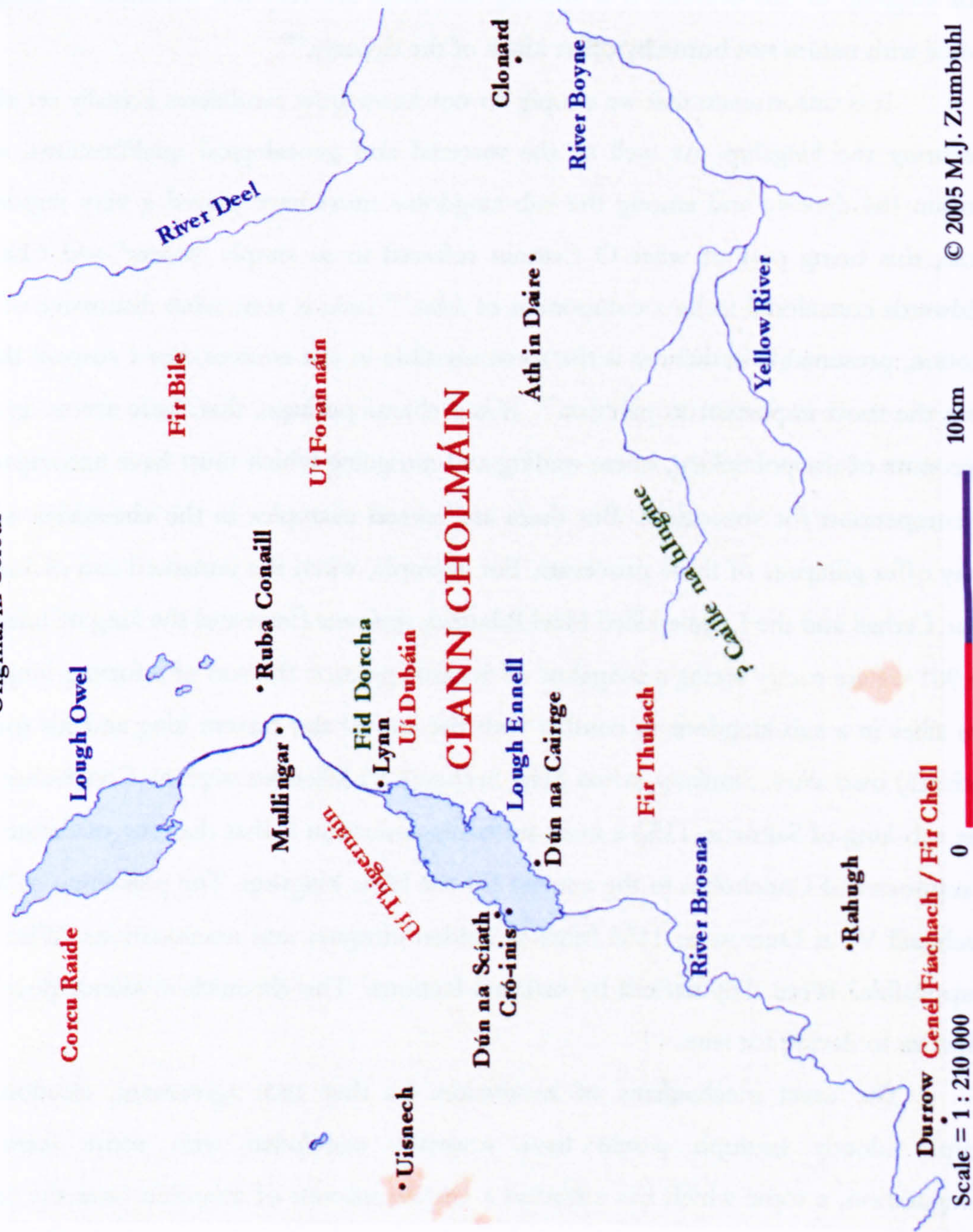
¹⁰⁸ Though the vogues for certain names in dynasties can be readily identified in the chronicles.

¹⁰⁹ Namely Lorcán (d. 864), Fergal (d. 951), Carlus (d. 960) and Ráen (d. 1027), though the last may have been a nickname.

¹¹⁰ Ó Corráin, 'Irish Regnal Succession', 29-38; Charles-Edwards, *EIWK*, pp. 100-1.

¹¹¹ Jaski, *EIKS*, p. 30.

Map 3: Clann Cholmáin: Core Territories
Original in Colour



FitzPatrick.¹¹² It is still unclear if, for example, the inauguration ceremony itself acted to boost the claims of a candidate whose other qualifications did not necessarily mark him out as ideal. Of some significance was the inauguration-site itself. For a king of Tara, this was normally taken to be Tara itself, but it is unclear whether the inauguration-site for the kings of Mide was Uisnech or elsewhere. Furthermore, given that one could be king of Mide (or Cenél nEógain) for some years before succeeding to the kingship of Tara, can one posit two inaugurations? Another public occasion which does seem to have acted as a symbol of royal power and prerogatives were the celebrating of a fair or *áenach*; certainly the *Áenach Tailten*, once an Uí Néill preserve, was by the twelfth century regarded as a symbol of the overkingship of Ireland, and was celebrated by Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair in 1120 and his son Rúaidrí in 1168.¹¹³ Yet even before this the king of Osraige, Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic, had demonstrated his taking of the kingship of Leinster in 1033 by celebrating *Áenach Carmain*, a matter to which we shall return in Chapter V. Following accession, kings seem normally to have undertaken a *crech rí* 'royal prey', normally or hosting or cattle-raid designed to impress his martial prowess on his people and his contemporaries.¹¹⁴ Again, it is difficult to assess how far such actions would have consolidated a reign which began in dispute and uncertainty, or whether they were demonstrations of a *fait accompli* and signified a kingship securely held. These questions lie outside the scope of the present study, but bring us to consideration of some of the ways in which royal power was articulated, and the places which were connected with kingship.

Royal Sites and Royal Lands

As we have seen, a number of sites in Mide were specifically associated with Clann Cholmáin. They took the title *rí Uisnig* from Uisnech, and it is possible that they had dwelt there at an early date. As late as the twelfth century it seems to have remained an important Clann Cholmáin site, for a conference (*comdál*) was held there.¹¹⁵ We have also seen the importance of the area around Lough Ennell, with main royal residences at Dún na Sciáth and Cró-inis; this area also remained significant into the twelfth century.¹¹⁶ However, it is not certain that the kings of Mide were normally resident there

¹¹² FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*.

¹¹³ *AFM* 1120, 1168.

¹¹⁴ P. Ó Riain, 'The "Crech Ríg" or "Regal Prey"', *Éigse* 15 (1973), 24-31.

¹¹⁵ *AFM* 1141.

¹¹⁶ *AFM* 1153.

by this stage; as we have seen, both Murchad Úa Maíl Sechnaill and his son Máel Sechnaill died at Durrow. The dynasty must also have owned a considerable amount of land elsewhere in Mide, and it is important to differentiate between the main royal dynasty of Clann Cholmáin, who took the surname Uí Maíl Sechnaill, and other families descended from them who lost royal status but who probably remained important nobles and landowners in various parts of Mide, though we have little information about these groups. One of the most important questions relating to the early history and expansion of Clann Cholmáin relates to how they originally acquired the lands they did in the midlands, and what this implied for their control of the overkingdom. We have seen that there were royal residences at churches, and there is good evidence for donation of land by Clann Cholmáin to churches, to which we shall turn below.

At the noble levels of society wealth was reckoned largely in terms of clients, rather than land-size. In other words, a nobleman did not necessarily have a great deal more land than a wealthy freeman-farmer, but he did have a considerably higher number of livestock to advance as fief and therefore a greater number of clients. It was from the renders of his clients that a noble received the additional resources he and his household either consumed or put to other uses. In practice, the nobility certainly did have a good deal more land than anyone else, but a higher proportion of this was used for the rearing and grazing of cattle rather than the production of cereals. The king received the greatest amount of food-renders from his clients, and his clients in turn received renders from their clients. Thomas Charles-Edwards has characterised this system in simple terms: one wishes to maximise what one gets from the level below, and minimize what one has to pass on to the level above.¹¹⁷ Overkingship of other kingdoms was in some ways a different matter, and we shall consider this further in the next chapter, along with the military resources of kings. Ultimately, clients and land were the economic basis of kingship, and from them kings raised troops for war and cattle-raiding, and wealth for consumption or redistribution. There are few explicit references to the exaction of revenues in the chronicles, though a couple of notices from the reign of Máel Sechnaill II stand out. CS 987 (=989) reports that after a victory over the Dubliners Máel Sechnaill exacted various dues, including *uinge óir gacha gardha gach aidche Notlac* 'an ounce of gold for every garth every Christmas night'. This was essentially the exaction of a tribute from an external enemy, but Máel Sechnaill also imposed himself on the people of Mide: CS 1005 (=1007) states that 'The *eneclar*

¹¹⁷ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 531.

[perhaps 'front/facing centrepiece'] of the great altar of Clonmacnoise was purchased by Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, and a hide from every enclosure (*les*) in Mide on its account'. In this case Máel Sechnaill appears to have enforced a special tax on the people of Mide to raise the funds for 'his' generosity.

In terms of land, kingship must have had its own set of special problems, about which there is little information in the sources. In the first place, the office of kingship was a separate institution from the royal dynasty. In a regular *fine*, when the father died, under normal circumstances his sons each received a share of his property. The earliest legal sources indicate that this property was meant to be divided equally, but there are indications that as time went on it was the older son who took the lion's share, especially the house itself.¹¹⁸ Of course the sons might have been adults already and had homesteads of their own. In the case of kingship, there were complications. The main royal residence(s), and perhaps by extension other royal lands, must go with the office of kingship itself. Otherwise, a royal residence like Dún na Sciáth could have been alienated to descendants who might never subsequently recover the kingship. This eventuality does not seem to have taken place, though the evidence does not allow us to be absolutely certain. This suggests that after a new king took office he and his branch of the family took control of the central place(s) and the family of the previous king moved elsewhere, presumably private residences belonging to their *fine*. In many cases members of the previous king's household could have found a place in that of the new king, particularly if the transition was relatively peaceful, or if it was a close relative (brother or son) who succeeded to the kingship. Of course, such a successor might have had his own land and house elsewhere, and may have been keen to bring in his own personnel to the royal centre on accession. This probably would have occurred when a more-distantly related opposing sept of the dynasty succeeded to the kingship; in the case of feud or violent succession, it is likely that the new incumbent would have wished to put his own men in place, or alternatively simply make his own residence the new royal 'capital', at least for day-to-day affairs. Unfortunately, there is little or no evidence by which we can test these theories, other than that as we have already observed, primary royal sites were used by kings over a considerable period of time. There is no clear instance of, for example, a king dying in the residence of his immediate predecessor from a distantly-related sept. A further problem is the phenomenon of royal itinerancy. Even if certain sites were the prerogative of the king

¹¹⁸ Kelly, *EIF*, pp. 412-13; Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 114-117.

(and his immediate family), their 'private' residences and those of other family branches and vassal lords may have served as points on the royal itinerary as he moved around consuming renders and interacting with subjects. Thus the status of any site may have varied considerably over time, and once again there is little information with which to test these ideas.

The legal materials on royal landholding are limited, but include some important information. Certain land was specifically identified as 'king's land' (*brug rīg/mruig rīg*).¹¹⁹ This appears to refer to mensal lands which were attached to the royal office, and, for example, a legal glossator of Heptad 43 identified Fíad Mugain in Éile as 'king's land' for the king of Cashel, with accompanying commentary stating that any cattle found in Tír Mugain on the king's inauguration-day were forfeit to the king.¹²⁰ The legend of Conall Corc states that the Cenél nAngsa were long excluded from the over kingship of Munster because they did not give any land as *brug rīg* to Cashel.¹²¹ Jaski has taken this to imply that those who recognised a common (over)king were bound to give part of their territory to him, which does seem to have been the case in the later middle ages.¹²² The legal materials do not specify if any particular kinds of place are normally *brug rīg*, though the above reference shows that grazing-land was, and another glossator states that it was the king's duty to hold the *áenach* on 'king's land'.¹²³ This suggests that Tailtiu and similar sites were thought of as being specifically *brug rīg*.

Katherine Simms has noted references in *AI* to *ferann rīg* 'king's estate' in the thirteenth century, another indicator that certain lands were attached to royal office.¹²⁴ The setting aside of such lands for the office of kingship or the royal heir could well be, as Simms suggests, a development of the concept of the *cumal senorba*, the share of kin-land (*fintiu*) set aside for the head of the kin-group to fulfil his office.¹²⁵ However, it is important to remember the distinction between royal land attached to the kingship and the kin-land belonging to the royal kindred privately. Different again was the land acquired by purchase or conquest, which an individual had more freedom to dispose of.¹²⁶

¹¹⁹ See Kelly, *EIF*, p. 403 for summary of the legal information and references.

¹²⁰ *CIH*, i, 40.2-9; v, 1844.33-40.

¹²¹ K. Meyer (ed.), 'Conall Corc and the Corco Luigde', *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts* 3 (1910), 57-63: 63; see Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 196.

¹²² Jaski, *EIKS*, p. 192.

¹²³ *CIH*, i, 4.10-11; 54.18.

¹²⁴ Simms, *FKTW*, pp. 129-30.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* For the *cumal senorba* see Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 117-21.

¹²⁶ Kelly, *EIF*, pp. 399-400.

Simms also drew attention to *AI* 1176.7 which refers to *fearann tánisteachta* 'heir's land', which might be a section of royal land specifically set aside for this purpose. Jaski has further discussed the references to *ferann rígdamnachta* 'land of *rígdamna*-ship'.¹²⁷ We have noted above that Flann Sinna 'profaned' Kells against his son Donnchad Donn in 902. It is possible that Donnchad was residing there, and that the incident was due to an attempt by Donnchad to assert his position among Flann's sons.¹²⁸ It is quite interesting that in literary sources set in the pre-Christian period Kells is presented as being the residence of the heir to the kingship of Tara. Thus the *dinnsenchas* of Odar (Odder, near Kells) appended to the Old-Irish tale *Esnada Tige Buchet* states that *Is ann didiu ro boí Cormac bua Cuind i Cenannas riasu no gabad ríge nErenn* 'it was then that Cormac úa Cuinn was in Kells before he could assume the kingship of Ireland'.¹²⁹ Similarly the Middle-Irish tale *Cath Cnucha* refers to Conn Cétchathach residing at Kells, waiting to become king of Tara.¹³⁰ The text refers to this place at Kells as *ferand rígdamna* 'land of a *rígdamna*'. Clann Cholmáin had sponsored the building of Kells by the Columban community on what had been royal land (possibly acquired by conquest in the eighth century), perhaps to weaken the influence of Síl nÁeda Sláine in the area.¹³¹ It seems that subsequently they maintained close links with the place and perhaps had a residence there that was particularly associated with the royal heir.¹³²

Were places like Tara, or Uisnech, or Dún na Sciath, considered to be *brug ríge*? That the laws consider *áenach*-sites such as Tailtiu to be so suggests that these other kinds of sites were considered to be the king's preserve, though I have not been able to find any specific references to that effect. The only recent attempt to consider the nature of authority over royal land and the distribution of land in a kingdom between king and vassals is that by Edel Bhreathnach for the Discovery Programme, a study which is of particular relevance here.¹³³ She reconstructs a model of territorial division in southern Brega in the twelfth century, with that overkingdom being made up of four

¹²⁷ Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 238-40.

¹²⁸ Woolf, 'View from the West', pp. 93-4; for the Columban context at this time, see Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, pp. 74-77.

¹²⁹ D. Greene (ed.), *Fingal Rónáin and Other Stories* (Dublin 1955), p. 31 (my translation).

¹³⁰ W.M. Hennessy, 'The Battle of Cnucha', *RC* 2 (1873-5), 86-93: 86; cf. Jaski, *EIKS* pp. 238-9.

¹³¹ Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, pp. 68-9.

¹³² Jaski also draws attention (*EIKS*, pp. 239-40) to the tale *Merugud Cléirech Coluim Cille* (ed. & transl. W. Stokes, 'The Adventure of St Columba's Clerics', *RC* 26 (1905), 130-70), which refers to Domnall Midi leaving *ferann rígdamnachta* to his son Fíacha, and that this consisted of the lands of Fir Rois and Mugdorna Maigen. See also the edn by T. Ó Máille, 'Merugud Cléirech Choluim Chille', in O. Bergin & C. Marstrander (edd.), *Miscellany Presented to Kuno Meyer* (Halle a.S. 1912), pp. 307-26.

¹³³ E. Bhreathnach, 'Authority and Supremacy in Tara and its Hinterland c. 950-1200', *Discovery Programme Reports* 5 (1999), 1-23.

main sub-kingdoms and the lands she designates 'royal demesne' around Tara and Skreen, extending up to the Boyne. Bhreathnach suggests that Clann Cholmáin's military defence of the area near Tara 'implies that they regarded this territory (roughly coextensive with the barony of Skreen) as their estate land'.¹³⁴ Bhreathnach marshals several other pieces of evidence to show that some land around Tara was regarded as mensal lands (i.e., directly-owned estates) of the king of Tara, which of course by the twelfth century meant the Uí Mail Sechnaill kings, but it is not clear that such a large area as the barony of Skreen could have been private demesne.

Regardless of the extent or location of royal land, the various central locations belonging to the Clann Cholmáin kings were the main focuses of their power. If we compare other overkingdoms, we see that there too primary royal residences seem to have been bound to the dynasty rather than the overkingship. So for example, when the Dál Cais became kings of Munster, their residence of Kincora became the most important centre.¹³⁵ When Uí Chennselaig took power in Leinster, they were apparently not based at Naas, seat of rival Uí Fáeláin, but in the south, probably Ferns where the later Meic Murchada had a house.¹³⁶

There are several reasons for these moves. First, it is natural that a dynasty would want a centre within its own lands and power-base, rather than the potentially hostile lands of the previous incumbents. Second, in a society of itinerant kings it did not necessarily matter too much where an overking's primary residence was. Thirdly, provincial overkingships were often associated (at least in literature) with sites that were not necessarily always royal residences: Tara is the obvious example. As long as the king could enforce control over significant inauguration, assembly and *áenach*-sites it did not necessarily matter whether he lived more often at, for example, Dún na Sciáth than Durrow. The important thing was that he had residences upon which to base his rule; as Charles-Edwards puts it, they were 'central to the business of being a king'.¹³⁷

The Royal Residence and Household

The vernacular Irish law-tracts make it clear that the king spent much of his time at the 'royal fort', *dún rí*, and there he was expected to make himself available for public

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³⁵ Shown by many annalistic references, e.g. *AI* 1010.4, 1026.3, 1077.2.

¹³⁶ Ferns was possibly a seat by 1042 when it was burned by Donnchad mac Briain (*AU* 1042.2), certainly by the reign of Diarmait mac Murchada (who died there in 1171).

¹³⁷ Charles-Edwards, *ECI*, p. 527.

affairs. Here he received envoys, and here also were the hostages of his client-kings and lords; as a legal maxim notes 'he is not king who does not have hostages in fetters'.¹³⁸ Here he held feasts, and was entertained in the hall; here lived the queen, and the royal offspring before they were sent off into fosterage. *Críth Gablach* famously describes the king's 'daily routine', but as has long been observed we should not take this too literally; the most important thing is that it is a list of the types of activity a king was expected to undertake.¹³⁹ Drinking and feasting was no mere leisure pursuit but an important aspect of the king's public role in the *túath*.¹⁴⁰ Hunting was a pursuit of royalty across Europe.¹⁴¹ That time should be set aside for marital business (*lánamnas*) reflects both the Christian duty of the husband and the practical need for royal offspring. *Críth Gablach* also envisages the king acting as judge both within the *túath* and in external relations; we shall consider this further in the next two chapters, but examples of Clann Cholmáin kings giving judgement will be discussed below.

These deeds represent a dual sphere of activity, on one hand private but in another respect very public. The king did not, of course, spend all or even most of his time at a single residence. An essential feature of Irish kingship was the king's progress or circuit around the houses of his clients. Here he would expect hospitality and food renders; here too the king was accessible for locals; he would make contacts with different nobles and their own clients. Thus complex networks of relationships were built up between the king and the magnates. The twelfth-century life of St Colmán of Lynn, *Betha Colmáin meic Líacháin*, presents kings of Tara staying at local residences in the Mide sub-kingdoms, such as Dún Brí and Dún Léime ind Eich.¹⁴² It is unclear whether these are residences of local rulers where the king was being entertained on his circuit, or whether they were personal residences (perhaps *brug rí*) analogous to the *uillae regales* Bede described in Northumbria.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ *CIH*, i, 219.5. For more on hostages, see Chapter III.

¹³⁹ D.A. Binchy (ed.), *Críth Gablach* (Dublin 1941), §41: *domnach do óul chorma ... lúan do brithemnacht, do choccertad túath; máirt oc fidchill; céitáin do déicsiu milchon oc tofunn; tardáin do lánamnas; aín díden do rethaib ech; satharn do brethaib* 'Sunday for drinking beer ... Monday for judgement, for correcting the people; Tuesday for *fidchell*-playing, Wednesday for watching hounds at the hunt; Thursday for marital business; Friday for horse-races; Saturday for judgements'.

¹⁴⁰ For a general account of Irish feasting see F. Kelly, *EIF*, pp. 357-9. More generally, see M.J. Enright, *Lady With a Mead Cup: Ritual Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tène to the Viking Age* (Dublin 1996), pp. 69-96; U. Schultz (ed.), *Das Fest: Eine Kulturgeschichte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich 1988); D. Altenburg et al. (edd.), *Feste und Feiern im Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen 1991).

¹⁴¹ Kelly, *EIF*, pp. 272-82 surveys some Irish evidence. More generally see J. G. Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk: the Art of Medieval Hunting* (London 1988).

¹⁴² Ed. & transl. K. Meyer, *Betha Colmáin Maic Líacháin* (RIA Todd Lecture Series 17, Dublin 1911).

¹⁴³ B. Colgrave & R.A.B. Mynors (edd. & transl.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford 1969), II.9, p. 164.

The actual nature of a *dún rí* varied. Until the tenth century most would have been ringforts; our current understanding suggests that later on the more typical home was a rectilinear structure less easy to identify in the archaeological record.¹⁴⁴ Crannogs, such as Cró-inis, are often considered to be especially associated with nobility or royalty due to the expense and labour required for construction.¹⁴⁵ The most important part of the royal residence was the central building or king's house, *tech rí*, effectively the royal hall. It is an interesting exercise for us to try to get an idea of the kinds of people one would expect to find at a royal residence, for several reasons. Principally it would give an impression of the kinds of people a king would be in contact with on a regular basis when he was not on campaign. It might also give us a glimpse of elements of royal administration, even in an embryonic form, though one must be careful of attributing governmental functions to persons who operated in a purely domestic capacity.¹⁴⁶ For Ireland there is no equivalent to Hincmar's *De Ordine Palatii* or the *Constitutio Domus Regis* of England, but for few places or periods of medieval European history do we have such texts.¹⁴⁷ Of all the Celtic-speaking countries Wales is best served (for the later medieval period) by the Laws of Court in Latin and Welsh, which have enabled scholars to reconstruct with some confidence several aspects of life in the Welsh royal household, and several aspects of royal administration.¹⁴⁸ The Irish legal texts do not contain exactly comparable material, but a few texts allow us to sketch out the nature of the royal household at certain periods.

We are faced with certain methodological considerations in so doing. Firstly, some of the texts are rather literary in nature, and therefore we must be extremely wary of taking their descriptions as literal rather than idealised (or even exaggerated for stylistic effect). This stricture applies to many of the descriptions of royal households in narrative sagas, and thus we shall set them aside here. Of course, for such descriptions to be recognised, they must have had a referential basis in reality, but the overall study

¹⁴⁴ The literature on dwellings is voluminous, and there is not space to do it justice here. Though some years old, N. Edwards, *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland* (London 1990), pp. 11-48 offers lucid guidance. The standard work on ringforts is M. Stout, *The Irish Ringfort* (Dublin 1997); the legal evidence on houses is summarised in Kelly, *EIF*, pp. 360-7.

¹⁴⁵ Warner, 'On Crannogs and Kings'; more generally see C. Fredengren, *Crannogs* (Bray 2002).

¹⁴⁶ For remarks on these methodological problems with regard to the Welsh Laws of Court, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, M. E. Owen & P. Russell (edd.), *The Welsh King and his Court*, (Cardiff 2000), pp. 3-5.

¹⁴⁷ D.B. Walters, 'Comparative Aspects of the Tractates on the Laws of Court', in Charles-Edwards, Owen & Russell, *The Welsh King and his Court*, pp. 382-99.

¹⁴⁸ The most important collection of essays is *The Welsh King and his Court*, see also D. Stephenson, *The Governance of Gwynedd* (Cardiff 1984) for an important case-study of the practicalities of royal government in the thirteenth century.

Table 4: The Royal Hall of Críth Gablach

D O O R	<i>Fénnid & Fergniae</i> <i>(fri formgaire ndoirseo)</i> Door-keepers	<i>Sóerchéili na flatha</i> Free-clients of lords	<i>Géill</i> Hostages	<i>Brithem</i> Judge	<i>Géill díthma</i> Forfeited hostages
					<i>Ben</i> <i>Queen</i>
					<i>Rí</i> <i>King</i>
	<i>Amuis x 4</i> Bodyguards	<i>Fer do gell gfallnaib</i> Man of Pledge for Vassals	<i>Techta</i> Messengers	<i>Dáam</i> Retinues	<i>Cuislemnaig</i> Pipers, Trumpeters, Jugglers
				<i>Éccis Cruiti</i> Poets Harpers	<i>Comairi</i> <i>Clesamnaig</i>

of literary representations of the royal hall is outwith the scope of this thesis. The second consideration is one of terminology. It is not clear that the Irish in the pre-Norman period had a specific term for a royal 'court' in the pre-Norman period, at least in the dual sense of both the royal household plus visitors and functionaries on one hand and the buildings they occupied on the other. A king had a retinue, *déis* (and a company, *dám*, which accompanied him on travels), and there was certainly a household, often *muintir* in literary texts, *lucht tige* or *teglach* elsewhere; but I have not found a term exactly analogous to Latin *curia* or Welsh *llys*.¹⁴⁹ This matter is an important one which requires further investigation in the future, and here the more neutral term 'household' will be employed, though it seems clear that the social grouping of household, visitors, hostages and servants found at an Irish king's residence is parallel to such constituencies elsewhere in Europe, even if there was no single term for it.

Críth Gablach contains an important early schematic for the persons normally considered to be present in king's house, though we do not need to take it absolutely literally (Table 4).¹⁵⁰ The king takes the primary place, flanked by the queen. Also close by on the right is the royal judge, a reflection of *Críth Gablach*'s contention that judgement was an important role for a king.¹⁵¹ In the corner close to the king are the forfeited hostages of his vassals in fetters, while down the hall to his right are the king's unfree clients (*géill*), free clients (*sáerchéili*) in attendance on him, and his doorwards at the entrance. On the south side, to the king's left, are his bodyguards, envisaged as men who owe the king their lives because he has freed them from the gallows, prison or slavery. Next comes the *fer gill do gíallnaib* 'man of pledge for unfree clients', who Binchy takes as responsible for ensuring the unfree clients discharge their legal obligations.¹⁵² Then come messengers, retinues (*dáma*, presumably of the clients), and the entertainers: poets, harpers, pipers, trumpeters and jugglers.

This scheme is what the author considered proper for a small-scale king about the turn of the eighth century. It is to be noted that the only 'personnel' mentioned are the bodyguards and doorkeepers, and the judge, though one must assume that even at this early date a king had servants and cooks and the like.¹⁵³ The next text which has a

¹⁴⁹ The Irish cognate of *llys*, *les* (later *lis*, *lios*) seems to be used only of (the enclosure of) a building-complex.

¹⁵⁰ Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, §46.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, §41.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 38 n. 587.

¹⁵³ The doorkeeper was an important position both in Celtic lands and elsewhere in Europe, e.g. the Frankish *ostarius*, for the door-ward in later medieval Scotland see M. Hammond, 'The Durward

bearing on the royal hall is probably of slightly later date, *Lánellach Tigi Rích 7 Ruirech*.¹⁵⁴ This text is more complex as it refers not to generics but to literary characters, in the hall of a king Conchobar.¹⁵⁵ Broadly speaking, the scheme seems to be roughly the same: the queen and judge are close to the king, the *naiscthi* (sureties; see below, pp. 103-4 for the parallel term *naidm*) are further down on the right, spearmen are close to the door, while entertainers are on the left. The main difference is that attendants are specified as being on hand to serve the king, and that certain other functionaries (cooks, hunters) are also present, but in a separate space off to the left. The final text which gives a picture of hall-layout is the famous description and diagram of the *tech midchuarta* 'house of the mead-circuit' found in the Book of Leinster and the Yellow Book of Lecan.¹⁵⁶ This specifies where the different ranks of nobility and professionals are to sit, and what cut of meat is proper to each person's status.¹⁵⁷ This text (or group of texts plus diagram) is just as literary a device as descriptions in sagas, and we shall pass over examining it in detail here.

A further literary source for the expected complement of the hall of the king of Tara is the *dinnsenchas* poem *Temair toga na tulach* which describes the hall of Cormac mac Airt. It is worth considering here because though its information may be problematic in reconstructing an 'Irish royal hall', it was written in the reign of Máel Sechnaill II as king of Tara, and probably was intended to glorify him. Thus although it may not be a literal description, it provides an interesting view of how Máel Sechnaill and his poet may have viewed themselves in an idealised way:

<i>Rí ocus ollam fíled,</i>	King and <i>ollam</i> of poets,
<i>súi, brugaid, bertís dlíged</i>	sage, hospitaller, they received their due;
<i>Liaig is dálem, goba gúr,</i>	Doctor and dispenser, stout smith,
<i>rechtaire, randaire rún,</i>	steward, apportioner 'in the know',
<i>máil na cethra dóib uile</i>	the heads of the beasts to all of them;

Family in the Thirteenth Century', in S. Boardman and A. Ross (edd.), *The Exercise of Power in Medieval Scotland 1200-1500* (Dublin 2003), pp. 118-38.

¹⁵⁴ Ed. & transl. M. O Daly, 'Lánellach Tigi Rích 7 Ruirech', *Ériu* 19 (1962), 81-6.

¹⁵⁵ O Daly took this to be Conchobar mac Nessa, but the text does not say this, and the fact that none of the characters regularly associated with him appear suggests someone else may be intended.

¹⁵⁶ *BkL*, i, pp. 116-20; *YBL* cols. 243-47. For ed. & transl. by J. O'Donovan of the poem *Suidigud Tige Midchuarta* from *LL*, see G. Petrie, *On the History and Antiquities of Tara Hill* (RIA Transactions 18, Dublin 1837/9), 199-204.

¹⁵⁷ For the various cuts we may compare A. O'Sullivan (ed. & transl.), 'Verses on Honorific Portions', in J. Carney & D. Greene (edd.), *Celtic Studies: Essays in Memory of Angus Matheson 1912-1962* (London 1968), pp. 118-23.

i tig ind rí barr-buide.

in the house of the yellow-haired king.¹⁵⁸

The poem lists many other visitors and guests present at the court: artificers, architects, cobblers and comb-makers; one stanza enumerates the entertainers, including the *drúth* 'fool' and the *fidchellach* 'chess-player'. We may take the stance that *Temair toga na tulach* is inadmissible as evidence for a 'historical' hall of the eleventh century, but I think this is too reductionist a position. Though this roster (and the similarly large one in *tech midchuarta*) is designed to be impressively large, as with descriptions of Arthur's court in other literatures, it is not too much to assume that many of the categories of persons listed are of the kind the aristocratic audience of the poems would be familiar with and not find exceptional.¹⁵⁹

We have mentioned that personnel of the royal household were often the origins of governmental officers in medieval Europe. Royal administration is normally considered to have been at a relatively basic level in pre-Norman Ireland, though Ó Corráin has argued that it became necessarily more sophisticated from the viking-age onwards as overkings came to control greater tracts of territory.¹⁶⁰ The only royal officials identified in the sources are the *rechtaire* and *máer*. The former is normally translated as 'steward' and *rechtaire* seem originally to have been the 'major-domos' responsible for many of the practical arrangements of the king's household and the surrounding area.¹⁶¹ This can be seen also in *tech midcuarta* and numerous literary texts. For example, *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin* represents the king's *rechtaire* as being responsible for the kitchen and fishing-nets close to the royal house.¹⁶² In *Tochmarc Étaíne* Eochu's *rechtaire* is responsible for the construction of a causeway across a bog.¹⁶³ Chronicle-evidence suggests that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries at least the *rechtaire* performed more important roles in the king's administration, though only two from Mide are mentioned. In 1018 Máel Sechnaill's *rechtaire*, one Cas Midi, was killed

¹⁵⁸ E.J. Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, i (RIA Todd Lecture Series 8, Dublin 1903), pp. 14-27, ll. 153-4, 157-60. I have emended Gwynn's 'portly butler'; *rín* normally means 'secret' and I suggest the idea (beyond metrical exigencies) is that the *rannaire* has the confidences of hidden information.

¹⁵⁹ Conspicuous by their absence from all these texts are clerics. For the literary descriptions of pre-Christian halls (Cormac's etc.) this is no surprise; *Críth Gablach* mentions clerics blessing the king's house when it is built (l. 572) but no ecclesiastics present in the royal hall, unless the king's judge is supposed to be one.

¹⁶⁰ D. Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and kingship in pre-Norman Ireland'. We shall return to this question in Chapter VI.

¹⁶¹ Kelly, *GEIL*, pp. 65-7.

¹⁶² M. Dillon (ed.), *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin* (Dublin 1963), §1.

¹⁶³ O. Bergin & R.I. Best (ed. & transl.), 'Tochmarch Étaíne', *Ériu* 12 (1938), 137-96: §§7-8.

alongside the king of Láegaire while on a raid.¹⁶⁴ In 1021 another *rechtaire*, Mac Conaillig, drowned in Lough Ennell.¹⁶⁵ We shall return to the 'historical' *rechtairi* in Chapter VI.

Betha Colmáin meic Liúcháin presents the Clann Cholmáin king's *rechtaire* as collecting the king's renders from the households of the area.¹⁶⁶ This idea is a familiar motif in Irish hagiography, and it seems that the clerical authors thought in terms of their own institutions, where an ecclesiastical steward or *máer* was responsible for collecting church-dues, which would often have been proceeds arising from the enforcement of ecclesiastical legislation; there is clear evidence that some *máir* had judicial functions.¹⁶⁷ Elsewhere, the first Irish life of Cíarán of Seirkieran (*Betha Sein-Chiaráin Saoigre*) presents the stewards, *maoir*, of the king of Ireland collecting his dues.¹⁶⁸ In the post-Conquest period there were both secular and ecclesiastical officials called *máir/maoir*, though it is unclear whether the secular offices were modelled on or derived from the ecclesiastical *máer*.¹⁶⁹ The word is derived from Latin *maior* and in Wales various officers with the parallel title *maer* were involved in royal household and administration.¹⁷⁰

A further official is the *rannaire*, literally the 'divider' who shared out the food (and possibly had other functions in running the household and hall), who we have seen mentioned in *Temair toga na tulach* and *Tech Midchúarta*. His role may have originally overlapped with the *rechtaire*, for the Middle Irish tale *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara', itself a valuable statement about conceptions of the Uí Néill royal household, states that the *rechtaire* had to be *ic roind* 'carving' at the feast.¹⁷¹ There is no *rannaire* in the annals for the pre-Norman period. However, in Gaelic Scotland the office seems to have been an important one, and in several twelfth-century royal charters there is mention of Alwin mac Arcill, *rannaire* of the household of David I.¹⁷² Alwin also appears as a witness to a notice in the Book of Deer.¹⁷³ The position still seems to have been current in the royal household into the 1170s when one Gilla Críst

¹⁶⁴ AU 1018.6.

¹⁶⁵ AFM 1021.

¹⁶⁶ Meyer, *Betha Colmáin* §55. One is also put in mind of the Pictish *exactatores* of AU 729.2, though their function may have been rather different.

¹⁶⁷ C. Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland AD 650 to 1000* (Maynooth 1999), pp. 211-14.

¹⁶⁸ Ed. & transl. C. Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉirenn: Lives of Irish Saints* (2 vols, Oxford 1922), i, p. 109; ii, p. 105.

¹⁶⁹ Simms, *FKTW*, pp. 83-4.

¹⁷⁰ Charles-Edwards, Owen & Russell, *The Welsh King And His Court*, pp. 301, 320.

¹⁷¹ Ed. & transl. R.I. Best, 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara', *Eriu* 4 (1910), 121-72.

¹⁷² See G.W.S. Barrow, *Scotland and its Neighbours in the Middle Ages* (London 1992); *idem*, *The Acts of Malcolm IV King of Scots, 1153-1165* (Regesta Regum Scottorum 1, Edinburgh 1960), pp. 32-3.

¹⁷³ K.H. Jackson (ed. & transl.), *The Gaelic Notes in the Book of Deer* (Cambridge 1972), p. 31; see p 63 n. 7 for a discussion of Alwin's name, provenance and office.

rennerius witnessed a grant at Stirling; a *rannaire* was still to be found serving the Earls of Strathearn in the first quarter of the thirteenth century.¹⁷⁴ The cumulative evidence suggests that the *rannaire* was an important person across the Gaelic world.

The king's will would have been conveyed directly or via men who served him, be they his sons, leading vassals or others. Certain of these individuals seem to have made up the king's *teglach* or *lucht tige*, literally 'household', the former cognate with the Welsh *teulu*.¹⁷⁵ In 1013 the annals report that several members of Máel Sechnaill's *teglach*, after a drinking-session, encountered the king of Cairpre and a member of the Bréifne royal family who were raiding in Mide with the men of Tethba, and were killed.¹⁷⁶ The named members of the *teglach* were Máel Sechnaill's cousin Donnchad (son of King Donnchad Finn, d. 974), called *rídamna Temrach*, and the kings of the Mide sub-kingdom of Delbna Bec and the kingdoms of Luigne and Gailenga, important vassals of Máel Sechnaill. *AFM* add that Máel Sechnaill's own son, Donnchad, was killed, though this might be confusion with the other Donnchad. Máel Sechnaill overtook the raiders and killed the king of Cairpre. It is clear from this example that a *teglach* could include leading men of the kingdom, and was also part of a fighting warband as well as an entourage for the king. As it happened, 1013 was not a good year for Máel Sechnaill; in this year were also killed his son Flann, and according to *AI* another son nicknamed *Int Albanach* ('the Scotsman'), whose moniker may indicate he spent a period of fosterage in the kingdom of Alba, perhaps in the royal courts of Cináed III mac Duib or Máel Coluim II mac Cináeda, or even with the rulers of Moray.

The Queen

The study of queenship in pre-Norman Ireland is at present in a peculiar position, namely that queenship in literary sources has received a great deal of published attention, but queenship in historical sources has not. This is partly a reflection of the distribution of materials; there is a great deal of material to be analysed in tales featuring Medb, or Étaín, or Eochaid's daughter, whereas references to queens in the chronicles

¹⁷⁴ G.W.S. Barrow with W.W. Scott, *The Acts of William I King of Scots, 1165-1214* (Regesta Regum Scottorum 2, Edinburgh 1971), pp. 36-7, 229-30; W.A. Lindsay, J. Dowden & J.M. Thomson (edd.), *Charters, Bulls and other Documents relating to the Abbey of Inchaffray* (Edinburgh 1908), §39.

¹⁷⁵ Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', p. 29.

¹⁷⁶ *AU* 1013.2, *AFM* 1012.

are brief and sparse. The ongoing work of Anne Connon and others will no doubt elucidate much of the role of the queen in the pre-Norman Gaelic polity.¹⁷⁷

Noblewomen's status derived from that of their husbands, and the wife of a king was not an exception. It is not clear that 'queen' and 'wife of a king', were necessarily the same thing.¹⁷⁸ Usage in the chronicles varies: some women are called 'queen of the king of Tara' (*regina regis Temoriae*); 'queen of Tara' (*regina Temrach*), or more usually simply called the wife of the king in question, e.g. 'Gormlaith wife of Tairdelbach Úa Briain' (*Gormlaith ben Tairrdelbaigh H. Briain*).¹⁷⁹ It is not clear what the basis is for the usage of titles and as it varies between chronicles it is difficult to draw conclusions. Given the polygynous nature of Irish society, it might be suggested that when a king had more than one wife simultaneously, the chief wife (*cétmuintir*) might be the 'queen' whereas other spouses would be essentially concubines (*adultraig*); but there is no clear evidence on the point.¹⁸⁰ It is probable that the primary function of a royal wife, even more than wives at other levels of society, was to provide children. This is one of the reasons for polygamy, though as kings had children by more than one spouse considerations such as fertility were not the only ones for royalty. Divorce and various forms of separation were also permissible in early Irish society. If a queen predeceased her husband, he may well have remarried. Thus, some kings recorded as having several wives may have had them consecutively. Again, the evidence in the chronicles which might allow us to date sequences of marriages is wanting. Royal marriages would in most cases have been contracted between noble kindreds, and we shall return to this aspect below. In what follows we shall define the queen as a royal wife normally resident with the king in times of peace, and consider her role.

As with the king, the queen would essentially have had both public and private roles. In the royal hall, the queen normally had a position adjacent to the king, according to *Críth Gablach* and *Lánellach Tigi Rích 7 Ruirech*. This can be corroborated by numerous literary texts, and is testament to her status relative to the king and the rest of the household. In this sphere of activity her roles included the distribution of certain

¹⁷⁷ For preliminary studies see Connon, 'The Banshenchas and the Uí Néill queens of Tara'; also D. Edel, 'Early Irish Queens and Royal Power: a First Reconnaissance', in M. Richter & J.-M. Picard (edd.), *Ogma: Essays in Celtic Studies in honour of Próinseas Ní Chatháin* (Dublin 2002), pp.1-19.

¹⁷⁸ See P. Stafford, 'The King's Wife in Wessex', *Past and Present* 91 (1981), 3-27; cf. *eadem*, *Queens, concubines, and dowagers: the king's wife in the early middle ages* (Athens 1983).

¹⁷⁹ *AU* 802.7, 931.4, 1076.7.

¹⁸⁰ For early Irish marriage see Kelly, *GEIL*, pp. , 70-75; D. Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', in M. O'Dowd & S. Wichert (edd.), *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society* (Historical Studies 19, Belfast 1995), pp.45-57:46-50; B. Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and on the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', in E.E. Meek & M.K. Simms (edd.), *The Fragility of Her Sex? Medieval Irish Women in their European Context* (Dublin 1996), pp. 16-42.

drink, food, clothes and other gifts.¹⁸¹ Queens would also have been present at other occasions. They might have attended mass with the king on the principal high days, and certainly had their own links with churches. Derforgaill, daughter of Murchad Úa Maíl Sechnaill, wife of Tigernán Úa Rúairc, was present at the consecration of Mellifont abbey in 1157 and in her own right gave sixty ounces of gold, a very large sum, and as much as her husband gave.¹⁸² According to *AFM* she also gave a chalice of gold for St Mary's altar, and altar-cloths for the other nine altars in the church. This brings us to another possible role for the queen: as the keeper of the domestic purse-strings, a role queens fulfilled elsewhere in Europe. Irish evidence is not clear on the point, but it seems that if there were separate royal *mair* and *rechtaire* the queen's role might not have been as great in this regard. On the other hand, if the queen came into the marriage with a considerable amount of property (*lánamnas comthinchuir* or even *lánamnas fir for bantinchur*) she retained a degree of control of this, and though women had limited legal capacity, we shall see presently examples of queens disposing of land. In the private sphere the queen could act as advisor to her husband.¹⁸³ Within the domestic sphere of the household the queen could speak with open mind to her spouse, and, as Charles-Edwards has observed, there was always a worry that harsh words capable of shaming the husband would be heard by the servants and get out into public.¹⁸⁴ Consequently, Irish wisdom-texts advocate marriage to a woman of gentle speech.¹⁸⁵ In daily life the queen would have various pursuits similar to those of female royalty elsewhere in Europe. As with all Irish nobility, she had a train of attendants, and among various activities would have engaged in embroidery and sewing. At a dynastic level the queen's two most important functions would have been the creation of links and alliances (however short-lived) between dynasties, and the production of heirs.

A number of queens of Clann Cholmáin are known from the chronicles, as we have seen above, and from other sources, principally the collections of information about famous Irish women known as the *Bansenchas* 'woman-lore', which exist in various prose versions and a poem composed by Gilla Mo Dutu Úa Casaide in 1147.¹⁸⁶ Pending

¹⁸¹ For fuller discussion of the queen's role see Edel, 'Early Irish Queens', 2-4.

¹⁸² *AU* 1157.4, *AFM* 1157. See also J. Ní Ghrádaigh, "But What Exactly Did She Give?": Derbforgaill and the Nun's Church at Clonmacnoise', in H.A. King (ed.), *Clonmacnoise Studies Volume 2: Seminar Papers 1998* (Dublin 2003), pp. 175-207. For general discussion see L. Bitel, 'Women's Donations to the Churches in Early Ireland', *JRSAl* 114 (1984), 5-23.

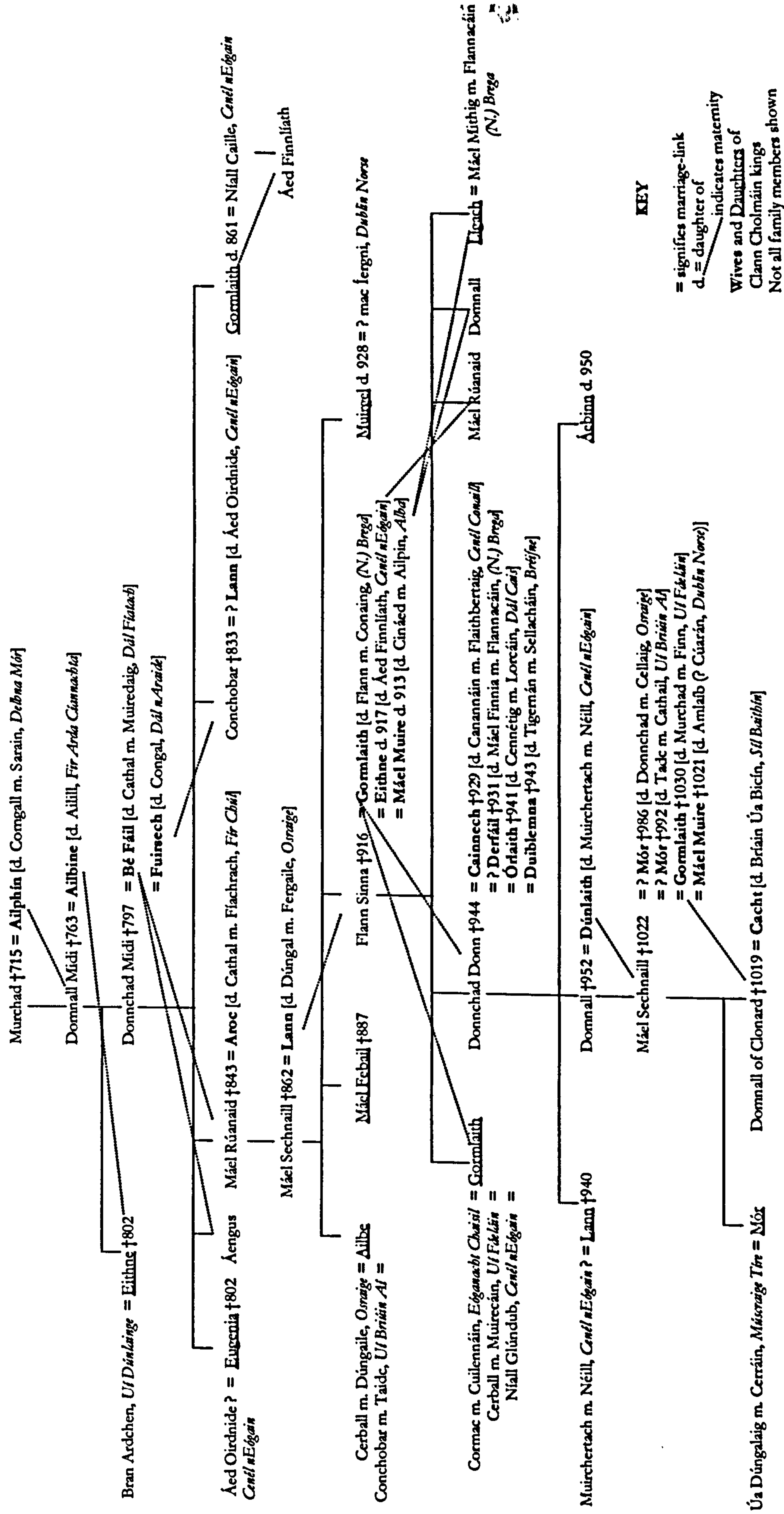
¹⁸³ Edel, 'Early Irish Queens', pp. 4-7.

¹⁸⁴ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 107.

¹⁸⁵ K. Meyer (ed. & transl.), *Tecosca Cormaic: The Instructions of King Cormac mac Airt* (RIA Todd Lecture Series 15, Dublin 1909), § 13.37.

¹⁸⁶ Ed. M. Dobbs, 'The Ban-shenchus', *RC* 47 (1930), 283-339; 48 (1931), 163-233; 49 (1932), 437-89.

Table 5A : Clann Cholmáin Marriage Ties



Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin's new edition of the texts we will not go into detailed discussion here. Connon has elucidated the original organisational principles of the text. It was originally based on a version of the Middle-Irish list of kings of Tara, and was essentially a list of their mothers.¹⁸⁷ This means that several queens of Tara known from chronicle-sources do not feature, presumably because their sons, if any, did not secure enduring fame by the time the text was put together. Versions of the *Bansenchas* were later expanded with a considerable amount of information about queens of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, including those of dynasties other than Uí Néill.¹⁸⁸

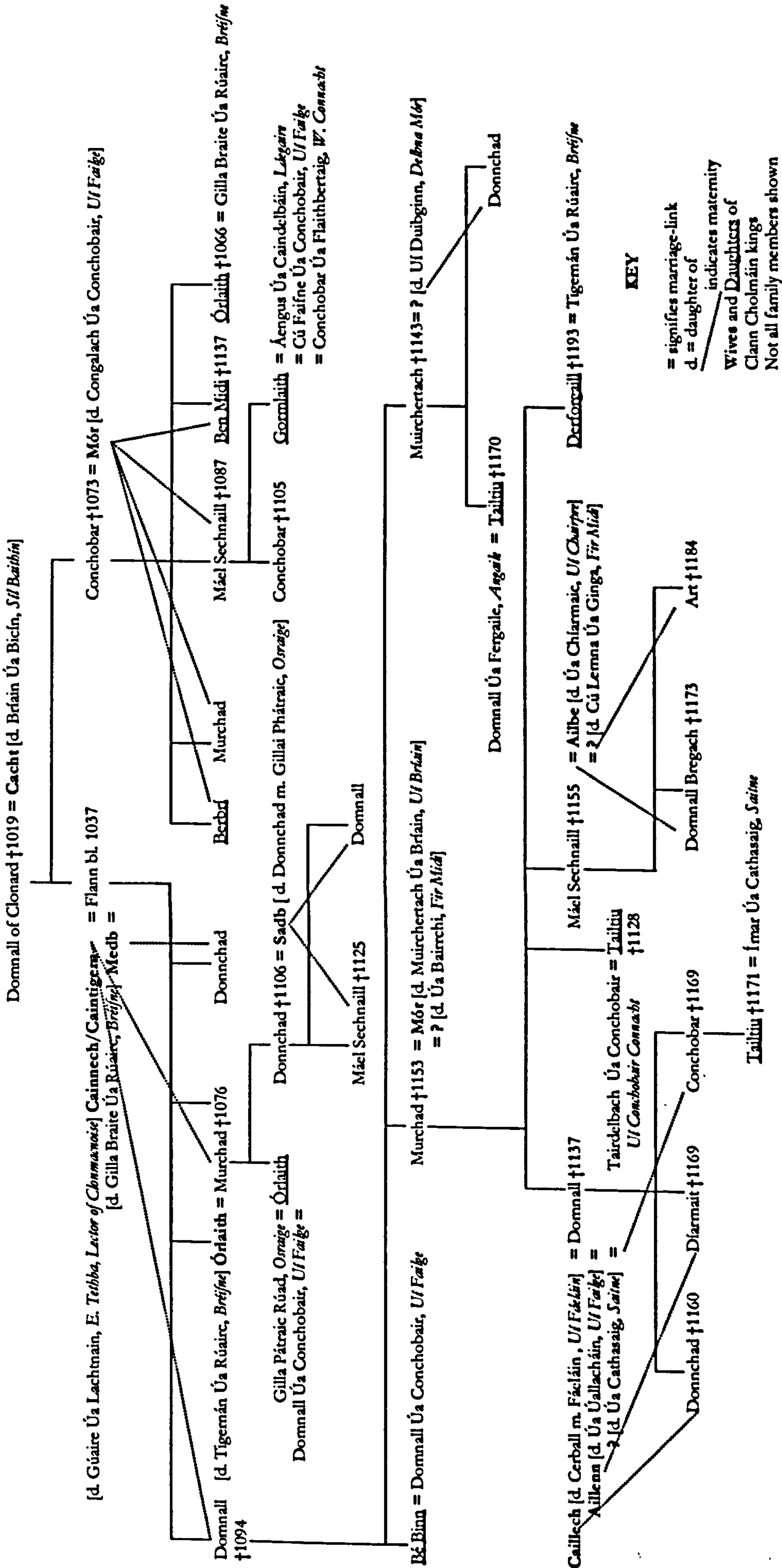
There are many important questions of how the information found its way into the texts, and from what sources they came. Ní Bhrolcháin has shown that when the information can be checked against external sources (principally chronicles) it is as a rule accurate, and thus one may infer that the information which we cannot corroborate has a good chance of being similarly accurate.¹⁸⁹ The most useful aspect is that, apart from naming many queens and royal mothers for a period when the chronicles are largely concerned with the deeds of men in a patriarchal society, the *Bansenchas* reveals the incredibly complex dynastic links of marriage and maternity which bound early Irish dynasties. Dynastic marriage as a confirmation of alliance or treaty is of course a general feature of society in the European middle ages. Equally important were marriages contracted within dynasties, which helped to bind different septs and branches together. We can briefly illustrate by reference to the marriages within Clann Cholmáin. Table 5A is a simplified version of the family tree, designed to illustrate where the women named in the *Bansenchas* and chronicles fit into the scheme (it is not complete). We may draw a slight distinction between marriages of Clann Cholmáin kings themselves and marriages of their daughters to other dynasts. It is obvious that over the period marriages were contracted with various other dynasties as political fortunes rose and fell and alliances shifted, but certain patterns emerge. Firstly, in several cases Clann Cholmáin kings took wives from the lesser dynasties of Mide, and indeed Brega. Thus Murchad Midi married Ailphín daughter of the king of Delbna Mór; his son Domnall married Ailbine daughter of Ailill king of Ard Ciannachta; Máel Rúanaid married Aroc, daughter of the king of the Síl nÁeda Sláine dynasty of Fir Chúl.

¹⁸⁷ Connon, 'The *Bansenchas*' pp. 107-8.

¹⁸⁸ M. Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Manuscript Tradition of the *Bansenchas*', *Ériu* 33 (1982), 109-35.

¹⁸⁹ M. Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The *Bansenchas* Revisited', in O'Dowd & Wichert, *Chattel, Servant or Citizen*, pp. 70-81.

Table 5B : Clann Cholmáin Marriage Ties (Continued)



Note also Ardaith †1115, d. ? Úa Mál Sechnaill = Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair, *Uí Chonchobair Connacht*

More common, at least as far as the sources go, were marriages contracted at greater distances. Donnchad mac Domnaill apparently took brides from two Ulster dynasties, Dál Fiatach and Dál nAraide. Máel Sechnaill I married the daughter of the king of Osraige. Donnchad Donn married at least four times, including the daughters of the kings of Connacht and Dál Cais. Most significant for Clann Cholmáin were marriages which connected them with Cenél nEógain in the period when the two dynasties alternated in the kingship of Tara, as Connon has shown.¹⁹⁰ Many of these involve the marrying off of daughters to the other dynasty. So Donnchad mac Domnaill's daughter Gormlaith married Níall Caille. Flann Sinna married Eithne daughter of Áed Finnlíath (who was therefore his second cousin) but Flann also married Áed Finnlíath's widow Máel Muire, who was (probably) Eithne's stepmother! Such a tangled web of consanguinity is impossible to show clearly on a table, but it maintained a certain amount of dynastic cohesion and was one of the mechanisms behind the succession of the kingship of Tara, which we shall consider further in the next chapter.

It is notable that the version of the prose *Bansenchas* found in the Book of Lecan contains particularly detailed information on the dynastic links of Uí Maíl Sechnaill in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. I have attempted to set these out in Table 5B, supplemented from the chronicles. It is interesting that even at this late period certain practices are recognisable; there are marriages with the 'internal' Mide dynasties of Delbna Mór, and Láegaire, and with 'neighbouring' dynasties of Osraige and Uí Failge. This is perhaps to be expected; there were only so many royal families around. It is notable that in the period after 1022 and the end of the alternating kingship of Tara, marriage links with Cenél nEógain effectively ended, though it is doubtful whether this was cause rather than effect. Marriages were still contracted with other significant dynasties, Uí Rúairc of Bréifne, Uí Bríain of Munster and Uí Chonchobair of Connacht.

Another source which affords us a glimpse of the supposed activities of Clann Cholmáin queens is *Betha Colmáin meic Lúacháin*. As we have seen, although this is a twelfth-century text it provides much important information. Two episodes in particular stand out. The first is in §50. Colmán has blessed the land (*ferann*) around Dún na Cairrge 'fort of the rock', a seat of the kings of Fir Thulach on the eastern side of Lough Ennell, and caused a healing spring to appear. The text notes that this place

¹⁹⁰ Connon, 'The *Bansenchas*', pp. 102-8.

was ever the residence of the kings of Fir Thulach until the time of the daughter of the son of Conchobar viz. the wife of Conchobar Uí Maíl Sechnaill when the king [of Mide] and his queen wrested it from Cú Chaille mac Dublaide, king of Fir Thulach ... she was the first of the queens of Mide 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 Thulach.¹⁹¹

This passage is important in many respects. It shows that an eleventh-century overking could appropriate land that had formerly been an important site for his sub-king, which is striking. It also shows that the land could be alienated to the overking's queen especially, and that it could remain a piece of 'royal land' attached to the position of queen over a period of time. In other words, much as there was a *ferann* attached to the institution of *rígdamna*, so too queenship could be an 'office' in its own right, rather than just a function of the office of kingship. The ability of a queen to hold official land (rather than any private land she may have held on entering the marriage) has important implications for what personal resources a queen could have, and may have been a factor in the generosity of Derforgaill's gift to Mellifont, if for example there was 'queen's land' in Bréifne.

As Walsh noted, there is some confusion in this passage of *Betha Colmáin*; Cú Chaille died in 1021 (*AFM*) in the reign of Máel Sechnaill II; Conchobar Uí Maíl Sechnaill reigned 1030-1073, and the error is probably confirmation that *Betha Colmáin* cannot be any earlier than the twelfth century, and probably from after 1122 when Colman's relics were recovered.¹⁹² As to the queen in question, she is stated to be a 'daughter of the son of Conchobar'. The *Bansenchas* has one Mór, daughter of either 'Conchobar king of Uí Failge' or 'the son of Conchobar'. Conchobar, the king of Uí Failge who gave his name to the later ruling dynasty died in 979 (*AU*), so one of his Uí Chonchobair descendants in the eleventh century is intended; probably Congalach mac Conchobair, who died in 1017. Mór is found in another source concerned with transfers of land, namely the *notitiae* in the Book of Kells, which will be discussed below.

The other main episodes in *Betha Colmáin* also involve links with Uí Failge, though here we are dealing with more remote 'history'. In the first (§§86-87), one Cináed mac Áengusa, king of Uí Failge, fell in love with the wife of the king of Tara and trysted with her at Fid Dorcha, the wood in which Lynn was situated. The king of Tara heard of this and came to kill her; Áengus pleaded with Colmán for help and offered

¹⁹¹ Meyer, *Betha Colmáin*, §50, incorporating P. Walsh's revised translation, 'The Topography of *Betha Colmáin*', *ZCP* 8 (1912), 568-69: 569.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

him tribute, and so Colmán turned him into a stag and the queen into a hind so they could escape. The miracle-motif is not especially uncommon. No Cináed mac Áengusa of Uí Failge is recorded, though Cináed mac Mugróin meic Áengusa died in 829. The episode is intended to account for why Lynn was due a large tribute from the kings of Uí Failge. The other episode follows straight on (§89) and relates how the king of Tara ‘Domnall mac Donnchada meic Murchada’ (either Donnchad d. 763 or Domnall d. 797) contracted marriage with the daughter of the king of Uí Failge and promised her a great bride-price (*tochra*) of 80 cows. But when the time came no cows could be found to give, only land, and the queen took it on condition it was near her confessor St Colmán. So she was given *Caille na hInge* ‘woods of the daughter’, which are said to extend from the head of Áth in Daire (Colmán’s family residence near Kinnegad) to ‘the tomb of bishop Áed’ in Fir Thulach; the latter is the church at Rath Áeda meic Bricc, Rahugh, where the *rigdál* of 859 took place. The queen naturally gives the land to Colmán for ever. Here we again have the idea of queen as able to independently hold and dispose of land. If the claim in *Betha Colmáin* relates to a genuine wood, the distance involved is over 20 kilometres, which cannot match the value of roughly 80 cows the land should have had; it is possible that the identification of Áth in Daire is incorrect.¹⁹³ Nevertheless, the idea is clear that Lynn possessed a considerable tract of land due to the benefice of a queen.

Royal Children

To be the child of a king was to be born into a position of relative privilege in early Ireland, as is the case with most societies possessing of royalty down to the present day. The research of Bronagh Ní Chonaill, Sheila Boll and others will soon provide a wealth of information about Irish childhood and fosterage, and consequently remarks here will be restricted to those of a general nature.¹⁹⁴

As we have seen, over half of Clann Cholmáin kings in the period 826-1153 were the sons of previous kings. This implies that in many cases kings had spent at least some of their youth growing up in a king’s household, though several years would have been spent in fosterage elsewhere. But we have also seen that it was unusual for a son to

¹⁹³ A forested area like this would have been land requiring labour (*etham frichnama*), a *cumal* of which was worth 16 dry cows (Kelly, *EIF*, p. 395); no matter what measurement of *tir cumaile* one uses, the area of *Caille na hInge* would not cover the distance.

¹⁹⁴ On literary representations of fosterage see now S. Boll, ‘Seduction, Vengeance and Frustration in *Fingal Rónáin*: the Role of Foster-Kin in Structuring the Narrative’, *CMCS* 47 (Summer 2004), 1-16.

directly succeed his father as king. Given that the king, his brothers and cousins could all have sons with a theoretical entitlement to the kingship, there would have been a considerable 'pool of princes' with potential to take the kingship. Of course, though polygamy and fecundity led to the pool of candidates increasing, other factors kept it in check. We have seen that the kings of Clann Cholmáin were not at all averse to eliminating dynastic rivals (who were also the potential fathers of future rivals) by mutilating them, typically by blinding, or by killing them outright. It is also quite likely that the common European practice of packing potential rivals off to monasteries was also done in Ireland. There is some evidence for this in the annals, and also instances of dynasts with names like Cléirchén and Athchléirech, suggesting that they had spent some time in a church before returning to the secular world.¹⁹⁵

On the available evidence it seems that murdered rivals had reached adulthood, but in many cases there is no way to tell for sure. What a reigning king was capable of depended entirely on his personal inclinations and power over his own kin-group. It is to be presumed that all members of the royal kindred were typically the wealthiest in society and their lands and dwellings could have had either a narrow or wide distribution throughout the kingdom. Under normal circumstances, as long as the other royals were at least publicly in obedience to and in normal relations with the king, their sons would presumably not have had to fear overly for their lives, and their minority would pass without fatal incident.

How was this minority spent? It is clear from the laws and sagas that the standard practice among the free and noble classes of Irish society was to place some or all of their children into fosterage (*altram*) for their upbringing, and royalty was no exception. Fosterage could either be one of affection (*altramm serce*) which was free, or more commonly fosterage which involved a fee. The main text of *Cáin Íarraith* 'the law of fosterage-fee' states that the fosterage-price for the child of a king was thirty *séoit* plus a horse for riding/racing.¹⁹⁶ The commentary to the text states that no matter what the status of the parent, the price for fostering a girl is one *sét* higher due to the additional accommodation arrangements required for young females, and presumably the risks of ensuring her inviolate status.¹⁹⁷ Royal children would normally have been fostered by royal and noble families who were responsible for their safety and education, and

¹⁹⁵ CS 936, AFM 1155. For a study of this phenomenon in the seventh and eighth centuries, see C. Stancliffe, 'Kings Who Opted Out', in P. Wormald (ed.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford 1983), pp. 154-76.

¹⁹⁶ CIH, v, 1761.1, 3.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1760.10-11.

indeed removing heirs from the royal household afforded them a degree of protection from enemies (a motif found in certain literary texts, e.g. *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*).¹⁹⁸

One of the most important characteristics of fosterage was the links it created between individuals and kin-groups. Kings' sons are regularly represented as being fostered in other territories, even in the households of other kings, and one may surmise that these links were sometimes of as much importance as marriage-ties.¹⁹⁹ The position of 'foster-brother' i.e. two (or more) persons who had been fostered together was clearly an important one. Unfortunately, beyond the literary and legal material it is quite tricky to get a sense of fosterage operating in the historical record. In fact, until the very late eleventh century almost all references to fostering or foster-relationships in the annals are to clerics, though in the twelfth century a few more references to secular figures occur, e.g. *AU* 1129.6: 'Gilla Críst grandson of Uidrén, chief of Cenél Feradaig, was burned in his foster-father's house in Tír Manach by treachery'.

Cáin Íarraith also specifies the lifestyle in which a child must be maintained, and this is a function of the child's status. Royal foster-children had to be educated to fulfil their roles. Boys were to learn *fidchell*-playing, *brandub*-playing (both types of board-game), horsemanship, swimming and archery.²⁰⁰ Girls were to learn sewing, embroidery and the like. However stereotyped the lists are, these skills are clearly among those required by the children of royalty across western Europe at this period.²⁰¹ The commentary also notes that if horsemanship is not taught (normally it would be taught to boys above the age of seven) a fine was due.²⁰² The commentary to *Cáin Íarraith* has a few other details about royal children. In its celebrated passage on the clothes worn by different social classes of children, it states that the sons of kings wear purple and blue.²⁰³ This is a familiar enough motif, but of course in Ireland as elsewhere it is kings who had the economic resources to give access to such colours, and we note that in the literature a queen (who may well have had a role in the production of the children's garments) could have a woad garden, essential for the production of such garments, in the vicinity of the *dún rí*.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁸ Binchy, *Scéla Cano*, §2.

¹⁹⁹ For a discussion of fosterage as a community-builder, see Charles-Edwards, *ECI*, p. 83.

²⁰⁰ *CIH*, v, 1760.33-4.

²⁰¹ The topic is vast, but see A. Giallongo, *Il Bambino Medievale: Educazione ed Infanzia nel Medioevo* (Bari 1990), S. Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London 1990), N. Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven, 2001).

²⁰² *CIH*, v, 1761.4-6.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 1759.14-15.

²⁰⁴ In *Scéla Éogain 7 Cormaic*, ed. & transl. T. Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt* (Dublin 1977), p. 122. For discussion see Kelly, *EIF*, pp. 141-2.

After fosterage, a prince or princess could then do several things, though how much personal choice they had is another matter. A princess could have been married off, or else would have remained a part of the household until such occurred. She could have entered religion; though our knowledge of Irish nunneries apart from Kildare is very limited, at least five daughters of Leinster dynasts became abbesses of Kildare.²⁰⁵ Sons had more options. Upon reaching legal age they could have been given a certain amount of land and livestock, and set up as lords on their own, though they could act as leading men for their father in counsel and battle. It is possible that the ceremony of giving arms, so prominent in the narrative literature, would have been undertaken before this stage, perhaps by the fosterer. Alternatively, at this point princes may also have entered religion. In a few cases royal adolescents might even have joined a band of *fianna*.²⁰⁶

Otherwise they could have lived in the royal household. When their father died they would have received a share of the inheritance, though as discussed above royal residence and land may have been a special case. Whether living in the father's household or independently, a prince would have had the usual responsibilities of a member of the *fine*, and perhaps others besides. They would have fought for the king, and royal sons would have sometimes been part of the *teglach* (perhaps alongside their own foster-brothers). In this environment new networks of contacts and allies (beyond those created in fosterage) could have been built up. This would enable a prince to take the final step, contesting the kingship when the time came. Many incidents of royal childhood are known from the sagas, but very few from historical sources. The most striking is *AU* 1109.9, when 'Domnall Rúad son of Gilla Pátraic, king of Osraige, was killed by another youth casting a stone'.²⁰⁷ Even when a prince did not have to fear for his life from adult relatives, being around other minors could be downright dangerous.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Muirenn ingen Cellaig, d. 831 (Uí Dunchada); Gormlaith ingen Murchada d. 1112, Sadb ingen Glúin Íarainn meic Murchada d. 1171 (Uí Chennselaig); Ingen Cerbaill meic Fáeláin dep. 1127 (Uí Fáeláin, her sister married Domnall of Mide d. 1137); Mór ingen Domnaill d. 1167 (Uí Failge). See *NHI*, ix, pp. 259-61. Cf. C. Harrington, *Women in a Celtic Church: Ireland 450-1150* (Oxford 2002), pp. 210-15.

²⁰⁶ K. McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Diberga*, and *Fianna*. Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland', *CMCS* 12 (Winter 1986), 1-22.

²⁰⁷ Gilla Pátraic had married Órlaith daughter of Murchad of Mide (d. 1076), but we do not know if Domnall Rúad was her son.

²⁰⁸ Cf. the law-tract *Mellbretha* 'sport-judgements', discussed by Kelly, *GEIL*, pp. 272.

The Articulation of Royal Imagery and Ideas

So far we have examined several of the spheres in which Clann Cholmáin kings were active. I now wish to turn to something more abstract, that is the promulgation of what we might call 'dynastic ideology'. I define this as the articulation and promotion of ideas designed to enhance the status and importance of the ruling dynasty. If the leading of armed hostings and the killing of rivals can be interpreted as royal displays of power, the promotion of concepts of Clann Cholmáin as great kings might be considered an assertion of royal authority.

There are several arenas in which the ideology of Clann Cholmáin kings was proclaimed. The first I wish to consider is one in which they have some claim to have been pioneers, that of regally-sponsored stonework. By 859 Máel Sechnaill I had made himself nominal overlord of most of Ireland, the first king to do so. His obit in *AU* 862.5 calls him *ri b-Ereinn uile* 'king of all Ireland'. This formulation is also found on monumental sculpture in the southern midlands of Ireland. The most important piece of sculpture is an ornate high cross from Kinnitty (Co. Offaly), inscribed thus:

OR DO RIG MAELSECHNAILL M MAELR[U]ANAID

OROIT AR R[IG H]ERENN

(south face)

OR DO COLMAN DO RO... IN CROSSA AR RIG HERENN

OR DO RIG HERENN

(north face)

A prayer for King Máel Sechnaill mac Mail Ruanaid. A prayer for the king of Ireland.

A prayer for Colmán who [made] this cross for the king of Ireland. A prayer for the king of Ireland.²⁰⁹

The concept of a 'kingship of Ireland' had certainly been evolving during the ninth century; Máel Sechnaill was the first king to put the concept into some kind of practice. The Kinnitty site is interesting, as it is on the southern slopes of the Slieve Bloom mountains, which formed part of the boundary between Mide and Osraige. It seems fair to suggest that the cross was erected after the *rigdál* of 859.²¹⁰ The inscription on the west cross at Durrow commemorates a Máel Sechnaill, 'king of Ireland' but it is

²⁰⁹ D. Ó Murchadha and G. Ó Murchú, 'Fragmentary Inscriptions from the West Cross at Durrow, the South Cross at Clonmacnois, and the Cross of Kinnitty', *JRSAl* 118 (1988), 53-66.

²¹⁰ For discussion of the illustrative panels, and the place of these crosses in the sculpture of the period see L. de Paor, 'The High Crosses of Tech Theille (Tihilly), Kinnitty and Related Sculpture' in E. Rynne (ed.), *Figures from the Past: studies on figurative art in Christian Ireland* (Dún Laoghaire, 1987), pp. 131-158.

unknown whether it refers to Máel Sechnaill mac Maíl Rúanaid or his descendant Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill. It is most probable that Máel Sechnaill mac Maíl Rúanaid is the king commemorated on the south cross at Clonmacnoise. An inscription on the cross at Killamery (Co. Kilkenny) has been read as commemorating Máel Sechnaill, though the reading is very doubtful.²¹¹ In any case, though decorated high crosses had been produced for some time (and those of Osraige are important early examples), a practice of monumental inscriptions for the kings of Clann Cholmáin seems to have begun with Máel Sechnaill.

The famous 'Cross of the Scriptures' at Clonmacnoise bears the inscription 'OR DO RIG FLAIND... RIG HERENN', commemorating Flann Sinna. This is the same wording as appears on the Kinnitty cross. The carving-styles of the inscriptions are so similar that they certainly come from the same workshop, and there is an argument that they were produced by the same craftsman, though this is chronologically unlikely.²¹² It is possible that the 'Cross of the Scriptures' was erected at the same time as the stone-church of Clonmacnoise was built by Flann and Abbot Colmán.²¹³ The consistent ideology of the crosses is striking, particularly when one considers that Máel Sechnaill was called *rí hÉrenn* in both stone and chronicle-entry but Flann was not, being given the title 'king of Tara' at his death.²¹⁴

Though the quantity of inscribed crosses is numerically small, it can be suggested that each one made an important point about the aspirations of the Clann Cholmáin kings who were responsible for them. Though literate ecclesiastics must have been the main audience for the inscriptions, work on inscribed stones in Britain has shown that there could still be an impact on an illiterate audience.²¹⁵ Though there may not have been many pilgrims or visitors to see the cross at Kinnitty, those at Durrow and especially Clonmacnoise would have been seen by many people, and their scale would have signalled the power of both the church and the king who patronised them. A panel on the Cross of the Scriptures has been interpreted as depicting King Flann and Abbot Colmán symbolically placing a staff in the ground, or representing Flann's

²¹¹ R.A.S. Macalister, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum* (2 vols, Dublin 1945-49), ii, p. 25; de Paor, 'The High Crosses', p. 157.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 154.

²¹³ CS 908 [=909]. One is reminded of the foundation stone of 685 at Jarrow, endowed by Ecgrith.

²¹⁴ AU 916.1. Note that Flann was apparently also the patron of the lost shrine of the Book of Durrow; The inscription as read by Roderick O'Flaherty in 1677 was *Oroit ocus bandacht Choluimb Chille do Flaund mac Maelsechnaill do rig Herenn lasandernad a cumdach so* 'the prayer and blessing of Colum Cille for Flann mac Maíl Sechnaill, for the king of Ireland who had this book-shrine made'. See M. Stokes, *Early Christian Art in Ireland* (London 1887), p. 89.

²¹⁵ K. Forsyth, 'Literacy in Pictland', in H. Price (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge 1998), pp. 39-61: 52-4.

ancestor Díarmait mac Fergusa Cerrbéoil granting Clonmacnoise to St Ciarán, either of which would be an interesting statement of royal links to Clonmacnoise. Harbison was inclined to derive the scene from the bible (as such panels normally were biblical).²¹⁶ A more recent hypothesis by FitzPatrick is that the scene represents Flann and Abbot Colmán holding Flann's 'rod of kingship' and that the scene represents a royal inauguration conducted by the coarb of Ciarán, which would be an even more potent statement of links between church and dynasty.²¹⁷ Peter Harbison and Roger Stalley have both contributed to the debate on the level of continental influence on the practice of erecting crosses.²¹⁸ In any event, it is clear that church-sites were viewed by these kings as important centres to assert their power, a matter we shall be returning to in Chapter IV.

We have already seen that the royal hall was one of the most important places for royal business, and here we find the next theatre for royal ideology. Specifically, I wish to consider 'court' poetry produced by professional poets for Clann Cholmáin kings, which we suppose would mainly have been aired in the hall as part of an evening's entertainment (though on other occasions also). For the purposes of this discussion I will examine some of the material under two main headings: on one hand praise poetry, and on the other narrative and historical poetry.

The commissioning of praise-poetry by kings and lords is a constant of the Gaelic world from the beginning of its history to its end in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We are fortunate in that several praise-poems, some fragmentary, some complete, survive for members of Clann Cholmáin. A number of praise-poems for Clann Cholmáin kings survive from late-eighth century onwards. A eulogistic quatrain of fairly standard form for Donnchad Midi is inserted in the chronicles (*AU* 797.1). There is also a quatrain preserved in the 'First Middle Irish Metrical Tract' which may have been composed in his lifetime. This tract, which sets out a range of metres through example seems to include several verses on Clann Cholmáin kings.

Donnchad dia-n-fich domun digthech
dom-[fh]oir giallach glonnchar

²¹⁶ P. Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland* (3 vols, Bonn 1992), i, p. 49.

²¹⁷ E. FitzPatrick, 'Royal Inauguration Assembly and the Church in Medieval Ireland', in P.S. Barnwell & M. Mostert (edd.), *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages* (Turnhout 2003), pp. 73-93: 80.

²¹⁸ P. Harbison, 'The Carolingian contribution to Irish sculpture', in M. Ryan (ed.), *Ireland and Insular Art AD 500-1200* (Dublin 1987), pp. 105-10, and *idem*, 'A high cross base from the Rock of Cashel and a reconsideration of the "Ahenny Group" of crosses', *PRLA* 93 C (1993), 1-20: 14-16; R. Stalley, 'European art and the Irish high crosses', *PRLA* 90 C (1990), 135-158.

comairdirc fri hÉirinn n-ollguirm
ainm maic Domnaill, Donnchad

Donnchad, through whom a fiery world seethes,
 May he who takes hostages and loves brave deeds protect me;
 It is as renowned as great blue Ireland,
 The name of the son of Domnall, Donnchad.²¹⁹

It is difficult to determine how much of this imagery is particular to Donnchad and how much may be stock praise-poetry; but from this early point we see that kings of Clann Cholmáin were being placed on a level bounded by all of Ireland. Flann Sinna, like Donnchad, is given a eulogistic verse in the chronicles, and like Donnchad quatrains survive in 'The First Middle Irish Metrical Tract'; indeed, Flann is the best-represented king in that collection.²²⁰ The language and imagery are similar to that of the quatrain for Donnchad mac Domnaill, featuring an extended metaphor:

Immon cathbarr, imma cléithe
Co rrian réilsheng,
Immon rí rí,
Immon ngréin ar inchaib Éirenn

Immon daig ndearb ndergór mbuidi
Batar ilí,
Immon mbarr fo-n-talla uilí;
Im Fhlann Midi.

Around the protector, around the chief as far as the clear and slender sea, around the illustrious king, around the sun in front of Ireland; around the fine, firm, red-golden, yellow [one] there were multitudes, around the royal-tree under whom everyone found room, around Flann of Mide.²²¹

Flann is addressed as king of Mide rather than of anywhere else; the poem might date from before the death of Áed Finnlíath, or alternatively even when Flann was king of Tara, his own people may have seen him first and foremost king of his own land, Mide. Once again, though the aspirations might not reflect reality, the Clann Cholmáin king is

²¹⁹ D. Ó hAodha, 'The First Middle Irish Metrical Tract' in H.L.C. Tristram (ed.), *Metrik und Medienwechsel* (ScriptOralia 35, Tübingen 1991), pp. 207-244, §1, p. 225. Perhaps 'great green' is to be preferred to Ó hAodha's 'great blue' for *ollguirm*.

²²⁰ Ó hAodha, 'The First Middle Irish Metrical Tract' §§ 4-6, 13.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, §4, p. 226.

presented as a sun suitable to illuminate all of Ireland. Probably the most significant poem connected with Flann Sinna is *Flann for Éirinn* 'Flann over Ireland' by Máel Muire Othna (d. 887), currently being edited by John Carey and recently discussed by Alex Woolf.²²² As well as implying that Clann Cholmáin had enjoyed a monopoly of the kingship of Tara (patently untrue), it is also interesting in that the poem dates itself to the *seisir náenach* 'sixth áenach' of Flann's reign.²²³ This might be the *Áenach Tailten*, and though it is not clear that Flann celebrated it annually, one might infer that the poem was written in the sixth year of his reign as king of Tara (885/6), which would just fit with authorship by Máel Muire.

Flann's son Donnchad Donn is also commemorated in the Metrical tract:

Érig súas, a Donnchad Duinn
For Fotla forchair shoruill;
Bid do chert ós chopblae Chuinn,
A uí choim chorcraí Chonuill.

Rúad rí rodba, rig dá raind,
Dian forba Temair telchhind;
Mo rann maissi móir mac Flaínd
Corand choir claisi Cremthhind.

Rise up Donnchad Donn, upon Fotla [Ireland] of very great violation. Let your right be over Conn's own field, o fair, royal descendant of Conall.

Strong aggressive king, king of two parts, whose patrimony is Tara – the summit; the son of Flann is my portion of great beauty, fitting *corand* of the trench of Cremthann.²²⁴

This poem is another clear example of kingship-imagery. Donnchad is the king of Tara, and he should rise up over Ireland. *Donnchad Donn for Fotla* is an almost identical formulation to *Flann for Éirinn*, which suggests some continuity of ideas, even if only as common poetic stock. Ó hAodha has suggested that this text may even represent an inauguration ode for Donnchad, a reminder that poetry was not reserved only for the royal hall.²²⁵

²²² Woolf, 'View from the West', p. 94.

²²³ *Lec.* 9 V a 38; cf. the version in the second copy of the poem at 297 R a 46.

²²⁴ Ó hAodha, 'The First Middle Irish Metrical Tract' §32, pp. 238-9.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 239 n. 100.

A considerable amount of verse is connected with the reign of Máel Sechnaill II. Several of these poems, though featuring lines of praise for Máel Sechnaill, fall into the category of narrative and history and we shall consider these below. First mention should be made of the elegies which survive. Several different commemorative verses are inserted in the different chronicles. Complete poems also survive in manuscripts, one attributed to Erard mac Coisse.²²⁶ Another is attributed to Flann úa Rónáin, also known as Flann *na Marb* 'of the dead', whose nickname suggests he was a professional eulogy-writer.²²⁷ After praising the deeds of Máel Sechnaill and enumerating main places of the Uí Néill, Flann specifies that Máel Sechnaill was a patron to him: 'my feather-bed was the reward'.²²⁸ There is no space here to comment on the payments given by kings to poets, other than to note that as well as gold or goods kings could give land to the professionals they patronised.²²⁹

Much of the narrative and historical material (note that there was no clear distinction between the genres) dating from the reign of Máel Sechnaill is associated with the name of Cúán úa Lothcháin, 'chief poet of Ireland' who was killed in 1024.²³⁰ He certainly worked under Máel Sechnaill's patronage, though one need not go as far as to call him his 'court poet'. The most famous poem ascribed to him is *Temair Breg, baile na fian*, a poetic version of the story of the sons of Eochaid Mugmedón.²³¹ This tale, which explains how Níall Noígíallach came into the sovereignty of Ireland, was effectively an origin-legend for the Uí Néill and consequently would have been most appropriate entertainment for an evening at Máel Sechnaill's hall, and could have been performed on other occasions also. The remaining poems attributed to Cúán discussed here survive in the collection known as the *Metrical Dinnsenchas*, the lore of places. We have already met one of these, *Temair toga na tulach*, for its description of the house of Cormac mac Airt, another of Máel Sechnaill's legendary ancestors. Another poem, *Temair, Tailtiu, tír n-óenaig*, though not attributed to Cúán, is addressed to Máel Sechnaill and finishes by praising him and wishing that his line *narab díbad i Temair* 'never be extinct in Tara'.²³² Another unattributed poem tells of the *senchas* of the River Boyne, the

²²⁶ Ed. K. Meyer, 'A Medley of Irish Texts, IV', *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* 3 (1907), 305.

²²⁷ Ed. & transl. J. Carney, 'The Ó Cianáin Miscellany', *Ériu* 21 (1969), 142-7.

²²⁸ Carney, 'The Ó Cianáin Miscellany', §12, p. 146.

²²⁹ Kelly, *EIF*, 403-4.

²³⁰ *AU* 1024.3.

²³¹ Ed. & transl. M. Joynt, 'Echtra mac Echdach Mugmedóin', *Ériu* 4 (1908), 92-111. See now C. Ní Dhubhnaigh, '*Temair Breg, baile na fian* and *Echtra Mac nEchdach Mugmedóin*: an edition, translation and comparative analysis' (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., University College Cork 2001)

²³² Gwynn, *Metrical Dinnsenchas*, i, pp. 38-45; ll. 73-80. An unattributed poem on Míde addressed to Máel Sechnaill is in *UM* 155 R a 23.

river of Tara and Brega; it addresses Máel Sechnaill as *mail Mide* 'prince of Mide' and calls him at the end *a Mail féil Sechláind* 'o generous Máel Sechnaill'.²³³ The two most important *dinnsenchas* poems attributed to Cúán are those on Druim Críach (Drumcree, Westmeath; space prevents further discussion here), and Tailtiu.²³⁴

The poem on Tailtiu has been considered to be of particular significance. The chronicles laconically report that in 1007 'the fair of Tailtiu was revived by Máel Sechnaill'.²³⁵ Cúán's poem on Tailtiu states that the fair was not held for 79 years until Máel Sechnaill restored it, and praises Máel Sechnaill to the extent that he is said to rise over Europe like the river Euphrates.²³⁶ At the end Cúán identifies himself and gives his best wishes to the 'youths of the noble fair'. *Aenach Tailten*, therefore, apparently went into abeyance after Muirchertach mac Néill 'disturbed' it in 927 (an occasion described in the poem as *duboenach nDonnchada* 'the black fair of Donnchad'), and at least part of the poem was written by Cúán to celebrate the restoration of the fair by Máel Sechnaill in 1007.²³⁷ These statements are found in the final 49 lines of that poem, which exist in only two of the MSS, suggesting that Cúán may have re-used an earlier poem for the occasion. The renewal of the fair, and the production (or redaction) of the poems on Tailtiu, and other places connected with the kingship of Tara could be viewed as an attempt by Máel Sechnaill to restore or boost the prestige of the Tara kingship in the face of the power and success of Brían Bóraime. I would go further and suggest that some of these poems were an appeal to a perceived common purpose among the Uí Néill. It has been observed that Brían's triumph over Máel Sechnaill was in part due to the unwillingness of the Northern Uí Néill to aid him. This poetry might have been part of an attempt to rally Uí Néill support against Brían, though the question requires further discussion than is possible here. In any case the longer version of the poem on Tailtiu is not only closely datable, but a non-elegiac poem written for a particular occasion; along with *Flann for Éirinn* an extremely rare occurrence in early Irish literature.²³⁸

²³³ E.J. Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, iii (RIA Todd Lecture Series 10, Dublin 1913), pp. 34-9; ll. 1-4, 60.

²³⁴ E.J. Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, iv (RIA Todd Lecture Series 11, Dublin 1924), pp. 42-57; 146-63.

²³⁵ *AU* 1007.10; see also Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu'.

²³⁶ Gwynn, *Metrical Dindshenchas*, iv, pp. 146-63, ll. 189-92, 197-200.

²³⁷ Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu' p. 120.

²³⁸ Gwynn, *Metrical Dindshenchas*, iv, pp. 413-19.

Clann Cholmáin and Church Patronage

The connections between kings and churches are numerous and will be discussed further in Chapter IV. Here we have already highlighted certain aspects of Clann Cholmáin activity. They had close links with the Columban churches, principally Durrow and Kells, but also were linked with Clonard and Clonmacnoise, as well as lesser churches such as Lynn and Rahugh. We have pointed out that there were royal residences at Kells and Durrow. Indeed, Durrow was closely connected with the dynasty into the twelfth century; as we have seen Murchad Uí Maíl Sechnaill died there. The hagiographical text known as 'The Sons of Uí Súanaig', dealing with the clerical families who moved into Rahan after Mo-chutu was exiled from there to Lismore, states that the joint-kings of Fir Chell (Cenél Fíachach) who plundered Rahan were accused by the coarb of Uí Súanaig 'in the house of Murchad Uí Maíl Sechnaill in Durrow, for it was there that Uí Maíl Sechnaill was at home' (*i ttech Murchada I Maelechlaind i nDurmagh, ar is ann boi Uí Maelechlaind istigh*).²³⁹ The text further mentions that Murchad gave one of these kings to a local family who killed him, an interesting illustration of royal justice with respect to an overking and a sub-king. The event is reported in *AFM* 1139, which add that Murchad killed the other joint-king *in gembel* 'in fetters'. Rahan and Durrow were both in Fir Chell (so-called because of the presence of these and other churches), only a few miles apart. It is unlikely, of course, that Murchad spent all or even most of his time at Durrow. *AU* 1124.3 relate there was 'A great shock to the king of Temair on Easter Sunday, i.e. his Easter house collapsed on him and his household (*teglach*)'. A *tech Cásca* may have been some kind of temporary construction for the royal household to celebrate the Paschal season, or the annalist may simply mean 'the house where he was at Eastertide'.

The patronage of high crosses at Durrow, Clonmacnoise, Kinnitty and elsewhere shows that churchmen were involved in formulating a royal ideology of the kingship of Ireland with Clann Cholmáin kings. Patronage manifested itself in different ways. In the first place there was the simple gift of goods, metal or equivalent. An interesting incident is reported for 1129:

The great altar of the stone-church of Clonmacnoise was opened and treasures were taken out, i.e. the *cairrecán* of Solomon's temple which had been given by Máel

²³⁹ Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉirenn*, i, p. 315; ii, p. 306.

Sechnaill mac Domnaill and the standing-cup of Donnchad mac Flainn and the three treasures which Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair had given.²⁴⁰

The thief, one Gilla Comgáin, did not get far; he was run to ground in Limerick the following year and hanged by the king of Munster. Here we see Clann Cholmáin patronage across generations: a chalice given by Donnchad Donn, and another gift given by Máel Sechnaill II.²⁴¹ We have already noted that Máel Sechnaill exacted a special tax in 1007 to pay for the *eneclar* of the altar of Clonmacnoise. This was in the same year that he restored *Áenach Tailten* and may have been another attempt by Máel Sechnaill to boost his prestige.

Of course, the most well-known form of donation in medieval Europe was the granting of land, and Clann Cholmáin were not exceptional.²⁴² We have already seen a queen donating land to Lynn, but *Betha Colmáin* is far more concerned with pressing Lynn's claims to land donated to it by kings, both local kings and overkings. Domnall mac Áeda, Cenél Conaill king of Tara (d.642) is supposed to have given the royal residence of Dún Léime ind Eich along with seventeen *baileda* to Colmán.²⁴³ This place was in Uí Forannáin, not far from Clonard, and the text states that the *baileda* were freed from obligation to the Uí Forannáin. This is an example of a strategy discussed by Charles-Edwards in his examination of mechanisms by which the leading Uí Néill dynasties maintained supremacy over the lesser dynasties; the sub-kingdoms were weakened by giving their land away to the church.²⁴⁴ Charles-Edwards considers the relevant example of Durrow in Cenél Fíachach, probably founded by Colum Cille under the auspices of Áed mac Áinmirech, Domnall's father (d. 598). The church was an Uí Néill church, but it was founded on Cenél Fíachach land. Not only that, but Durrow was only a few miles away from Rahugh, the church of Cenél Fíachach's own saint, Áed mac Bricc.²⁴⁵

This returns us to an important problem. One of the causes invoked by Byrne for the 'collapse' of Mide was the presence within it of the greatest number of churches of any Irish province, and the freedoms from taxation and manpower obligation claimed by the lands of those churches drastically reduced the resources available to the

²⁴⁰ CS 1125 [=1129]; cf. *AT*, *AFM* 1129.

²⁴¹ For a discussion of the significance of Máel Sechnaill's gift, see C. Bourke, 'Cairrean Tempuill Solman', *Peritia* 16 (2002), 474-7.

²⁴² For discussion of land-donations to the church, see Kelly, *EIF*, pp. 404-6.

²⁴³ Meyer, *Betha Colmáin*, §45.

²⁴⁴ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 555-6.

²⁴⁵ *Betha Colmáin meic Liachain* reckons Rahugh to be in Fir Thulach, which may well have been the case by the twelfth century.

Clann Cholmáin kings. It is unclear whether such a question can be answered, given the dearth of records of church landholding in the area, even from the post-conquest period. One might suggest *prima facie* that *Betha Colmáin* contains a full record of the holdings of Lynn in the early twelfth century, though hagiography has many problems and the church's claims need not have correlated with reality. That said, a case-study based on one of the few pieces of evidence for church land-holdings in Mide may be instructive.²⁴⁶ Most of the sites, as one might expect, were close to Lynn itself. Several were around the church or in its wood, Fid Dorcha. About twenty places are recorded in this area, which is named after its original inhabitants, the Uí Dubáin. The next most important area is neighbouring Uí Thigernáin, the area to the west and north of Lough Ennell. Here Mullingar with its fish weir, as well as another twenty or so *baileda* are supposed to have been given to Colmán. Mention has already been made of sites in Fir Thulach given to Lynn. The question immediately rises as to how big these donations were. Gregory Toner has recently considered the question via the term *baile*, which the text uses as a general term for most of them.²⁴⁷ His analysis, particularly of donations whose value is given, suggests that they were farm-estates of tens of acres rather than fields of a few acres.²⁴⁸ Where they are named, the names are mostly of the type Ráth Spéláin (rath of Spélán), Dún Senchada (fort of the *senchaid*) and Les na Moga (enclosure of the slave), implying the holdings were named after the central house or farmstead within them, though names such as Cluain Gillai Fínáin ('the meadow of Gilla Fínáin') and Ard Mór ('great height') are found also.²⁴⁹ It follows that even a small church like Lynn possessed considerable estates within the vicinity, to say nothing of the persons and livestock.

This brings us to the immunities from taxation and imposition. *Betha Colmáin* generally uses stereotypical formulae of a type found in many Irish saint's lives, normally *sáer co bráth* 'freedom till doom'. However, there are certain specific provisions which are interesting. After enumerating seventeen *ráthanna* in Uí Thigernáin which were free from taxation, the text states that neither Uí Gusáin or Uí Thigernáin were obliged to provision (*bíathad*) the king of Mide in Cró-inis, but only in Ruba Conaill, that there should not be a billeting (*coinnmed*) upon them in Cró-inis, and that their winter-beef (*mairt gemreid*) and lenten food (*mbíad corgais*) should only be consumed in Ruba

²⁴⁶ See also the brief discussion in Doherty, 'The Vikings in Ireland', pp. 317-8.

²⁴⁷ G. Toner, 'Baile. Settlement and Landholding in Medieval Ireland', *Éigse* 34 (2004), 25-43.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 34-6.

²⁴⁹ Meyer, *Betha Colmáin*, §74.

Conaill. Further, the Uí Gusáin were entitled to the tax from strangers (*cáin a deorad*) from the king of Mide.²⁵⁰ The phrasing of the text suggests that these are not privileges for the residents of the Lynn estates in Uí Gusáin and Uí Thigernáin, but for the inhabitants of those lands generally with respect to the king of Mide. As such this particular part of the text is comparable with certain other tracts on (over)kingship which we shall encounter in Chapter III.

The privileges are supposed to derive from the fact that the lands were granted to Colmán by Conall Guthbind, the Clann Cholmáin king (d. 635). This is the culmination of a storyline in which Conall and his *rechtaire* had demanded considerable food-renders from Colmán's family, and Conall had been miraculously pinned to the floor of his hall at Dún Brí by his own weapons. Conall submitted to Colmán and pledged him Dún Brí with the other lands, in return for being released from his straits. Colmán promised Conall a new royal site, Ruba Conaill, presented as originally a church belonging to Colmán's rival Últan (probably of Ardraccan). The site is mentioned a couple of times in the annals: firstly the battle of Ruba Conaill in 803 (*AU*), in which Conchobar mac Donnchada defeated his brother Ailill to claim the sole kingship of Mide; secondly in 1159 (*AFM*) when Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn banished Diarmait Uí Maíl Sechnaill from the kingship and installed his brother Donnchad. From these references we would know Ruba Conaill was a place in Mide with royal associations; it is only *Betha Colmáin* which confirms for us that it was a royal residence, not to mention the fact that here there is possible continuity of use from 803 to 1159.

As for larger churches, we are fortunate to possess the *notitiae* of land-donations recorded in the Book of Kells.²⁵¹ Though the land around Kells passed from the kingship of Clann Cholmáin to Uí Rúairc of Bréifne in the twelfth century, several records show Uí Maíl Sechnaill involvement. No. 2 records the granting of the retreat of Colum Cille and its herb-garden to God and pious pilgrims forever, warranted by Máel Sechnaill IV mac Conchobair Uí Maíl Sechnaill.²⁵² No. 3, a contract for a piece of land bought by a priest of Kells and his kinsman was warranted by Domnall mac Flainn Uí

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, §62.

²⁵¹ G. Mac Niocaill, *Notitiae as Leabhar Cheannanaís 1033-1161* (Dublin 1961), revised by *idem*, 'The Irish "charters"', in P. Fox (ed.), *The Book of Kells, MS 58, Trinity College Library Dublin: Commentary* (Lucerne 1990), 153-65; in what follows the revised numbering of the *notitiae* in 'The Irish "charters"' is employed. Three of these (8 [1], 8 [2] and 10) are transcripts no longer extant in the Book of Kells but copied into RLA MS 934 and BL MS Add. 4791. For a general assessment of the material see M. Herbert, 'Charter Material from Kells', in F. O'Mahony (ed.), *The Book of Kells: Proceedings of a Conference at Trinity College Dublin 6-9 September 1992* (Dublin 1994), pp. 60-77, and D. Broun, *The Charters of Gaelic Scotland and Ireland in the Early and Central Middle Ages* (Quiggin Pamphlets on the Sources of Mediaeval Gaelic History 2, Cambridge 1995), pp. 30-1.

²⁵² Mac Niocaill, 'The Irish "charters"', 155-6.

Maíl Sechnaill (d. 1094).²⁵³ Both of these *notitiae* are examples of Mide kings guaranteeing transactions rather than making donations themselves, but the earliest record, notice 4 (1033x1049), relates how Conchobar Úa Maíl Sechnaill (d. 1073), as atonement for the blinding of two nobles (possibly rulers of the Mide sub-kingdom of Uí Beccon) who were under the protection of the clerics and relics of Kells, 'gave Kildalkey with its territory and land to God and Colum Cille for ever, free of tribute or dues, expedition or hosting, or billeting of king or chief'.²⁵⁴ The notice chastises Conchobar for profaning the sanctuary and reminds him of the close relation between the Uí Néill and their saint, Colum Cille, and states that it is more dangerous for a king of Tara to violate the immunity of Colum Cille. Among the guarantors were not merely Conchobar and the abbot of Kells, but also the abbots of Armagh and Clonmacnoise, and the kings of four Mide sub-kingdoms, demonstrating the significance of the donation. The final guarantor is the queen, Mór 'daughter of the son of Conchobar', whom we have met already as the queen to whom the land at Dún na Cairrge in Fir Thulach was alienated.

It is clear from the annals that the injuring or killing of enemies under the protection of the church was not uncommon, and one might guess how many gifts of land or wealth were given to the church in recompense. From these two sources, one may suspect that the churches of Mide had acquired considerable estates with immunities in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and that Mide (and Brega) had more churches than elsewhere implies there is some substance to Byrne's hypothesis. On the other hand, Mide and Brega had the highest proportion of fertile land of all the provinces (especially given that bog-cover was probably less extensive at the time), so it does not necessarily follow that increased church-holdings had a debilitating effect on Clann Cholmáin resources and manpower.²⁵⁵ The matter requires further detailed investigation by the specialist.

Conclusion: Clann Cholmáin and Dynastic Practice

Clann Cholmáin went from relative obscurity to the heights of power in Ireland and then back again. We have examined some of the processes at work throughout their

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 156-7.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 157-8.

²⁵⁵ For the levels of bog, forest etc. see M. Ryan, 'Furrows and browse: some archaeological thoughts on agriculture and population in early medieval Ireland', in Smyth, *Seanchas*, pp. 30-6.

dynastic history and some of the practices employed by their kings. However one came to take the kingship, securing one's position by the elimination of rivals was *de rigueur* throughout the period. A second challenge, which we have not had space to discuss in depth here, was to be dominant kings of Southern Uí Néill; in other words to dominate northern and southern Brega. Yet even when Clann Cholmáin kings were dominant, Brega kings could take very active and independent roles in Irish politics. The ultimate challenge, at least until the end of the tenth century was to make a success of the kingship of Tara, and extend royal power over other kingdoms and provinces.

One of the most important problems is the perceived 'collapse' of the dynasty. A full solution requires a thoroughgoing reanalysis of the political history, but I will offer a few observations here. The first problem is one of perception. The political history of Ireland in the eleventh and twelfth centuries tends to have been written in terms of the big characters: Diarmait mac Maíl na mBó, Tairdelbach Ua Briain, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair. It could be suggested that the application of this framework, putting the focus on what later scholars with hindsight consider to be the most important persons, distorts our understanding somewhat. The annals seem to have a higher regard for the Uí Maíl Sechnaill kings. *AFM* calls Murchad Ua Maíl Sechnaill *tuile ordain aireachais, & shaor-chlandachta Éreann* 'flood of the glory, magnificence, and nobility of Ireland'; his son Máel Sechnaill was poisoned at Durrow in 1155 *i t-tuile a ratha & a righe* 'in the flood of his prosperity and reign', and his death likened to a *craobh riana bláth* 'a branch [cut down] before its blossoming'.²⁵⁶ Unfortunately it is not clear from where *AFM* got these statements; the contemporary annals covering these events are either lacunose or do not have these positive appraisals. I have suggested above that the division in 1105 and subsequent failure of a single king to assert his supremacy was the real beginning of the end, though the problems had earlier origins. Ultimately though, after Máel Sechnaill II no king of Mide did become king of Ireland or even king with opposition, which does demonstrate a decline, if not collapse.

I have attempted to show that Clann Cholmáin kings were very conscious of the imagery and ideology of their rule, as shown clearly by the inscribed stone crosses. They were also patrons of literature. This is true of many Irish kings, but in this case we have a larger and more discrete body of evidence than is usual, and in the case of Máel Sechnaill II we are most fortunate. A future challenge for scholars is to discern what

²⁵⁶ *AFM* 1153, 1155.

ideologies of kingship evolved in the twelfth-century period when the great collections of pseudo-history and mythology were put together. This was the period by when the Uí Maíl Sechnaill had been comprehensively eclipsed and the kingship of Tara had been reduced to a prerogative of the kings of Mide alone; yet that kingship of Tara had been woven into the fabric of the national kingship of Ireland, a kingship which the kings of Mide alone of the earlier great kingships failed to provide a real contender to in the years 1022-1169. Dynastic strife was not rare, and Clann Cholmáin seem to have been no more inchoate than their contemporaries; though there were many reasons, it is perhaps bad luck as much as anything else which meant that one of their number, perhaps Conchobar mac Domnaill, did not go on to contest the overkingship of Ireland.

Chapter III: Overkingship

The main theme of this chapter is overkingship.¹ The medieval Irish polity consisted of kingdoms ruled by kings of varying status and power. The concept, if not the reality, of an overkingship of Ireland was in existence by the eighth century.² In what follows we shall examine the various kinds of political relationship between Irish kingdoms, of which overkingship was perhaps the most common, if by no means the only permutation. There are several key questions pertaining to overkingship, and not all of them can be examined here. The first is how a position of overkingship was established. The simple answer is by means of real or perceived military might. Successful campaigning might lead to two outcomes: the direct annexation of territory (*claideb tír* ‘sword-land’), or the establishment of a hierarchical relationship of power between overking and the king (and sub-kings) of different kingdoms. The former seems to have been a common process in the fifth to seventh centuries, most visible in the (semi-) historical annals charting the conquests of Uí Néill.³ The latter seems to have been rather more common in the period examined in this thesis, with important exceptions (such as the growth of Bréifne, which will be considered in Chapter V).

In attempting to trace these processes through history, we are faced with acute methodological problems. The most important is the perennial question of the significance of what the chronicles do, or do not, tell us, given that they are not a uniform record.⁴ For example, as we shall see presently, chronicles barely report the taking of hostages, a symbol and guarantee of overlordship, before the ninth century, and reports are still infrequent until the late tenth century. Yet *Críth Gablach* and other legal materials take the practice of hostage-giving for granted.⁵ Áed Oirdnide, king of Tara, invaded Leinster in 804, 805, 818 and 819.⁶ On the first of these occasions Fínsnechta the king of Leinster submitted to him, and on the second and third Áed divided Leinster between two princes. On the first occasion *AU* report that as a consequence of the invasion *coru gíall Fínsnechta do Áedh* ‘the hostages of Fínsnechta

¹ See Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, pp. 28-32; Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 40-7, for general accounts. Jaski, *EIKS* and Charles-Edwards, *ECI*, though containing much useful information pertaining to overkingship, do not discuss the topic in its own right.

² Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 50-8, 254-61.

³ Byrne, *The Rise of the Uí Néill*; Charles-Edwards, *ECI*, pp. 441-68.

⁴ C. Etchingham, *Viking Raids on Irish Church Settlements in the Ninth Century: a Reconsideration of the Annals* (Maynooth 1996), pp. 1-6, 58-9.

⁵ Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, §§ 27, 32, 46.

⁶ *AU* 804.10, 805.7, 818.6, 819.1.

[were given] to Áed'. Should we suppose that in 805 and 818 Áed took hostages to guarantee the new dispensation he had arranged in Leinster, even though the annals do not say this? Or did Áed hope that mutual antagonism between the kings he had set up, coupled with the threat of his own direct intervention, would be enough to secure the settlement?

The question of reportage has been investigated by several scholars in recent years, most profitably by Patrick Sims-Williams.⁷ He is particularly concerned with the dating of the Welsh *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* rather than Irish submission-processes *per se*, but he makes several important points. He considered the annalistic phrase *táinic i tech* 'came into the house of' meaning 'submitted to', which first appears in 1059.⁸ Earlier commentators, notably Charles-Edwards and Marie Therese Flanagan, have suggested that this formula indicates the commencement of a new practice of submission, which may have been introduced by Brían Bóraime and his descendants.⁹ Sims-Williams noted that D.A. Binchy, on comparative anthropological grounds, ascribed far older origins to the custom than were implied by the annals.¹⁰ He also pointed out that historians 'are aware of the problem of selective recording by annalists, but nevertheless wish to find a more than verbal significance in their changing usage', and discussed an attempt by Flanagan to rehabilitate the methodology of inferring changing historical practice from changing annalistic usage.¹¹ He adduced several pieces of evidence, primarily varying accounts of the same event in different chronicles, for linguistic and stylistic factors which come into play in accounts of kings submitting, which, after all, were highly-charged events.¹² His final point was that annalists often did *not* mention customs that were 'taken for granted', and that we must tread most warily if we want to chart a history of the forms of royal submission from the annals.¹³

Bearing in mind these strictures, we may consider the practical processes by which king-overking relationships were established in pre-Norman Ireland, even if we cannot assign exact dates to developments in the way these links were forged. In what follows we shall take the following approach to the material. Firstly, we shall consider

⁷ P. Sims-Williams, 'The Submission of Irish Kings in Fact and Fiction: Henry II, Bendigeidfran, and the Dating of *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', *CMCS* 22 (Winter 1991), 31-61.

⁸ *AI* 1059.7; *CS* 1057 [=1059].

⁹ T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Date of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion* (1970), 263-98: 296-7; M.T. Flanagan, *Irish Society, Angevin Settlers, Angevin Kingship: Interactions in Ireland in the Late Twelfth Century* (Oxford 1989), p. 177.

¹⁰ Sims-Williams, 'The Submission of Irish Kings', 40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹² *Ibid.*, 41-3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 43.

general questions about the relationships between kingdoms, including treaties, hostage-giving, and submissions, considering examples from across Ireland. Armed with this framework we shall then examine two case-studies of dynasties practicing overkingship. Both of these studies will have two poles of chronological focus, one in the eighth-ninth centuries, and one in the eleventh-twelfth centuries; these have been determined by the specific evidence which will be considered. The first study is of the overkingship of Munster, under both the Eóganachta and Uí Bríain. Here we shall be mainly concerned with the articulation of political relationships voiced in certain texts, *Frithfolad Caisil* 'The Counter-obligations of Cashel' of the eighth century, 'The West Munster Synod' of perhaps the ninth century, and *Lebor na Cert* 'The Book of Rights' of the late eleventh or early twelfth century. The second study will discuss the Cenél nEógain dynasty of Northern Uí Néill. Here we shall focus on two main themes, firstly their relationship with the Airgíalla, about which survives an important poem comparable with the Munster texts already mentioned; secondly, we will consider the strategies of their Meic Lochlainn kings as they strove for the overkingship of Ireland in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This second study will refer more often to chronicle-evidence and should illustrate some of the general points investigated in the first part of the chapter. Where annalistic evidence is used, although examples are taken from all the chronicles, the principal focus will be on *AU* and *AI*. There are two main reasons for doing this. Firstly, it is instructive to consider the semantics and usage of terminology over the period within individual chronicles and compare them with each other. There is not space here to do this for all the chronicles, but *AU* and *AI* constitute useful data-sets and also contrast with each other in several respects. Secondly, there is much unique information on the Cenél nEógain preserved in *AU* and on Munster affairs in *AI*; therefore concentrating on these chronicles will be particularly relevant to our case-studies and may illuminate if not variation in royal practice between north and south, at least variation in annalistic usages.

Political Relationships

Irish society knew a hierarchy of kings. We have seen in Chapter I an example of how the practicalities of a political structure culminating in the kingship of Ireland was envisaged to have operated in particular legal cases. Yet, though the pyramidal structure of kingship presented in *Críth Gablach* lies behind most reconstructions of Irish society

found in secondary works, scholars have long recognised that in practice relationships between kings were far more complex.¹⁴ Kingdoms were of different sizes, some larger, some smaller, and kings who were theoretically of the same rank would have been acutely conscious of the subtle distinctions between their power and relative standing. Relationships between kings (and among the nobility) involved complex and continuous negotiation, and even if one disagrees with Charles-Edwards' assertions as to the power of the Uí Néill overkings in the eighth century, one must agree that their success was built as much on consensus of their allies and sub-kings as their own military force.¹⁵

What were the benefits of overkingship? Most obviously, the overking gained status and power. As we shall see in Chapter VI, kings, even of the 'lowest' grade, continued to exist in Ireland down to the end of the twelfth century, even if the actual power of most of them was paltry in comparison with kings in Britain or the Continent, or even the great Irish overkings. As Byrne appositely wrote: '[i]t never occurred to any high-king that he should abolish the provincial kingships or even the petty kingdoms'.¹⁶ Even an overking of all Ireland may not have been in a position to do so; though peoples and dynasties were conquered (and even extirpated), the concept of kingship and its significance, even at the small, local level seems to have been very tenacious within Irish society. We shall return to this matter in Chapter VI; much work remains to be done in determining exactly why the local *rí* still remained important into the later middle ages (if it was not merely a matter of terminology), but such sociological questions are beyond the scope of the present work.

Overkingship brought different kinds of benefits than might accrue from direct conquest and annexation of land. These must have varied with the nature of the relationship involved. Scholars, following the terminology used by the Irish themselves, distinguish between 'free' and 'unfree' sub-kingdoms, analogous to free and unfree clientship.¹⁷ A 'free' kingdom (*sáerthúath*, literally 'free-people') was in a relationship of relatively honourable subjugation, and for example may only have been required to provide limited military service. As we shall see, the 'Poem on the Airgíalla' is very much concerned with keeping this obligation light. Kingdoms in an 'unfree' position (normally *aithechthúath* 'rent-paying people', occasionally *dáerthúath* 'unfree people') had rather heavier burdens, and were required to provide tribute (and possibly other

¹⁴ E.g., Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', pp. 9-13.

¹⁵ Charles-Edwards, *ECI*, pp. 584-5.

¹⁶ Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 270.

¹⁷ E.g. Charles-Edwards, *ECI*, pp. 530-1, 546, 557.

services). Sub-kingdoms whose ruling dynasty could claim kinship with the overking were entitled to the status of 'free' kingdoms, thus reducing their obligations; this provided a strong motivation for the rulers of sub-kingdoms to assert genealogical links with their overlords, a matter to which we shall return in Chapter VI.¹⁸ This is one of the main reasons behind the creation of the Airgíalla foundation-legend, examined below. As well as these two main types of sub-kingdoms, we may also draw a distinction between 'internal' and 'external' sub-kingdoms. From the point of view of a provincial overking, the former would be the constituent kingdoms of his province, while the latter are those beyond the provincial boundaries, over whom he might assert overlordship either directly, or through their own (provincial) overking. An overking might have personal or family lands distributed throughout his own province (as might be the case with Clann Cholmáin), but one feels it to be less likely that he was in a similar position in external territories, at least until the interprovincial conflicts of the ninth and later centuries had played out for some time. The question of how far down the ranks of society external overlordship reached is an important one which we shall examine at the end of the chapter.

Before moving on to investigate various data in detail, let us consider a model of overkingship at the level of this hypothetical provincial overkingdom. In this case we may assume that by *ca* 800 the overkingship was a long-standing institution, often held by one dynasty for a considerable period, though perhaps shared between different branches of that dynasty; of course dynastic regime-change was ever a possibility. Within the province, the various kingdoms would have been in long-standing relationships of subordination to the overkingship. In several cases we can trace, to some extent, the circumstances by which the relationship was created. For example, the domination of Airgíalla by Cenél nEógain, though never absolute, was apparently assured by the battle of Leth Cam in 827.¹⁹ This is not to suggest that such events led to the sub-kingdom meekly and permanently submitting to the overking and his successors (there is abundant historical evidence to the contrary); rather, the establishment of such a relationship created a historical precedent, a framework to which later overkings had recourse, if they were so inclined and able. However, most of the political structures within provinces were very long-standing and had a history which is untraceable. Some

¹⁸ Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 45-6.

¹⁹ *AU* 827.4; for discussion see A.S. Mac Shamhráin, 'The making of Tír nEógain: Cenél nEógain and the Airgíalla from the sixth to the eleventh centuries', in C. Dillon & H.A. Jefferies (edd.), *Tyrone: History and Society* (Dublin 2000), pp. 55-84: 76-9.

clues as to the origins of these relationships, how the sub-kingdoms came to be subordinated to the overkingship, *might* be preserved in literary texts (and genealogies) such as those we shall examine below, but such writings are aetiological and pseudo-historical and should be treated with the utmost caution.

Within the province, as well as relationships of subordination to a common overking (which were of greater or lesser antiquity) the rulers of the various kingdoms may have been overkings in their own right, and many would have been in a position to act with considerable independence. How then did the provincial king exercise his overlordship?

In the first place, he would regularly have gone on circuit, interacted with his subject kings and nobles, consumed his rents, and arbitrated affairs in various parts of the overkingdom.²⁰ Though it is difficult to see this itinerant style of kingship operating in the historical record, it is clear from numerous literary anecdotes (such as *Betha Colmáin meic Lúachain*, which we encountered in Chapter II) that this is what overkings were envisaged as doing. Such regular kingly activities as the hunt may well have been conducted on occasion in lands far from the overking's home territory, and provided other opportunities for interaction.²¹ It is to be remembered that apart from the real or imagined genealogical links between dynasties within a province (e.g., Clann Cholmáin were of Uí Néill, as were Cenél Maine of Tethba, Caille Follamain, Cenél Fiachach and Cenél nArdgail of Mide), there were numerous networks of marriage and fosterage which bound overkingdoms together.

This brings us to the question of where a king actually conducted business with his sub-kings and lords. Some of an overking's vassals might be with him on a more regular basis, as might be the case with members of Máel Sechnaill's *lucht tige* massacred in 1013. It is unclear to what extent overkings required sub-kings to attend them in their hall, whether on a regular basis or at certain times of the year such as festivals. As in other European countries this must have depended on the relative status of king and overking, and the nature of their relationship. Charles-Edwards was inclined to see in the appearance of the formula *táinic i tech* 'came into the house of' as a newer style of overkingship which required the attendance of sub-kings rather than simply the

²⁰ Charles-Edwards, 'Early Medieval Kingships in the British Isles', in S. Basset (ed.), *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (Leicester 1989), pp. 29-39: 29-33.

²¹ There is but a single pre-Norman annalistic reference to hunting, namely *AU* 818.2 which remarks of the cold winter of that year that *ete & fianlaighi iar Loch Echoch* 'herds and hunting-bands were on Lough Neagh' because it was frozen. The text does not show whether these bands were under royal auspices; *fianlaighi* could mean 'band of *fianna*' but the context does suggest hunters. There are several references to hunting in the post-Conquest annals, e.g. *MCB* 1437.11.

rendering of hostages.²² As we have seen, there are dissenting views as to the novelty or not of this practice, and whether the formula is in fact connected with attendance on an overking is another matter. *Críth Gablach* mentions in the king's hall the *sóerbéli* 'free clients' who are *i coímtlecht do flaith* 'in attendance on the lord'.²³ *Coímtlecht* literally means 'going together' and also means 'accompanying, escorting' as well as 'attending', so it is not clear whether the *sóerbéli* are here in attendance as part of the obligations of lordship or rather are members of the king's retinue accompanying him on circuit.²⁴

The overking's 'house' (be it a *dún rí* or some other location, e.g. his camp) and the houses he visited while on circuit were locations where he could interact with clients. On many occasions such places might have been venues for the overking and a small proportion of the aristocracy to meet. Let us then consider on what occasions there may have been more general assemblies.²⁵ The best-known of these is the *áenach* or fair, of which *Áenach Tailten* is the most famous.²⁶ *Áenaig* could have been held at local and provincial level, of course. Presiding over them was an important prerogative and a symbol of kingship and authority; this is why Máel Sechnaill revived *Áenach Tailten* in 1007; Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic held *Áenach Carmain* to symbolise his taking of the overkingship of Leinster.²⁷ It seems that these provincial *áenaig* were held once a year at most, and so there must have been other opportunities for assembly, even if these did not involve the populace as generally as did an *áenach*. A royal inauguration would certainly have been an opportunity.²⁸ These, however happened far more infrequently than the *áenach*, even in times of instability.²⁹

There also would have been many other gatherings of the nobles of a kingdom. The most usual terms for this are *dá(i)l* 'assembly, meeting' and *airecht* 'court, council'.³⁰ Unfortunately, there are not many references to such meetings in the pre-Norman historical record. The chronicles generally use *dál* (or compounds such as *rígdál* 'royal meeting', *comdál* 'joint-meeting') of meetings between kings of different overkingdoms,

²² Charles-Edwards, 'The Date', pp. 296-7.

²³ Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, §46.

²⁴ *DIL*, p. 130 s.v. *coímtlecht*.

²⁵ For a brief discussion of Irish royal assemblies, see Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 49-56. More generally see P.S. Barnwell & M. Mostert (edd.), *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages* (Turnhout 2003).

²⁶ For a summary of references to *áenaig* see Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 50-3.

²⁷ *AU* 1033.4, *AT*, *AFM* 1033. See below, p. 240.

²⁸ E. Fitzpatrick, 'Leaca and Gaelic Inauguration Ritual in Medieval Ireland', in R. Welander, D.J. Breeze, & T.O. Clancy (edd.), *The Stone of Destiny: Artefact and Icon* (Edinburgh 2003), pp. 107-121.

²⁹ A probable exception is the overkingdom of Ulaid in 1007, when five kings ruled (beating even the Romans' 'Year of Four Emperors' in 69), four of them coming to the throne in that year; see *AU* 1007.1, 1007.4, 1007.8, 1007.12. This was due to internal feuding and the factionalism of politics at the time would have ensured any inauguration-ceremonies were not universally attended.

³⁰ For discussion see Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 53-6.

rather than for assemblies within a kingdom.³¹ An interesting formulation occurs twice in *AU* (it is not in the other chronicles), namely *congressio senodorum*.³² Previous scholarship had considered these to be primarily ecclesiastical councils (and there were certainly many ecclesiastics present at each occasion), taking the Latin to mean 'a congress of synods', which would have various implications for our ideas about ecclesiastical government in the period.³³ Ó Corráin, however, suggested instead that *senodorum* was a Hiberno-Latin spelling of *senatorum* in the sense of 'nobles, optimates, leading men' and that the *congressiones* were primarily events convened to conduct Uí Néill business; in this case, we would then have a kind of internal *dál* of the Uí Néill kingdoms.³⁴ Etchingham was not entirely convinced by Ó Corráin's thesis that the purpose of the assemblies was to make peace, and observed that no laymen are actually named as taking part (we might expect that the king of Tara would be named), but there may be something in the idea that these events were gatherings of the optimates of the Uí Néill overkingdoms (and the Laigin in 780) comparable, in terms of personnel, with the great councils of the Frankish world.³⁵ Our main problem, of course, is that these may be the only two such events identified in the chronicles.

A most common form of assembly must have the military muster and hosting, which perhaps should not be totally differentiated from 'peacetime' assemblies.³⁶ Though the primary business was very different, kings and overkings would no doubt have availed themselves of the opportunity to conduct other business as far as was possible while conducting military manoeuvres. References to hostings in the annals can also tell us a good deal about the extent of an overking's political ties, though there is also a good deal they leave unrevealed. The targets of the hosting obviously indicate to us elements of the king's politics, though of course we must consider each campaign with reference to its wider context. If the record names other kings or nobles who took part in the action, we can deduce something about the nature of the leader's overlordship. Unfortunately there are some difficulties; generally these other kings are named mainly when they fell in battle, and survivors are presumably left unmentioned

³¹ E.g., *AU* 737.9, 784.8, 859.3, 1090.4, 1111.10.

³² *AU* 780.12: '*congressio senodorum nepotum Néill Lagingentiumque*, 804.7: '*congressio senodorum nepotum Néill*.'

³³ D.N. Dumville, *Councils and Synods of the Gaelic Early and Central Middle Ages* (Quiggin Pamphlets on the Sources of Mediaeval Gaelic History 3, Cambridge 1997), pp. 33-4; for some Frankish comparanda see S. Airlie, 'Talking Heads: Assemblies in Early Medieval Germany', in Barnwell & Mostert, *Political Assemblies*, pp. 29-46.

³⁴ Ó Corráin, 'Congressio Senodorum', 252.

³⁵ Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland*, pp. 209-10.

³⁶ That 'military' musters (for which the term *tinól* and compounds such as *comthinól*, *mórthinól* and *lérthinól* are used) might have other purposes is shown by e.g. *AI* 1071.7; *tinól* and related words could also be used of an ecclesiastical gathering, e.g. *AT* 1143.

much of the time (except for certain battle narratives which also name the victors, such as those of Belach Mugna in 908 or Clontarf in 1014). Furthermore, it is not clear in what capacity such persons were taking part in the hosting. Were they vassals fulfilling obligations of military service? Or were they free agents acting as allies, who were perhaps subordinate to the leading overking in terms of power and status, but not in an established relationship of submission? In many cases it is impossible to tell; even when we hear of one king submitting to another and fighting alongside him at some later point, we may not be certain that the overlordship previously established was still in operation.

Nor have we reached the end of our questions. What were the practicalities of maintaining relationships of parity or hierarchy, the means of communication at distances? How were kings and lords informed of an assembly, or summoned to go on a hosting? An *áenach* may have been a fixture in the calendar, but other events were rather more contingent. *Críth Gablach* speaks of the *techta* 'messengers' in the king's hall, and such agents must have been common; in a later passage, *Críth Gablach* notes that along with the *rechtaire*, the *techtair* (another term for messenger) was entitled to half the sick-maintenance of their lord.³⁷ Did they employ only verbal means of communication, or did they also bear written messages? If the latter were much used, essentially none have survived, though of course we have such exceptional correspondence as that of Tairdelbach and Muirchertach Úa Briáin.³⁸ We would not necessarily expect such ephemera as letters or messages to survive (whether on parchment, wax-tablet or other medium), and is difficult to imagine some of the eleventh and twelfth century overkings, who were often on campaign away from home for months, operating without them. However, even if a sub-king or lord was summoned to an assembly or hosting, what compelled him to go other than fidelity or fear of reprisal? The law-text *Míadslechta* states that a king who was absent from the feast, *áenach* or *dál* of an overking (here prosaically termed *rí rí* 'king of kings') was to pay a fine of one *cumal*.³⁹ As Jaski observed, this incentive would only have had an effect if the overking could extract the payment, and when *Áenach Tailten* was revived in 1007 the overkings of Northern Uí

³⁷ Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, §§ 46, 33; note that the passage is concerned with the value of the sick-maintenance for the *rechtaire* and *techtair*, though Jaski, *EIKS*, p. 49 and n. 60 (perhaps following Simms' discussion of part of *Uraicecht Becc*, *FKTW*, p.80) states that it relates to their honour-price.

³⁸ J.F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland*, i, *Ecclesiastical* (New York 1929; rev. imp. L. Bieler 1966), pp. 760-1, 759.

³⁹ *CIH*, ii, 583.13-14.

Néill and Connacht did not feel obliged to attend.⁴⁰ A fine of one *cumal* would not have been a particularly heavy imposition at any period, and overkings must have had several means by which to encourage attendance beyond force or fine. The fostering of interdependent relationships such as those seen in the Munster texts we shall look at presently would have been one strategy. These questions of course presume that there was a political relationship which the overking and sub-king could make use of. Therefore we shall now consider the mechanisms by which these links were established.

Treaties and Peacemaking

Kings could enter into a form of relationship on a relatively equal footing. This was known as *cairde* 'kinship' or 'treaty'. The treaty was bound upon a king's people at an *áenach* and a typical example would be a *cairde* between two kings of neighbouring kingdoms, of similar rank. The *cairde* enabled the prosecution of business between the two kingdoms, for example enabling the exaction of redress for injuries and killings across the border, as we have seen in the tract on *cró* and *díbad*.⁴¹ There was a law-text on *cairde*, knowledge of which was a prerequisite of a judge.⁴² This text has not survived, though possible fragments of the text and commentary survive in some manuscripts.⁴³ One commentary distinguishes between a *cairde rí* 'king's *cairde*' and *cairde túaithe* 'people's *cairde*' and interestingly implies that a *cairde túaithe* is of longer duration.⁴⁴ It is not clear what the difference between the two exactly entails; perhaps a *cairde túaithe* 'belonged' to the people and was a treaty between the two polities intended to endure, whereas the king's *cairde* was a personal agreement between the two rulers, the operation of which might not outlast the reign of either. One of the possible quotations from the lost *cairde*-tract deals with the seven crimes which can be prosecuted over the border when *cairde* is in operation.⁴⁵

Cairde could also be employed in a hierarchical relationship of king and overking. Thomas Charles-Edwards has suggested that this was appropriate to

⁴⁰ Jaski, *EIKS*, p. 53.

⁴¹ Kelly, *GEIL*, pp. 5, 127.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 279; for details see R. Thurneysen, *Die Bürgschaft im irischen Recht* (abhandlungen der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Jahrgang 1925: Phil.-Hist. Klasse 7, Berlin 1928), pp. 32-3.

⁴³ The text was probably called *Bretha Cairdi* 'Treaty Judgements'; see L. Breatnach, 'On the Original Extent of the Senchas Már', *Ériu* 47 (1996), 1-143: 31-2. Possible quotations and commentary are found at *CIH*, i, 114.8-16.23; iii, 791.5-792.23; 807.17-809.2.

⁴⁴ *CIH*, i, 114.8-14.

⁴⁵ *CIH*, iii, 791.5-6: *guin 7 brait 7 gait 7 turorguin 7 forchor ban 7 forloscad 7 aer* 'wounding, theft, robbery, nocturnal theft, abduction of women, arson, satire'.

sáerthúatha, because the *sáer*-status of the subject kingdom meant its obligations were relatively light and honourable.⁴⁶ The obligations of such peoples are seen in several texts which will be discussed below. A *sáerthúath* owed hospitality to the overking, but not tribute or shares of judicial fines. An *aithechthúath* had to give up these things, and in some instances of a three-tiered relationship an *aithechthúath* sub-kingdom had to give renders to the overking directly, without going through the intermediate local king.⁴⁷

There are no explicit references to *cairde* in chronicles, though *AU* uses the antonymous term *escairdiu* 'hostilities' in reference to conflicts between Fergal mac Domnaill of Cenél nEógain and Loch Foyle vikings.⁴⁸ There are several instances of peacemaking which occur in the annals, the most famous being the account of the *rigdál* at Rahugh in 859.⁴⁹ The most important business conducted here was the transfer of the overlordship of Osraige from the kings of Munster to the kings of Uí Néill, but in the first place the annalist says that the conference was *ic denum sidha & caincomraicc fer n-Erenn* 'to make peace and amity between the men of Ireland'. There was no *cairde*, as such; Máel Gúala, king of Munster, bought off the aggressive king of Uí Néill, Máel Sechnaill mac Maíl Rúanaid, and the price was Osraige, though how much power Máel Gúala had enjoyed over Osraige is debateable. In fact, Máel Gúala may not have had much say in the matter; as we shall see below he had in the previous year been forced to hand over hostages to Máel Sechnaill, thus acknowledging his overlordship.

This was not the first occasion on which peacemaking is reported in the annals. Peculiarly enough, the earliest references to 'peace' in *AU* and *AI* both occur at 721, though in reports of different events, and different terminology is used. *AU* report the establishment of *pace Christi* by means of a law promulgated by Inmesach the *relegiosus*.⁵⁰ The *AI* record is of an accord between Fergal mac Maíl Dúin, king of Tara, and Cathal mac Finguine, after the later had campaigned in Brega.⁵¹ The term used is *dorónsat síd*, literally 'made peace', and *síd* is the standard word for this.⁵² The entry then goes on to state that Fergal submitted to Cathal, a partisan Munster statement, and concludes by naming the five kings of Munster who had been kings of Ireland down to Brían Bóraime, which shows that this part of the record, if not the whole of it, is no earlier than the eleventh century. After 721 *AU* and *AI* do not refer to 'peace' again until the

⁴⁶ Charles-Edwards, *ECI*, p. 530 ff.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 531-3.

⁴⁸ *AU* 921.7. The term is also used in the surviving legal fragments on *cairde*.

⁴⁹ *AU* 859.3.

⁵⁰ *AU* 721.9.

⁵¹ *AI* 721.2.

⁵² Cf. T. Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Semantics of *Síd*', *Éigse* 17 (1977), 137-55.

incidents in 859 referred to above (*AU*) and an episode in 973 which we shall look at below. After 859 the next instance of peacemaking in *AU* is at 914.6 where we are told that *sidh eter* 'peace [was made] between' Níall mac Áeda, king of Ailech, and Áed mac Eochocáin, king of Ulster. This accord took place at Tulach Óc, inauguration-site of Cenél nEógain and important residence of the kings of Ailech. The annal makes no mention of any guarantees being made or tributes being surrendered, so the relationship entered into here seems to be a relatively equal one, though Níall would obviously have been in a superior position inasmuch as he was a far more powerful king. The alliance (if that is what it was) persisted, and Áed fell in the battle of Dublin alongside Níall in 919.⁵³

There are several subsequent instances of peacemaking in *AU*. On some occasions, two enemies were expecting to fight one another but did not, e.g. *AU* 938.4: 'Donnchad son of Flann and Muirchertach son of Níall made preparations for a battle, and God brought them to peace'. More notably, in the years around 1100 abbots of Armagh acted as peacemakers between north and south. In 1097 Muirchertach Úa Briáin of Munster and Domnall úa Lochlainn of Ailech went to war, but Domnall, abbot of Armagh *rus-tairmesc fo gné sith* 'restrained them in a semblance of peace'. Domnall acted as peacemaker for them again in 1099, 1102 and 1105 (on which last peacemaking mission he died), and his successor Cellach did so in 1107, 1109 and twice in 1113. On most of these occasions the peace is said to be for a year, and the annalists do not give details of guarantees or pledges which were given. In most instances however, we can expect that when peace was brokered by clerics, an oath was sworn on relics such as the *Bachall Ísu* 'The Crozier of Jesus'.⁵⁴ Ó Corráin described Domnall as an 'ever-present diplomat' whose actions, though apparently preserving the status quo, in fact served the interests of Mac Lochlainn rather better.⁵⁵ This may be the case, but these armistices should probably also be seen in the light of the contemporary European 'Peace of God' movement, which had manifested in Ireland particularly during the great panic at the feast of the decollation of St John in 1096 and subsequently.⁵⁶

⁵³ *AU* 919.3.

⁵⁴ E.g. *AU* 1166; see further below p. 144.

⁵⁵ Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, p. 147.

⁵⁶ *AU* 1096.3, *CS* 1092 [=1096]; cf. A. O'Leary, 'Mog Ruith and Apocalypticism in Eleventh-Century Ireland', in J. Nagy (ed.), *The Individual in Celtic Literatures* (Dublin 2001), pp. 51-60; B.T. Hudson, 'Time is Short: the Eschatology of the Early Gaelic Church', in C. Bynum & P. Freedman (edd.), *Last Things: Death and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia 2000), pp. 101-23; H.E.J. Cowdrey, 'The Peace

A very interesting inversion of this scenario is reported in *AI* 973.3. In this year Dub-dá-Léithe abbot of Armagh visited Munster to collect Armagh's revenues (presumably from *Lex Patricii*), but he and the abbot of Emly *co ndernsat debaid imon gabáil* 'made strife about the levy (lit. 'taking')', so that Mathgamain, Dál Cais king of Munster, had to intervene *co n-derna síd etarru* 'so that he made peace between them' and the rights of Patrick were agreed. Aside from the striking image of a king making peace between two of the most senior clerics in Ireland, it is interesting that Mathgamain effectively settled the argument in Armagh's favour; Emly, though a chief church in Munster was historically more closely-aligned with the Eóganachta dynasties. It would be Mathgamain's brother Brían Bóraime who would visit Armagh in 1002 and be styled *Imperator Scotorum* in the Book of Armagh; on the other hand, as we shall see in Chapter V, the Eóganachta had recognised the significance of Patrick's church at an early date.

There are many instances of peace being made, or broken which occur in the chronicles in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, a reflection of the large-scale warfare of the era. As the conflict between Muirchertach and Domnall shows, these instances were generally respites in a war, or series of wars, and probably should not be equated with the *cairde* of the legal materials. On many occasions peace was not a matter of cease-fire between enemies of broadly equal power, but the submission of a king to an overking:

AU 1130.5

Sluagadh la Conchobur H. Lochlainn & la Tuaiscert n-Ereinn i n-Ulltaibh ... Maithi imorro Uladh ima righ iar sein co h-Ard Macha i comdhail Conchobhair co n-dernsat sith & comluighi & co fargsat giallu.

An army was brought by Conchobar Úa Lochlainn and the north of Ireland into Ulaid [and he defeated them] ... the nobles of Ulaid with their king then went to Armagh to meet Conchobar, and they made peace and mutual oath and left hostages.

Here, having been brought to heel by a heavy defeat the Ulaid under their king submitted to the king of Ailech. Peace was made, but the relationship between the two sides was in no way equal; Conchobar was acknowledged overlord and the Ulaid handed over hostages as a guarantee they would not rebel.

and the Truce of God in the Eleventh Century', *Past and Present*, 46 (1970), 42-67; T. Head & R. Landes (edd.), *The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around 1000* (Ithaca 1995).

Submissions

Kings made formal acts of submission to other kings. We are not told all the mechanisms by which this took place, but it certainly involved a public act or ceremony, with the use of certain ritualised language and actions. The Ulaíde were forced to make a 'mutual oath' (*comluigi*) in 1130, the terminology implying the king of Ailech made an oath on his side also. The most important element was that the submitting king should hand over one or more hostages to the new overlord; these hostages were the symbol of submission and of the lordship possessed by the overking, for as a legal text says, 'he is not a king who does not have hostages in fetters' (*géill i nglasaib*); similarly *Tecosca Cormaic* lists 'hostages in fetters' among the things which are best for a king.⁵⁷ Hostages were also the guarantee of good behaviour on the part of the submitting king (or lord), and their lives could be forfeit if the submitting king broke the terms of the treaty of submission.⁵⁸ In practice hostages were often close relatives of the submitting king, with correspondingly high status, and probably would have been treated well as long as conditions of *cairde* prevailed. On the other hand, we have seen in Chapter II that *Críth Gablach* specifies the position the hostages in fetters took in the king's hall. Kelly identifies these as hostages whose lives are forfeit to the king because of rebellion, withholding of tribute or other treason by a client or sub-king.⁵⁹ The concepts of hostages (*gíall*), pledge (*gell*) and hostage-surety (*aitire*) were closely connected and in non-legal sources (principally the chronicles) they can be used interchangeably with the general meaning of 'hostage'.⁶⁰

Actual records of submissions and hostage-giving are not especially plentiful in the chronicles. In the *Annals of Ulster* they are hardly noticed at all before the mid-ninth century, increasingly so thereafter but still not very often, the numbers reaching a peak before the English invasion and dropping off thereafter. *AI* is slower to begin recording hostage-giving, but soon catches up.

⁵⁷ *CIH*, i, 219.5; Meyer, *Tecosca Cormaic*, §1.

⁵⁸ This, of course, is a pan-European practice; for an excellent recent study see A.J. Kosto, 'Hostages in the Carolingian World (714-840)', *Early Medieval Europe* 11.2 (2002), 123-47.

⁵⁹ Kelly, *GEIL*, p. 174.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

Table 6. Submissions / Hostage-taking in *AU* and *AI*

	[no instances before the eighth century]	
	<i>AU</i>	<i>AI</i>
701-750	1	1
751-800	1	0
801-850	3	0
851-900	5	0
901-950	2	2
951-1000	5	10
1001-1050	13	10
1051-1100	6	20
1101-1150	15	11
1150-1169	22	2
1169-1200	1	2

Certain features deserve immediate comment. The gaps in *AU* and *AI* in the twelfth century partially account for the numerically low incidences in those years, even though reportage in the twelfth-century annals was much fuller. The drop-off in the years following the English *adventus* is notable. Other than this, the samples are too small to analyse more thoroughly, especially if we recall Etchingham’s caveats on undifferentiated statistical use of annal-entries. On the other hand, the ninth to twelfth century reports are often concerned with the taking of hostages from other provinces, a practice that certainly was developing in this period. Here, rather than consider the numbers, we shall discuss the terminology used. *AU* employ various formulations to describe submission and hostage-giving, and essentially the same formulae are found in the other chronicles; we shall consider each in turn.

(i) *Gíall*

The commonest formula used throughout the period is one which reports the transfer of hostages, *géill*, from one party to another. From the ninth to the twelfth centuries hostages are nearly always said to be *taken* from another, e.g.:

AU 955.3

Slogad la Domnall m. Muirchertaigh co longaibh ... for Loch n-Uachtair coro ort in m-Brefne & co tuc giallu h-Ui Ruairc.

Domnall mac Muirchertaig led a force with ships ... upon Lough Oughter, and plundered Bréifne and took hostages from Úa Rúairc.

AU 1025.4

Sluagad la Flaithbertach H. Neill, i m-Bregaibh & i nGallaib co tuc giallu Gaidhel o Ghallaib.

Flaithbertach Ua Néill led a hosting to Brega and among the foreigners, and he took the hostages of the Irish from the foreigners.

In this last instance Flaithbertach was asserting authority over both the Dublin vikings and the Irish kingdoms whose hostages he took from them. This incidentally shows that already by this time the viking-towns had been assimilated to the Irish polity to the extent that they followed practices of hostage-taking and the like, though whether the vikings were concerned about the niceties and subtleties of the Irish legal system is another matter. From about the end of the eleventh century and through the twelfth we hear both of hostages being taken, as before, but also of hostages being given. This is clearly the same process, but merely a variation in language:

AU 1090.4

Comdal eter Domnall m. m. Lochlainn & Muircertach H. Briain ri Caisil & m. Flainn H. Mael Sechlainn ri Temhrach co tartsat a n-giallu uile do righ Ailegh.

A meeting between Domnall mac meic Lochlainn and Muirchertach Úa Bríain king of Cashel and the son of Flann Úa Mail Sechnaill and they gave all their hostages to the king of Ailech.

In the above examples we see two kinds of hostage-taking: one is to take hostages directly from the kingdom on which overlordship is being asserted; the other is to take someone else's hostages from a kingdom, asserting authority over both that kingdom and the kingdom whose hostages they held. Thus hostages were a kind of 'currency of power' and could change hands between competing overlords more than once.

Generally speaking, *AU* and *AI* speak of hostages in the plural, which could mean, for example, that when an Uí Néill king took hostages from Munster he was taking hostages both from the king of Munster personally (i.e., members of the Munster royal dynasty) but also hostages of the Munster subkingdoms previously held by the king of Munster. This is by no means clear however, and the nature and status of hostages probably varied greatly; we have little evidence on the details of exactly how 'low' one went in taking hostages. If the submitted king was expected to be trustworthy

he would probably only have to hand over his own hostages; if conditions were doubtful the overking might have wished to have some 'local' hostages in an effort to exercise more direct control and influence. The main factor would have been what the overking felt capable of getting away with. Depending on the strength of the submitting king, the overking may well have been satisfied with a nominal hostage-giving from the submitter, after which he was left to his own devices. *AI* provide an interesting example of Muirchertach Úa Briain's policy toward Connacht; after campaigning in the province for almost three months *tucad giall cach tellaig o Conmacnib & ó Sil Muirethaig do Muirchertach* 'a hostage was given to Muirchertach for every hearth from the Conmaicne and from Sil Muiredaig'.⁶¹ This implies the taking of hostages at a very local level, suggesting Muirchertach felt it necessary to impose his lordship on these peoples directly rather than via their kings or a Connacht overking.⁶² The word *tellaig* can mean both 'hearth' and by extension 'household' (cf. Máel Sechnaill extracting a hide from every *les* in Mide), but can also mean 'district' (e.g. Tellach nÁeda in Bréifne, the name now represented by the barony of Tullyhaw), so it is not clear exactly to what level Muirchertach extended his hostage-taking in this instance.

The annals do not provide too much information as to where the taking of *géill* took place. During the campaigns of Máel Sechnaill mac Maíl Rúanaid against Munster, there are several instances of hostage-taking; he took the hostages of Déisi at Inneóin na nDéisi near Waterford.⁶³ In 856 we read that he was in Cashel and he took Munster hostages.⁶⁴ We are not told whether these were members of the ruling family (at this time Eóganacht Chaisil, under King Máel Gúala mac Donngaile) or whether they were hostages from the Munster sub-kingdoms resident at the royal seat of Cashel, or a combination of both. Perhaps the first option is the most likely as we read in *AU* 858.4 that:

Mael Sechnaill m. Mael Ruanaigh co feraib Erenn do tuidhecht h-i tire Muman ... Tuc Mael Sechlainn iarum giallu Muman o Belut Gabrain co Insi Tarbnai iar n-Ére, & o Dun Cermnai co h-Arainn n-Airthir.

⁶¹ *AI* 1095.11.

⁶² Compare *AI* 1105.11, in which *dorat Úa Ruairg cetri giallu do Muircertach* 'Úa Rúairc gave four hostages to Muirchertach'; here Muirchertach did not feel it necessary (or was unable) to impose his overlordship other than through the Bréifne overking.

⁶³ *AU* 854.2.

⁶⁴ *AU* 856.2.

Máel Sechnaill son of Máel Ruanaid came with the men of Ireland to the lands of Mumu ... [after their kings were defeated at Carn Lugdach] ... Máel Sechnaill then took the hostages of Mumu from Belach Gabráin to Inis Tarbnai west of Ireland, and from Dún Cermna to Ára Airthir.

The last section implies that Máel Sechnaill took the hostages of the sub-kingdoms of Munster from the Osraige border all the way to the Kerry coast, though whether he travelled all the way across the province to do so seems unlikely. By the end of 858 Máel Sechnaill had acquired the hostages of both the provincial overking of Munster and the main sub-kingdoms, and was in a position of overlordship that no-one from outside the province had ever achieved before. No wonder that Máel Gúala was unable to protest the alienation of Osraige at Rahugh in 859.

(ii) *Naidm* / *Aitire* / *Braighti*

These terms are employed by *AU* far less than *gíall*. They are also important elements of Irish contract law, and are not exactly synonymous with *gíall*; *AI* 1051.7 states that Donnchad mac Briáin went on a hosting but *noco tuc giallu na h-aitere* 'brought back neither hostages nor sureties'. Therefore we shall consider the various terms separately.

Naidm. This term is only used twice in *AU*, at 721 and 915, and not at all in *AI*. In Irish contract law it refers particularly to an enforcing surety; the word is the verbal noun of *naiscid*, 'binds' 'pledges', so literally it is someone or something which binds a contract.⁶⁵ A *naidm* has an obligation of status rather than finance to enforce a contract, i.e. if a principal defaults on a contract for which the *naidm* is surety, and the *naidm* does not enforce payment, the *naidm* loses his honour-price. There are two possible instances of the word in *AU* (the corresponding verb does not seem to be used in chronicles). The first occurrence of the word comes in an account of one of the attempts by the Uí Néill king to exact the *bóruma* 'cattle tribute' from the Leinstermen:

AU 721.8

Innred Laighen la Fergal & maidm inna Boraimhe & maidm n-aggiallne Laghen fri Fergal mc. Maile Duin.

An invasion of the Laigin by Fergal, and the cattle tribute was imposed and the hostages of the Laigin secured for Fergal son of Máel Dúin [editors' translation].

⁶⁵ For discussion see Kelly, *GEIL*, pp. 171-3.

The editors' translation is based on a proposed emendation of both instances of *maidm* 'breaking, bursting' to *naidm*, in accordance with the reading of *AT*: *Indredh Laigen 7 naidm na Bóroma 7 naidm na ngíall ar Laignib la Feargal mac Maíle Dúin*.⁶⁶ One might accept the proposed emendation of *AU*, but it is unclear how far the annalist is using *naidm* in its technical meaning of binding surety.

The second instance of *naidm* at 915 is in an account of a rebellion by two sons of Flann Sinna, king of Tara, whose power was in decline; he was to die the following year. Flann's ally (and successor as king of Tara), Áed mac Néill of Cenél nEógain brought an army from the north, *coro gabh naidhm Donnchada & Concobhuir fria reir a n-athar, & co fargabh osadh iter Midhe & Bregha* 'so that he exacted a surety from [Flann's sons] Donnchad and Conchobar that they would obey their father, and made a truce between Mide and Brega'. In this case *naidm* is being used in the contractual sense as a binding surety. The incident illustrates the support Áed was willing to give Flann, who he expected to succeed, and Áed's desire to put down the claims of rival claimants, in this case Flann's own sons. It further suggests that Donnchad and Conchobar were operating from Brega, perhaps as 'viceroys' in the region, which at this point still had its own kings: Máel Mithig mac Flannacáin was overking of northern Brega and seems to have acted as a faithful vassal to Flann, at least earlier in his career, though we have little information on him; he is often seen acting with Flann's sons and grandsons.⁶⁷ Fogartach mac Tolairg was overking of southern Brega and even less is known about him.

Aitire. This word is derived from *etir*, 'between', so is literally someone who stands between the two parties of an agreement.⁶⁸ An *aitire* guarantees the fulfilment of obligations with his own person, rather than his property; if a principal defaults he places himself in the custody of the other party for a fixed period. Thus *aitire* can be interpreted as 'hostage-surety', and in some ways the *aitire* plays a similar role to the *gíall*. There are not many instances of the use of *aitire* in *AU*, most coming in a group in the period 1000-1025, which suggests annalistic fashion rather than then-current political practice. There are only two occurrences in *AI* (one of which we have met in 1051.7),

⁶⁶ *AT* 721.

⁶⁷ E.g. *AU* 903.4, 913.4.

⁶⁸ Kelly, *GEIL*, pp. 172-3.

again suggesting that the usage is particularly an *AU* trait.⁶⁹ The editors of *AU* normally render *aitire* by ‘pledge’ in the English translation, so for example:

AU 960.1 Domnall son of Muirchertach led an army to Dál nAraide and took pledges (*co tuc aitire*).

AU 1010.4 Brian led an army to Cláenloch of Slíab Fúait and took the pledges (*coro gaibh etire*) of Leth Cuinn.

If the terminology of *AU* really does reflect the detail of these events it would mean that something different to the occurrences of rendering *géill* was taking place. When an *aitire* pledges himself at the making of a contract, he is addressed in specific terms by the other parties: ‘swear by God that you will be ready and willing to remain in stocks or in prison, with your foot in a fetter or your neck in a chain until you be freed therefrom by debt-payments’.⁷⁰ If the annals are talking about *aitire* in the technical legal sense, then on the occasions where it is used, the overking (in these cases Domnall and Brían) is exacting pledges from local nobles that they would guarantee peace and submission or else be taken into custody at some future date, or, the terms of peace and submission have been broken and the overking is taking these nobles into custody to ensure forfeit-payments. However, there are reasons to conclude that *AU* does not always use *aitire* in its precise legal sense. Firstly, the whole system of *aitirecht* would be difficult to enforce at the level of overkingdoms or provincial kingdoms; Domnall and Brían would have had to travel very large distances to take an *aitire* into custody for the ten-day period. The system of *giallnae* would be a far more straightforward mechanism than *aitirecht*, which is more suited to local, small-scale agreements. Indeed, Binchy has suggested that *aitire* might be an adaptation of hostageship to private contracts.⁷¹ Secondly, there are a few instances of *aitire* in *AU* where it seems clear that a *giall* is being talked about. For example, *AU* 1072.8 reads ‘the French [i.e. Normans] went into Scotland and brought away the son of the king of Scotland as hostage’ (*i n-eitirecht*). The son in question was Donnchad, eldest son of Máel Coluim III of Scotland, who went to live at the Anglo-Norman court, and thus acted as *giall* rather than *aitire*.

⁶⁹ The other instance is at *AI* 1109.2 and is the same trope of returning from a hosting without hostage or surety, though here the formula is *cen giall, cen aitire*.

⁷⁰ *CIH*, ii, 597.21-3; translation in Kelly, *GEIL*, p. 172.

⁷¹ D.A. Binchy, ‘Celtic Suretyship, a Fossilized Indo-European Institution?’, in G. Cardona, H.M. Hoenigswald & A. Senn (edd.), *Indo-European and Indo-Europeans: Papers Presented to the Third Indo-European Conference at the University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia 1970), p. 363. Of course, this is to take a rather static view of the law, and the system of *aitirecht* may have developed considerably after the relevant legal materials were committed to writing.

On the other hand, there are a few instances where *AU* might be using *aitire* in its precise sense. The most notable example comes in *AU* 1029.6:

Amhlaim m. Sitriuc, ri Gall, do erghabhail do Mathgamain H. Riagain, ri Bregh, co fargaibh da .c. dec bo & .vi. xxx. ech m-Bretnach & tri .xxx. unga do or & cloidim Carlusa & aitire Gaidel eter Laigniu & Leth Cuind, & tri .xxx. unga do argut gil ina ungai geimlech, cona cethri fichid bo cuid focall & impidhe & cethri oetire d'O Riagain fein fri sith, & lanlogh braghad in treas oetire.

Amlaíb son of Sitriuc, king of the foreigners, was held prisoner by Mathgamain úa Ríacáin, king of Brega, and as his ransom he gave up 1,200 cows and six score Welsh horses and sixty ounces of gold and the sword of Carlus and Irish pledges both of the Leinstermen and Conn's Half, and sixty ounces of pure silver as his fetter-ounce; and four score cows was the portion of the promise and the entreaty, with four pledges to úa Ríacáin himself for peace, and full compensation for the release [lit. 'throat', 'neck'] of one of the three pledges.

This is one of the more extraordinary instances of ransom reported in Irish chronicles. If the figures are in any way accurate the annal is a testament to the fiscal resources of the town in the eleventh century, and this might be of relevance to considerations of the figures in *Lebor na Cert* which will be discussed below. Exactly how to interpret the various uses of *aitire* here is a problem. That Amlaíb 'gave up' pledges of the Irish (in contrast to *Gaill*, foreigners) suggests that these were in fact hostages, *géill*, held in Dublin. The other uses seem more suggestive of contract law: four *aitiri* guarantee peace between Amlaíb and the king of Brega.

Brága. This seems to be a later term for *gíall*, and in *AU* and *AI* they appear to be interchangeable. *Brága* 'hostage' is a secondary development of *brága* 'throat', and as far as annalistic usage goes simply seems to be a newer term for the same institution which came into fashion in the later eleventh century.⁷² The example from *AU* 1029 quoted above may be its first appearance in that chronicle, though there it probably has its primary meaning 'throat, neck', for thereafter the term is not used until the late twelfth century, where it occurs a number of times.⁷³ The first use in *AI* is in 1088:

AI 1088.4

Sluaged la Muirchertach i L-Laigniu, co táncatar Leth Cuind dara b-éssi coro loiscset Luimnech & Mungarit & coro múirset cathir Cind Chorad & co rucsat bragti as.

⁷² DIL s.v. *brága*, p. 80.

⁷³ *AU* 1156 is the first occurrence, though the ancestor of *AU* and *ALC* may have had instances in the twelfth-century section now missing.

A hosting by Muirchertach into Leinster, and Leth Cuinn came in his rear, burning Limerick and Mungret, and they levelled the fort of Kincora and took captives from it.

It is used again in *AI* 1120.4 and then not again until the late twelfth century.

(iii) *Coming into the house*

In both the chronicles and other kinds of texts the phrase *táinic i tech* 'came into the house of' is a phrase meaning 'submitted to'. The formula suggests that originally there may have been a ritual of travelling to the overking's dwelling and with inferior status publicly entering the residence, in contrast to an overking going to a sub-king's house in a position of superiority and expecting hospitality. Usage in the annals suggests the phrase simply means 'submits' regardless of location; a king's camp in the field would be 'his house'.

AU 1076.4

Sloigedh la Tairrdelbach i Connacht co tainig ri Connacht ina thech .i. Ruaidri H. Conchobair.

A hosting by Tairdelbach into Connacht, and the king of Connacht, i.e. Rúaidrí Ua Conchobair, came into his house.

In this case, the king of Munster is away from home on campaign in Connacht, yet it is the king of Connacht who submits to him and 'comes into his house'. In fact we more often read of kings on their own turf submitting to an overking. This is hardly surprising, for it is when a powerful overking with an army turns up on your own doorstep that you are most likely to submit:

AU 1166

Sluagadh la Ruaidhri h-Ua Conchobair & la Tighearnan h-Ua Ruairc co h-Es Ruaidh, co tangatur Cenel Conaill i n-a thech, co tardsat a m-braithi do h-Ua Conchobair, co tarat ocht fichtiu bó doibh, i n-ecmais oir & etaigh.

A hosting by Rúaidrí Ua Conchobair and by Tigernán Ua Ruairc to Ess Rúad, so that the Cenél Conaill came into his house and gave their hostages to Ua Conchobair.

Naturally, these kinds of submissions were important events, and wherever they took place doubtless a significant amount of symbolism was incorporated into a public performance. There are no texts which describe the detail of such an occasion, but there was probably some kind of formal entry of the submitting king(s) into the presence of

the overlord, exchanges of formalized language (perhaps also including utterances by poets), an exchange of oaths, and then of hostages, hostage-sureties, tributes or stipends depending on the occasion and the relationship being entered into or renewed by the parties involved. We can guess that the most essential component of these performances was status, for considerations of status was paramount in Irish society. We shall see below that Munster texts *Frithfolad Caisil* and *Lebor na Cert* are much concerned with the relative status of kings and how this is played out in public. In terms of 'going into the house' it is extremely unlikely that the ceremony took place in the submitting king's own dwelling, for that would violate his private space and status; it is more likely that such activities took place in a public space outside the *dún*, or at the overking's camp.

AU 1157

Sluaghadh la Muircertach b-Ua Lachlainn co Tuaiscert Erenn i Mumain, co rangadur faichthi Luimnigh & co tangadur maithi Muman im a righaibh i teach b-Ui Lachlaind & co fargaibhset a m-braighti aicce.

A hosting by Muirchertach Úa Lochlainn along with the North of Ireland into Munster, until they reached the Green of Limerick and the nobles of Munster around their kings came into the house of Úa Lochlainn and left their hostages with him.

In the twelfth century Limerick was the most important site in north Munster, and the public green outside the city a most suitable place for such an event. On this occasion Muirchertach received the submission not of the overking of Munster, for there was none; Diarmait Mac Carthaig was king of Desmond, Tairdelbach Úa Bríain king of Thomond. Neither is stated to be present, but again we see an overking trying to assume direct overlordship of sub-kingdoms because there was no provincial king he wished (or was able to employ) as agent and intermediary. The various Munster sub-kings hand over hostages, but there is no record here of Muirchertach handing over stipends.

(iv) *Demands and Gifts*

Two other elements need to be addressed briefly here. The first is the term *riar*, which means 'will' or 'demand'. In *AU* it is used of the abbots of Armagh when they obtained their revenues while on circuit, e.g. 973.5: *Dub Dha Lethe, comarba Patraicc, for cuairt Muman co tuc a reir* 'Dub-dá-Léithe, coarb of Patrick, [was] on a circuit of Munster and

took his demand.⁷⁴ In 1006 Bríain Bóraime went on a circuit of Leth Cuinn and granted the demand of Patrick's community at Lammastide.⁷⁵ *AU* 1111.10 refers to Domnall úa Lochlainn taking the hostages of the Ulaid *a riara fein* 'for his own demand', which might simply mean that he took hostages of his own choosing, or might relate in a more particular way to the giving of tribute by a sub-kingdom. In 1162 *AU* use *riar* in respect to the host of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn; he led an unsuccessful campaign against the *gaill* so that *ni fhuaratur a reir don chur-sin* 'they [Mac Lochlainn's host] did not get their demand on that occasion'. This is the one instance where *AU* might use *riar* to mean a secular demand for tribute; of course, the annalist might be using the word in the sense of 'will, wish'. In contrast, *AI* frequently employ the term, beginning in 907.3 when Cormac mac Cuillenáin and Flaithbertach mac Inmainén campaigned in Connacht *co tucsat a r-riara ó Chonnachta* 'and took their demand from the Connachta', which formulation implies the imposition of tribute. Other instances occur in 1010.4 (which uses the compound *lánriar* 'full demand'), 1011.5 (employing *ógriar* 'complete demand') and 1095.3. An interesting record comes in *AI* 1059.7:

Mac Briain do dul co tech h-Ui Chonchobuir Chonnacht co tuc a réir h-uad eter séotu & muine & additin & coro astad and ó Init co Caisc.

Mac Bríain went to the house of Úa Conchobair Connacht so that he took his demand from him including treasures and valuables and acknowledgement and so that he was detained there from Shrovetide until Easter.

Mac Airt translated the first part as 'Brian's son submitted to Úa Conchobuir' but I think we can take *dul co tech* literally as 'went to the house of' (simple physical movement), rather than interpreting it as a synonym of *táinic i tech* ('submitted'). In these years Donnchad mac Bríain was struggling against his foes, Diarmait mac Maíl na mBó of Leinster and Diarmait's allies Áed mac Taidc king of Connacht and Tairdelbach úa Bríain.⁷⁶ The question here is who obtained his *riar*. If Donnchad was submitting he could not exact valuables from Áed; therefore we must assume that Áed was bestowing them on Donnchad as a gesture of his supremacy. This then would be a form of stipend-payment. The 'acknowledgement' was clearly important; perhaps Donnchad wanted Áed to recognise him against the claims of his nephew Tairdelbach. Also

⁷⁴ Cf. *AU* 1092.6, 1092.6.

⁷⁵ *AU* 1006.4.

⁷⁶ Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, p.135.

notable is the fact that Donnchad stayed for all of Lent; this was not merely attendance for a festival or military service, but an expression of considerably inferior status.

The matter of stipend-payments is the last element of terminology we shall examine here. The bestowal of this stipend or gift by an overking was a symbol of his supremacy. In the chronicles terms for the practice appear in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. *AU* 1080.6, 1083.6, and 1084.4 have the word *túarastal*, which does not appear elsewhere in that chronicle, suggesting that this usage was a short-lived stylistic feature.

AU 1083.6

Domnall H. Lochlainn do ghabail ríghí Ceniúil Eogain. Crech rígh láis for Conaillibh co tuc boroma mor é co taraidh túarustal don creich-sin do Feraib Fernmuighi.

Domnall úa Lochlainn took the kingship of Cenél nEógain. He made a king's prey on the Conaille and carried off a great cattle-tribute and disbursed stipend from that prey to the men of Fernmag.

The word *túarastal* literally means to give eye-witness evidence in a case, and by extension to be in the presence of something (whereby one may gain such information).⁷⁷ Thus we may again be dealing with the concept of submission as involving attendance. *AI* have *túarastal* at 1095.6 and 1120.4.⁷⁸ *AI* also employ a different word, *innarrad*, literally 'wages', apparently with the same meaning as *túarastal*. It is first used of the reign of Brían Bóraime:

AI 1011.5

Sluaged mór la Brian co Cenel Conaill eter muir é tír co tanic h-Ua Maíl Doraid, rí Ceneúil Chonaill, láis co Cend Corad, é co ruc innarrad mór o Brian é co tuc a ogréir do Brian.

A great hosting by Brían to Cenél Conaill by both land and sea so that Úa Maíl Doraid, king of Cenél Conaill, came with him to Kincora and so that he received great stipend from Brían and so that he gave Brían his complete demand.

Here we see several elements combined: coming to the overking's house, literally as well as metaphorically; the acceptance of a stipend, as well as the *ogríar*, though the exact significance of *ríar* here is debateable. *Innarrad* also occurs in *AI* at 1070.9 and 1076.2. The importance of the concept of stipend comes across clearly in *Lebor na Cert* which we shall discuss below. Again, it is striking how stipend only appears in the annals of the

⁷⁷ Kelly, *GEIL*, p. 176; *DIL*, p. 612 *s.v.*

⁷⁸ Plus one post-Conquest instance at 1225.2.

Map 4: Munster



eleventh and later centuries, and we are transported back to the problem of how much older such customs might be.⁷⁹ Overall, it seems that we have a complex of ideas – of hostage-giving, attendance, the obtaining of demands and the granting of stipends – which are all closely connected with the establishment of overkingship; but not all elements need be present in the creation of such a hierarchical relationship, at least not in the chronicle-accounts.

Now that we have considered various elements of peace, hosting and submission, we may now turn to examples of overkingship as practiced by dynasties. As noted above, we shall investigate first the Munster overkingship. We have encountered several annalistic examples of Munster kings already, but in the following section I wish to take an approach centred not on the chronicles, but rather on several texts which convey valuable information about the way the Munster overkingship was perceived at several points in the province's history.

The Articulation of Overkingship in Munster

Munster is unusual in that there is a good deal of information pertaining to the nature of relationships between kingdoms and overkingdoms. Some of these texts have recently been discussed by Jaski and Charles-Edwards.⁸⁰ We shall begin by examining overkingship at the lowest local level and work our way up to the overkingship of Ireland as perceived around 1100. In each case discussion will focus on a particular text of Munster provenance. These are 'Dál Caladbuig', a list of the obligations pertaining to a small *túath*; this is found attached to *Frithfolad Caisil* 'The Counter-obligations of Cashel', a list of the obligations owed by the overking of Munster at Cashel to his sub-kingdoms and those owed to him in return.⁸¹ We will then turn to 'The West Munster Synod', a quasi-ecclesiastical text designed to justify a rebellion by a group of West Munster sub-kingdoms against their immediate overlord, the king of West Munster (*Íarmumu*).⁸² Finally we shall look at 'The Book of Rights', *Lebor na Cert*.⁸³

⁷⁹ Binchy apparently considered the stipend a development of the custom of an overlord granting a gift or fief, *rath*, which is known from the law-tracts, but this term is not used in the chronicles. See *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, p. 31.

⁸⁰ Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 205-8; Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, pp. 512; 530-43.

⁸¹ Ed. J.G. O'Keeffe, 'Dál Caladbuig', in J. Fraser, P. Grosjean & J.G. O'Keeffe (edd.), *Irish Texts*, i (London 1931), pp. 19-21

⁸² Ed. K. Meyer, 'The Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories', *ZCP* 8 (1912), 291-338: 315-17.

⁸³ Ed. & transl. M. Dillon, *Lebor na Cert: The Book of Rights* (Irish Texts Society 66, Dublin 1962).

The overlordship of the Eóganachta dynasties in Munster has been characterized as a weaker and less centralized kingship than that of the Uí Néill: '[t]he kingship of Cashel was in fact a very loose hegemony operating under rules proper to the archaic and tribal stage of society'.⁸⁴ Not all scholars would now agree with this model, but early Munster texts do seem to show that the sub-kingdoms were very concerned to maximise their standing vis-à-vis their overking. This of course is by no means unique to Munster, but it is for the Eóganachta overkingdom that we have the most evidence.

(i) *Frithfolad Caisil*

This is a text, or rather a family of texts, of which only one has been edited so far.⁸⁵ The most recent discussion of these texts is by Charles-Edwards.⁸⁶ In his discussions he considered first a short tract on the Munster people Dál Caladbuig which is prefixed to *Frithfolad Caisil* proper in the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, and indeed O'Keeffe did not distinguish between the two in his edition. Charles-Edwards would date the Dál Caladbuig text to the eighth century and considers it a good example of overkingship at a low level within an overkingdom.⁸⁷ Dál Caladbuig were an *aithechthúath* and their obligations to their local overlords (one of the branches of Eóganacht Airthir Chliach) were of two types typical for a population-group of such status, namely food-renders and labour services; the latter was a requirement for Dál Caladbuig to provide for the construction of the overking's residence.⁸⁸ Charles-Edwards considered the most interesting feature of the text to be the assertion that the rulers of Dál Caladbuig consumed part of their renders at the very overking's hall which they had built.⁸⁹ This, he contends, shows that although Dál Caladbuig were at the lowest level of kingship within Munster, they could still interact with the local Eóganacht kings whose cousins

⁸⁴ Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 203.

⁸⁵ Ed. J. O'Keeffe, 'Dál Caladbuig', from YBL 328 a 1. Most commentators call the text *Frithfolad Muman* but the phrase it uses itself is *Frithfolad Caisil*. Another version, existing only in fragments, has not been edited and is found in *Lec.* 192 b 36; this text does have a title, *Frithfolad Ríg Caisil*. Comparable unedited texts on the rights and obligations of the kings of Cashel are at *Lec.* 52 V b 11 and 230 v b 1.

⁸⁶ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, pp. 531-48.

⁸⁷ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 531.

⁸⁸ O'Keeffe, 'Dál Caladbuig', §§2-4; Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 533.

⁸⁹ O'Keeffe, 'Dál Caladbuig', §4: *caithitseom lais* 'they consume it with him'; Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 533.

were dominant throughout the province, the 'branches of a great tree of kingship' which bound the overkingdom together.⁹⁰

Though rather different in nature to the longer *frithfolad*-text which follows, the tract on Dál Caladbuig does serve to illustrate several features of the Munster overkingship at the most basic level: the collection of rents and services from an *aithechthúath* and maintenance of authority by means of interaction between overking and local people. The *Frithfolad* texts on the other hand are concerned with Munster kingdoms of more important status, essentially the ones immediately below the provincial overkingship; these kingdoms were *sáerthúatha*, whose relationships with the overkings of Cashel are defined in terms of reciprocal arrangements: the term *frithfolad* means 'counter-obligations'.⁹¹ Charles-Edwards characterizes the strategy of *Frithfolad Caisil* as attempting to 'safeguard the privileges of client-kingdoms by presenting them as one side of a contract between overking and vassal kings'.⁹² The text is of uncertain date, but seems to reflect conditions of the mid-eighth century and some decades afterwards, when the overkingship of Cashel rotated fairly regularly between Eóganacht Chaisil, Eóganacht Glennamnach and Eóganacht Áine.⁹³ The other three main Eóganacht dynasties, those of Raithlenn, Loch Léin and Uí Fidgente, were excluded. Charles-Edwards notes that this situation is reflected also in genealogical tracts: the three 'inner circle' dynasties entitled to share in the kingship are represented as being descended from Nia Fraích son of Conall Corc, while the others were supposed to have descended from Nia Fraích's less-famous brothers (though other Munster texts are at variance with this scheme).⁹⁴ *Frithfolad Caisil* does not mention the 'inner circle' of dynasties as it is concerned with the sub-kingdoms, not the rulers, and one of its most important points is the order of status among the client-peoples. The king of Cashel gives gifts of fief to some of the sub-kingdoms, expecting payments in return; he is also expected to pay a *cumtach* 'protection payment' if he fails to meet his duties as overking.⁹⁵

The most significant kingdoms listed are in fact the Eóganacht dynasties who were not of the inner circle: Raithlenn, Loch Léin and Uí Fidgente. The text is careful

⁹⁰ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 534.

⁹¹ D.A. Binchy, 'Irish History and Irish Law II', *Studia Hibernica* 16 (1976), 7-45: 25-31.

⁹² Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 522.

⁹³ P.T. Irwin, 'Aspects of Dynastic Kingship in Early Medieval Ireland' (unpubl. D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford 1997), pp. 98-101.

⁹⁴ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, pp. 536-37.

⁹⁵ O'Keefe, 'Dál Caladbuig', §§9-10, 13-14.

not to give them the name 'Eóganacht', thus lowering their status.⁹⁶ Their relationship with the kings of Cashel is summarized in a series of terms which come at the very end of the text:

§18. *Frithfoladh Caisil uaidib-seom dino comgiall 7 comurradhas 7 comfonaidm 7 comchairde fria ferand ó chach di araile...*

The counter-obligations of Cashel from them, then, [are] equal hostageship and equal law and equal binding [or surety] and equal alliance to their territory from each one to another... [my translation].

The final term, *comchairde*, 'relationship', 'equal alliance' is very important. It is based on the concept of *cairde* 'treaty', and here shows that the two-sided nature of the agreement in *Frithfolad Caisil* is essential; it is a specialized form of contract law. *Comgiall* is also significant, as it implies giving of hostages on both sides, rather than simply the handing over of hostages to the superior party in the relationship; *comfonaidm* implies the same kind of relationship with respect to the *naidm* or surety. The main obligation which is imposed on these three 'favoured client' dynasties is to provide military service for the king of Cashel if he is going on hosting against Síl Cuinn (i.e., the Uí Néill and Connachta) and the Laigin, *fri himdegail enig Muman* 'to defend the honour of Munster'.⁹⁷ These dynasties did not have to pay tribute to the king of Cashel, but on the other hand they do not receive any payments from the overking.

The kingdoms next in order of precedence were the Osraige and Corcu Laígde. They too did not have to pay tribute; this is said to be because they shared in the kingship of Munster at a remote point in the past.⁹⁸ This indicates the extent to which the kingship of Munster was seen as a long-standing institution rather than a creation only of the Eóganacht dynasties. However, the main part of *Frithfolad Caisil* deals with kingdoms of lesser status, to whom the king of Munster gives a grant (*rath*) of varying amounts of *cumala* every seven years. The Uí Líathain are first of these. Their hostages are not taken until the hostages of the rest of Munster are taken, and the *rath* given them by the king of Cashel is the greatest.⁹⁹ The Múscraige are next in precedence: their obligation was to provide the *ollam* 'chief poet' of Cashel, and their king sits beside the king of Cashel unless the kings of the three 'most favoured vassals' Raithlenn,

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, §§9, 17.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, §17.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, §§13, 16. As we shall see in Chapter VI there is considerable evidence for links between the ruling dynasties of Corcu Laígde and Osraige.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, §8.

Íarlúachair (i.e. Loch Léin) and Uí Fidgente are present, and he raises his knee before them, an action symbolic of equal status.¹⁰⁰

There are other peoples whose obligations and provisions are listed in the text, and Charles-Edwards characterizes much of this detail as being concerned with the terms 'ministerial clientship', i.e. peoples having to provide officers to serve in the king of Cashel's household.¹⁰¹ Thus, as we have seen, the Múscraige provide an *ollam*, as well as other poets. Other groups seem to have their 'ministers' rationalised in terms of the perceived etymology of their names; thus the Bóindrige (possibly 'white-cow people') send dairy-stewards, the Cerdraige ('craft-people') send smiths, and the Corcu Mo Druad door-wards and jesters.¹⁰²

One may ask how likely all of this is. The presence of oddities such as Fir Maige Féne sending a druid to Cashel, supposedly the most Christian of kingdoms, and even the very name Corcu Mo Druad 'people of my druid' suggest that this 'ministerial clientship' was a very old institution in Munster. Peoples like the Cerdraige are very well attested and not simply an invention of this text. Thus Charles-Edwards concludes that 'ministerial clientship had long been a crucial part of the political fabric of Munster; this in turn explains the central position of the *rígsuide* or *suide flatha*, "royal seat", and why the text is concerned with the order of precedence in seating close to the royal seat at feasts and the like.¹⁰³ One does not need to suppose that the text is an exact record of all the obligations existing in the eighth or ninth centuries, but it seems perfectly feasible to expect that some kingdoms would be expected to provide military service, whereas others might have to provide 'domestic' or other kinds of services to the king of Cashel. Moreover, one of the most important concerns of the text is the relative status and precedence of the sub-kings, and it is easy to see that the king of Cashel had one kind of relationship with the Corcu Laígde, to whom he did not give fief but also did not pay tribute, and a different kind of relationship with the Corcu Mo Druad, a people of rather inferior status.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, §9. See P.W. Joyce, *A Social History of Ancient Ireland* (2 vols, London 1903), ii, pp. 489-91.

¹⁰¹ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, pp. 542-5.

¹⁰² O'Keeffe, 'Dál Caladbuig', §§10, 13.

¹⁰³ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 545.

(ii) 'The West Munster Synod'

Dál Caladbuig and other *aithechthúatha* had considerable impositions resulting from a subjection which they could not escape. *Sáerthúatha* were in a far better position, inasmuch as like free clients they would theoretically be able to terminate their agreement. In practice of course, it was down to the power of the overking to keep recalcitrant vassals in check. As can be seen from annalistic examples, kings often transferred their allegiance to a new overking, but this was often a matter of compulsion, and was a characteristic of the interprovincial wars of the ninth to twelfth centuries; the Rahugh *rigdál* of 859 is only the most famous example. Within a province the transfer of allegiance can occasionally be seen, and a most notable example of this also comes from Munster, a text known as 'The West Munster Synod' or (after its main character) 'Mac Arddae's Synod'.¹⁰⁴ The concentration of power in the hands of the 'inner circle' of Eóganacht dynasties in East Munster (Aurmumu) in the eighth century was made possible by the decline of the overkingdom of West Munster (Íarmumu), which at times was regarded as a separate province. The kings of Íarmumu were normally of the Eóganacht Locha Léin (based around Killarney) who as we have seen were regarded as an inferior people by the author of *Frithfolad Caisil*. The last king of Íarmumu is so-titled in *AI* 791.2; subsequent kings are styled *rí Locha Léin*. It was the transfer of allegiance by the West Munster *sáerthúatha* from the king of Íarmumu to the king of Cashel directly which led to the end of the separate overlordship in the west. These events belong to the later eighth century but 'The West Munster Synod' rationalises the situation in historicist terms, claiming it had its origins in a synod held in the sixth century, though featuring some personages of the seventh.

In summary, the text describes a conference held by Mac Arddae mac Fidaig, king of Cíarraige Lúachra, and mother's son to St Cíarán of Clonmacnoise.¹⁰⁵ Mac Arddae, Cíarán, and St Brendán (of Birr) decide the Cíarraige should make alliance with the Corcu Óche, Músraige and surrounding peoples against the king of Loch Léin. The alliance is made, warranted by the oaths of various saints including Cíarán, Brendán, Mo-Chutu (of Rahan), Nessán (of Mungret), Mo-Lúa (of Clonfertmulloe) and others besides, with the coarb of Ailbe of Emly present to make an oath for the *fortúatha*

¹⁰⁴ Ed. K. Meyer, 'The Laud Genealogies'; summarized and partially translated in Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 216-8.

¹⁰⁵ Meyer, 'The Laud Genealogies', p. 315, ll. 2-6.

‘external peoples’ of Íarmumu.¹⁰⁶ The king of Íarmumu arrives and asks whether the synod is injuring his sovereignty; the saints prophesy his offspring will not rule as kings and Brendan says: *bid suir Irmumu ó togai cipé rí bes hi Caisiul di chlaind Óengusa maic Nad Fraích 7 timarne Pátraic nat bé rí hi Caisiul acht di chlaind Nad Fraích 7 armi hé suidigethar [ríg] for cach túaeth hi Mumain* ‘Íarmumu will be free by choice, whatever king may be in Cashel of the progeny of Áengus mac Nad Fraích (and Patrick prophesied that there would not be a king in Cashel except one of the progeny of Nia Fraích), and it should be he that should place a king over every *túath* in Munster’.¹⁰⁷ Mac Arddae and the others then handed over their hostages to the son of Crimthann, king of Cashel. The text then states that if a king of Cíarraige wishes to submit to a king of Loch Léin, he will be due half of the tribute due to the king of Loch Léin, that the king of Cíarraige should keep the tribute due from him to the king of Loch Léin ‘for that is one of his *folaid*’; that they should exchange hostages (rather than the Cíarraige simply rendering up hostages) and a number of further conditions.¹⁰⁸

It is plain that this tract is, as Byrne observed, ‘a political manifesto’.¹⁰⁹ The conditions for the Cíarraige to submit to the king of Loch Léin make the title ‘king of Íarmumu’ a nonsense, and suggest this text might be of Cíarraige provenance. The tract is perhaps better read as a testament to a treaty between the Eóganacht Chaisil and the Cíarraige, and Byrne suggested its background should be traced to the late-eighth century or even the reign of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn (d. 847), which would explain the otherwise unattested son of king Crimthann to whom the West Munster tribes submitted.¹¹⁰ ‘The West Munster Synod’ does show that free kingdoms theoretically could transfer allegiance and submit directly to greater overkings, rendering the position of an intermediate king void. As we have seen in Chapter I, recourse to greater kings is an essential feature of the tract on *cró* and *díbad*. If ‘The West Munster Synod’ is a product of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn’s reign, it is testament to his efforts to build up his overkingdom against the Uí Néill. His was an age in which Irish kings began to act regularly across provincial boundaries and assert overlordship of distant kingdoms. Such practices did, of course, exist before the ninth century, and both the Cenél nEógain interventions in Leinster and the campaigns of Cathal mac Finguine of Munster are good examples, though in the case of Cathal one suspects he was

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, ll. 6-18.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 26-30. I have slightly emended Byrne’s translation.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, ll. 7-29.

¹⁰⁹ Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 219.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20.

maintaining his own position against the Uí Néill rather than seeking overlordship of other provinces.¹¹¹ The first king to achieve domination of all Ireland in any real sense was Brían Bóraime in the early eleventh century. After his time the position of 'king of Ireland' was not simply viewed as an infrequent prospect, but an attainable reality.

(iii) *Lebor na Cert*

In moving to *Lebor na Cert* we cross a gulf of about two centuries from the early Munster texts discussed above. I wish to concentrate on *Lebor na Cert* in this section because it is significant as the premier text which attempts to define the nature of Munster over kingship with regard to the rest of Ireland as well as with regard to internal Munster kingdoms. Additionally, in belonging to the period of Uí Briain dominance it provides an interesting contrast with some of the ideas of the earlier Eóganachta texts, though its genre is different and perhaps we should not compare them directly. The kind of over kingship enjoyed by Brían Bóraime and several of his successors in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was of a scale far greater than that seen in the texts discussed above.

The text seems to be a Munster compilation of the later eleventh century, for it is clearly written from a Munster perspective and describes conditions which did not pertain before the career of Brían Bóraime. The main part of the compilation is a series of poems which are feigned to have been composed by St Patrick's follower St Benén (Benignus). The poems list the *túarastail* paid by the kings of the various Irish provinces to their sub-kingdoms, and the tributes and hospitalities expected in return. The poems are preceded by prose summaries which do not always agree with them in detail, but are generally fairly consistent. The very structure of *Lebor na Cert* shows the way in which over kingship developed, or at least was adapted to the conditions of provincial overlordship. Instead of a *rath*, or a share of raiding-spoils, *sáerthúatha* are now given a *túarastal*, normally military or luxury goods. For example, a stipend listed for the Múscraige is seven horses, seven hounds, seven cloaks and seven mail-coats.¹¹² Other goods given as part of *túarastal* include shields, rings, chess-sets, ships and swords. The *túarastail* granted to the provincial kings by the king of Cashel 'when he is king of Ireland' are of similar nature but of larger orders of size.¹¹³ In broad terms, this kind of

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-11.

¹¹² Dillon, *Lebor na Cert*, ll. 409-10.

¹¹³ E.g. Dillon, *Ibid.*, ll. 58-61.

stipend reflects the changed economic conditions of eleventh-century Ireland; higher-status goods were more widely available, and it has to be said that most of the goods listed as *túarastail* were portable or easily transportable across large distances with a royal army. In *Frithfolad Caisil* we were told that the Munster kings made payments to the value of several *cumala*, though the goods were not specified. Here the system is much more developed, and it is possible the details of *Lebor na Cert* have been schematized to an unreal extent.

The first section, on Munster, is by far the most detailed. It begins with a prose list and poem which detail the stipends paid by the king of Munster when he is king of Ireland to the provincial kings, before listing the stipends due to the Munster sub-kingdoms.¹¹⁴ Then the text goes on a clockwise circuit round Ireland: Connacht, Ailech, Airgíalla, Ulaid, Tara and Leinster.¹¹⁵ For all of these the stipends to the sub-kingdoms are described, but there is no list of what each provincial king pays to the other provincial kings if he is king of Ireland himself; thus the Munster section is unique in that respect. On the other hand, some of the sections start their poems on the 'internal' provincial payments by stating that their provisions apply when the king is not king of Ireland, so it is not as if our Munster author wished to deny the kingship of Ireland to other provinces. This clause is invoked in the sections on Ailech, Ulaid, Tara/Mide, and Leinster.¹¹⁶ There might be various reasons as to why the kings of Connacht are not included in potential kings of Ireland, whereas the kings of Ulaid are; if one is seeking to match the formulations of *Lebor na Cert* with one particular time-period, one finds it difficult; there seems to me to be no single time in the eleventh and twelfth centuries when all the conditions of the text apply. That, of course, is assuming that everything in the text is supposed to reflect reality in some way, and it is not at all clear that this is so.

In the earlier part of the last century, *Lebor na Cert* was considered to have its origins in the early ninth century, being updated in the eleventh, and was taken to represent the realities of relationships between kings and overkings. Following Myles Dillon's new edition in 1962 this attitude changed to a considerable extent. For Dillon the Book of Rights 'wears rather the aspect of a work of fiction'.¹¹⁷ His reasons for stating this are primarily to do with internal inconsistencies; in various poems the

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, ll. 31-141.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 31-52, 54-137.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ll. 951-2, 1233, 1397, 1533-4

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xiii. Cf. the comments by Dillon, 'Irish History', 29 n. 34, that the values in *Lebor na Cert* are 'utterly unreal'.

stipends paid to the same king are often different.¹¹⁸ He did not point out however that on the whole there is a fairly large degree of consistency, considering the compilatory nature of the text. It would in fact be more suspicious if there was complete consistency, for then the work would appear to be that of one of Dillon's Irish scholars 'who delighted in imaginary regulations and distinctions'.¹¹⁹ Dillon's conclusion was that though there might have been some basis in reality as to the gifts of horses, swords and so forth that were bestowed by the kings, and also the tributes that were received by them, the main text was the work of a professional poet and was 'simply intended to flatter the kings and particularly to exalt the king of Cashel'.¹²⁰

There are a number of objections which can be raised to this reductionist approach. The first is that as we have seen, there are a number of records of stipends being paid by overkings to sub-kings. Here is a further example:

AU 1166

Sluagadh la Rúaidrí h-Ua Conchobair ... co tangatur Cenel Conaill i n-a thech, co tardsat a m-braighti do h-Ua Conchobair, co tarat ocht fichtiu bó doibh, i n-ecmais oir & etaigh.

A hosting by Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair ... so that the Cenél Conaill came into his house and gave their hostages to Úa Conchobair and he gave them eight score cows, besides gold and clothing.

These figures are not too dissimilar from many found in *Lebor na Cert*, for example, the stipend from the King of Ailech to the men of Tulach Óc includes fifty horses and fifty cloaks.¹²¹ Though Dillon found some of the figures for stipends in *Lebor na Cert* to be extravagant, they do not rise above the figure of 100 cows or horses.¹²² The main area for suspicion is in the lists of tributes paid to overkings, which for most provinces are in the order of tens or hundreds, but in the case of several Munster sub-kingdoms hits four figures; for example, the Déisi are expected to render to the king of Munster *dá míli*

¹¹⁸ E.g., in the poem on the stipends paid by the king of Cashel when he is king of Ireland the stipend given to the king of Ailech is fifty horns, swords and horses (ll. 78-9); in the poem on Ailech itself the king is said to receive fifty swords, horses, shields, slaves and suits (ll. 983-5), and in the poem on the stipends given by the king of Tara when king of Ireland (not part of *Lebor na Cert* proper) Ailech is not mentioned at all. But it seems unlikely that we should expect different kings of Ireland to be supposed to always give the same stipend.

¹¹⁹ Dillon, *Lebor na Cert*, p. xiv.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, ll. 1048-50.

¹²² Generally speaking however, figures for stipends are in the tens whereas those for tributes are in the hundreds; cows are normally tribute and horses stipend; see the tables in Dillon, *Lebor na Cert*, pp. 179-89.

torc 'two thousand boars' and *míli bó* 'a thousand cows' a year.¹²³ This is the greatest imposition, but several other peoples were supposed to render 1000 cows, namely the Múscraige, Cíarraige Lúachra, Corcu Duibne and Boirenn (i.e. Corcu Mo Druad), of which the first two are also supposed to render 1000 boars.¹²⁴ Yet the second poem on tribute in this section gives the Múscraige a tribute of 300 boars and 100 cows.¹²⁵ These figures are more in line with those given for peoples in the other provinces.

What are we to make of all this? To my knowledge there has been little discussion of whether the figures given for tribute have basis in reality. Attempting to posit a solution would require a greater understanding of the early Irish economy than we currently have, though it is reasonable to suppose that a kingdom the size of Corcu Duibne could render a three-figure sum of cows.¹²⁶ Insofar as there is consistency within the text, figures of tribute in the order of a few hundred cows for a people like the Múscraige (who were settled in several districts scattered across Munster) seems not inherently unlikely, but more work would have to be done to determine whether the economy of the Múscraige could support such an imposition in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹²⁷ As for the poem featuring figures of one or two thousands, this seems far less likely, though of course we must remember that Munster was among the wealthiest of the Irish provinces in the pre-Norman period. It could well be the case that these figures were designed to be punitive, to keep kingdoms such as Corcu Duibne or Múscraige in check by extracting surplus, and reducing the capital with which the local kings and nobility could support their own client-networks. The closest parallel within *Lebor na Cert* is the tributes of the Leinster sub-kingdoms, which in the case of Dublin and the Laígis are given as seven hundreds.¹²⁸ These were both (particularly in the case of Dublin) rich and well-resourced kingdoms in the period, and so again the plausibility of the tribute is a matter of economic debate; the figures given for the other Leinster kingdoms are generally one or two hundreds. The simplest solution for the problem of the four-figure sums in Munster is that this poem has indeed been exaggerated for reasons of praise or simple boasting; the other list of Munster tributes seem more realistic.

¹²³ Dillon, *Lebor na Cert*, ll. 194, 196.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, ll. 158-61 (Múscraige), 174-7 (Cíarraige), 178-81 (Corcu Duibne), 186-9 (Corcu Mo Druad).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 331-4.

¹²⁶ A.T. Lucas, *Cattle in Ancient Ireland* (Kilkenny 1989).

¹²⁷ For an introduction to some of the problems of determining the faunal component of the economy from archaeological evidence see M. McCarthy, 'Archaeozoological Studies and Early Medieval Munster', in M.A. Monk & J. Sheehan (edd.), *Early Medieval Munster: Archaeology, History and Society* (Cork 1998), pp. 59-64.

¹²⁸ Dillon, *Lebor na Cert*, ll. 1632-5, 1660-3.

Regardless of how 'correct' figures for stipend and tribute are, *Lebor na Cert* is a text which describes a world where kings disburse gifts as symbols of their overlordship and expect goods and services in return; in this Ireland of the eleventh century is the same as that of the eighth. And, as with the *Frithfolad* texts, there is a distinction between free and unfree sub-kingdoms; there are those which pay tribute, and those which do not, and the relative status of different kingdoms is of some significance. There are obvious differences between the kinds of overkingships described; the relationship between the Múscraige and the Eóganachta described in *Frithfolad Caisil* was far more advantageous for the sub-kingdom than the relationship described in *Lebor na Cert*, and the same could be said of the Corcu Mo Druad and several other peoples. Whether this is due to 'inflation' of the tributes imposed by overkingship in the two hundred-plus years which had elapsed between the two texts being compiled, or whether it is a reflection of the different nature of relationships between the Dál Cais / Uí Briáin kings of Munster and their sub-kingdoms compared with their Eóganachta predecessors, or a combination of these and other factors is difficult to say. We should be very careful of inferring substantial changes in the nature of the Munster overkingship on the basis of what are after all literary texts. On the other hand, it is clear that *Lebor na Cert* shares many concepts with the earlier works. The most obvious is that Cashel is the symbol of the Munster overkingship, not the glamour of the incumbent dynasty. In *Lebor na Cert* certain kings are exempt from paying tribute, such as those of Osraige, Raithlenn and Loch Léin.¹²⁹ The text looks back toward the Eóganacht overkingship, even though it was produced after Dál Cais had become supreme in Munster.

What was *Lebor na Cert* for? Dillon's argument was that it was essentially praise poetry, to flatter kings, but based on genuine practice of stipend and tribute. It has been suggested that the text was composed for recitation at the Synod of Cashel in 1101, when Muirchertach Ua Briáin of Munster was at the height of his power.¹³⁰ As Anthony Candon has noted, the text emphasises the supremacy of Cashel (and its Christian associations, which we shall examine in Chapter IV), and is a clear assertion of the supremacy of the kingship of Cashel, which should have no equal in Ireland, not even

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, ll. 295-8.

¹³⁰ The most detailed arguments in favour of this view are in A. Candon, 'Barefaced Effrontery: Secular and Ecclesiastical Politics in Early Twelfth Century Ireland', *Seanchas Ard Mhacha* 14.2 (1991), 1-25: 12-17. Earlier expressions of the idea are K. Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources* (London 1972), pp. 285-6, and Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 192.

the kingship of Tara.¹³¹ The text could then be praise-poetry geared to propaganda purposes. One might infer that the text's lists are highly unlikely, yet it could be that the text is in some measure a real record of traditional tributes and stipends. I use the word 'traditional' specifically. As Dillon wrote, kings might have given what they felt like giving, and if the client-king accepted, he took what he got.¹³² But the various figures, though they might have reflected reality to some extent, were not, I suspect, intended to convey exact amounts of cows, rings or whatever. What they are is a schematized measure of status. The various figures must be intended to reflect the relationships between the various kings, both in terms of current conditions and historical precedent, and in this they are like *Frithfolad Caisil*. One of the texts appended to *Lebor na Cert* (though not originally a part of it) is a short poem, also preserved independently, which is introduced with the statement that *ní dlig cuaird a cúiced i nÉrinn fili nach fiasara císa 7 tuastla in chóicid sin* 'no province in Ireland owes a circuit to a poet who does not know the rents and stipends of that province'.¹³³ The poem goes on to say that a poet is not entitled to hospitality when on circuit in a province or single kingdom *nach dron dreachraigfeas sochar dochar dílmáine* 'if he cannot distinguish firmly the revenues and burdens and exemptions'; a poet who can do these things is *ail ollaman* 'a rock of an ollam', i.e. a solid scholar.¹³⁴ He understands these things *conus uili indisfea in cach aireacht ard* 'so that he will recount them all in every high assembly'.¹³⁵

According to this poem then, one of the requirements of the poet is that he know the kinds of data found in *Lebor na Cert*. This is a branch of *senchas*, traditional learning, and suggests that as well as praise-poetry or propaganda we are dealing with a genre which the *senchaid* had to master, a genre of which *Lebor na Cert* is in some ways an epitome, and that there were probably many other texts and versions which we do not now have. The *Frithfolad* texts are at pains to convey the relative status and position of kings and what is due to and from them, for in these gifts, tributes and actions such as raising the knee is symbolized the relationships between Irish kingdoms and overkingdoms.¹³⁶

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

¹³² Dillon, *Lebor na Cert*, p. xvii.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, ll. 1780-1. I have emended Dillon's translation.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, ll. 1794-5, 1800.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 1804-5.

¹³⁶ Of course, many Irish literary texts are concerned with precedence and seating arrangements among kings, most famously *Fled Dúin na nGed*; see R. Lehmann (ed.) *Fled Dúin na nGed* (Dublin 1964); M. Herbert, 'Fled Dúin na nGed: A Reappraisal', *CMCS* 18 (Winter 1989), 75-87.

Map 5: The North of Ireland



The Cenél nEógain Overkingship

For our second investigation of the practice of overkingship we shall examine the Cenél nEógain dynasty of Northern Uí Néill. It is instructive to consider them in comparison with Munster, for there are both similarities and differences between the two overkingdoms. In the first place the growth of the Cenél nEógain overkingdom, particularly their dominance of the Airgíallan peoples can, to a certain extent, be seen in the historical record; this in contrast to the process by which the Eóganachta gained dominance in Munster, which is effectively a matter of prehistory. Thus the first section here will focus on relationships between Cenél nEógain and the Airgíalla in the eighth and ninth centuries; the 'Poem on the Airgíalla' provides an interesting counterpart both conceptually and chronologically to *Frithfolad Caisil*. Like the Uí Briain kings of Munster, the Meic Lochlainn kings of Cenél nEógain were contenders for an island-wide overkingship in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the information on the strategies employed by Meic Lochlainn in the chronicles is quite detailed; thus the second section will discuss some of this material for the light it sheds on the practice of overkingship. The full history of Cenél nEógain will not be dealt with in depth here, especially the activities of its kings with regard to the kingship of Tara. As we have seen in Chapter II there are several important questions pertaining to the early history of Cenél nEógain which have been recently investigated by scholars, namely the processes by which Cenél nEógain became more powerful than the neighbouring Cenél Conaill, who previously had been the Uí Néill dynasty *par excellence* in the north, and how this allowed them to establish a regular alternation in the kingship of Tara with Clann Cholmáin.¹³⁷ The answers to these questions lie in the late seventh and early eighth centuries and are strictly speaking outside the scope of the present work. However, we shall discuss some general points concerned with the background of the Cenél nEógain overkingship.

The primary royal centre of Cenél nEógain was Ailech, in the southern part of Inishowen (*Inis Eógain*). The name of Ailech itself was used as the title of the Cenél nEógain kingship, as for example Uisnech was sometimes used for the Clann Cholmáin kingship. However, king of Ailech (*rí Ailig*) was used far more frequently and consistently than Clann Cholmáin used *rí Uisnig*; Clann Cholmáin kings were more often known as kings of Mide (*ríg Midi*). The title is used all the way down to the Anglo-Norman period, showing that the theoretical centre of the kingship remained in the

¹³⁷ Mac Shamhráin, 'The making of Tír nEógain'; Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743'.

original homeland of Inishowen. Nevertheless, the territorial expansion of lands meant that the situation of Ailech was remote from the new geographical centre of the overkingdom, in lands which took the name of the dynasty (*Tír nEógain*, Tyrone), and from the later ninth century the royal inauguration site of the kingship was at Tulach Óc (Tullyhogue, near Cookstown), which continued in use as the O'Neill inauguration site until the sixteenth century.¹³⁸ This 'transfer' may be interpreted in several ways. It could be that Ailech was simply not seen as a site with overpowering ritual importance, and that transferring the inauguration centre to Tullyhogue was a matter of pragmatism. Alternatively, the move was a deliberate statement about the new centre of the kingship, in fertile lands with closer links to east Ulster and the midlands. This seems less likely, given the retention of the title *rí Ailig* and the fact that Ailech continued in use as a fortress. It was, however, on the periphery of Cenél nEógain power after the ninth century.

The overkingdom over which Cenél nEógain ruled was known to contemporaries as 'The North', *In Fochla* or *In Túaiscert* (or Latin equivalents). By this seems to be meant the territories dominated by Northern Uí Néill, both Cenél nEógain and Cenél Conaill, and indeed its first-named rulers were of Cenél Conaill. The term first appears in what is probably a retrospective entry on the battle of Móin Daire Lothair at *AU* 563.1, which has the usage *Uí Néill in Tuaisceirt* 'Uí Néill of the North'. The terminology only really seems to be used contemporaneously from the mid-eighth century, beginning with the death of Áed Muinderg mac Flaithbertaig, *rex in Túaiscirt*.¹³⁹ Áed was of Cenél Conaill, and his son Domnall is called *rex aquilonis* at 779 and at his death in 804.¹⁴⁰

Though Áed and Domnall may have been 'kings of The North' it is uncertain exactly what is meant by this. It seems unlikely that this is intended to signify 'kings of Northern Uí Néill', for Cenél nEógain had become more powerful than Cenél Conaill and indeed ousted them from sharing in the kingship of Tara. This latter development may provide a clue. Áed Muinderg's father Flaithbertach had been the last Cenél Conaill king of Tara before his apparent abdication in 734; the end of his reign and the succession of his rival Áed Allán of Cenél nEógain is normally considered to signal the

¹³⁸ J. Hogan 'The Irish Law of Kingship, with Special Reference to Ailech and Cenél Eóghain', *PRLA* 40 C (1940), 186-254: 205; *idem*, 'The Ua Briain Kingship in Telach Óc', in J. Ryan, S.J. (ed.), *Féil-sgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill* (Dublin 1940), pp. 419-27; Fitzpatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, pp. 138-56.

¹³⁹ *AU* 747.4.

¹⁴⁰ *AU* 779.10, 804.1.

dominance of Cenél nEógain.¹⁴¹ It is interesting, then, that the style 'king of The North' appears in the very next generation with Flaithbertach's son. It is almost as if a new political identity was being set up in opposition to Cenél nEógain's new supremacy, or at least the titles were some form of recognition that Cenél Conaill retained special status; yet there they were not overlords of the Cenél nEógain kings. However, there are further complications. Firstly, it may not have been apparent as early as the reign of Áed Muinderg that Cenél Conaill were to be permanently excluded from the kingship of Tara, and the fact that Donnchad Midi, Clann Cholmáin king of Tara, felt compelled to lead a hosting into the north to take the hostages of Domnall son of Áed suggests that Flaithbertach's son and grandson were still powerful kings.¹⁴² Alternatively, Charles-Edwards has argued that the use of the term 'king of Uí Néill' was applied to kings of Mide when they acted as 'deputy kings' when not themselves kings of Tara, and that the style 'king of The North' might have a similar function.¹⁴³ This reading of the evidence would support the idea that the title was originally applied to the Cenél Conaill kings as a reflection of their new status vis-à-vis the Cenél nEógain kings. The biggest problem with this interpretation is *AU* 788.1 which reports the death of Máel Dúin son of Áed Allán, and calls him *rex Ind Fhochlai*. It is difficult to know whether we should read anything into the language difference between the styles of the two contemporaries, Áed *rex aquilonis* and Máel Dúin *rex ind Fhochlai*.

Our investigations are not made easier by the fact that the annalists continue to use 'the north' as a more general geographical designation for the north of Ireland. It is in the ninth-century annals that terms for the north are used most, and after the death of Domnall in 804 *AU* do not refer to any subsequent kings of Cenél Conaill as 'kings of The North'. On the other hand, *AI*, which are less partisan to Cenél nEógain and in the years about 1000 seem to take an active interest in Cenél Conaill, call Máel Rúanaid Ua Maíl Doraid, king of Cenél Conaill, *rí in tíascirt*.¹⁴⁴ *AU* refer to only one ruler after 804 as *rí Ind Fhochlai*, namely Fergal mac Domnaill (d. 938) in *AU* 921.7. The variation of usage of the style does seem to indicate that though Cenél nEógain kings were often the most powerful kings in the north, they did not regularise an institution of the 'kingship of the north' as opposed to the kingship of Ailech.

¹⁴¹ *AU* 734.8, 734.10. Flaithbertach died *in clericatu*, according to *AU* 765.2.

¹⁴² *AU* 779.10.

¹⁴³ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, pp. 479-80, 510-11. Charles-Edwards is incorrect in asserting that Lorcán mac Cathail (king of Mide, d. 864) 'did not even belong to the Uí Néill' (p. 480).

¹⁴⁴ *AI* 1026.4.

Though in *AU* there is only one 'king of The North' after 804, there is a sequence of '*rigdamnai* of The North', commencing in the late ninth century. These are Fachtna mac Maíl Dúin (d. 868), his brothers Áengus (d. 883, styled *rigdamna* of *In Tuaisceirt*) and Murchad (d. 887, himself a king of Ailech); Úalgarg mac Flaithbertaig (d. 879, also styled *rigdomna* in *Túaisceirt*); Flann mac Domnaill (d. 906) and his brother Flaithbertach (d. 919, also king of Ailech).¹⁴⁵ These last two were brothers of the Fergal who was called *ri Ind Fhochlai* in 921. All these persons were members of Cenél nEógain rather than Cenél Conaill. That one could be '*rigdamna* of The North' should imply that one could be 'king of the North' and yet as we have seen the latter term is hardly used. That *rigdamnai* and *rig* of the north do not appear in *AU* after the mid-tenth century is further evidence that, even though the Cenél nEógain hegemony might be thought of as a kingdom of 'The North', they did not see its kingship institutionalised in those terms; the titles, as used by *AU*, seem to reflect a position of seniority within the Cenél nEógain polity, often when its kings were kings of Tara, or occasionally is used of Cenél nEógain kings when Clann Cholmáin held the kingship of Tara. Thus, Fachtna was *rigdamna* of the north while Áed Finnliath was king of Tara; however Murchad, who was also king of Ailech, is awarded the title while Flann Sinna was king of Tara. As well as being an indication of seniority, the styles might reflect a position of sub-kingship within the north, as Charles-Edwards suggested.

The next regular series of references are to the conflicts between Domnall úa Lochlainn and Muirchertach Úa Briain in the early twelfth century, when Domnall's forces are regularly referred to as 'the north of Ireland'; this usage reflects a trend to use 'north' loosely to mean the Cenél nEógain hegemony, the extent of which varied over time.¹⁴⁶ The usage is maintained into the reigns of Domnall's descendants.¹⁴⁷ Thus, by this time 'the north' can refer to an overkingdom embracing the whole northern part of Ireland, including the Northern Uí Néill territories and the Airgíalla, and on occasion the Ulaid. It is notable that though this overkingdom was conceived of by the annalists as a more-or-less cohesive polity (and it is uncertain that this was the same polity as that ruled by the late eighth-century Cenél Conaill kings), few of its Cenél nEógain kings were given the title 'king of The North'; they generally were styled 'king of Ailech'. It is perhaps surprising that when the title 'king of Tara' came to mean the kings of Mide only in the early eleventh century that the northern kings did not make more of 'king of

¹⁴⁵ *AU* 868.4, 879.10, 883.8, 887.1, 906.1, 919.3.

¹⁴⁶ E.g. *AU* 1097.6, 1099.7, 1099.8, 1103.5; cf. *AI* 1034.8, 1070.3.

¹⁴⁷ E.g. *AU* 1130.5, 1157.

The North' or some other formulation as a way of expressing their status; but this must be a matter for future investigation.

As stated above, in what follows we shall focus on two aspects of overkingship as practiced by Cenél nEógain: firstly, their relations with the neighbouring Airgíalla, which arguably provided the main foundation for the creation of an overkingdom of *Int Fochla*; this section will consider some more literary expressions of that relationship, which are closely comparable with some of the Munster texts we have already encountered. Secondly we shall look in more detail at the politics of the Mac Lochlainn kings in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as they strove to assure their dominance in the north on the one hand and to compete for the overkingship of Ireland on the other. This section will necessarily be more closely based on annalistic evidence, and the element of historical narrative will facilitate a better understanding of how Cenél nEógain overkingship practices changed in this period.

(i) *Cenél nEógain and the Airgíalla*

Airgíalla is a name given to a group of peoples who were settled in large areas of Ulster. Their lands were supposedly part of the vast over-kingdom of Ulaid in the last centuries of Irish prehistory. It has been long suspected by scholars that the collapse of the earlier Ulaid overkingdom and their restriction to eastern Ulster was connected to the rise of the Airgíallan kingdoms; either an internal collapse facilitated their expansion, or the founders of Airgíalla invaded Ulster and took the lands, thus destroying the power of the Ulaid.¹⁴⁸ The second explanation is the one found in most of the relevant Irish literary and historical materials, which are of course from centuries later than the period when the events probably took place, and these legends of the events are bound up inextricably with the rise of the Uí Néill. Irish tradition dated the collapse of Ulaid power in mid-Ulster to the fifth century; Byrne however has shown that the Ulaid retained considerable power into the early seventh century.¹⁴⁹ We do not know when and by whom the name *airgíalla* was given; it perhaps means 'hostage-givers' and the most economic interpretation of the name is that the nine leading Airgíallan kingdoms rendered the hostages to Níall *Noígíallach* 'of the nine hostages'.¹⁵⁰ This, however, is in

¹⁴⁸ Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 46, 50-1, 68-9, 72-4.

¹⁴⁹ F.J. Byrne, 'The Ireland of St Columba', in J. McCracken (ed.), *Historical Studies* 5 (London 1965), 37-58: 41.

¹⁵⁰ Mac Shamhráin, 'The Making of Tír nEógain', pp. 55-7, 64; Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 73.

contrast to another Irish tradition which makes Níall receive various hostages from Ireland and Britain. In fact, the story of the origins of the Airgíalla is set two generations before Níall's time, though it was obviously composed after the Uí Néill had achieved dominance in the Northern Half. The ways in which the Airgíalla came to be dominant in their lands are not our direct concern, and their origin-legend would not be particularly useful in this regard in any case. What that text does tell us is something of how they perceived their relationship with the Uí Néill, and for this reason I propose to examine it more closely, for like the Munster texts it gives a good insight into how the Irish rationalised and structured their political relationships.

The earliest version of the Airgíallan origin-legend runs as follows.¹⁵¹ It commences with a genealogical summary which explains the common ancestry of the Uí Néill and Connachta, whose shared ancestor was Eochaid Mugmedón.¹⁵² It then states that the Airgíalla are next nearest to the Uí Néill, meeting their pedigree at Cairpre Lifechair, great-grandfather of Eochaid Mugmédon and great-grandson of Conn Cétchathach.¹⁵³ The Airgíalla then are part of Síl Cuinn, 'the seed of Conn', the most significant peoples in the northern half of Ireland. This genealogical link then established, the text then traces the genealogy downwards to the 'three Collas', the supposed ancestors of the leading Airgíallan peoples of later centuries, the Uí Meic Úais, Uí Chremthainn, Ind Airthir and Mugdorna.

This background established, the story of the Three Collas is related. They lived during the reign of Fiachu Sraibtime, and were Fiachu's nephews. However, they feared that Fiachu's son Muiredach, a great champion, their cousin, would become king directly after Fiachu, and deprive them of the chance of kingship. Accordingly, while Muiredach is away on campaign they attack Fiachu. A druid prophesies to Fiachu that if he defeats the Collas, none of his descendants will be king, but if he is defeated and killed, his descendants will be king until Doomsday 'and none of the descendants of the Collas will ever reign'.¹⁵⁴ Fiachu chooses the latter and is accordingly killed, but the Collas flee to Britain to escape the wrath of Muiredach. They debate what to do, and after several years decide to return and seek mercy from Muiredach. They come to Tara

¹⁵¹ Ed. & transl. M.A. O'Brien, 'The Oldest Account of the Raid of the Collas (circa A.D. 330)', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 3rd Series 2 (1939), 170-77. The text is found prefixed to the Airgíalla genealogies in all of the main collections; O'Brien based his edition on Laud Misc. 610 (ed. K. Meyer, 'The Laud Genealogies', 317) and Rawlinson B502 (later ed. by O'Brien himself in *CGH*, pp. 147-52).

¹⁵² O'Brien, 'The Oldest Account', §1.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, §2.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, §7.

‘without hound or servant’, i.e. in submissive fashion, and Muiredach forgives them.¹⁵⁵ They live with Muiredach and become his great champions, but after some time Muiredach decides it is time for the Collas and their children to find a new land, lest there be strife with Muiredach’s progeny. The Collas ask which land would be easiest from them ‘to make sword-land of it’ (*co ndernam tír claidib de*), and Muiredach suggests they go to Ulster.¹⁵⁶ The Collas go north by way of Connacht, where they are welcomed, and together with the men of Connacht they fought seven battles against the Ulaid in Fernmag (Farney, Co. Monaghan) and defeated them, making ‘sword-land of the district where now are Mugdorna and Uí Chremthainn and the Ai[r]thera and Uí Meic Úais, etc.’¹⁵⁷

The legend of the Collas is clearly designed to explain the political relationships between different peoples. It seeks to give the Airgíalla an honourable place among the dynasties of Dál Cuinn but also explain why the Airgíalla were not entitled to a share of high-kingship; they were excluded because of the Collas’ *finéal* ‘kinslaying’ of their uncle. This story was probably invented to make the best of the Airgíallan position, one of subordination. Yet it additionally provides a historical reason for the Airgíalla to have an important role in the armies of the Uí Néill. In his discussion of the text, Charles-Edwards suggests that the story was probably put together in the eighth century by someone sympathetic to the rulers of Fernmag and ‘expresses in succinct narrative the essence of the relationship between the Airgíalla and the Uí Néill as the Airgíalla wished it to be.’¹⁵⁸ Though these peoples claimed descent from the Three Collas, Charles-Edwards has shown that the genealogies are fabrications; these different peoples, with their diverse names, were of various different origins.¹⁵⁹ However they came to dominate the lands they possessed, in the eighth century and perhaps earlier their ancestral identity was reshaped in order to link them to the Uí Néill, their overlords.

The exact origins of this overlordship are irrecoverable. The Airgíalla probably fell under the loose overlordship of the Uí Néill during the latter’s expansions in the fifth and sixth centuries, but probably had considerable independence from the kings of Tara, particularly if the incumbent was one of the Southern Uí Néill. The overlordship was probably piecemeal and intermittent; references in the annals to an overking of all Airgíalla who would be a direct vassal of the Uí Néill overking are practically non-

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, §10.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, §§11-12.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, §13.

¹⁵⁸ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, p. 514.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 514-18 for discussion.

existent before the ninth century. The situation changed with the rise of Cenél nEógain. By the eighth century they had expanded eastwards from Inishowen into Co. Derry and along the northern coast into Antrim at the expense of the Cruithin kingdoms there.¹⁶⁰ They had also made territorial gains in mid-Ulster at the expense of Uí Meic Úais. The key event in the history of Airgíallan-Uí Néill relationships was a transfer of whatever allegiance the Airgíalla owed to the Uí Néill overking to a direct relationship with the king of Cenél nEógain. Charles-Edwards has placed this event in the years 732-34.¹⁶¹ In these years the Cenél nEógain king Áed Allán ('the wild') mac Fergaile abandoned his previous alliance with the Cenél Conaill and fought a series of battles against them and their king, Flaithbertach mac Loingsig, who was then king of Tara. At least two of the Airgíallan kingdoms were already important allies of Cenél nEógain; Áed's father, Fergal mac Maíl Dúin, was accompanied by kings of Uí Chremthainn and Ind Airthir on his campaign to Leinster to levy the *bórama* or cattle tribute in 722, and several died with him in the Battle of Allen.¹⁶² Áed triumphed over Cenél Conaill in 734 and ousted Flaithbertach from the high-kingship; Cenél Conaill would never regain it.¹⁶³ Charles-Edwards would date the agreement between the Airgíalla and Cenél nEógain to this time, though as we have seen there was a precedent for it in the reign of Fergal. We continue to find Airgíallan leaders fighting alongside Cenél nEógain; in the battle of Serethmag in 743 when Áed was killed, the kings of Uí Chremthainn, Ind Airthir and Uí Thuirtre fell with him.¹⁶⁴ Thus, the legend of the Collas might well be a production stemming from 734 or thereafter.

Another text which Charles-Edwards would date to the same period also describes the relationship between the Airgíalla and Uí Néill in terms representative of the 'favoured vassal' status of the Airgíalla. It is interesting because it is a northern text which parallels *Frithfolad Caisil*. It is normally known after its editor as the 'Poem on the Airgíalla'.¹⁶⁵ There are several problems with the text and it is probable that some stanzas have dropped out, but on the whole the contents are intelligible. It begins by comparing the nobility of the king of Tara (here called lord of Tailtiu) and the Airgíalla, and the relative positions held by the provincial kings of Ireland at an imagined feast in a hall: the king of Tara presides over all, the king of Munster in the south, the king of

¹⁶⁰ Mac Shamhráin, 'The Making of Tír nEógain', pp. 61-79.

¹⁶¹ Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743', 410-11.

¹⁶² *AU* 722.8.

¹⁶³ *AU* 734.8, 734.10.

¹⁶⁴ *AU* 743.4.

¹⁶⁵ Ed. & transl. M. O Daly, 'A poem on the Airgíalla', *Ériu* 16 (1952), 179-88.

Leinster beside him and the king of Connacht behind.¹⁶⁶ The poem seeks to establish the relative status of the provincial overkings, a feature we have encountered in *Lebor na Cert*, though we do not need to suppose that here it describes actual protocol of seating arrangements; such a meeting of Irish kings is never reported in the eighth century.

The poem then alludes to the common ancestry of Airgíalla and Uí Néill, and the legend of the Three Collas. It explicitly states that *comshaíre ceneuil do Uip Néill fri Oirgialda* ‘the Uí Néill and Airgíalla are equal in nobility of race’ – save for the fact that Uí Néill are entitled to be (over)kings.¹⁶⁷ The text then refers specifically to various Uí Néill kings called Áed, including an Áed Allán (supposedly an alias for Áed Úaridnech who died in 612), which lends some support to Charles-Edwards’ theory of authorship in Áed Allán’s time.¹⁶⁸ The poem then lists various dues and entitlements of the Uí Néill, including the requirement that the Uí Néill overking be a just judge ‘when he is besought about any evil’.¹⁶⁹ After this is the section on the dues of the Airgíalla. Their main obligation is military service of three fortnights once every three years, and then only in springtime.¹⁷⁰ A third of the spoils won in battle they get to keep.¹⁷¹ A number of other provisions relating to legal matters are described, which seek to maximise the standing of the Airgíalla with regard to the Uí Néill overking. The text ends by stating that the agreements are made in *comgíalla* ‘equal/mutual hostageship’, a term we have already encountered in *Frithfolad Caisil*, and concludes with a list of witnesses to the agreement which include supposed Airgíallan kings of the sixth century and churchmen of the day, comparable with ‘The West Munster Synod’.¹⁷² The closing stanza runs ‘they [the Airgíallan kings] are to sit beside the king who holds the land of Taitiu’.¹⁷³

The poem then is a testament to the Airgíalla-Uí Néill relationship, written to promote Airgíallan interests and status. There are several other features of the text which we cannot discuss at length here.¹⁷⁴ One main theme is that like the legend of the three Collas (not to mention the ‘West Munster Synod’) it seeks to explain conditions of the eighth century by reference to earlier events, in this case an agreement supposed to have been made in the sixth century. It speaks of the Airgíallan kings as individuals, which reflects the fact that there are almost no overkings of all Airgíalla to be found in

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, §§1-4.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, §10.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, §§11-12.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, §21.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, §§24-5.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, §26.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, §§39-48.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, §49.

¹⁷⁴ See Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 115-17.

the annals in the seventh and eighth centuries. The kings of Uí Chremthainn, Ind Airthir and others are found at various times fighting alongside Uí Néill kings. The relationship was not always friendly however. From the annals of the eighth and early ninth centuries we can discern a pattern of advance by the Cenél nEógain into Airgíallan lands, made possible in part by the fact that the Airgíalla were a confederation of roughly equal kingdoms with no mesne overking to organise resistance.¹⁷⁵ Disquiet at Cenél nEógain expansion led to some of the Airgíallan kings throwing their lot in with the Ulaid, and matters came to a climax at the battle of Leth Cam in 827. There, Níall mac Áeda of Cenél nEógain defeated Muiredach mac Echdach king of Ulaid, the king of Uí Chremthainn and other kings of the Airgíalla.¹⁷⁶ Not all Airgíalla had 'rebelled' against Níall, but now they were under Cenél nEógain dominion and after 827 we find regular occurrences of an overking of Airgíalla, *rí Airgíalla*, in the chronicles, often fighting alongside Cenél nEógain kings.¹⁷⁷

Cenél nEógain interests in Airgíallan lands also advanced on another front. At an early stage they began to patronise the church of Armagh and the community of St Patrick. Charles-Edwards would also attribute this development to the master-plan of Áed Allán, for in Áed's *annus mirabilis* of 734 we find a record of the relics of Peter, Paul and Patrick being brought on tour *ad legem perficiendam* 'to fulfil the law'.¹⁷⁸ Only seven years earlier the relics of Adomnán had been taken on tour to promote *Cáin Adomnáin*, the Law of Adomnán, but in 737 after a meeting at Terryglass between Áed and Cathal mac Finguine, king of Munster, the law of Patrick was proclaimed in Ireland.¹⁷⁹ Charles-Edwards concludes that Áed rejected saints Columba and Adomnán, hitherto the patrons of Uí Néill generally and Cenél Conaill and Clann Cholmáin in particular, and embraced the powerful church of Armagh which was pressing its own claims for supremacy in Ireland, though it would be some time before they were accepted.¹⁸⁰ Armagh lay in the lands of the Airgíallan kingdom of Ind Airthir, and members of Ind Airthir dynasties competed with the Uí Chremthainn for control of the church. Cenél nEógain supported Ind Airthir abbatial candidates against Uí Chremthainn, and accordingly we find no record of Int Airthir fighting against Níall mac Áeda at Leth Cam. From then on the abbacy and many hereditary offices of Armagh were held by

¹⁷⁵ Mac Shamhráin, 'The Making of Tír nEógain', pp. 64-8; cf. T.J. Fee [=T. Ó Fiaich], 'The Kingdom of Airgíalla and its Sub-Kingdoms' (Unpubl. M.A. diss., University College Dublin, 1950).

¹⁷⁶ *AU* 827.4.

¹⁷⁷ E.g. *AU* 885.4, 919.3, 949.4, 963.3, 970.4.

¹⁷⁸ *AU* 734.3. Note the entry does not specify *which* law.

¹⁷⁹ *AU* 737.9, 737.10.

¹⁸⁰ Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743', 410.

Ind Airthir families such as Uí Níalláin and Clann Sínaig.¹⁸¹ Cenél nEógain interests in Armagh continued throughout the period: they had a residence there and many of their kings were buried there.¹⁸² Meanwhile the defeat of Uí Chremthainn and others at Leth Cam allowed Cenél nEógain to consolidate their hold on the lands that were henceforth known as Tír nEógain.¹⁸³

(ii) *Mac Lochlainn Overlordship*

In the ninth and tenth centuries Cenél nEógain kings regularly became kings of Tara in alternation with Clann Cholmáin. The changes were generally bloodless, i.e. a king of Tara did not kill his predecessor to acquire the kingship, but a new king of Tara would often consolidate his rule by raiding the territories of his predecessor. The last Cenél nEógain king of Tara was Domnall úa Néill, who fought on several fronts during his reign, attacking the Ulaid, Bréifne, Leinstermen and Dublin vikings.¹⁸⁴ During his reign several other members of the dynasty are named as kings of Ailech, and it is probable that they acted as sub-kings in the north while he was king of Tara; certainly Domnall was often active in Mide, until Clann Cholmáin drove him thence in 971.¹⁸⁵ Domnall returned to plunder Mide, moving on southwards to Uí Failge.¹⁸⁶ This seems to have settled the issue for a while, but in 980 Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, king of Mide, won a great victory at Tara against the vikings of Dublin and the Isles.¹⁸⁷ Máel Sechnaill did not get to test himself against Domnall, who died the same year at Armagh, titled *ardrí Érenn* 'high king of Ireland' by the Ulster annalist.¹⁸⁸ Thereafter Cenél nEógain never again acquired the kingship of Tara, and it would be several generations before their kings acquired status outside the north that would equal or surpass that of Domnall.

In the remaining part of this chapter we shall consider the activities of the Meic Lochlainn kings who strove to make themselves *ardrí Érenn*. This will provide a useful illustration of how powerful Irish kings in the period set about gaining dominance on a far wider scale than the provincial overkingdom, and provides a useful historical counterpart to the Munster ideas of overkingship contained in *Lebor na Cert*. The history

¹⁸¹ T. Ó Fiaich, 'The church of Armagh under lay control', *Seanchas Ard Macha* 5 (1969), 75-127.

¹⁸² E.g. *AU* 935.7, 1064.7. Cf. the poem *Cert cech rí co réit*, see below, pp. 255-6.

¹⁸³ Mac Shamhráin, 'The Making of Tír nEógain', pp. 78-9.

¹⁸⁴ E.g. *AU* 960.1 (Dál nAraide), 955.3 and 965.6 (Bréifne), 968.3 (Leinster).

¹⁸⁵ *AU* 971.2. Probable sub-kings in the north include Domnall's brother Flaithbertach (d. 949), and three cousins Flaithbertach, Tadc and Conn who all died in 962.

¹⁸⁶ *AU* 971.6

¹⁸⁷ *AU* 980.1.

¹⁸⁸ *AU* 980.2.

of Cenél nEógain from 980 until the emergence of the Meic Lochlainn has not been paid a great deal of attention, except perhaps for the long reign of Flaithbertach mac Muirchertaig, who briefly submitted to Bríain Bóraime, often raided the Ulaid, and went on pilgrimage to Rome before resuming his reign. From him descended the later O'Neills. After Flaithbertach's death the kingship of Ailech passed to a distant relative, Níall mac Maíl Sechnaill. This itself is peculiar, as Níall's branch of the dynasty, Clann Domnaill, had not held the kingship for four generations, going back to Domnall mac Áeda who died in 915; this was thus an instance of the three-generation 'rule' of kingship being broken, which might suggest there were internal dynastic problems after Flaithbertach's death, though there is no evidence in the annals.¹⁸⁹ There is not space here to consider the succession among the Cenél nEógain kings and their activities in the late eleventh century. To some extent they were isolated while the kings of Munster, Leinster and Connacht strove for island-wide overkingship, but gradually the Cenél nEógain became more important players in these struggles. The kingship remained with Clann Domnall and ultimately the descendants of Níall's brother Lochlann secured it.¹⁹⁰ It is upon the activities of two of these kings that we shall concentrate.

The career of Domnall úa Lochlainn was a new high-water mark for the overkingship of Cenél nEógain.¹⁹¹ In 1088 Domnall first forayed outside his province, and Rúaidrí mac Áeda gave him the hostages of Connacht, 'and they went together into Mumu and burned Limerick and the plain as far as Dún Achad, and they brought away the head of the son of In Caillech, and they razed Kincora'.¹⁹² The kings of Ailech and Connacht had thus entered into an alliance against Muirchertach Úa Bríain, king of Munster; though Domnall was overking and superior, the support of Áed was vital for his campaign against Muirchertach. Áed for his part had been at war with Muirchertach for some time, and Domnall úa Lochlainn had now become arbiter of affairs in the rest of Ireland. In 1090 a meeting (*comdál*) was held between Domnall, Muirchertach Úa Bríain, and Domnall Úa Maíl Sechnaill of Mide, 'and they all gave their hostages to the

¹⁸⁹ For a detailed discussion of the succession-problem, see Hogan, 'The Irish law'.

¹⁹⁰ The descent of the Meic Lochlainn was once considered doubtful, as Irish sources give a pedigree going back to either Domnall úa Néill (d. 980) or to Máel Sechnaill mac Maíl Rúanaid (d. 997). It has been shown conclusively by D. Ó Corráin ('Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn and the *Circuit of Ireland*', in Smyth, *Seanchas*, pp. 238-50: 247-50) that the descent via Máel Sechnaill is correct; similar conclusions were reached by Jaski, as shown in the table in *EIKS*, p. 304. Thus, Ardgar was of a branch of the dynasty which had not enjoyed the kingship of Cenél nEógain since 915. Moreover, though Ardgar's uncle was his predecessor, one has to go back five generations to find a king in direct patriline.

¹⁹¹ The contemporary sources generally use the term 'úa Lochlainn', but modern scholarship favours the later family name 'Mac Lochlainn' (short for mac meic Lochlainn 'son of the son of Lochlann').

¹⁹² *AU* 1088.2. For more information on Art *In Caillech* 'the cock' Úa Rúairc, see Chapter V below, p. 208.

king of Ailech'.¹⁹³ Domnall was now overlord of Connacht, Munster (and thereby also theoretical suzerain of Leinster) and Mide. In the following years Domnall focused his attention on his closer neighbours; he killed the king of Ulaid in 1091 and blinded the king of Cenél Conaill in 1093.

As we have already seen in our examination of peacemaking, the dominant theme in Irish politics for the ensuing two decades were struggles of Domnall úa Lochlainn and Muirchertach Úa Bríain for supremacy in the island, and the efforts of abbots of Armagh to prevent the violence from escalating out of control. During this period Domnall did not fail to keep an eye on his near neighbours; the Cenél Conaill were defeated by the Cenél nEógain in 1098, and he led an expedition of the men of the North of Ireland against the Ulaid in 1099. A praise-poem on this incident is inserted in *AU* by hand H2:

*Tuctha geill Uladh ar eian
innisit fiadhain co feigh
la Domnall H. Flainn mur leombain
& la sil no clainn Eogain fheil.*

*Da etire trena tuctha
do loechraidh Uladh o chein
in tres cen dibh abb Comgaill
do righadh Domnaill H. Neill.*

*In nomaid bliadhain ar nochat
ar mile bliadhain co m-blaidh
o gein Crist cinnti cen crinadh
is innti ro siledh sein.*

The hostages of the Ulaid were taken by force,
Witnesses state clearly,
By Domnall Úa Flainn like a lion,
And the seed or offspring of generous Eogan.

Two stout hostages were given
A while ago by the warriors of the Ulaid;
The third of them was Comgall's abbot,
To en-king Domnall descendant of Níall.

¹⁹³ *AU* 1090.4.

The ninety-ninth year
 And the thousandth in renown
 From the birth of Christ unwithered,
 It is then that that was beheld.¹⁹⁴

The phrase 'ua Néill' is interesting: Domnall was not a member of the Clann Néill branch of the Cenél nEógain, and the reference to him as 'Úa Flainn' or descendant of Flann mac Domnaill (d. 906) appears to be correct. It is possible that 'úa Néill' here might refer to Domnall's descent from Níall Noígíallach, or it could be an attempt to link him with Clann Néill.¹⁹⁵ It is notable that the hostages given by the Ulaid include the coarb of Comgall, that is the abbot of Bangor, the most significant church in Ulaid. One might not expect a churchman to have to act as a hostage and live at a royal court; and indeed the Irish term used is *aitire* 'hostage-surety', and so here is perhaps an instance of a more specific use of the term by an annalist, with the cleric acting as a surety who would hope to be ransomed within ten days. It is striking that the poem envisages the abbot as 'en-kinging' Domnall; the only instance we have of such an action is in 993:

AU 993.8

Muirecán o Boith Dhomnaig, comarba Patraicc, for cuairt i Tír n-Eogain coro erlegh gradh righ for Aedh m. n-Domnaill i fiadnuse samhtha Patraicc, & co tuc mor-chuairt Thuaiscirt Erenn.

Muirecán from Both Domnaig, successor of Patrick, was on circuit in Tír nEógain and conferred kingly orders on Áed son of Domnall, in the presence of Patrick's community, and he also made a great visitation of the north of Ireland.

This is one of very few instances of clerical 'ordination' of kings in pre-Norman Ireland. Áed had been king for some four years already, so whatever ceremony took place, it was not his original inauguration. We would probably expect that an abbot of Armagh would have a role in such a ceremony for a king of Cenél nEógain, which makes the assertion of the poem in *AU* 1099 more interesting. Of course, the sentiment of the poem (even if the poem is contemporary with the events of 1099) may be purely poetic rather than describing actuality. One more feature deserves attention: events in 993 took

¹⁹⁴ *AU* 1099.8.

¹⁹⁵ Thus performing the same function as the genealogies tracing Meic Lochlainn descent from Níall Glúndub; cf. n. 190 above.

place *i fiadnaise* 'in the presence of' which is also a technical legal formula for witnesses in contracts and cases. The same concept is found in the second line of the 1099 poem, and is supported by the final line which speaks of events *ro sil[l]ed* 'looked upon, beheld'.¹⁹⁶ This shows that a fundamental principle of Irish law applied in hostage-taking as well as in many other areas: the public display of activities validated them. The poet's assertion that witnesses saw the taking of the Ulaid's hostages is an affirmation of Domnall's overlordship.

Certainly, in the years around 1100 domination of Ulaid was a main bone of contention between Domnall and Muirchertach Úa Briáin. In 1102 'the hostages of the men of Ireland' (*Eiteredha fer n-Erenn*) were handed over to the abbot of Armagh for the guarantee of a year's peace between Domnall and Muirchertach.¹⁹⁷ Again, the term used is *aitire*, and here we may suspect we are dealing with sureties rather than hostages who were expected to live in the keeping of the abbot of Armagh. The 'men of Ireland' formula probably refers to the fact that between them Domnall and Muirchertach held hostages of all the Irish provinces.

After this peace Domnall once again had to deal with the Ulaid, and conducted a 'great war' (*cocad mór*) against them. Muirchertach assembled a great army to come to the aid of the Ulaid; after a stand-off, Domnall made a surprise attack on part of Muirchertach's army, killing the king of Osraige, the king of Cíarraige and a number of other nobles at Mag Coba. Domnall's spoils included the royal tent and a *camlinne* (probably a battle standard).¹⁹⁸ Despite this apparently decisive defeat Muirchertach persisted, a testament to the resources he could marshal. The abbot of Armagh travelled to Dublin in 1105 in another attempt to make peace, but fell ill and died at Duleek.¹⁹⁹

In 1107 the new abbot of Armagh negotiated a year's peace between Domnall and Muirchertach, and he did so again in 1109.²⁰⁰ By this time Domnall was middle-aged and we begin to see his offspring taking an active role in enforcing Cenél nEógain overlordship. In 1111 the Ulaid attacked Tulach Óc and cut down its sacred trees; in retaliation Domnall's son Níall made a raid which carried off a huge number of cows.²⁰¹ In the same year a meeting was held between Domnall and the king of Ulaid, and again

¹⁹⁶ The reading is of course *ro siledh* 'dripped, poured' which though possible makes little sense in the context of the poem.

¹⁹⁷ AU 1102.8.

¹⁹⁸ AU 1103.5.

¹⁹⁹ AU 1105.3.

²⁰⁰ AU 1107.8, 1109.5.

²⁰¹ AU 1111.6.

the king of Ulaid handed over hostages (*eteredha*).²⁰² As we have seen above, these concessions were made to Domnall *a ríara féin* 'of his own demand'. Troubles with the Ulaid continued, and in 1113 Domnall invaded once more, dividing Ulaid between two branches of the Dál Fiatach dynasty, and reserving some of the territory for himself.²⁰³

Let us step back to consider the general trends in Mac Lochlainn overlordship. Though he often led hostings outside the north, and regularly locked horns with Muirchertach Úa Briain, Domnall's perennial struggle was to secure the submission of the Ulaid, who were often supported by Muirchertach. Thus the Ulaid became a proxy theatre of conflict between the two great overkings. This is not to suggest that the Ulaid themselves were impotent, and that Domnall was forced to invade repeatedly shows that they had considerable might of their own; moreover, their rulers were apparently willing to disregard the fate of the hostages held by Domnall. This resistance on the part of Domnall's eastern neighbours saw an escalation in his responses: the carrying off of a large cattle-tribute in 1111, followed by Domnall taking the hostages as he pleased; when this did not work, he divided Ulaid between rival dynasts. This last tactic was not new, but the fact that Domnall is said to have retained territories for himself is striking: he was essentially annexing land to the kingship of the North, land to which he had no hereditary right. That he did so suggests that he expected to be able to put this settlement into practice, which implies that the scale of overkingship (and particularly the level of control in external provinces) had developed by the twelfth century. We shall return to this matter in Chapter VI. However, it is important to note that the foundations of Domnall's overkingship were the same as that of earlier Cenél nEógain kings: maintenance of dominance over the Airgíalla, and aggression against Cenél Conaill. The exaction of hostages was the main method of ensuring submission in the twelfth century as it had been earlier.

Domnall was succeeded by his son Conchobar, and in the following years the pattern of aggression against the Ulaid continued.²⁰⁴ Meic Lochlainn activities were largely restricted to the north by the power of Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair of Connacht, though Tairdelbach's supremacy was continuously contested by the other leading Irish kings.²⁰⁵ Conchobar was succeeded by his nephew Muirchertach, the second great Mac Lochlainn king of the twelfth century, and in several respects Muirchertach followed the

²⁰² *AU* 1111.10.

²⁰³ *AU* 1113.7.

²⁰⁴ E.g. *AU* 1122.5, 1130.5.

²⁰⁵ See J. Ryan, *Toirdelbach Ó Conchubair*, O'Donnell Lecture (Dublin 1966).

policies of his predecessors. In 1147 he was joined by the Airgíalla and resumed the Cenél nEógain custom of attacking the Ulaid, defeating them at Lecale and taking their hostages.²⁰⁶ He returned again in 1148 and carried off more hostages, including a son of the king, Cú Ulad Mac Duinn Slébe. He returned yet again in the same year and temporarily expelled Cú Ulad from the kingship. Tigernán Úa Rúairc of Bréifne then led an army to Ulaid to restore Cú Ulad, who was promptly ejected by his own people; he resumed the kingship a year later. The whole campaign was brought to a conclusion when Muirchertach held a meeting (*comdál*) at Armagh, attended by his own nobles, those of Airgíalla and of Ulaid:

AFM 1148

co n-dernsat ogh-sídh fo Bachaill Íosa b-i f-fiadhnaisi comharba Pattraicc, & a shamhtha, & ro fhagaibhsíot gialla acc Ua Lochlainn. Braighde Ceneoil c-Conaill dan[o], lá b-Ua Lochlainn.

and made full peace under the *Bachall Ísu*, in the presence of the successor of Patrick and his clergy; and they left hostages with Úa Lochlainn. The hostages of Cenél Conaill were also with Úa Lochlainn.

Here we see once more peacemaking at Armagh with relics, the rendering of hostages, and the presence of clerics as witnesses (*i fiadhnaisi*) to guarantee the agreement.

The events of 1149 are of considerable interest. Cú Ulad regained the kingship of Ulaid, and Muirchertach marched against him. Yet Donnchad Úa Cerbaill, king of Airgíalla, rendered up his own son to Muirchertach *tar cenn Ulad* 'for the sake of the Ulaid'.²⁰⁷ It seems that the overking of Airgíalla, though well aware of the obligations to his overlord, still wished to maintain friendly relations with his neighbours the Ulaid, and he seems to have tried to help both sides. Thus, later in 1149 Muirchertach and the forces of the North again came against the Ulaid, and Donnchad was with Muirchertach. They plundered much of Ulaid, and in the end Cú Ulad 'came into the house of Úa Lochlainn, and delivered his own son up to him as a hostage' (*i ngíallna*); whether this is the same son Muirchertach carried off the previous year is unknown. We then see Donnchad acting in alliance with Cú Ulad against Brega; thus Donnchad had been successful in avoiding the alienation of his neighbour, and they were able to act as allies in submission to, but independently of their overking Muirchertach. Muirchertach for his part, having secured the north, went on a grand tour to Bréifne, where Tigernán

²⁰⁶ AFM 1147.

²⁰⁷ AFM 1149.

Úa Rúairc submitted to him, and then to Dublin where the king of Leinster, Díarmait Mac Murchada also submitted.²⁰⁸

In 1151 Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair defeated Tairdelbach Úa Bríain of Munster in the battle of Móin Mór, one of the bloodiest of the twelfth century.²⁰⁹ Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn was disinclined to allow Úa Conchobair to build up too much power in the south and led a large army to northern Connacht to receive hostages from Úa Conchobair.²¹⁰ In 1152 Muirchertach and Úa Conchobair concluded a peace treaty at Beleek, 'where they made friendship under the staff of Jesus, and the relics of Colum Cille', though we are not given any other details of guarantees or pledges.²¹¹ Yet in 1153 Úa Conchobair partitioned Munster and banished Úa Bríain to the north.²¹² Muirchertach decided to intervene on the side of Úa Bríain, and in his campaign of that year decisively defeated the Connachta. In addition, he accepted the resubmission of the king of Mide for which faithfulness he granted him all Mide and lands in Leinster, and restored Tairdelbach Úa Bríain to the kingship of Thomond.²¹³ Ó Corráin characterised this campaign as an 'unqualified success'; Muirchertach was approaching the acme of his power.²¹⁴

It is again interesting to consider how the mechanisms of overkingship had developed by this point. The conquest and partitioning of kingdoms between different claimants, seen sporadically in the ninth and tenth centuries, is reported far more often. The power of a great king like Muirchertach was so extensive that he did not even have to travel to Leinster to receive its hostages; Mac Murchada sent them to him. Hostages were still the currency of overlordship; the king of Mide was granted Leinster lands in Uí Fáeláin and Uí Failge, lands to which he had no historical right whatsoever, but after Muirchertach's settlement of 1153 the king of Leinster was not in a position to argue:

AFM 1153

táinig Ua Maoileachlainn ina thigh co b-fárcaibh gialla aige, & do rad-somb an Midhe uile dhó ó Sionainn co fairrge, & Uí bh-Faolain, & Uí bh-Failge.

Úa Maíl Sechnaill came into his [Muirchertach's] house and left him hostages, and he [Muirchertach] gave him all Mide from the Shannon to the sea, and Uí Fáeláin, and Uí Failge.

²⁰⁸ *AT*, *AFM* 1149.

²⁰⁹ *AT*, *AFM* 1151; *MCB* 1151.3.

²¹⁰ *AT*, *AFM* 1151.

²¹¹ *AFM* 1152.

²¹² *AFM* 1153.

²¹³ *AFM* 1153.

²¹⁴ Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, p. 162.

Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair had not been deposed from his kingship and was still the only king in Ireland able to put up a fight against Muirchertach, and attempted a seaborne invasion of the north in 1154, which defeated fleets of Man and the Isles hired by Muirchertach (the use of which forces hints at the scale of Muirchertach's fiscal resources), but achieved little else.²¹⁵ In turn Muirchertach led an army to Connacht, razed it, and then went to Dublin to accept its submission. Muirchertach granted the Ostmen the huge stipend (*túarastal*) of 1200 cows for accepting him as overking.²¹⁶

Úa Conchobair was now in his mid-sixties but still unwilling to give up the fight. He began building a coalition against Muirchertach but died in 1156 'king of Ireland with opposition', and Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn was now supreme throughout Ireland, a position no Uí Néill king had ever achieved, even though *AU* had occasionally awarded the title. This was now the summit of the Cenél nEógain overkingship, and at the consecration of Mellifont in 1157 Muirchertach acted in the capacity of 'king of Ireland'.²¹⁷

From this time comes an interesting document which attests to the aspirations of the Meic Lochlainn. It is the poem *A Mbuirheartaigh mbic Néill náir*, also known as 'The Circuit of Ireland by Muircheartach mac Néill'.²¹⁸ The text has recently been discussed by Ó Corráin, who has concluded that far from being what it purports to be, a contemporary description of the circuit of Ireland made by Muirchertach mac Néill meic Áeda in 941-2, the text is in fact a historicist construction from the reign of Muirchertach mac Néill Meic Lochlainn, intended to shine on him the reflected glory of his Uí Néill predecessor.²¹⁹ For in 1156-7 Mac Lochlainn did go on a rough circuit of Ireland. It began as a journey eastwards to subdue a rebellion by the Ulaid, but he then went southwards to Dublin, Leinster and Osraige, and received their hostages. He returned to Leinster and proceeded from there to divide Munster between the Uí Briain and Meic Carthaig, before returning home.²²⁰ Ó Corráin sees the poem as a celebration of these exploits, utilising the story of the tenth-century exploits of Muirchertach mac Néill. The further purpose was genealogical. As we have seen the Meic Lochlainn

²¹⁵ *AT*, *AFM* 1154. Cf. S. Duffy, 'Irishmen and Islesmen in the kingdoms of Dublin and Man, 1052-1171', *Ériu* 43 (1992), 93-133: 123-5.

²¹⁶ *AFM* 1154.

²¹⁷ *AU* 1157.4.

²¹⁸ Ed. & transl. J. O'Donovan, 'The Circuit of Ireland, by Muircheartach mac Neill, Prince of Aileach', *Tracts Relating to Ireland* 1 (Dublin 1841), 24-58; also ed. & transl. E. Hogan, *Móirthimchell Éirenn uile dorigne Muirchertach mac Néill* (Dublin 1901).

²¹⁹ Ó Corráin, 'Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn'.

²²⁰ *AU*, *AFM* 1156, 1157.

actually descended from the Clann Domnaill branch of the Cenél nEógain dynasty, and it is something of a surprise that they managed to take the kingship in 1036. The implied descent in *A Mhuircheartaigh mhic Néill náir* makes them a segment of the Clann Néill side of the dynasty, descended from Níall Glúndub, king of Tara (d. 919), father of the Muirchertach who went on circuit in 941-2. These were glorious ancestors for the Meic Lochlainn to have, and indeed we find this doctrine in some of the genealogical collections, showing that the pedigree had probably been concocted as early as the reign of Domnall úa Lochlainn.²²¹ The text then provides a glorious historical background for Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, just as *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* (written ca 1100) did for the Uí Briain and *Caithréim Cellacháin Chaisil* (written probably 1127x34) did for the Meic Carthaig.²²²

The heights attained by Muirchertach in 1156-7 could not last. Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair had inherited his father's kingship of Connacht, and though it took him some time to build up his own power base he was soon able to challenge Muirchertach. For a couple of years there was relative stability, but as on many previous occasions the Ulaid rose up against Muirchertach. Once again he led a hosting into Ulaid and expelled the king, and the Ulstermen 'gave their hostages (*géill*) to Úa Lochlainn, through the might of his regal power (*tria nert righe*)'.²²³ The king of Ulaid attempted to recover his kingdom, but the Ulstermen expelled him through fear of Muirchertach and he was imprisoned by Muirchertach's old ally, Donnchad Úa Cerbaill of the Airgíalla. After a further great hosting to Ulaid Muirchertach held a meeting at Armagh, and the king of Ulaid was restored to his throne in exchange for his own daughter, and 'the son of every chief of Ulaid' (*mac cecb toisigh d' Ulltaibh*) as hostages (*i m-braightechus*), as well as a number of valuable treasures. Despite this agreement, in the following year Muirchertach blinded the king of Ulaid (for what transgression we are not told) which action violated the *Bachall Ísu* in whose presence the settlement had been made, as well as offending Donnchad Úa Cerbaill who had also stood as guarantor.²²⁴ This outrage was an excuse for Muirchertach's opponents, led by Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair, to rise up against him. Firstly Rúaidrí gained the submission, and support of the men of Mide, Leinster and Dublin. Most importantly Donnchad Úa Cerbaill 'came into his house';

²²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 247-50.

²²² For the dating, see M. Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib: Some Dating Considerations', *Peritia* 9 (1995), 354-77; D. Ó Corráin, 'Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisik: History or Propaganda?', *Ériu* 25 (1974), 1-69.

²²³ *AU* 1165.

²²⁴ *AU* 1166.

clearly Donnchad thought his erstwhile overking had gone too far.²²⁵ And the hosting marched to Tír nEógain, at the invitation of the Cenél nEógain, many of whom were disgusted by Muirchertach's actions and had abandoned their support for him. Muirchertach was killed with only a very small party remaining faithful to him, and the Ulster annalist clearly felt justice had been done:

AU 1166

A great marvel and wonderful deed was done then: viz., the king of Ireland to fall without battle, without contest, after his dishonouring the successor of Patrick and *Bachall Ísu* and the successor of Colum Cille and the Gospel of Martin and many clergy besides. His body then was carried to Armagh and buried there, in dishonour of the successor of Colum Cille and his community, and the community of Colum Cille fasted regarding it, together with the head of the students of Derry - for his being carried to a cemetery.

Thus for all his supposed royal power, Muirchertach was undone by violating a peace-agreement, though it is remarkable that he was still able to take to the field in old age. The position of leading king in Ireland passed to Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair, who was not able to enjoy it for long before the English invaded. The Meic Lochlainn meanwhile were able to retain some power in Cenél nEógain into the thirteenth century, but supremacy in the north gradually passed to the Clann Néill branch of the dynasty, the later O'Neills.

Conclusion: the Practice of Overkingship

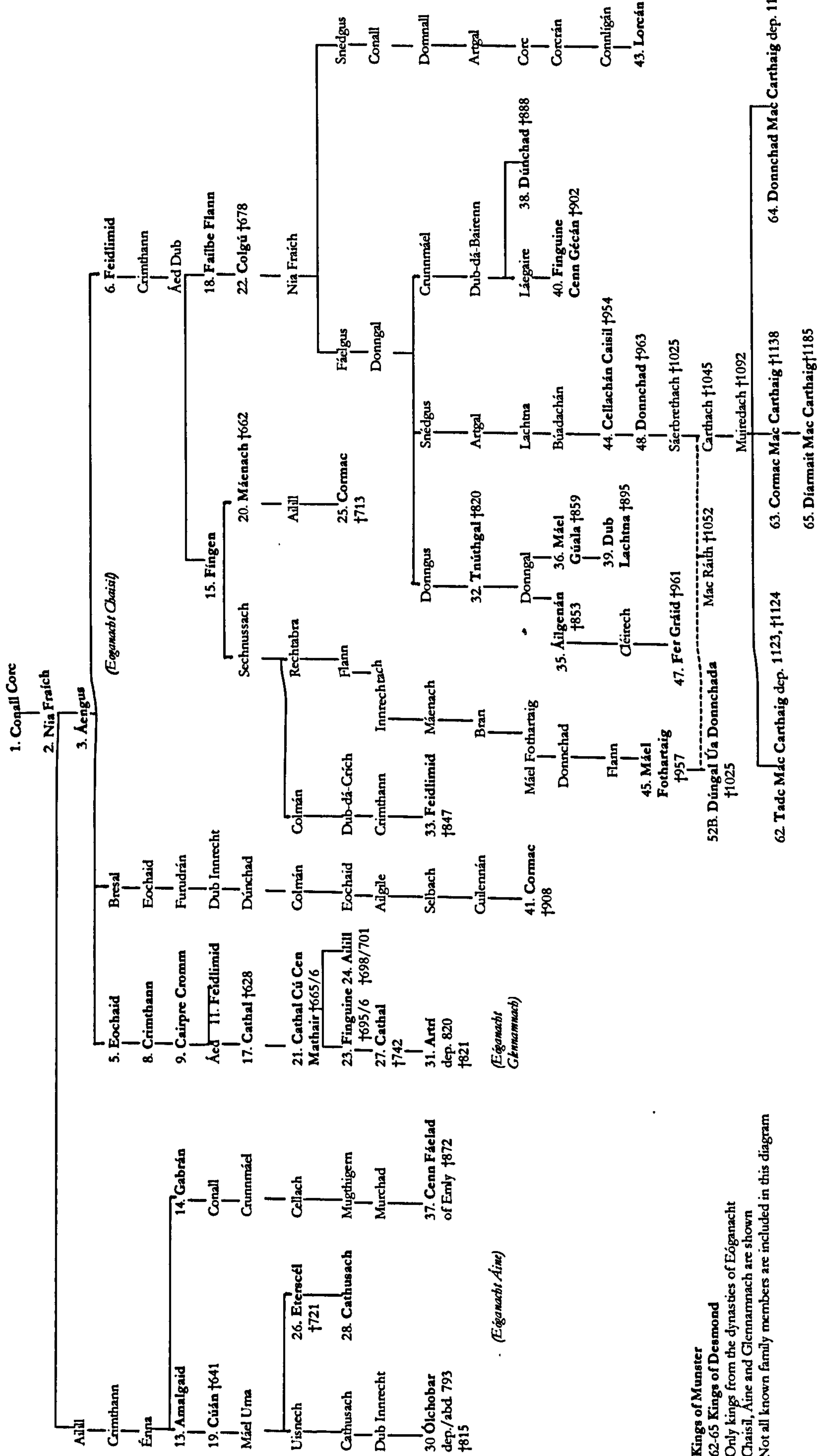
In this chapter we have covered a lot of ground in examining different examples of political relationships and the practice of overkingship. We have noted the difficulties in attempting to discern the extent to which these practices may have changed over time, and noted that for example the recording of 'coming into the house' does not necessarily imply a new form of submission practice being used in the eleventh (or an earlier) century. It is important to note that the taking of hostages was a key practice until the coming of the Normans (and indeed later), and in some of the later annals we have indicators of the kinds of hostages which were taken. On many occasions peace was made between kingdoms only for the treaty to lapse or be broken, and one gets the sense that Irish kings were often prepared to disregard the oaths sworn to guarantee

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

these arrangements. That said, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn's actions so outraged opinion that he precipitated his own downfall.

We have seen the articulation of relationships of overlordship in various ways. The 'Poem on the Airgíalla' seems to be written from the point of view of the sub-kingdoms, as a way of bolstering their own position and minimizing the claims the overkings of Tara and Cenél nEógain had on them. *Lebor na Cert* on the other hand, written towards the end of the period and in the context of a potential overkingship of all Ireland, is written from the point of view of the great Munster overkings, and conceives of their overlordship in terms of tributes and *túarastal*; the giving of luxury stipends may well be a development of overkingship practice in the ninth and later centuries. In the case of *Frithfolad Caisil* it is harder to determine whether the point of view is more from the top downwards or *vice versa*, but the 'West Munster Synod', like the Airgíalla poem, seems to be constructing political relationships from the point of view of the subjugated. The most important point to note about all this material is the extent to which relationships were contingent and negotiable. The chronicle-records show aspiring overkings time and time again intervening in other territories, sometimes with apparent success but often finding that their actions have not led to long-term results: the relationship between Cenél nEógain and the Ulaid is a good example. Sub-kingdoms naturally wished to make the best of their position and in the struggles between the great overkings in the eleventh and twelfth centuries the 'transfer' of overlordship from one authority to another (symbolised by hostages, the currency of power) show the extent to which the Irish polity was fluid. But this was not a new departure; political units were created, fragmented and re-ordered at a far earlier date, as the author of the 'West Munster Synod' knew well.

Table 8: Eóganacht Kings of Munster and Meic Carthaig Kings of Desmond to 1185



Chapter IV: The Christian Identity of an Irish Kingdom

Thus far we have considered royal practices pertaining to succession, landholding, political relationships and overkingship. In Chapter II we briefly examined matters such as donations to the formulation of dynastic imagery and donations to the Church. This chapter will further consider Christian aspects of kingship, specifically examining Christian influences on kingly practice and some methods employed to maintain an aura of specialness and distinction about kings. Once more these are topics worthy of their own full-length investigation. Several elements overlap with matters discussed in other chapters, but again here we will attempt to gain an overall picture of historical practice by reference to a case study.

The question of what exactly made a king a king is one that this thesis does not attempt to address comprehensively. In the period under consideration, the Irish polity had crystallized into its 'classical' shape and the main dynasties had, in the main, been in existence for a number of generations. This aura of antiquity was, as we have seen, one of the essential symbols of fitness, demonstrated again and again through genealogical material. Pedigrees were not the only component of royal status. Though there was not a 'class' of royals as such, a perception existed that there was something fundamentally special about kings.¹ Kings who did not descend from kings did not, in a sense, exist in early medieval Ireland, for when they acquired kingship they quickly had an appropriate genealogy concocted which provided the requisite essentials. We shall encounter examples of this process at a provincial level of kingship in Chapter V.² In terms of dynastic practice, over *la longue durée*, even after heredity and legitimacy were established, royal dynasties in Ireland and elsewhere put a considerable effort into making a distinction between themselves and the rest, even if some of the rest are extremely wealthy nobles with more actual power than the royal dynasty itself. It was important for any dynasty with ambitions of durability to accrue a considerable amount of 'distinction' or 'cultural capital', for it could pay dividends when other royal resources, be they followers, lands or military capability were straitened by circumstances.³

¹ T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Crith Gablach and the law of status', *Peritia* 5 (1986), 53-73: 62 which shows that heirs were classed as being of noble rather than royal status; the best current introduction to the 'specialness' of kings is Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 57-88.

² Classic comparanda are the alleged Carolingian links of Hugh Capet; see R. Fawtier, *Capetian Kings of France* (London 1960), pp. 55-7; E.M. Hallam & J. Everard, *Capetian France 987-1328* (2nd edn, Harlow 2001), pp. 83-90.

³ For these ideas see M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, transl. G. Roth & C. Wittlich as *Economy and Society: an outline of interpretive sociology* (2 vols, Berkeley 1968), ii, pp. 1111-57; P. Bourdieu, *La*

This study attempts to trace very diffuse signs of royal power. Chronicle-evidence can tell us much about the internal history of a dynasty, and about its successes and conquests at home and abroad. We have already encountered several literary (and indeed inscriptional) texts which sought to cultivate a distinctiveness around kings and dynasties. In what follows, perhaps to an ever greater extent than previous chapters, analysis of the audience and context of particular texts is important, because we are seeking to identify manifestations of kingship which are more elusive than for example the taking of hostages. The historical dimension is of course essential to the present methodology, and this is not neglected, but the hope is to consider some matters, which have been much discussed, in different ways. For example, the placing (if it can be termed thus) of royal personnel in churches is a recognised aspect of royal practice, and was the focus of a classic study by Ó Corráin.⁴ The phenomenon is well known from elsewhere in Europe. The motivations deduced for this practice are various, but the benefits which accrued to the royal dynasty (or its representatives) are normally taken to be the acquisition of church revenues and resources, and the extension of royal power. Terms such as 'royal power' are often used in contexts such as military capability and the enforcement of submissions, but I have not come across an attempt at a clear definition of what 'royal power' means in connection with churches. Does it mean that the church will supply the dynasty with revenues, billeting or even military forces when demanded? Does it imply that this church would promote support of the dynasty among those for whom it provided pastoral care, at whatever level of society they may be? Does one expect said church to create texts supporting the dynasty, and if so can we find examples of this? There are indications that all these manifestations of church support for a dynasty existed. It is perhaps a little disingenuous to present these questions as novel, since it is clear that many of those who have written about this subject have been aware of them.⁵ It is also clear that more thinking along these lines needs to take place, and in the present chapter we shall be particularly concerned with the third of these questions.

The dynasty which will be the main focus of the present study are the Eóganachta of Munster, with whom we have spent a considerable amount of time in

Distinction: critique social du jugement, transl. R. Nice, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London 1984); cf. H.A. Myers, *Medieval Kingship* (Chicago 1982).

⁴ D. Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais – Church and Dynasty', *Ériu* 24 (1973), 52-63.

⁵ E.g., Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais'; *idem*, 'The Early Irish Churches: Some Aspects of Organisation', in D. Ó Corráin (ed.), *Irish Antiquity: Essays and Studies Presented to Professor M.J. O'Kelly* (Cork 1981), pp. 327-41; A.S. Mac Shamhráin, *Church and Polity in Pre-Norman Ireland: The Case of Glendalough* (Maynooth 1996).

Chapter III. The reasoning behind the choice is partly that we have a good range of texts concerning them which bear upon the questions asked here. It will also let us consider further, in a tangential way, the questions of the overkingship of Ireland and the kingship of Tara; for a period at least the kings of Cashel were considered to be counterparts of the kings of Tara, and this element of their distinctiveness will repay consideration. Furthermore, the substantial amount of work which has been done on the Dál Cais, successors of Eóganachta as kings of Munster, will provide useful points of comparison.

The Historical Background of the Eóganachta Kingdoms

As is the case with the other significant dynasties of the pre-Norman period, the origins of the Eóganachta are lost in the mists of Irish prehistory, with only dim glimpses available through the lenses of origin-legends and historical geography.⁶ Ó Corráin still provides the clearest account of the distribution of the various Eóganacht groups across the province of Munster.⁷ It seems likely that groups who later called themselves Eóganachta (i.e., descendents of the legendary ancestor Eógan Mór) had risen to supremacy in various parts of the province at some point shortly before the dawn of Irish history or soon thereafter, at the expense of various groups who had been paramount in different parts of the province previously.⁸ Whether these latter groups (among them the Corcu Laígde and Músraige) were truly 'aboriginal' inhabitants of Munster and the Eóganacht 'invaders' (perhaps returning from piratical activity around Britain, as has been suggested) is a moot point for our purposes and is in any case probably unanswerable.⁹ By the same token, we cannot say for sure whether the groups later calling themselves Eóganacht were originally related; given the later tendency for outside groups to attach themselves to existing dynasties by means of fabricated genealogies it is entirely possible that many of the later 'Eóganachta' had differing origins.¹⁰ The problems here are very similar to those facing the student of the prehistory of the Uí Néill; there we are really dealing with not one but several dynasties.

⁶ D. Sproule, 'Origins of the Eóganachta', *Ériu* 35 (1984), 31-7.

⁷ Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, pp. 1-9.

⁸ *Ibid.* See also Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 169-82.

⁹ Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 184 and V. Di Martino, *Roman Ireland* (Cork 2002), pp. 92-5.

¹⁰ We note that *Frithfolad Caisil* excluded the dynasties of Raithlenn, Loch Léin and Uí Fidgente from the provincial kingship and even denied them the title 'Eóganacht'. Though above we followed Charles-Edwards in considering this a reflex of the fact that these dynasties were not of the 'inner circle' of Eóganachta who shared the overkingship in the eighth century, it is just possible that the text reflects a historical reality, namely that these dynasties were not originally Eóganachta.

The genealogies present a common genetic origin, but this information is more useful as a guide to the perceptions and concerns of the genealogists themselves rather than an indicator of the true origins of the different groups. In the case of the Eóganachta the source materials are more meagre than for Uí Néill. By the eighth century when sources become fuller, Eóganacht dominance in Munster was assured, as we have seen in Chapter III. The real focus of the overkingdom was in East Munster (*Aurmuu*), an area dominated by the three dynasties of Eóganacht Áine, Eóganacht Chaisil and Eóganacht Glennamnach, situated in east Limerick, Tipperary and north Cork. The symbolic capital of the overkingdom was the rock of Cashel. The place-name itself might be significant, Irish *caisel* being an early borrowing from Latin *castellum*.¹¹ This fact has lent some weight to the idea that the Eóganacht had been raiders of Britain in the late-Roman/sub-Roman period. No earlier name for the site seems to have been recorded, which is surprising as the rock is impossible to miss rising up from the plains of Tipperary. It would have been less striking in the early middle ages before the chapel and cathedral were built, but it is hard to believe that it was not a named place of some significance from a very early date. Yet this is precisely what the Eóganachta's own origin-legends would have us believe. I propose to look at these texts first, for though they are not the earliest relevant materials, they can tell us a good deal about the perceptions the Eóganacht kings had about themselves.

The Eóganacht Dynasty and the Coming of Christianity

The Eóganachta aetiologies consist of genealogical material and various sagas, and though Eógan Mór was the eponymous founder of the dynasty, the legends which are most important are those concerning Conall Corc. Corc is perhaps the most significant ancestral figure for the Eóganachta. He often stands as the apical figure in their pedigrees and in the genealogical scheme is the great-great-grandson of Eógan Mór, the eponymous ancestor of the dynasties. Corc was regarded as the true founder of Eóganacht success, and as such fulfils the role played by Níall Nóigíallach for Uí Néill. Indeed, several texts synchronize Corc and Níall, representing them as the great dynastic founders of north and south respectively, though the antiquity of these

¹¹ J. Vendryes, *Lexique Étymologique de L'Irlandais ancien* (Dublin and Paris, 1959-), C (Dublin and Paris 1987), s.v., pp. 22-3.

traditions is questionable.¹² The Munster material dealing with Conall Corc, which altogether might be termed a saga, is preserved only in fragments.¹³ Myles Dillon's assessment of these fragments was that '[s]ome of them are very old, and appear to preserve early tradition'.¹⁴ Perhaps the most significant text is that concerned with the discovery of Cashel and Corc's establishment of it as the seat of his kingship. Dillon edited and translated this story, apparently a conflation of two texts, over sixty years ago.¹⁵ It is preserved in a fifteenth-century manuscript (Dublin, Trinity College MS 1336 [H.3.17]), and is titled *Senchas Fagbála Caisil 7 Beandacht Ríg* 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel and the King's Blessing'. The essence of the story is that a pair of swineherds, who served the kings of two Munster kingdoms (Múscraige and Éile) were in the vicinity of Cashel when the site itself was shown to them in a vision, and the angel of the Lord told them whoever should first kindle fire in Cashel would receive the kingship of Munster.¹⁶ The swineherd of the king of Múscraige went to Corc and told him, so that ultimately Corc went to Cashel to light a fire and also held a feast; and in return the king of Múscraige was to be the senior sub-king 'who should be summoned to the king of Cashel first'.¹⁷ Meanwhile the swineherd of the king of Éile had told his king, named Conall, the same news, and Conall hastened to Cashel to find Corc already there. Conall was displeased, for Cashel lay within the lands of Éile, but Corc agreed to pay him off with seven *cumala* (the standard honour-price for a king).¹⁸ The same amount went to the swineherd (interesting enough in itself), named Duirdriu, who then pronounced a blessing upon Corc's kingship. The story then states:

'It is the duty of the Uí Duirdrenn [Duirdriu's descendents] to pronounce this blessing every year upon each king who shall succeed to Cashel, and they are entitled to seven cumals from every 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, namely that he have truth and mercy.'¹⁹

¹² V. Hull (ed. & transl.), 'Conall Corc and the Kingdom of Cashel', *ZCP* 18 (1930), 420-1: *Rob e Niall mac Eachach Muidmedoin ro-bo rig for Eirind in tan do-luid Corc mac Luigdeach tairis* 'Níall son of Echu was king over Ireland when Corc son of Lugaid came over [the sea from Britain]'.
¹³ These are listed by V. Hull in 'The Exile of Conall Corc', *PMLA* 56 (1941), 937-50.
¹⁴ M. Dillon, 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel', *Ériu* 16 (1952), 61.
¹⁵ *Ibid.*
¹⁶ *Ibid.*, §4.
¹⁷ *Ibid.*, §5.
¹⁸ *Ibid.*, §6.
¹⁹ *Ibid.*, §7. Note that the importance of the Uí Duirdrenn is also recognised in *Frithfolad Caisil* §9: *VII cumala do Élib re cach na* [gap: extent approx. 7 characters] *a cumdach fobith Durtrend cetafuair Caisil trian do*

There follows a note about one king upon whom the blessing was not pronounced, who duly died a violent death, but was the only king of Cashel who died so, thus fulfilling the prophecy Patrick uttered when he baptized Áengus mac Nad Fraích as the first Christian king of Cashel.

This relatively straightforward account is prefaced by a much shorter version, which simply mentions the vision appearing to the swineherds and then gives what appear to be list of benedictions on the kings of Cashel: 'a powerful blessing of prosperity south upon you all, kings of Cashel: blessing of rule, blessing of cattle, blessing of victory'.²⁰ The text states that these blessings will fall on the king of Cashel *céne forcomédaidh fírinni co fodlaib trócaire* 'so long as you keep justice with the divisions of mercy'.²¹ The emphasis on the justice of a ruler is found in several other Irish texts, most notably *Audacht Morainn*, but here it is clearly paralleled with Christian mercy and these blessings come from the Lord.²² After this section there is a list of the kings of Cashel from Corc down to Cathal mac Finguine (d. 742), a list which has been extended to Dub Lachtna (d. 895) at a later date.²³ The list may be compared with a statement in the *Tripartite Life* of Patrick that there were 27 kings *ro-fallnaisit fo bachaill* 'who ruled under a crozier' in Cashel down to the time of Finguine Cenn Gécán, Dub Lachtna's successor.²⁴ This imagery, which connects the kingship of Cashel with episcopal rule, occurs in other texts also. After the list of kings there follows a series of *dicta* uttered by the swineherd of Múscraige concerning the kings of Cashel, which are in the difficult form known as *rosc* 'rhetoric'; several of the ideas in it seem to be taken from *Audacht Morainn*, but the *dicta* have so far defied attempts at translation.²⁵ In essence they seem to be a prophecy concerning Corc and the kingdom of Cashel, which also looks back to the legendary pseudohistory of Ireland, with the taking of the Southern Half by Eber son of Míl Espáine.²⁶ The clearest part of the *dicta* is a refrain which runs: *respondit rex 7*

Ib Durdrend' anaill do rig 'Seven *cú mala* for the Éile for every ... their *cúmdach* because Duirdriu first prepared [taking *fúar* as v.n. of fo-fer] Cashel: a third to the Uí Duirdrenn, the rest to the king'.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, §2.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² See F. Kelly (ed. & transl.), *Audacht Morainn* (Dublin 1976) for the oldest version of this text. *Bennacht* 'blessing' only occurs here once, in l. 147.

²³ Dillon, 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel', §2.

²⁴ W. Stokes (ed. & transl.), *The Tripartite Life of Patrick, with other documents relating to that Saint* (2 vols, London 1887), i, p. 196.

²⁵ Vernam Hull made some early attempts: see 'Varia Hibernica 2: *móraigid*', *Celtica* 5 (1960), 136-7; 'A passage in *Senchas Faghála Caisil*', *ZCP* 29 (1962/4), 187-8; 'Two passages in the Story of the Finding of Cashel', *ZCP* 30 (1967), 14-6. Kelly re-edited the *dicta* as an appendix to *Audacht Morainn*, pp. 72-4, but did not attempt a translation.

²⁶ Dillon, 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel', §3, ll. 35-62.

dixit: rob fír fíthar, rob bríg bríghther ‘may it be a truth which is confirmed, may it be a power that is enforced’; *Respondit populus: amen.*²⁷ After the conclusion of these *dicta* the narrative restarts with the longer and more explicit version summarised above.

The text, then, is a compilation of two similar versions of the story and contains material of varying levels of antiquity. Dillon believed that the first part dated from the eighth century; the list of kings originally ending with Cathal seems to suggest this, and there is nothing in the language to tell against it; the rhetoric need be no older.²⁸ The second account has Old Irish forms, but also several which are Middle Irish and this points to a date perhaps early in the tenth century. This date is also suggested by the presence of the Patrick legend in a form very close to that found in the Tripartite Life of Patrick, a text which we shall be examining below. On the other hand, the statement that kings would not die in violent circumstances seems to require a date before the death of Cormac mac Cuillenáin in 908.

The only extended discussion of this text is that of Byrne.²⁹ He suggested that the obscure rhetoric and the responses by king and people ‘may well be the actual formulae used at the consecration of the kings of Cashel’.³⁰ This does not take into account the fact that the *dicta* are uttered in the presence of the king of Múscraige rather than the king of Cashel, but the general obscurity of that section precludes putting too much weight on this. Byrne drew attention to the ‘pagan’ nature of the blessings, with their emphasis on fertility, the elements and suchlike. But he also pointed out that the word *bennacht* ‘blessing’ is a borrowing from Latin *benedictio*. There is nothing necessarily ‘pagan’ about associating fertility with kingship in the eighth century, or indeed any other time.³¹ Byrne observed that the longer version had been coloured by Patrician hagiography, and in discussing the line which states that the king should not die by violence provided he observes his prescriptions, ‘namely truth and mercy’, he noted ‘how the pagan concept has been assimilated to the language of the psalms’.³² Though Byrne was not completely explicit on the point, he was suggesting that in this text (or pair of texts) that pre-Christian conceptions of kingship in Munster were gradually ‘Christianized’ and that this process can be seen occurring at an early date in the first

²⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 42-3.

²⁸ L. Breatnach, ‘Poets and poetry’, in McCone & Simms, *Progress*, pp. 65-77 discusses the reasons for rejecting the assumption that *roscaid* indicates antiquity.

²⁹ Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 187-8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

³¹ See K. McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth 1990), pp. 31, 121. But cf. Byrne’s remarks on *Audacht Morainn* in *IKHK* p.25: ‘the oldest recension ... is purely pagan in outlook’.

³² Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 189 (footnote).

version of the story, and that it was essentially complete by the time of the redaction of the second version, which was influenced by Patrician hagiography and the doctrines of Armagh. The idea of kingship in Munster was, by the tenth century at any rate, a thoroughly Christian one, but this idea had a history that could be traced back a fair way.

Before we assess Byrne's conclusions, it would be useful to step back for a moment and consider what kind of text 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel' is. I have referred to it above as an 'origin-legend' of the Eóganachta, in that it explains the link between the Eóganachta, Cashel and the Munster kingship, further explaining the fortunes of Corc and his descendents as deriving from the blessing of God. This is in contrast with the Uí Néill origin-legend, 'the adventure of the sons of Eochaid Mugmedón' in which the sovereignty-goddess bestows kingship and dynastic success upon Níall.³³ The preoccupation of the Cashel material seems to be to present the dynasty as fundamentally Christian from the outset, to the point that the very seat of their kingship is miraculously revealed. This at least is true of the later version of the story. If we accept an early tenth-century date, the story can be seen to define a perception the Eóganachta had of themselves at this time, as *the* Christian dynasty in Munster which had a stake in the Patrician conversion of Ireland from the beginning and was just as connected to Armagh as the Uí Néill, if not more so. As we shall see, similar preoccupations are found in the *Tripartite Life*. The ultimate development of this idea is in *Lebor na Cert*, and in the very first section of *Lebor na Cert* as we have it contains a brief summary of the finding of Cashel.³⁴ The earlier version of the tale contained in 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel' itself is a little more difficult to interpret, primarily because of its conciseness. It shows that the revelation of Cashel by heaven was an idea older than the tenth century, but exactly how far back it goes we cannot say. The blessings and rhetorical material might be analysed as evidence of the assimilation of pagan concepts to Christian ideals, but what is the function of the text? It would not be going too far to extend Byrne's ideas and suggest that some part of the inauguration of the king of Cashel would include a summary account of the 'origins' of the kingship, together with what seem to be some kind of verbal formulae describing the greatness of the kingship. Even if the text has nothing to do with an inauguration

³³ Ed. & transl. W. Stokes, 'The Death of Crimthann son of Fidach, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedón', RC 24 (1903), 172-207; Ní Dhubhnaigh, 'Temair Breg, baile na fian and Echtra Mac nEchdach Mugmedóin'.

³⁴ Dillon, *Lebor na Cert*, ll 8-13.

per se (and as there is effectively no pre-Norman account of any inauguration ceremony of an Irish king we have no definite ideas about what rituals took place) it might still be representative of some kind of public occasion or festival involving both the king and the populace. In any case, the text was produced for consumption by some audience, however small, and it seeks to impart a particular message: the Eóganachta are a special dynasty, and this is why. One might say that all Irish dynastic aetiologies do this for their subjects, and to some extent that is true, but the fact that other dynasties are represented in this tale yet are pushed into functionary or background roles suggests that the text is concerned with highlighting the distinctiveness of Corc and his descendants.

However, the text is not just about the Eóganachta. It is, in some respects, written from a Múscraige perspective, inasmuch as it gives them a key role in the foundation of the kingship of Cashel for which they are rewarded with high status as a sub-kingdom of Cashel. We have seen in Chapter III that the Múscraige were prominent in *Frithfolad Caisil* and Charles-Edwards has discussed their treatment there, which implies that the king of the Múscraige was the equal of the Eóganacht kings from outside the inner circle of Caisil, Áine and Glennamnach.³⁵ The text also seems to articulate the claims to importance of Uí Duirdrenn, who shall pronounce the blessings on the king of Cashel yearly and receive seven *cumala* in return. In fact, there is something of a balancing act (particularly in the longer version) of the claims to importance of the Múscraige on the one hand and the Éile and Uí Duirdrenn on the other. The Éile lost the site of Cashel (we do not need to consider whether the text represents a historical incident in some way), but the text explains their importance; again, Charles-Edwards has shown how their high status is expressed in other texts such as *Frithfolad Caisil*.³⁶

Thus the 'Saga of the Finding of Cashel' betrays several concerns. It seems to be part of the world-view that would make Cashel a Christian centre of kingship from the beginning (despite being 'found' before the coming of Patrick), in contrast with Muirchú's pagan Babylon of Tara.³⁷ It is concerned about the relative precedence of Munster kings, particularly the relations of the kings of Cashel with the Múscraige and Éile, and in this it is related to *Frithfolaid Caisil* and *Lebor na Cert*. It is possible that the text we have preserves something of an actual public ceremony or rite in which the king

³⁵ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, pp. 542-3.

³⁶ Charles-Edwards, *ECl*, pp. 545-6 and n. 70.

³⁷ Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, p. 84: *in Temoria istorum Babylone*.

of Cashel took part, even if it was not the inauguration itself. The *responsio* of the people might be considered 'pagan'; but the best analogues are quite clearly to be found in the Bible.³⁸ The text does share features with the kind of material found in *Audacht Morainn* and some of the other *speculum principis* texts, but a key word is *bennacht* 'blessing' which is ultimately a Christian Latin word, though this would not necessarily have been transparent to the educated Irish ecclesiastic. Thus, though the traditions of the past of the Cashel kingship are to some extent mediated in this text, which after all is imperfectly preserved in a set of origin-legends, the point of view is fundamentally Christian.³⁹

Further, the second version of the story seems to show that an Armagh perspective had been taken on board by the Munster kings, or at least those who produced the text. This is further evidence for a date in the ninth century or later, and it may be usefully compared with another text which buys into a northern way of looking at the world, namely the *Tripartite Life* of Patrick. This awareness of a particular conception of history can also be found in secular texts, which show the influence of Uí Néill ideology. We noted above that some texts present Corc and Níall as contemporaries. A brief example is an unedited text which dates from perhaps the late-ninth or tenth centuries.⁴⁰ The form of the text is a poem of advice put into the mouth of Torna Éices, who is presented as a tutor to both Níall and Corc, and addresses several pieces of advice on the conduct and practice of kingship to them (principally to Níall). There is nothing particularly unique about the contents, but it belongs to the genre known as *Specula Principum* (of which we have already mentioned *Audacht Morainn*), a type of writing which seems to have been heavily influenced by the ideas of Munster ecclesiastics, as we shall see below.

I have dwelt on this story at some length because it forms a substantial part of the material dealing with the origins of the Eóganachta and the way they saw themselves, and more particularly how they wished to present their distinctiveness (and that of their kingship) to others. Cashel itself and the blessing of Patrick were part of

³⁸ The most obvious point of comparison is the Book of Nehemiah (alias 2 Esdras in the Vulgate) 8:6: *et benedixit Ezras Domino Deo magno et respondit omnis populus amen amen* 'and Ezra blessed the Lord the great God and all the people responded "amen, amen"'. In this context Ezra is proclaiming the Mosaic law to the people. Though the *dicta* in the 'Story' are uttered by Duirdriu in a different context, it seems very likely to me that the passage is influenced by 2 Esdras 8.

³⁹ For a similar German situation, and Einhard's views, see K.J. Leyser, *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society: Ottonian Saxony* (London 1979), pp. 80-1.

⁴⁰ Dublin, Trinity College 1281 (H.1.7) 174v and 1363 (H.4.22) 162. Torna's fosterage of Corc is stated also in 'Conall Corc and the kingdom of Cashel', 421: *fa comalta sein do Chorc .i. Torna Eices do Chiarraidi Luachra 7 Lair Derg, ben Torna* 'these were the foster-parents of Corc, namely Torna Éices of Cíarraige Lúachra and Láer Derg, wife of Torna' [my translation].

what made them different and superior to other kings in Munster, and indeed Ireland as a whole. There does seem to be an element of strongly Christian kingship from an early stage, which is not seen so clearly in other parts of Ireland. It is now for us to consider what other evidence there is for these ideas in Munster and how far back we can trace them.

Learned Culture in Early Munster

We must not suppose that the materials relating to Corc and the Christian kingship of Munster stood in isolation. Though the main concern of the present thesis is the period from the eighth to the twelfth centuries, I would like to make a brief *excursus* to the slightly earlier period, and consider the scholarly culture in Munster out of which the 'Story of the Finding of Cashel and the King's Blessing' developed. There are two main reasons for this. In the first place, a broader grasp of the texts containing similar ideas to those found in the 'Story' will allow us to understand that text better, and enhance our appreciation of what its authors were trying to do. We have already pointed to comparisons in *Audacht Morainn*. Secondly, we are concerned with how the kings of Munster cultivated the specialness of their rule over a long period, and it would be useful to see if any of these features can be found at a time anterior to the date of the 'Story'.

It has often been noted that sources for Munster history are particularly sparse in the early period, by which is meant that the annalistic record is scanty compared with the midlands and north. This is certainly the case, and Byrne's suggestion that the lack of concern in the south as to the dating of Easter was a contributing factor to the lack of annalistic record-keeping is one that might repay investigation.⁴¹ In any case, the southern Irish churches officially accepted the Roman practice of Easter dating at the synods of Mag Léne (near Durrow) around 630-1 and Mag nAilbe (Carlow) around 632.⁴² Byrne was also one of the earlier scholars to point to the high standards of Latin education in the south at an early period. The fame of Columbanus (trained at Bangor) and Adomnán of Iona together with the fuller source-record from the north sometimes incline us to think of that area being a scholarly power-house in the sixth and seventh centuries, but of course there were important centres all over Ireland.

⁴¹ Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 169-70.

⁴² M. Walsh & D. Ó Cróinín, *Cummian's Letter De Controversia Paschali and the De Ratione Computandi* (Toronto 1988), pp. 6-7.

There are a number of putatively early texts of the seventh and eighth centuries (in both Latin and Irish) with Munster connections but it is difficult to place many of them in definite historical contexts.⁴³ One probably early example which has been little examined to date is a poem of advice to a king addressed to king Máenach of Munster (d. 662), the first line of which is *Ro-chúala la nech légas libru*.⁴⁴ This poem appears in the Book of Leinster and is there attributed to the Leinster saint Mo Ling, whose *floruit* around the end of the seventh century (attested by his appearance in the guarantor-list of *Cáin Adomnáin*) would not make authorship impossible, though there is no other reason to suppose the poem was by him, as the author does not identify himself in the text and there is no other external evidence.⁴⁵ The contents of the poem are particularly notable, and detail a stern clerical conception of justice:

Rochúala la nech légas libru

Intí ances in mbidbaid iss é fessin as bidbu.

Rochúala la cech nduine nodléga:

Cech óen aric slabrada forrig cin cecha ndéna

I have heard it said by someone who reads books: he who spares a criminal is himself a criminal.

I have heard it said by every person who so reads: each one who devises chains quells crime, whatever he may do.

The poem specifies that the books in question are the books of God, and then the poet praises Máenach explicitly:

Móinach Casil comdas rí lasa marbtar drochdóini;

Atá Mumu lais i ssíd, rop maith Díä don dagrig.

Máenach of Cashel is a just king by whom evil folk are killed; Munster through him is at peace, may God be good to the noble king.

⁴³ A good exception to this rule is provided by the fragmentary legal tract *Cáin Fuithirbe*. See L. Breatnach, 'The ecclesiastical element in the Old Irish legal tract *Cáin Fuithirbe*', *Peritia* 5 (1986), 36-52.

⁴⁴ Ed. & transl. K. Meyer, 'An Old-Irish poem ascribed to St. Moling', *Miscellanea Hibernica* (Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 2, Urbana 1917), p. 567. The only recent comment on the text is in Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 82.

⁴⁵ M. Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The guarantor list of *Cáin Adomnáin*, 697', *Peritia* 1 (1982), 178-215.

The poet then makes a blessing on the king who killed the ‘evil folk’, and closes by exhorting more of the same:

*Dia mbad [f]rim contúased rí, ropad ní a chland dia éis,
Drochdóini lais dochum báis, ilar dagdóine ‘ma meis.*

*Timmairg na dóini tréna, airchis na dóini trúaga,
Tol maicc Dé cecha ndéna, iss é do less, rochúala.*

If a king would listen to me, his offspring after him would amount to something,
let him put evil folk to death, and have a multitude of good people around him.

Keep the strong ones in check, have pity on the wretched folk, perform the will of
God whatever you may do – that is your true advantage, I have heard.

This preoccupation with royal justice is striking, especially the strong calls for capital punishment. There is no room for mercy or leniency for evildoers; only the poor and wretched should have pity shown them. With this context in mind it is difficult to know what we should make of the text. If we accept the contents at face value the poem is evidence of a rather militant cleric’s attitude to crime and punishment in the later seventh century, in the form of praise-poetry. As far as I can see, the language is acceptably Old Irish, but there is nothing in the poem other than the reference to Máenach which provides any kind of date. The only real case that the poem is later would be to suppose that a later poet would want to recommend severe royal justice, on the basis that Máenach had acquired a reputation for such severity; otherwise the poem would not make sense. The question would then be who the poem was for; the obvious answer would be a later king of Cashel, though why a poem would be composed with reference to Máenach seems unanswerable. We have little other source-material with which to contextualise the poem. Nothing is known of Máenach other than the date of his death and that he was a member of the Cenél Fíngin branch of Eóganacht Chaisil. This sept of the dynasty produced several other kings, most notably Feidlimid mac Crimthainn. The concern with prosperity and peace is of course found other royal advice texts. Notably, this concern is found in connection with Máenach’s father Fíngen. In *AT* 619 at the notice of Fíngen’s death is inserted a quatrain:

In Muma

Re linn Fíngen maic Áeda

Table 9: List of Royal Advice-texts in Old and Middle Irish

[based on that in Roland M. Smith 'The *Speculum Principum* in Early Irish Literature', *Speculum* 2 (1927), pp. 411-455]

***Aibidil Luigni maic Éremóin* 'The Alphabet of Luigne mac Éremóin'**

Ed. K. Meyer, 'Das Alphabet des Cuigne mac Emoin', *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* 3 (1907), 226-30; ed. & transl. R.M. Smith, 'The Alphabet of Cuigne mac Emoin', *ZCP* 17 (1928), 45-72

***Audacht Morainn* 'The Testament of Morann'**

Ed. & transl. F. Kelly, *Audacht Morainn* (Dublin 1976); for the later recension see R. Thurneysen (ed.), 'Morands Fürstenspiegel', *ZCP* 11 (1917), 56-106

***Bríathartheosc Con Culainn* 'The Precept-instruction of Cú Chulainn'**

Ed. & transl. R.M. Smith, 'The *Bríathartheosc Conculaind*', *ZCP* 15 (1925), 187-92; also ed. M. Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dublin 1975), pp. 9-10

Cert cech ríge co réil

Ed. & transl. T. O'Donoghue, 'Cert Cech Ríge co Réil', in O. Bergin & C. Marstrander (edd.), *Miscellany presented to Kuno Meyer* (Halle a.S. 1912), pp. 258-77

Díambad messe bad ri réil

Ed. & transl. T. O'Donoghue, 'Advice to a Prince', *Ériu* 9 (1921-3), 43-54

***Tecosc Cuscraid* 'The Instruction of Cuscraid'**

Ed. & transl. R.I. Best, 'The Battle of Airtech', *Ériu* 8 (1915), 170-90; ed. & transl. M. Fomin, 'Наставление Кускраю (Tecosc Cúscraid)', in A. Falileyev (ed.), *Язык и Культура Кельтов: Материалы IX Коллоквиума* (*Language and Culture of the Celts: Proceedings of the IXth Celtic Colloquium*), (St Petersburg 2003), pp. 122-143

Ro-chúala la nech légas libru

Ed. & transl. K. Meyer, 'An Old-Irish poem ascribed to St. Moling', *Miscellanea Hibernica* (Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 2, Urbana 1917), p. 567

***Senbríathra Fíthail / Bríathra Flainn Fína maic Ossu* 'The Wisdom of Fíthail / The Sayings of Flann Fína son of Oswiu'**

Ed. & transl. R.M. Smith, 'The *Senbríathra Fíthail* and Related Texts', *RC* 45 (1928), 1-92; ed. & transl. Colin A. Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom Attributed to Aldfrith of Northumbria: An Edition of Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* (Tempe, 1999)

***Tecosca Cormaic* 'The Instructions of Cormac'**

Ed. K. Meyer, *Tecosca Cormaic: The Instructions of King Cormac mac Airt* (RIA Todd Lecture Series 15, Dublin 1909)

***Tecosc Ríge Thoma Éices do Níall Noígíallach* 'The King's Instruction of Torna Éices to Níall Noígíallach', begins *Gabh mo Theagasg a Néill náir* 'receive my instruction, O noble Níall'**

Unedited; there are two witnesses, Dublin, Trinity College 1281 (H.1.7) 174v and 1363 (H.4.22) 162

Note that there is considerable overlap between these texts and those which could be considered more general 'wisdom' or 'advice' texts (e.g. *Tecosc Doidin* 'The Instruction of Doidin', ed. & transl. R.M. Smith, 'The Advice to Doidin', *Ériu* 11 (1932), 66-85. See the list of wisdom-texts in Kelly, *GEIL*, pp. 284-6. There is also a certain amount of ecclesiastical matter in Irish which may be considered here, principally the section 'recht ríge' in the rule of Fothad/Mo Chuta, for which see K. Meyer (ed.), 'Incipit Regula Mucuta Raithni', *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* 3 (1907), 312-20; Mac Eclaise [= K. Meyer], 'The Rule of St Carthage', *IER* 27 (1910), 495-517.

Robdar lána a cuiledha

Robdar toirrtigh a treba.

'In Munster, in the time of Fíngen son of Áed, its store-houses were full,
its homesteads were fruitful'.

This quatrain is put into the mouth of Mór Muman, a character who may originally have represented some aspect of a sovereignty-goddess of Munster, though her attributes were later given to historical persons.⁴⁶ As far as the Mo Ling poem goes, these sentiments are thoroughly Christian and are the benefits accruing from royal justice. There is no way of knowing whether or not Máenach was in fact renowned for justice as the poem seems to suggest; but if the poem originally was contemporary with the king to whom it was addressed (and I do not see why someone would forge such a work at much later date) then it provides a revealing glimpse into a southern Irish churchman's conception of Christian kingship and royal justice in the late seventh century. It is probably coincidence that the only king of Cashel who died a violent death before the composition of the later text of 'The story of the finding of Cashel' was Máenach's grandson Cormac, who was slain in 713 at the battle of Carn Feradaig (Cahernarry, Co. Limerick).⁴⁷

We might further consider how to relate this text with some of the other royal advice texts, a few of which are certainly of an antiquity comparable with this poem. Perhaps the most significant, in that it achieved fame on the European stage, is the text known as *De Duodecim Abusivis*.⁴⁸ This text has received particular attention because of its section on the *rex iniquus* 'unjust king' which exerted a great deal of influence on later texts of royal advice, theology and philosophy.⁴⁹ The date of *De Duodecim Abusivis* has normally been assigned to the seventh century. Hellmann, who believed that the text made certain use of Isidore assigned it to ca 650x670.⁵⁰ The more recent researches of Aidan Breen and others have shown the text to be a product of the *Romani* party in the Irish Church who early accepted the Roman dating of Easter and who are generally

⁴⁶ Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 205-6; T.P. O'Nolan, 'Mór of Munster and the Tragic Fate of Cuamu son of Cailchin', *PRLA* 30 C (1912), 261-82; S. Ó Coileáin, 'The Structure of a Literary Cycle', *Ériu* 25 (1974), 88-125.

⁴⁷ *AI* 713.2.

⁴⁸ The standard (and dated) edition is that of S. Hellmann, *Ps.-Cyprian de XII abusivis saeculi* (Texte und Untersuchungen 34.1, Leipzig 1909). The best recent summary of the contents and textual history is that of A. Breen, 'De XII Abusivis: Text and Transmission' in Ní Chatháin & Richter, *Ireland and Europe in the early Middle Ages: Texts and Transmission*, pp. 78-94; Breen's new edition is forthcoming.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., H.H. Anton, 'De duodecim abusivis saeculi und sein Einfluss auf den Kontinent, insbesondere auf die karolingischen Fürstenspiegel' in Löwe, *Die Iren und Europa*, pp. 568-617.

⁵⁰ Hellmann, *Ps.-Cyprian*, pp. 12-13.

considered to have been strongest in the south of the island, or at least the areas outside the influence of Iona and the Columban *familia*.⁵¹ Byrne, at least, would associate the text with the learning of Munster schools such as Lismore.⁵² A date around the middle of the seventh century seems the most likely, and the text found its way to the Continent relatively quickly; it now survives in a huge number of manuscripts, in two principal recensions, one attributed to Cyprian and the other to Augustine.

As well as influencing continental theology, the text also continued to inform later writings in Ireland. A large extract from the section on *rex iniquus* forms chapters 3-4 of *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* (hereafter *CCH*) Book XXV, *De Regno*.⁵³ One of the authors to which the compilation of *CCH* was attributed was Ruben of Dair Inis (a church on the Munster Blackwater; he is called 'scribe of Munster' in his obit), another indicator of Munster scholarship in the seventh and eighth centuries.⁵⁴ The summary of the material from *De Duodecim Abusiis* in *CCH* XXV lists the effects on the realm of having a bad king:

The iniquity of an unjust king disrupts the peace of the people, awakes outrage at the kingship, banishes fruits of the earth, impedes the service of the people, makes ready the derelictions of duties...[my translation]⁵⁵

These sentiments are familiar from *Audacht Morainn* and elsewhere. Though many of the motifs must have antecedents in the pre-Christian past in Ireland, they chime well with Biblical ideas and indeed the general field of ideas about kingship found in Indo-European and Middle Eastern literatures. By the time we see them in Ireland they are very much a part of a literate and Christian worldview which was being theorized and taught in the church schools. I do not think that one needs to draw a distinction between the ideas in the Latin texts of *De Duodecim Abusiis* and *CCH* on one hand, and the preoccupations with prince's truth and prosperity in vernacular texts such as 'The story of the finding of Cashel' and *Audacht Morainn* on the other. We may then consider

⁵¹ Breen, 'De XII Abusiis', p. 84.

⁵² Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 169-70.

⁵³ The only published edition remains H. Wasserschleben, *Die irische Kanonensammlung* (2nd edn, Leipzig 1885). For useful introductions see M.P. Sheehy, 'The *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* – a Celtic Phenomenon?', in Löwe, *Die Iren und Europa*, pp. 525-35; L.M. Davies, 'The Biblical Text of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*', in P. Ní Chatháin & M. Richter (edd.), *Irland und Europa: Bildung und Literatur* (Stuttgart 1996), pp. 17-41; T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Construction of the *Hibernensis*', *Peritia* 11 (1997), 207-49.

⁵⁴ See B. Jaski, 'Cú Chuimne, Ruben and the Compilation of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*', *Peritia* 14 (2000), 51-69.

⁵⁵ Wasserschleben, *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, p. 77.

to what extent kings, such as the Eóganachta of Munster, may have been exposed to these ideas. *Ro-chúala la nech léas libru* could, on the face of it, have actually been recited in front of king Máenach. We do not need to suppose that any literate kings actually read *CCH* (apart, perhaps, from such exceptional characters as Cormac mac Cuillénáin), but in one case at least, it is likely that the theology of *De Duodecim Abusiis* did come to be heard directly by kings. There is no doubt that the influence of the text in Ireland continued after the eighth century, for one of the homilies in the *Lebor Breac* is a *Sermo ad Reges* in Middle Irish.⁵⁶ The text of *De Duodecim Abusiis* in the homily is a fairly literal rendering in Irish of a paraphrased Latin text (of the Augustinian recension); the Latin is included in the manuscript with the Irish and in the opinion of Breen the scribe was translating as he went, or copying from an exemplar which had done this.⁵⁷ It remains uncertain exactly when or where this Irish translation was made, but it attests a continuing interest in those ideas in the Middle Irish period. A continuing interest in royal advice is also found in an Irish text, entitled *Díambad messe bad rí réil* 'If it were I who was a splendid king'.⁵⁸ This text, perhaps of the tenth century, is addressed to an unnamed king of Cashel and incorporates a good deal of what may be called 'ecclesiastical' ideas; we shall consider it further in Chapter VI.⁵⁹

Our overall assessment must be that Irish kings, including the kings of Cashel, were well aware of Christian ideas about kingship, and would have been aware that the king, favoured by God, occupied a very special position in society. This is one of the reasons why the second version of 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel' is concerned to make it clear that it is the authority of God and Patrick which gave the kingship of Cashel its unique authority, and why kings of Cashel would not die a violent death if they followed Christian principles of kingship. The question of how far the practices of Irish kings were influenced by clerical ideas is a matter to which we shall return in Chapter VI. Here, now that we have examined some early texts concerned with the Christian identity of the Cashel kingship, we can consider how that kingship developed in the eighth and later centuries.

⁵⁶ Ed. & transl. R. Atkinson, *The Passions and Homilies from Leabhar Breac* (Dublin 1887), pp. 151-62, 401-13.

⁵⁷ Breen, '*De XII Abusiis*', p. 91. This suggestion, if correct, would have important implications for our understanding of how Irish scholars and translators worked.

⁵⁸ Ed. & transl. T. O'Donoghue, 'Advice to a Prince', *Ériu* 9 (1921-3), 43-54.

⁵⁹ Below, p. 256-7. For discussion of the text, see T.O. Clancy, 'King-making and Images of Kingship in Medieval Gaelic Literature', in Welander, Breeze & Clancy, *The Stone of Destiny*, pp. 85-105: 98-9.

The Development of the Munster overkingship

From the mid-seventh to mid-eighth centuries, the accession of overkings of Cashel from different Eóganacht dynasties (the 'circuit on branches') was restricted to representatives of Eóganacht Chaisil, Eóganacht Áine and Eóganacht Glennamnach. This at least was a level of 'dynastic order' approaching that of the alternations of Clann Cholmáin and Cenél nEógain in the kingship of Tara.⁶⁰ During this period Munster conflicts were very much internal affairs and were the outcomes of conflicts between the different subkingdoms. The collapse of the power of the Eóganacht Locha Léin overkingdom in Íarmumu allowed the eastern triarchy of Eóganacht kingdoms to build up their power. Several subject tribes of the west transferred their allegiance directly to the kings of Cashel, a change of the political order reflected, as we have seen, in the 'West Munster Synod'.⁶¹

Cathal mac Finguine of Eóganacht Glennamnach was the first king of Munster to intervene in any major way beyond the borders of the province.⁶² As we have seen, the mid-eighth century was a period of considerable dynastic upheaval in the Uí Néill-dominated midlands and north of Ireland, as Clann Cholmáin and Cenél nEógain respectively rose to become the dominant Uí Néill families in those regions. Cathal took advantage of strife in the midlands to make forays into the territory of the Southern Uí Néill.⁶³ Cathal did not achieve any great successes on these expeditions, though it is more likely that they were symbolic assertions of power than real attempts to dominate the Uí Néill overkingship. Nor did Cathal have any great success in dominating the neighbouring province of Leinster, something which the Uí Néill king Áed Allán did manage to achieve with his victory in the battle of Áth Senaig in 738.⁶⁴ Cathal acted on an island-wide stage of ecclesiastical politics. In 737 there was a *dál* between Cathal and Áed at the church of Terryglass.⁶⁵ No further information is given but the entry following reads *Lex Patricii tenuit Hiberniam*. One may conclude that at the meeting Cathal accepted the supremacy of Armagh. There is no definite connection between the two entries but the second would not make sense unless Munster were included; of course *Lex Patricii* could have been proclaimed in Munster without any concessions on

⁶⁰ A brief discussion of this period of alternation, and the legend of Mór Muman which seems to reflect political reality in saga can be found in Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 204-7.

⁶¹ See above, pp. 116-18.

⁶² For a summary of Cathal's career, see Byrne, pp. *IKHK* 207-11.

⁶³ E.g. *AU* 733.7.

⁶⁴ *AU* 738.4.

⁶⁵ *AU* 737.9, 737.10.

the part of Munster churches. Whatever was agreed at Terryglass there was not further conflict between Cathal and Uí Néill until his peaceful death in 742. In later times Cathal was famed for his generosity toward poets and the greatness of his reign within Munster; but there is little which characterizes the kingship of Cashel as being particularly different from any other kingship in Ireland at the time.⁶⁶ His reign does seem to mark the point at which Munster became much more involved in the affairs of the rest of the island, and when the influence of Armagh began to be strongly felt in the south.

After Cathal's death there is little annalistic information on the doings of the kings of Cashel for the rest of the eighth century. According to the king-lists, he was succeeded by Cathussach mac Eterscéla of Eóganacht Áine, but there is no information about Cathussach; we do not even have an obit for him. He appears to have been succeeded in turn by Máel Dúin mac Áeda of Eóganacht Locha Léin, who broke the tripartite rotation of the overkingship among the eastern dynasties. It is difficult to reconcile this with the apparent erosion of Eóganacht Locha Léin power in Íarmumu, but the evidence is too scanty to discern what was going on. There may have been several competitors for the kingship, and Máel Dúin is not admitted by the official regnal lists. The picture becomes even darker towards the end of the eighth century, when one Ólchobar mac Flainn is called king of Munster by *AU* at his death in 796. He is further termed 'scribe, bishop and anchorite'.⁶⁷ *AI* call him abbot of Inis Cathaig (Scattery Island in the Shannon estuary) and place his death in 797.⁶⁸ If he was both abbot and king then he would have been the first of the 'cleric-kings' of Munster. Possibly *AU* have confused the ecclesiastic Ólchobar with a namesake who was called *rígdamna Muman* by *AI* at his death in 805. The possibility of Ólchobar mac Flainn being both ecclesiastic of Inis Cathaig and king should still be considered however, as such a combination did occur just over a century later. In any case there seems to have been a certain amount of confusion or even a succession-dispute in the years before 800, though this simply could be a misleading impression given by incomplete and contradictory sources. More problems are caused by the fact that *AU* record the installation of a king four years before the alleged king of Munster Ólchobar mac Flainn died:

⁶⁶ For Cathal's literary character see, e.g., Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, pp. 1, 41-2.

⁶⁷ *AU* 796.1.

⁶⁸ *AI* 797.2.

AU 793.3

Lex Ailbhi for Mumain & ordinatio Artroigh m. Cathail in regnum Mumen.

AI do not report these two events, which seem closely related in the mind of the Ulster annalist. This entry has been interpreted in various ways. The promulgation of *Lex Ailbi* has been seen as an attempt to reverse Cathal mac Finguine's policy of rapprochement with Armagh.⁶⁹ This view presupposes that the interests of Emly and Armagh were naturally opposed, to say nothing of the fact that we do not know the contents of the Laws of Patrick and Ailbe and thus can say nothing of whether they were potentially in conflict.⁷⁰ It is difficult to see how the first part of the entry relates to the second. Though there is no evidence which we can bring to bear on the question, if we do suspect a succession crisis or dispute it might be that Artrí was a candidate with the backing of Emly, and the promulgation of *Lex Ailbi* was part of the establishment of his rule. The simple fact is that we cannot know. This does however open up the question of relations between Emly and the Eóganachta. There had in fact been an earlier promulgation of *Lex Ailbi* in 784 according to *AI*, where it is given its Irish name *Cáin Ailbi*.⁷¹ The king who took part in this promulgation was almost certainly Cathussach mac Eterscéla; as noted above, we know nothing about him other than that he belonged to Eóganacht Áine. This fact might be significant however, as there were close links between that branch of the dynasty and Emly, at least in the later ninth century, and we shall return to the links between Emly and the Eóganachta below.

On a more general level, Artrí is significant because he is the first Gaelic leader recorded to have been 'ordained' into the kingship, at least according to *AU* which explicitly use the term *ordinatio*. Adomnán, in *Vita Columbae* implies that Díarmait mac Cerball and Oswald of Northumbria were 'ordained by God' but this more likely refers to destiny and the blessings of the Lord.⁷² Of more interest is Adomnán's account of Colum Cille consecrating Áedán mac Gabráin king of Dál Riata. There has been significant debate about Adomnán's account of those events, but they do not seem to be a direct antecedent of Artrí's ordination in Munster.⁷³ This occurred in a period in

⁶⁹ E.g. Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 209-10.

⁷⁰ Patricia Kelly has recently attempted to show that a text known after its editor as *Ríagail Patraic* is in fact *Cáin Phatraic*, but this is still uncertain. See 'The Rule of Patrick: textual affinities', in Ní Chatháin & Richter, *Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: texts and transmission*, pp. 284-95.

⁷¹ *AI* 784.1.

⁷² A.O. & M.O. Anderson (edd. & transl.), *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (London 1961), I.1, p. 200; III.5, pp. 188-90.

⁷³ M. J. Enright, *Iona, Tara and Soissons: the origins of the royal anointing ritual* (Berlin 1985), *idem*, 'Royal succession and abbatial prerogative in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*', *Peritia* 4 (1985), 83-103; M. Meckler,

which there was a general European vogue for royal ordinations and anointings which began with the Carolingian coup in Francia; the upstart dynasty needed mechanisms to add to their charisma, lacking as they did the hereditary glamour of the Merovingians.⁷⁴ Charles-Edwards discussed ordination (and particularly the Irish verb *oirdnidir*) in detail with regard to *Críth Gablach*.⁷⁵ He has shown that the concept of ordaining there is very different to what a Frank might have expected of an *ordinatio*, and the Irish *oirdnidir* can simply mean the bestowal of rank, which could be done by a people as well as an individual. Thus, if the Latin *ordinatio* of *AI* has no sense which is very distinct from Irish *oirdnidir*, we cannot assert that Artrí was necessarily the beneficiary of a special ecclesiastical seal of approval. Contemporary with Artrí was Áed mac Néill of the Cenél nEógain, known by the nickname *oirdnide* 'ordained', though the details of that event are unknown; it was later supposed that he received the epithet and ecclesiastical favour for releasing churches from their obligations. Though Artrí was ordained to the kingship of Munster, he was followed by a series of kings who apparently combined secular and ecclesiastical office, a phenomenon which has been viewed as peculiarly characteristic of the Munster kingship.

The Cleric-kings of Cashel

The period of roughly a century after the death of Artrí mac Cathail is one in which there seem to have been several kings of Cashel who combined secular with ecclesiastical office. This is to be distinguished from kings or senior royalty who retired to monasteries (and some of these emerged to resume a secular career).⁷⁶ We are concerned with kings who apparently held secular and ecclesiastical office concurrently. In Leinster, Áed Dub, brother of Fáelán mac Colmáin, king of Leinster (d. 665) was abbot of Kildare, as were the brother and other relatives of Fínsnechta mac Cellaig (d. 808), including the latter's great-grandson Muiredach: *rex Laiginensium et princeps Cille Dara*.⁷⁷ In 819 Cathal mac Dúnlainge died as king of Uí Chennselaig and vice-abbot of

'Colum Cille's Ordination of Aedán mac Gabrán', *Innes Review* 61 (1990), 139-50; Jaski, *EIKS*, pp. 57-63.

⁷⁴ J.L. Nelson, 'Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation* (Cambridge 1994), pp. 52-87: 54-5.

⁷⁵ Charles-Edwards, T.M., 'A Contract Between King and People in Early Medieval Ireland? *Críth Gablach* on Kingship', *Peritia* 8 (1994), 107-19: 108-11.

⁷⁶ Stancliffe, 'Kings who Opted Out'.

⁷⁷ *AU* 885.9.

Ferns, one of the most important houses in south Leinster.⁷⁸ It seems that Cathal was a king who later took over abbatial office, for in 817 he had attacked Ferns and 'four hundred were killed'.⁷⁹

Munster is notable in that it has far more of these characters than anywhere else. Here, not only were close relatives (brothers or sons) of kings elevated to the throne, but there were also instances of ecclesiastical office-holders with distant or unknown genealogical provenance taking the kingship. Examples of this phenomenon seem to be lacking elsewhere. Furthermore, it was not only some kings of Cashel who came from an ecclesiastical background but local rulers as well. Some examination has been made of these figures.⁸⁰ These 'cleric-kings' have sometimes been viewed negatively, as aberrations from the norm, but sometimes positively. It would be very useful to consider whether they were a peculiar product of a Munster or Eóganachta concept of kingship, and further whether some of the texts discussed so far fit into contexts connected with the cleric-kings.

We have noted above that the apparent ordination of Artrí mac Cathail and Áed Oirdnide fits into a context of European adoption of royal ordinations, though there are no specific references in the Irish material to anointing. If there was some connection between the promulgation of *Lex Ailbi* in Munster and the ordination of Artrí into the kingship an important role would probably have been played by Emly, the foremost ecclesiastical foundation in Munster. The high status given to the head of Emly is attested by a late Old Irish (perhaps ninth-century) gloss on the *Senchas Már* collection of legal tracts, which reads *Ar id dá secht cumala díri n-ollaman .i. comarba Caisil nó Pátraic nó Ailbeo* 'For fourteen *cumala* are the recompense for a supreme one, i.e. the coarb of Cashel or of Patrick or of Ailbe'.⁸¹ St Ailbe was the founding saint of Emly and in this scheme his successor is awarded the higher ecclesiastical status which the head of Armagh also received. Also interesting is the mention of *comarba Caisil*. *Comarba(e)* is the regular term for an heir in the legal materials, but when used in this fashion in texts it is normally found with a personal name, especially that of a saint, the ecclesiastical 'coarb'.⁸² We might expect the title *comarba Caisil* to be used of the 'reformed' bishops of Cashel after the synod of 1101, but its use at this time seems unusual. One assumes a

⁷⁸ *AU* 819.5.

⁷⁹ *AU* 817.5; See also Hughes, *CEIS*, pp. 190-1.

⁸⁰ L. Ó Buachalla, 'Contributions towards the political history of Munster 450-800 AD', *JCHAS* 56 (1951), 87-90; 57 (1952), 67-86; 61 (1956), 89-102; Hughes, *CEIS*, pp. 211-14; Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 215-5, 220-29.

⁸¹ *CIH*, iii, 922.35-6.

⁸² For discussion see Etchingam, *Church Organisation*, p. 163.

reference to the king of Cashel, and there is only one other instance of this usage known to me, in *Lebor na Cert* which may have been composed for the synod of Cashel in 1101, which usage we shall consider in the final section below.⁸³ Considering the use of *Comarba* in legal tracts, we might have Cashel itself being considered as the heritable property (*orba*) of its king, in which case the grouping with the heads of Armagh and Emly would be even more striking. It is possible that the term is used with an ecclesiastical connotation and that at this stage the kings of Cashel were considered pseudo-ecclesiastics whether or not they were clerics.

Paralleling kingship and religious vocation may have suggested the combination of offices in particular circumstances. The vocational concept of kingship, originated by Gregory the Great, was not unknown in the ninth century; it was developed by Alfred, king of Wessex, for example.⁸⁴ It is striking that the rule attributed to Fothad na Canóine, the ecclesiastic associated with Áed Oirdnide, includes kingship with a list of clerical offices – bishop, abbot, priest, confessor, monk and *céli Dé*, giving it its own section on *recht ríge*.⁸⁵ If the office of kingship was viewed as being quasi-clerical, then combining genuine clerical office with it may have been a natural progression. The problem is whether we can trace this ideology any further back than the ninth century, or whether it can be particularly connected with Munster. Proceeding from the notion of the kings of Munster ruling ‘under a crozier’, it might be suggested that in their inauguration and their reigns the Munster kings were thought of as being peculiarly ecclesiastical and that the emergence of cleric-kings was a logical extension of this concept. However, analysts of the Irish Church have generally sought more practical reasons. The ninth century was the time when outsiders, namely vikings, changed the course of Irish history forever and Kathleen Hughes sought the explanation for the cleric-kings in the upheavals of that century. Pluralism in ecclesiastical appointments increased and Hughes saw the additional combination of secular and ecclesiastical office as an attempt on the part of the churches, the prime targets of viking-raids, to gain better protection for themselves.⁸⁶ The appropriation of the defensive forces of a local king, a warrior, may have been very attractive to a church (the aforementioned

⁸³ Dillon, *Lebor na Cert*, ll. 208-9.

⁸⁴ See M. Kempshall, ‘No Bishop, No King: the Ministerial Ideology of Kingship and Asser’s *Res Gestae Alfredi*’, in R. Gameson & H. Leyser (edd.), *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting* (Oxford 2001), pp. 106-27.

⁸⁵ Ed. K. Meyer ‘Incipit Regula Mucuta Raithni’, *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* 3 (1907), 312-20; ed. & transl. Mac Eclaise [=K. Meyer], ‘The Rule of St Carthage’, *IER* 27 (1910), 495-517. See Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 63-9, 144, 163-4; Haggart, ‘The *céli Dé*’, pp. 97-102.

⁸⁶ Hughes, *CEIS*, pp. 211-14.

Muiredach of Kildare is called 'a hero of whom many deeds are told'⁸⁷), while the revenues of churches may have been attractive to local lords. Acquiring such revenues by more direct means was perhaps one of the motives for the conflicts which occurred between ecclesiastical houses and one of the reasons why Feidlimid mac Crimthainn (king of Cashel, 820-847) attacked churches on a regular basis.

Byrne did not dismiss Hughes' theory entirely, but his main suggestion was that the cleric-kings were compromise-candidates in times when dynastic succession was in dispute. That is, when competing dynastic segments could not clearly settle on one claimant to the throne, a 'neutral' ecclesiastic, related to the dynastic segments, would be installed as a king satisfactory to all, one who in theory should have no descendants who would later compete for the kingship.⁸⁸ He further postulated that such disputes would have been more common among the Eóganachta, for he considered that their hegemony was far looser than the overkingships of Uí Néill and Laigin.⁸⁹ It has already been noted that this view of the Munster polity is not necessarily tenable, and in any case fractiousness clearly was present among even the 'strong' dynasties, and yet there are no instances of outsider clerics being made kings to preserve the status quo. Therefore other factors must be involved.

We have discussed above the claims for the shadowy Ólchobar mac Flainn to have been the first abbot and king of Munster. Even if one accepts the attribution in *AU* there is very little else which can be said about him; he is said to have been of the Uí Fidgente dynasty (geographically apposite for an abbot of Inis Cathaig) but I have been unable to locate him in the genealogical tracts. He is usually assumed to have been the son of Flann mac Eircc (d. 763), king of Uí Fidgente.⁹⁰ Ólchobar would have been the only member of Uí Fidgente ever to be called king of Cashel, which casts further doubt on his claims.

The next 'cleric-king' was the famous Feidlimid mac Crimthainn.⁹¹ Yet, the background to his taking of the kingship of Cashel is shrouded in mystery. The apparent lack of action (and success) against the kings of Laigin and Uí Néill following the death of Cathal mac Finguine in 742, together with an apparent confusion as to the

⁸⁷ *AFM* 882.

⁸⁸ Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 214.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 203. There are problems with the view that Munster kingships were 'archaic' and 'tribal'; see Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', pp. 2-4; Etchingham, 'Early Medieval Irish History', pp. 129-30.

⁹⁰ E.g. in Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 296; but cf. *IKHK* (2nd ed.), p. xxviii: 'It [is] unlikely that he was ever king: his inclusion in some sources may be due to confusion with Ólchobar mac Duib Indrecht †805'.

⁹¹ For a summary of his career see Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 211-15, 220-8.

royal succession before the time of Feidlimid, led Byrne to comment that 'it seems fair to assume that the kingship of Cashel was at a low ebb' in the early ninth century.⁹² Feidlimid, of course, did much to remedy the situation, campaigning against the Laigin, Connachta and Uí Néill with great success. Our primary concern here is with Feidlimid's ecclesiastical connections. The first notice of him is *AI* 770 recording his birth, an entry which does not occur elsewhere and is obviously retrospective. If this date is approximately correct, Feidlimid had a long career about which we know nothing prior to his taking the kingship of Cashel, in the year 820 according to the main chronicles.⁹³ Nothing is said of him when he took the overkingship of Munster other than his name and patronymic; the chronicle-entries give no comment on his background or any office which he held previously. The main genealogies agree as to his pedigree, belonging to Cenél Fíngin of Eóganacht Chaisil, the sept which had produced Máenach mac Fíngin but no kings of Cashel for over a century before Feidlimid.⁹⁴ Perhaps, then, we could place *Ro-chúala la nech légas libru* in his reign, though there is no positive evidence for this.

That Feidlimid had particular interest in ecclesiastical matters is shown by his next recorded action, 'Patrick's law on Munster by Feidlimid...and Artrí [bishop of Armagh]'.⁹⁵ This seems to be an echo of Cathal mac Finguine's policies of almost a century previously. It seems, especially given his later career, that the Uí Néill idea of an overkingship of Ireland held an attraction for Feidlimid. He seems to have thought that to counter Uí Néill expansion effectively, he needed to play them at their own game, which in part would entail making overtures to the major churches, including Armagh. It may have been Feidlimid who attempted to create a doctrine of links between Armagh and the Christian kingship at Cashel rather than with the formerly pagan kingship of Tara.

Feidlimid demonstrated his power over the next few years with attacks on the churches of Gallen and Clonmacnoise, until there was a *rigdál* at Birr between Feidlimid and Conchobar mac Donnchada, Clann Cholmáin king of Tara.⁹⁶ Significantly, *CS* (uniquely) has an entry for the same year: 'the vice-abbacy of Clonmacnoise given to Munstermen, which was never done before'. Clonmacnoise, not far from Munster's northern border, had become a very attractive target for Feidlimid. He continued

⁹² Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 215.

⁹³ *AU* 820.5, *AI* 820.2, *CS* 820.

⁹⁴ See Table 8.

⁹⁵ *AU* 823.5.

⁹⁶ *AU* 827.10, *AFM* 825, *AClon* 824.

attacking the community of St Ciarán until the end of his life.⁹⁷ In 836 Feidlimid imprisoned Forannán, abbot of Armagh, who was on a visit to Kildare; he was one of a pair of rival claimants to that office, and Feidlimid apparently was more sympathetic to the other faction.⁹⁸ In the same year *Dunlang m. Cathusaigh, princeps Corraighe Moire, mortuus est sine communione i Caisiul regum* 'Dúnlang son of Cathussach, abbot of Cork, died without communion in Cashel of the kings' and there also occurred the *Gabail Fédlimthe i n-abbthaine Corraige* 'Entry [lit. 'taking'] of Feidlimid into the abbacy of Cork'.⁹⁹ This second entry is the first reference to Feidlimid holding ecclesiastical office. It is difficult to estimate his reasons for assuming the abbacy of Cork. One possibility suggested by Byrne is that it was an attempt by him, acting with reforming zeal, to 'clean up' Cork, which had become embroiled in running battles with other churches and the Múscraige.¹⁰⁰ We are unsure how long Feidlimid held the office; the next reference to an abbot of Cork is in *AI* 863.

The most notable events of Feidlimid's career occurred in 838. There was a *rigdál mór* attended by Feidlimid and Níall mac Áeda, Cenél nEógain king of Tara. According to the partisan *AI* this took place in Clonfert, and Níall 'submitted ... so that Feidlimid became full king of Ireland that day, and he occupied the abbot's chair of Clonfert'.¹⁰¹ *AU*, *AFM* and *AClon* state that the meeting (if there was only one) took place at Cloncurry in Co. Kildare and mention nothing of submission or abbacy, except the statement in *AClon* that 'Felym mCcriowhayne went all over Ireland and was like to depose the king and take the kingdome to himself'.¹⁰² Níall's submission may have been an exaggeration on the part of the Munster chronicler of *AI*, but of interest here is the second reference to Feidlimid entering an abbacy. If there was only one conference and Feidlimid did occupy an 'abbot's chair', if only for a short time afterwards (the next record of an abbot of Clonfert is a death-notice in *AI* 850), then Feidlimid gained control of a house outside Munster. This of course depends entirely on what one understands by *co n-dessid h-i suide abbad Cluana Fertá*. As regards motivation, Clonfert was in the lands of Uí Maine, who had recently been on the receiving end of a Munster

⁹⁷ In Hughes's estimation, *CEIS*, p. 192, Feidlimid 'was responsible...for more violence toward the Church than any other Irishman'.

⁹⁸ *AU* 836.3.

⁹⁹ *AU* 836.2; *AI* 836.1. Though I have not found positive genealogical evidence, it is just possible that this Dúnlaing was the son of Cathusach mac Eterscéla, the king of Munster who had proclaimed *Cáin Ailbi* in 784 and was of Eóganacht Áine.

¹⁰⁰ Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 224.

¹⁰¹ *AI* 838.1.

¹⁰² Also, *ARC* § 237: *Gabál Héreann huile la Feidlimidh*.

assault (*AU* 837) and had been involved in a feud with Cork; these may be clues as to why Feidlimid was supposed to have taken control of Clonfert.¹⁰³

In 841 Feidlimid led a hosting to Leinster, but he was defeated by Níall near Cloncurry. This is another instance of the Cenél nEógain kings regarding the domination of Leinster with particular jealousy. A short verse inserted in both *AU* (by Hand H2) and *AFM* reads:

*Bachall Fheidlimidh fighligh
fo-racbadh isna draighnibh;
dos-fuc Níall co nert n-atha
a cert in catha claidhmigh.*

The crozier of devout Feidlimid was left in the thorns;
Níall, mighty in combat, took it by right of victory in battle with swords.¹⁰⁴

Though Feidlimid does not appear to have been a bishop at any stage, he is referred to as having a 'crozier', which we have already encountered as an image of Munster kingship. After this battle, Feidlimid did not campaign against Tara or Leinster and the chronicles are silent about him for a few years. In 842 the joint-abbots of Armagh (including the once-imprisoned Forannán) visited Munster, possibly proclaiming the Law of Patrick again.¹⁰⁵ Feidlimid went on one last campaign against Clonmacnoise in 846, but according to *CS*, *AFM* and *AClon* the vengeance of Ciarán caught up with him, so that he was internally wounded and died the following year. His death-notice in *AI* gives him no title, but both *AU* and *AFM* call him scribe, anchorite and 'best of the Irish'. Panegyric verses on him are included at this point in *CS* and (in fuller form) *AFM*. Though nowhere stated explicitly, it may be that Feidlimid entered religion and retired to a church after falling ill in 846. He had evidently acquired some reputation for holiness by the time of his death, though accounting for this reputation in the light of his behaviour towards a number of churches, most especially Clonmacnoise, caused Conell Mageoghagan some difficulty in his translation in *AClon*: 'notwithstanding his

¹⁰³ Hughes, *CEIS*, p. 190.

¹⁰⁴ *AU* 841.5, *AFM* 840.

¹⁰⁵ *AI* 842.1. The entry reads: *Phátraic co Mumain la Forannán ocus la Diarmait*. In the edition *Cáin* has been editorially supplied as the first word, but it is possible that the scribal omission was in fact *scrín* 'shrine'. Cf. *AI* 845.2: *Forannán, abb Ard Macha, do brith do gentib ó Chluain Comardae ocus scrín Patraic do brissiud ocus do brith dóib*. Of course, relics were used when imposing *cána*.

great irregularity and great desire of spoyle he was of sum numbered among the scribes and anchorites of Ireland'.¹⁰⁶

Feidlimid's successor in the kingship of Cashel was another Ólchobar. *AI* 848.1 read: 'Ólchobar son of Cináed, abbot of Emly, took the kingship of Cashel'. Here, unequivocally, we are dealing with a character who was an ecclesiastic first (although it should be noted that *AI* are the only chronicle to note his role as abbot). He is unanimously admitted to the king-lists as ruler of Cashel. Byrne originally found support for the compromise-candidate theory in Ólchobar's supposed family-connections, attaching him to Cináed mac Congaile meic Maíl Dúin of Eóganacht Locha Léin.¹⁰⁷ This descent has been shown to be incorrect by Ó Corráin, who has noted that the unedited genealogies of Eóganacht Áine claim that he belonged to that dynasty.¹⁰⁸ Ó Corráin has associated the text with Emly on relatively convincing grounds; so it seems likely that Ólchobar was in fact a member of this group.¹⁰⁹ This evidence provides more hints of close links between Emly and the kingship of Cashel.

Ólchobar's immediate activity against vikings is noteworthy, especially in contrast to the policies of Feidlimid. His main recorded achievement was the battle at Sciath Nechtain which was fought in alliance with Lorcán, overking of Leinster.¹¹⁰ Ólchobar also undertook a siege-action against the Cork-vikings.¹¹¹ If there were subsequent campaigns they are not recorded. His death as king of Cashel is recorded by most chronicles in 851, although *AI* are again the only one to give him the title of abbot of Emly (presumably reflecting special knowledge of such matters).

Cenn Fáelad úa Mugthigirn is unusual in that we rely upon *FAI* for details of his career beyond his accession and death.¹¹² He apparently took the kingship of Cashel in 861.¹¹³ His family-origins are also obscure. He is recorded as abbot of Emly in his obits in 872, but not in his accession-notices.¹¹⁴ One wonders whether or not he was abbot before he came to the kingship. He is not recorded in genealogical texts. Byrne attached

¹⁰⁶ *AClon* 844.

¹⁰⁷ Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 295. This connection was used to support the idea that he was a neutral candidate, based on the loss of power which the Eóganacht Locha Léin overkings of West Munster had recently suffered. See also D.N. Dumville, 'Two approaches to the dating of "Nauigatio Sancti Brendani"', *Studia Medievalia* 3rd Series 29 (1988), 87-102.

¹⁰⁸ D. Ó Corráin, review of *IKHK* in *Celtica* 13 (1980), 150-68: 164; this information has been incorporated by Byrne into the 'Additional Notes' section of *IKHK*, 2nd edn.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* The association is based on the fact that the text preserves the genealogies of an abbatial family of Emly.

¹¹⁰ *AI* 848.2, *AU* 848.5, *CS* 848.

¹¹¹ *CS* 848.

¹¹² *FAI* §§306, 342, 403.

¹¹³ *AI* 861.1, *FAI* §306.

¹¹⁴ *AU* 872.3, *AI* 872.1, *CS* 872.

Cenn Fáelad to Eóganacht Airthir Chliach, yet admitted his pedigree to be 'evidently faulty'.¹¹⁵ Ó Corráin attempted to place him more accurately, attaching him also to Eóganacht Áine on the evidence of the king-list of the 'Laud Synchronisms' which state that he belonged to that group (Uí Énna Áine).¹¹⁶ Both his son Eógan (d. 890) and his uncle Rechtabra (d. 819) were also abbots of Emly. Ó Corráin has offered an ingenious way to fit these persons into the Eóganacht Áine genealogies; if he is correct this would again be of some significance for the roles of Emly and Eóganacht Áine in the kingship of Cashel.¹¹⁷ Cenn Fáelad died 'after long suffering' in 872.¹¹⁸ As with Feidlimid, it is possible that he entered religion not long before death.

Of all the royal ecclesiastics in Munster, Cormac mac Cuillenáin was recognised as the most 'clerical' in later texts. His reputation as a man of great learning long outlasted his death, with a large body of learned writings and poetry attributed to him from his own time right down to the present day.¹¹⁹ Yet, as one might expect, few details of his early career are known. His family-connections are interesting. The main pedigrees agree on his ancestry, making him a member of Eóganacht Chaisil.¹²⁰ However, the line is far removed from the others which provided kings of Cashel (eleven generations back to Áengus mac Nad Fraích), none of the persons in it has been securely identified, and the sept had no previous role in the kingship of Cashel. This does not invalidate the pedigree, but it does suggest that if it is correct some fairly extraordinary circumstances of succession led to Cormac becoming king. In the saga-narrative of the battle of Belach Mugna in *FAI*, Flaithbertach mac Inmainén calls Cormac 'son of an outsider'.¹²¹ This suggests that the author of *FAI* (or the ultimate source of the statement put into Flaithbertach's mouth) considered Cormac not to be a member of the inner Eóganacht circles.

According to *FAI* Cormac studied at Dísert Díarmata in Leinster. *CS* 888 and *AFM* 885 report the death of Snédgus of Dísert Díarmata, 'teacher of Cormac'. It is possible that at some point Cormac became a bishop; for in the notice of his

¹¹⁵ Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 293.

¹¹⁶ Ó Corráin, review of *IKHK*; again, Byrne has incorporated this information into *IKHK*, 2nd edn.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *AU* 872.3, *AI* 872.1, *CS* 872, *FAI* §403. The chronicles are consistent in using the formulation *úa/nepos Mugthigirn*; The king-list in *Cogad Gaedel re Gallaib* identifies him as Cenn Fáelad mac Murchada.

¹¹⁹ For example, L. Breatnach (ed. & transl.), 'An Edition of *Amra Senáin*' in D. Ó Corráin, L. Breatnach & K. McCone (edd.), *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in honour of Professor James Carney* (Maynooth 1989), pp. 7-31; though there are doubts as to Breatnach's attribution.

¹²⁰ Those in Rawl. B.502 150 b 28 and LL 320 d 1 are ed. in *CGH*, p. 217; cf. *BB.* 175 f 35; *Lec.* 216 v b 14; *UM* 26 r a 4.

¹²¹ 'Foillsighidh', *ar sé*, 'do beagmeann-mnaidhe, 7 dearóile do chineoil tréod, uair mac comaitigh thú' (*FAI* §423).

assumption of the kingship in 901 he is called 'noble bishop and celibate'.¹²² If this was the case, there is no evidence as to exactly where or when Cormac became bishop. He may have been bishop of Dísert Díarmata where he studied, or of Clúain Úama where according to *FAI* § 423 he requested to be buried. Cormac is nowhere referred to as being an abbot. His episcopal status is not mentioned in the *AU* and *CS* entries for 901. He appears to have become king in a time of strife, for his predecessor Finguine Cenn Gécán mac Laégaire was still alive when Cormac took over and in the following year was 'deceitfully killed by his own'.¹²³ Thus, it is possible here that dynastic dispute was again the occasion for an ecclesiastic to come to power in Cashel. There is no evidence to support John Kelleher's thesis that Cormac was an Uí Néill puppet-king who later rebelled against his master.¹²⁴

In 906 Flann Sinna assaulted Munster, where he 'harried from Gabrán to Luimnech'.¹²⁵ This prompted a sustained retaliation by the Munstermen against the Southern Uí Néill and Connachta.¹²⁶ It is interesting that the Munster armies were led by both Cormac and Flaithbertach mac Inmainén.¹²⁷ The latter had not been introduced in the chronicles before 907, and he seems to have been functioning as a campaign-leader or chief adviser to Cormac. Certainly, the redactor of *FAI* presented him as Cormac's co-ruler, and almost as the devil on his shoulder, or in Byrne's memorable phrase, his 'evil genius'. Further conflict resulted in the Battle of Belach Mugna or MagnAilbi in 908, in which Cormac was killed. The most detailed account of events is provided by the substantially later account in *FAI* which we shall return to in Chapter V.

Belach Mugna wiped out for some years any pretensions of the Munstermen in general or of the Eóganachta in particular to domination in other parts of Ireland. The chief participant on the losing side not to forfeit his life was Flaithbertach mac Inmainén. His background is also unknown, but if we lend credence to the account in *FAI* he had been abbot of Inis Cathaig before 908. It is possible that Flaithbertach belonged to Uí Fidgente or Cíarraige Lúachra, who provided most of the known abbots for Inis Cathaig and it was not until the eleventh century that outsiders, in the form of

¹²² *AI* 901.3.

¹²³ So *AU* and *CS*; *AI* state that Cenél Conaill Chaisil, a collateral Eóganacht branch of the line of King Colcu (d. 678), were the perpetrators.

¹²⁴ J.V. Kelleher, 'The Rise of the Dál Cais' in E. Rynne (ed.), *North Munster Studies* (Limerick 1967), 230-41: 235-6.

¹²⁵ *AU* 906.3, *CS* 905.

¹²⁶ *AI* 907.1, 907.3, 907.4.

¹²⁷ *AI* 907.3.

Dál Cais, inserted their own personnel.¹²⁸ *FAI* add that it was to Inis Cathaig that Flaithbertach returned after 908, until he came out again to take the kingship of Cashel in undescribed circumstances.¹²⁹ Other chronicles state that he took the kingship of Cashel in 914, and the length of his stay in that office is unknown.¹³⁰ According to *AU* 922, 'Lorcán son of Condlígán took the kingship of Cashel'. Flaithbertach therefore abdicated the kingship in 922, for *AFM* state that he went on pilgrimage (*do dhul ria oilithre*). According to an *AFM* entry for the following year, he was captured by vikings and taken to Limerick. His subsequent fate is unknown, but he lived until 944.¹³¹ Ultimately, what we do know about Flaithbertach is what he did before he was king and what he did after, but nothing during the reign itself. As an ecclesiastic, he was perhaps the second king of Munster to be abbot of Inis Cathaig, the one ecclesiastical institution other than Emly which seems to have some links to the kingship of Cashel.

These, then, were the cleric-kings of Cashel. Yet we have not got much closer to deciding why they appeared. Byrne suggested that they were compromises, which on first consideration sounds most odd. Successful claimants for the kingship in Ireland were dynamic, resourceful and ambitious men, and several cleric-kings demonstrated these qualities in what we know of their careers. It seems most unlikely that such persons were reluctantly made kings by consent of other competing political groups. And if they were, who were the deciding powers who made them king?

On the other hand, if we accept Ó Corráin's thesis that church-offices were often held by politically unsuccessful sub-segments of ruling dynasties, we can concede that these officers had distant claims on the kingship but were excluded from ever acting on it (not least because they had theoretically renounced worldly power).¹³² Yet such dynastic groups could still maintain a considerable amount of *fébas*, especially in the case of the Emly ecclesiastics of Eóganacht Áine. In this regard it is interesting to consider the overall trends in Eóganacht dynastic succession. If Feidlimid mac Crimthainn came to power by means of the regular dynastic alternation between Eóganacht Chaisil, Áine and Glennamnach he may have drastically altered the nature of that succession. For, apart from the later cleric-kings (excepting Cormac mac Cuillenáin) and one briefly-reigning Eóganacht Raithlinn king of Cashel (Dub-dá-

¹²⁸ Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais', 53-4.

¹²⁹ *FAI* §423.

¹³⁰ *AI* 914.1, *CS* 913. *FAI* §423 state that Flaithbertach was king for thirty-two years, but this is obviously a calculation based on the date of his death.

¹³¹ *AU AI* 944.1.

¹³² Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais'.

Bairenn mac Domnaill, d. 959), Eóganacht Chaisil monopolised the kingship down to the Dál Cais take-over. The big exceptions are the Emly cleric-kings Ólchobar and Cenn Fáelad, and if, as Ó Corráin suggests, they were both members of Eóganacht Áine, we might even be able to think in terms of Emly and Cashel not as ecclesiastical and secular poles of Munster but as rivals, with the Áine candidates utilizing the resources of their dynasty and Emly in an attempt to maintain the 'circuit among the branches' of the Éoganachta. This is, it must be said, supposition, though it could furnish a practical reason for the existence of Emly abbots who became kings of Cashel. One might even go further and suggest that it was the Eóganacht Chaisil dynasty in particular who were responsible for the promotion of Patrick as bestower of the Cashel kingship's Christian lustre, at the expense of Ailbe of Emly. We shall return to the matter below. There remains the possibility that to some extent these kings, perhaps especially Cormac mac Cuillenáin, made their reigns an 'experiment' in ecclesiastical kingship. Of all the cleric-kings Cormac's later reputation makes him the saintliest, as well as the greatest scholar. Although the ascription of many secular poems to him may be doubtful,¹³³ there is every chance that he was involved in the compilation of the glossary which bears his name (*Sanas Chormaic*) and there is a rule ascribed to him.¹³⁴ These works may have been produced before or after he became king. As Cormac had been a career-ecclesiastic, he may have approached his kingly rule with similar asceticism, but we cannot know whether he made the institution of kingship more Christian, or whether he was deeply affected by texts such as *CCH*.

The types of cleric-kings discussed here seem to have been peculiar to Munster. The Leinster equivalents appear to be royalty who became ecclesiastics, not the other way round. Yet we do not have to restrict the phenomenon to the South; there is one possible example from elsewhere. In 863 Muiredach mac Maíl Dúin, *secnap* (vice-abbot, prior) of Armagh and king of Ind Airthir (in which Armagh was situated), was killed by Domnall mac Áeda, overking of Northern Uí Néill.¹³⁵ Muiredach may have been an ecclesiastic who rose to rule what was effectively Armagh's personal domain. Or it may be that the local rulers naturally took a role in Armagh's affairs. The term *secnap* is interesting, and seems to mean prior, deputy or heir-designate to an abbot.¹³⁶ None of the cleric-kings of Munster is called *secnap* exclusively and the term may have been

¹³³ For example, see Kenney, *The Sources*, pp. 734-5.

¹³⁴ J. Strachan (ed. & transl.), 'Cormac's rule', *Ériu* 2 (1905), 62-8.

¹³⁵ *AU* 863.2.

¹³⁶ Haggart, 'The *céili Dē*', pp. 161-7 has a full discussion of the term; cf. Hughes, *CEIS*, p. 211; Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 73.

applied to a lay person who acquired office. But it is possible that Muiredach was an ecclesiastic first. This evidence should caution us against thinking of cleric-kings as a purely Munster phenomenon. Nor should we even think of them as purely associated with the Eóganachta; several other Munster kings may also have been ecclesiastics. These include Fogartach mac Suibni, king of Cíarraige Cuirchi who died also at Belach Mugna in 908. *AFM* call him Fogartach .i. *eccnaidhe* 'i.e., the wise', but *FAI* call him *in sui fheallsombdhachta & diadhachta* 'the sage in philosophy and theology'.¹³⁷ This formulation suggests that he was an ecclesiastic, but the gap of time between the battle and the composition of the saga in *FAI* mean that we cannot be certain about Fogartach's status. With Cormac mac Mothlai, king of Déisi who died in 920, we are on safer ground:

AI 920.1

Martra Cormaic meicc Cuilennain, epscop & secnap Lis Móir & abb Cille Mo Laise & rí na n-Desse & cend athchomairc Muman olchena, la Hú Fothaid Aiched.

The martyrdom of Cormac mac Cuillenáin [*recte* Mothla], bishop and vice-abbot of Lismore and abbot of Kilmolash and king of the Déisi and chief counsellor of Munster, at the hands of Uí Fothaid Aiched.

The churches of Lismore and Kilmolash were both in Déisi territory in Co. Waterford. Cormac was of the royal dynasty of Déisi, and his son also became king of Déisi.¹³⁸ This suggests that Cormac was not a rank outsider who had already embarked on an ecclesiastical career before becoming king; the fact that he acceded by killing a rival bolsters this.¹³⁹ The title 'chief counsellor' accorded Cormac in *AI* is significant: though it may simply be a courtesy title alluding to his wisdom, one wonders if it related more directly to his activities. Flaithbertach mac Inmainén seems to have acted as a kind of chief advisor to Cormac mac Cuillenáin; so it is possible that Cormac mac Mothla acted in a similar capacity, although there is no direct evidence for this. The same title is awarded to our next figure of interest, Fínsnechta mac Láegaire, king of Cíarraige Lúachra. The only entry is *AI* 929.1: *Fínsnechta mac Loegaire, primánchara Hérend ocus rí Ciarraige Luachra 7 cend athchomairc Muman, quieuit*. Unfortunately nothing else is known of him, although the use of *cend athchomairc* is again notable. He must have enjoyed a

¹³⁷ *AFM* 903; *FAI* §423.

¹³⁸ Fáelán mac Cormaic, d. 966 (*AI* 966.1); see *CGH*, pp. 252, 394.

¹³⁹ For the events of his reign, see *AI* 897.2 on his accession; *FAI* §442, *AFM* 915.

reputation for piety to have been called *prímánchara Éirenn* 'chief confessor of Ireland' also.

The final cleric-king in Munster was Rebachán mac Mothla, king of Dál Cais. His death notice in *AI* 934.1 records that he was abbot of Túaim Gréine (Tomgraney). This church was traditionally connected with Uí Fíachrach, but it seems likely that Dál Cais cultivated close ties with the people and the church from early on.¹⁴⁰ Two other Dál Cais holders of the abbacy of Tomgraney are known in the eleventh century.¹⁴¹ Rebachán's career is otherwise unknown and he seems to have been the last king in Munster to have held ecclesiastical office before or during his kingship. It may only be a coincidence that the first Dál Cais ruler to be named in this connection lived at the end of the period in which one finds Eóganacht cleric-kings, and in the generation before Dál Cais rose to the overkingship of Munster. His reign was perhaps the last of Clann Áengusa in the Dál Cais kingship, followed by the first of Uí Thairdelbaig, the group which would go on to be kings of Dál Cais and overkings of Munster.¹⁴²

Though there were other kings in Ireland who held church offices, when one adds these examples to the Eóganachta instances it does seem that Munster made something of a habit of installing cleric-kings in the ninth and tenth centuries. Though in most cases these kings must have had their own resources, followers and *febas* with which to acquire the kingship, their ecclesiastical background may have made it easier to take royal office in certain circumstances. The direct and indirect effects of vikings left churches seeking protection, but paradoxically the heads of churches had greater power than before. Viking-raids may also have had some influence on the breakdown of the old dynastic alternation in Munster, though the activities of Uí Néill dynasts had more to do with it. If leading ecclesiastics were politically active in such circumstances and had a claim to kingship, there may have been little to stand in their way.

Emly, the Tripartite Life of Patrick, and the Life of Ailbe

We have seen several times already that Emly played a significant role in the Eóganacht kingship of Munster. Yet the dossier of materials relating to Emly and its founding saint, Ailbe, is not particularly bulky. When one attempts to write a history of the church of Emly in the early middle ages one does not find very much to go on. There is

¹⁴⁰ Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais', p. 55.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 214; Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais', p. 55.

a tolerably full record of abbots from the late-seventh century onwards in the annals, together with notices of a couple of bishops (the record of bishops after the diocesan reorganisation of the twelfth century is fuller); historical incidents involving Emly are not particularly prominent in the annals; and documents which may be associated with the church have not survived in any great number. It seems fair to say that Emly was not an early centre of annalistic recording, or if it was, its records did not find their way into the sources of the surviving chronicles; this at least would account for the relative paucity of entries regarding affairs at Emly. The Emly dossier of texts appears in the main to be restricted to two items. One is the *Life* of Saint Ailbe which exists in more than one version and has been discussed most profitably by Richard Sharpe.¹⁴³ The other text is the metrical rule of St Ailbe, which is a notably practical example of that genre.¹⁴⁴ The only other texts to which one may assign an Emly provenance are certain genealogical materials pertaining to its abbots, already mentioned above in relation to Ólchobar mac Cináeda and Cenn Fáelad úa Mugthigirn.

Emly's name *Imlech Ibair* perhaps means 'water-bordering land of the yew tree' and might have been a site of considerable importance in the pre-Christian period. Sacred yews were not peculiar to Munster, but the name Eóganachta, though analysed as deriving from an eponymous ancestor Eógan, contains the word *eó*, yew. The true origins of the church at Emly are unknown, but if the traditions about Ailbe's death contained in the chronicles are at all correct the church was founded in the second quarter of the sixth century.¹⁴⁵ It may have been a ritual place for the Eóganachta before that time, and any earlier relationship with the site of Cashel is also unknown. An early significance for Emly might in part underlie the later traditions that Ailbe was a pre-Patrician saint of the south. These traditions reach their fullest development in the *Life* of Ailbe and related texts, and clearly were developed in response to the growing power and influence of Armagh; nevertheless, even without Ailbe himself Emly may have had a considerable prehistory.

Emly was certainly patronized by early kings of Munster but it is not clear what connections it had with the kingship of Cashel before the era of the cleric-kings. I have suggested above that Artrí mac Cathail may have been an Emly-backed candidate in a time of dynastic dispute, though there is no direct evidence for this. He must have

¹⁴³ R. Sharpe, 'Quatuor Sanctissimi Episcopi: Irish Saints Before St Patrick', in Ó Corráin, Breatnach & McCone, *Sages, Saints and Storytellers*, pp. 376-99.

¹⁴⁴ Ed. & transl. J. O'Neill, 'The Rule of Ailbe', *Ériu* 3 (1907), 92-115.

¹⁴⁵ Ailbe's death is variously given at 527/8 (*AU AI*), 534 (*AU AT*) and 542 (*AU*). The entries as we have them are, of course, retrospective.

favoured Emly if the promulgation of *Lex Ailbi* is anything to go by. As we have noted, the enforcing of this law in Munster was not necessarily a deliberate reversal of the policies of his father, but Emly and Armagh were both seeking to advance their interests in Munster in the eighth and ninth centuries. In this context, let us return to 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel'. We recall that the shorter version of the text, which comes first in the manuscript, mentions the angel of the Lord and his blessing on the kings of Cashel. Its list of the kings of Cashel originally ended with Cathal mac Finguine and it is most likely that it was in his reign that this version of the story was originally put together. There are no direct references to Patrick, Armagh or for that matter Emly or any other church in this account. In the second, longer version the angel is a cleric in white 'with two chanting choirs about him, symbolizing the coming of Patrick'.¹⁴⁶ In naming the one king who died violently in Cashel for not observing truth and mercy, this version refers to a prophecy made by Patrick when he baptized Áengus mac Nad Fraích. The story is lifted from the *Tripartite Life* of Patrick, or a common source. 'The Story of the finding of Cashel' concludes with Patrick's blessing upon the men of Munster and his warning not to kill.¹⁴⁷ Then follows an enumeration of the tax of 'the scruple of Patrick's baptism' upon Munster, 500 each of cows, cloaks, brooches, mantles, sheep and ingots of iron, 'and this tax was brought from the king of Cashel until the time of Cormac, and it was brought once from Cormac himself'.¹⁴⁸ The tax must be the dues to Armagh under *Cáin Phatraic/Lex Patricii*; it is difficult to see what else it could be.

The reference to 'Cormac' has implications for dating the text; only two Cormacs were kings of Munster and the likely candidate here is Cormac mac Cuillenáin, which supports the probable dating in the tenth century. If the references to the levying of *cáin* are genuine we may ask why it was supposed to have ceased in his time. We have already seen that *Cáin Phatraic* was enforced in Munster in 842 and 846 (and possibly in the reign of Cathal mac Finguine in 737); unfortunately there are no other references to its levying in Munster until after the reign of Cormac mac Cuillenáin.¹⁴⁹ There is admittedly quite a gap until these references begin, so it is quite possible that at the time

¹⁴⁶ Dillon, 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel', §4.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, §7.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, §8.

¹⁴⁹ These are *AU* 973.5 (cf. *AI* 973.3), 1068.2, 1094.6, 1106.6, 120.4 (cf. *AI* 1120.7), all of which refer to the abbot of Armagh on circuit in Munster. There are also several references to *mair* (stewards) of Patrick in Munster, e.g. *AU* 1052.5, 1073.3, 1113.3 which indicate that revenues were collected at times other than when the coarb of Patrick was on tour. See further H. Pettiau, 'The Officials of the Church of Armagh in the Early and Central Middle Ages to A.D. 1200', in A.J. Hughes & W. Nolan (edd.), *Armagh: History and Society* (Dublin 2001), pp. 121-86: 124.

this version of the 'Story' was composed *Cáin Pátraic* had temporarily ceased to be applied in Munster. Even so, this version of the text was written by someone who subscribed to the ideology of Armagh as the most important church in Ireland.

The connection between Patrick and Cashel is of some antiquity. In the seventh century Tírechán states that Patrick baptized Áengus mac Nad Fraích and his sons *super petram Coithrigi* 'upon the rock of Patrick' at Cashel.¹⁵⁰ The fullest expression of the ideology of Patrick and Cashel is found in the *Tripartite Life*. Most of the materials in this large work belong to the ninth century, and as it stands it was perhaps written in the reign of Finguine Cenn Gécán (d. 902), the last-named king to have ruled 'under a crozier' in Cashel.¹⁵¹ The narrative of the conversion of Munster focuses on Cashel. When Áengus mac Nad Fraích wakes in the morning after the arrival of Patrick he finds all the pagan idols of Cashel have been thrown down. Then during the baptism Patrick accidentally drove the point of his crozier through Áengus's foot; Áengus made no complaint, assuming it was part of the Christian ritual. Patrick then prophesied that none of his successors would die a violent death (the exception-clause about Cormac úa Máenaig found in 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel' is absent here); another reason to consider the text to pre-date the death of Cormac mac Cuillenáin in 908. The text also includes the intriguing phrase *ní rí Caisil cu ron-orddnea comarba Patraic ocus cu-tarda grad fair* 'no one is king of Cashel until the coarb of Patrick ordains him and confers orders on him.'¹⁵² We have noted that some writers, at least, compared royal office with episcopal office, and the incidents of royal ordination. This suggests there might be more in the idea that the kingship of Cashel was a particularly Christian office comparable to abbacy or episcopacy; we recall the gloss in the law tracts which referred to a *comarba Caisil*. The role given to Armagh here is very striking; whatever the claims of Emly to inaugurate the kings of Cashel, the author of this work has ignored them. If such an inauguration ever took place, one might expect at least one of the chronicles to have mentioned it. It also seems unlikely (though not impossible) that the Emly cleric-kings Ólchobar mac

¹⁵⁰ Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, p. 162. For *Coithrige* see D. McManus, 'A Chronology of the Latin loan words in Early Irish', *Ériu* 34 (1983), 21-71; A. Harvey, 'The Significance of *Coithrige*', *Ériu* 36 (1985), 1-9.

¹⁵¹ For a summary of scholarship on the date, see D.N. Dumville, 'The Dating of the Tripartite Life of Saint Patrick', in *idem*, *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493-1993* (Woodbridge 1993), pp. 255-8. Broadly, K. Mulchrone argued for a date around 900 (in her edition, *Bethu Phátraic: The Tripartite Life of Patrick* (Dublin 1939)), G. Mac Eóin ('The Dating of Middle Irish Texts', *Proceedings of The British Academy* 68 (1982), 109-37) argued for a ninth-tenth century date, while F. Mac Donncha O.F.M. ('Dáta Vita Tripartita', *Éigse* 18 (1980), 125-42), and K.H. Jackson ('The Date of the Tripartite Life of St Patrick', *ZCP* 41 (1986), 5-45), while allowing for early sources, dated the text to the eleventh or twelfth centuries.

¹⁵² Stokes, *The Tripartite Life*, i, p. 196 [my translation].

Cináeda and Cenn Fáelad úa Mugthigirn would have allowed themselves to be ordained into the kingship of Cashel by the abbot of Armagh.

It is likely that by the ninth century there were pro- and anti-Armagh factions in Munster (and indeed in other parts of Ireland). Feidlimid mac Crimthainn was not slow to grasp the potential of allying with the most significant church in the country. Whatever the ecclesiastics of Emly thought themselves, they had to adapt to a reality in which Patrick was the national apostle and Armagh sought pre-eminent status in the island. The resulting counter-propaganda was less effective, and seems intended to try to safeguard Emly's position of pre-eminence in the south. Thus the legal gloss we encountered specifying the status of the coarb of Ailbe as being equivalent to the status of the coarb of Patrick; this bipolar axis in the ecclesiastical sphere reflects the evolving secular traditions paralleling Tara and Cashel, Níall Noígíallach and Conall Corc. How much notice churchmen in the north took of Emly's protestations is unclear. As we have seen, the apparent cessation of payments of *Cáin Phatraic* in the time of Cormac was not permanent. It is interesting that the *máir* in Munster seem to appear after the mid-tenth century; their presence could be due to the Dál Cais dominance of Munster; after their takeover Emly had to play second fiddle to Dál Cais churches, especially Killaloe, for a considerable time. It was Brían Bóraime himself who had cemented relations between Dál Cais and Armagh during his famous visit of 1005 when he had placed a donation of twenty ounces of gold on the altar of Patrick and his confessor Máel Suthain made an entry in the Book of Armagh describing Brían as *imperator Scottorum*.¹⁵³

If we return the focus to the Eóganachta kings rather than the aspirations of Emly and other Munster churches, one might suggest a further reason for the careful incorporation of Patrick into the history of the dynasty. Quite simply, Patrick had an unarguable glamour, and his cult attracted persons and stories from all over Ireland to it. This process snowballed with growth of the influence of Armagh, and the key point is that the Irish kings themselves bought into the importance of the cult. The ancestors of several of the significant Irish dynasties were said to have been baptised by Patrick, even if local saints and churches played a more important role in the day-to-day life of each kingdom. Thus when we see Patrick baptising Áengus, regardless of the extent to which Armagh claims were accepted in Munster, we are seeing the Eóganachta kings making sure that the Patrician glamour rubs off on themselves. That Patrick baptised

¹⁵³ *AU* 1005.7; see Kenney, *The Sources*, pp. 353-4.

the Uí Néill king Láegaire mac Néill does not serve to make the Uí Néill more special than anybody else. The ultimate result, naturally, is that soon all dynasties had their sanction from Patrick, and other distinctions came into play, which for the Eóganachta must have included the legends about the finding of Cashel.

Let us return briefly to the attitudes of the Munster churches. The most significant counter to the Armagh doctrines was the tradition that Ailbe, together with several other southern saints, were active proselytisers before Patrick came to Ireland. It is most likely that there were Christians and missionaries active in the south of Ireland before Patrick's time; Palladius is the only one recorded in history.¹⁵⁴ It is unlikely that the later traditions about these early saints have any basis in reality. As noted above, the annalistic evidence for Ailbe places him in the early sixth century. Nevertheless, the Life of Ailbe of Emly is very explicit about his preceding Patrick, together with the southern saints Ibar, Ciarán of Seirkieran and Déclán of Ardmore, of whom the last is the most likely to have a genuine claim of pre-Patrician status. Ailbe's Life belongs in a group with lives of Déclán and Ciarán which all agree that these four saints were bishops before Patrick, and that all of them (except Ibar) were consecrated in Rome; startling claims, to say the least.¹⁵⁵ Early scholarship on these texts did not know quite what to make of them. The most useful analysis was that of Todd, who asserted that the lives were illustrative of the ambitions of the Munster churches in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹⁵⁶

Sharpe discussed the possible sources for this material. In his opinion, the one source for the Life of Ailbe was a version found in the *Codex Salmanticensis* collection of lives, and though this is in Latin, Sharpe suggested from the forms of names that this version 'appears to be an ancient text, probably copied from a manuscript during the Old Irish period.'¹⁵⁷ His suggested date was *ca* 800, and he drew attention to a note by Byrne which associated the text with the first recorded promulgation of *Cáin Ailbi* in Munster.¹⁵⁸ As noted above, the king of Munster at this time was Cathussach mac Eterscéla, of the Eóganacht Áine, the branch of the dynasty with the closest links to Emly. However, the early life still incorporates the traditions of Patrick in Munster, and

¹⁵⁴ For further consideration of this question, see. D. Ó Riain-Raedel, 'The Question of the 'Pre-Patrician' Saints of Munster', in Monk & Sheehan, *Early Medieval Munster*, pp. 17-22.

¹⁵⁵ For discussion of the contents of these lives, see Sharpe, 'Quatuor Sanctissimi Episcopi'.

¹⁵⁶ J.H. Todd, *St Patrick, Apostle of Ireland* (Dublin 1864), pp. 220-1.

¹⁵⁷ Sharpe, 'Quatuor Sanctissimi Episcopi', p. 390.

¹⁵⁸ F.J. Byrne, 'Derrynavlan: the Historical Context', *JRS* 110 (1980), 116-26.

so could not, in Sharpe's view, be earlier than *ca* 700 or the time of Tírechán.¹⁵⁹ By the time of the later version of the life, the Patrician material had become part of the core of traditions about the Christian kingship of Cashel and could not be ignored, so Ailbe actually skulks in the background while Patrick is baptizing Áengus, and this in his own Life! It seems fair to say that Todd was largely right and the concerns of this text were with defending Emly's position in its own part of Ireland. Patrick acknowledges Ailbe's claim to be a bishop and this may echo Munster archiepiscopal ambitions in the twelfth century. Sharpe concluded that 'an author in Munster, desiring to promote the status of Emly, had the motivation to present the principal local saint as a forerunner of the better-known national apostle ... the historical interest of these claims from a Munster church in the eighth century remain to be explored'.¹⁶⁰ Unfortunately, it is difficult to explore too far, as the dating of the *Salmanticensis* text is still too approximate, and it is not certain that Sharpe's dating by reference to the orthography of Irish names in a Latin text is entirely reliable: John Carey has argued that Sharpe's dating of the 'O'Donohue' group of lives (those shared by the Salamanca, Dublin and Oxford collections) is doubtful and that those texts contain spellings which suit dates in the ninth century and later.¹⁶¹ On the other hand, the O'Donohue *Vita Albei* contains an Old-Irish verse, which might indicate an eighth or early ninth-century date.¹⁶² The most likely contexts are either the years at the end of the eighth century when *Cáin Ailbi/Lex Ailbi* was promulgated twice in a short space of time, a sure sign of Emly asserting itself, or during the reigns of the Emly cleric-kings of Cashel Ólchobar mac Cináeda and Cenn Fáelad úa Mugthigirn.

Royal Saints in Ireland

Although the claims of Ailbe and company to have been saints before the coming of Patrick are of doubtful antiquity, there do seem to have been a striking number of Munster saints in the sixth and seventh centuries. This is no indication that the province was more holy than other parts of Ireland, which acquired a reputation for being an *insula sanctorum* at an early date. A question which is very relevant to our theme is that of the presence, or otherwise, of royal saints in Ireland. Given that holy men and women

¹⁵⁹ Sharpe, 'Quator Sanctissimi Episcopi', p. 390-4.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

¹⁶¹ J. Carey, review of R. Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives: An Introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford 1991), *Speculum* 68 (1993), 260-2: 261-2.

¹⁶² W.W. Heist, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Brussels 1965), p. 130.

were among Ireland's most exported commodities in the early middle ages, and given that a large proportion of Irish ecclesiastics (including many of the historical saints) were members of royal dynasties or their offshoots, one might expect to find at least a few royal saints, i.e. kings, queens, princes or princesses who were later venerated as such. The existence of such persons was in general a boon for the royal dynasty that could claim them (regardless of the individual circumstances of the saint's life and legends), for they added in an appreciable way to the distinctiveness of the dynasty. Surprisingly, they seem to be rather thin on the ground in Ireland, certainly compared with certain parts of Europe. Ireland lacks an Oswald, a Louis, an Óláf. It therefore might be significant that two of the best candidates for royal sainthood in Ireland were members of the Eóganacht, namely Feidlimid mac Crimthainn and Cormac mac Cuillenáin, the cleric-kings whose careers we have already examined in some detail. We must ask why these two characters were regarded as saints: was it more to do with their clerical status or their kingly status? If the kingly side of the equation can be removed altogether, would that imply there were no royal saints in pre-Norman Ireland, and if not, why not? We must also ask whether the reputation for holiness which Feidlimid and Cormac later enjoyed was an intensely personal thing, or was it partly a characteristic of the Eóganacht dynasty; did later members of the dynasty seek to make capital of their illustrious ancestors?

Feidlimid, despite his violence against certain churches, gained a reputation for piety very quickly. He was associated with the *céli Dé* and is one of the 'Unity of Máel Rúain' (*Lucht Óentad Maíl Rúain*) in the Tallaght group of documents.¹⁶³ Furthermore his death-day is listed in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*, much of which text dates from before his death.¹⁶⁴ Another document in the Book of Leinster, the 'Unity of Feidlimid' is an expanded version of *Lucht Óentad Maíl Rúain*, listing twenty-four ecclesiastical companions of Feidlimid, who gathered together with him in Derrynavlan 'practising devotion without extravagance, at cross vigil in Lent'.¹⁶⁵ The commemoration of Feidlimid's day (28 August) is also found in later martyrologies, including *Féilire Uí*

¹⁶³ *B&L*, vi, pp. 1683, 1686. See Haggart, 'The *céli Dé*', pp. 102-5. Feidlimid's inclusion may, of course, only imply commemoration rather than veneration.

¹⁶⁴ R.I. Best & H.J. Lawlor (edd.), *The Martyrology of Tallaght* (Henry Bradshaw Society 68, London 1931), 28 August. On the date see P. Ó Riain, 'The Tallaght Martyrologies, Redated', *CMCS* 20 (Winter 1990), 21-38; D.N. Dumville, 'Féilire Óengusso: Problems of Dating a Monument of Old Irish', *Éigse* 33 (2002), 19-48: 31-46.

¹⁶⁵ *B&L*, vi, p. 1707-8. See Haggart, 'The *céli Dé*', pp. 105-8.

Górmáin and the Martyrology of Donegal.¹⁶⁶ Together with Cormac, Feidlimid is the only Irish king to be mentioned in any of the martyrologies and therefore these two seem to be the only Irish kings who were venerated as saints, at least by some. It is possible that rather than any particular church promoting the cult of Feidlimid (and we do not even know where he was buried), his reputation was preserved by the *céli Dé* ascetic movement as part of their *óentu* of saints.

Cormac mac Cuillenáin is in another league. There are a huge number of Irish texts attributed to him, including a rule, not to mention various legends of his non-consummated marriage to queen Gormlaith and the saga of his doom at Belach Mugna.¹⁶⁷ His reputation seems to have been secure from the moment of his death; he was viewed principally as a great scholar and holy man. As we have seen, later traditions (such as *FAD*) show him to have been concerned with prayer and devout scholarship first and foremost, and kingship a distant second. There is no way of telling whether this is any kind of reflection of his own attitudes, as none of the surviving texts attributed to him deal specifically with kingship. As a figure of Irish literature and history he is rather singular; in some respects however he conforms to types of royal saint found elsewhere in Europe.

There has been a considerable amount of work done on the question of royal saints and sacral rulers in early Europe. Two syntheses, that of František Graus and that of Robert Folz, broadly divide the royal saint into three types: the two most significant being the martyr (often falling in battle against heathen enemies) and the monk-ascetic king (or confessor).¹⁶⁸ Each has a different third type; in Graus's scheme the innocent king betrayed and killed by his enemies (a subset of the martyr for Folz) and in Folz's model the royal miracle-worker or thaumaturge.¹⁶⁹ This last was a definite type of the late middle ages in Europe and indeed Folz places his three types into a chronological sequence, but the miracle-worker does not concern us here.¹⁷⁰

Cormac mac Cuillenáin was not only a martyr, but also conforms to the confessor-type in most particulars, and in more general terms the ascetic-scholar type

¹⁶⁶ W. Stokes (ed. & transl.), *Féilre Húi Gormáin: The Martyrology of Gorman* (Henry Bradshaw Society 9, London 1905); J.H. Todd & W. Reeves (edd. & transl.), *The Martyrology of Donegal: A Calendar of the Saints of Ireland* (Dublin 1864).

¹⁶⁷ Harrington, *Women in a Celtic Church*, pp. 261-5

¹⁶⁸ F. Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger* (Prague 1965); R. Folz, *Les saints rois du Moyen Âge en Occident (VIe-XIIIe siècles)* (Brussels 1984).

¹⁶⁹ Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger*, p. 428; Folz, *Les saints rois*, pp. 69-115.

¹⁷⁰ The most recent study of royal saints, taking in comparative evidence but concerned mainly with Hungary, is G. Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, transl. E. Pálmai (Cambridge 2002).

would apply to a very large number of Irish saints, including some related to kings, the prime example being Colum Cille. This latter pattern of saints belonging to aristocratic lineages has been termed *Adelsbeiligen* by Prinz and its appropriateness for the Irish situation was noted by Ó Corráin.¹⁷¹ Cormac's cult also seems to have acquired miracle-working characteristics by the time the saga of the Battle of Belach Mugna in *FAI* was composed, for in speaking of Cormac's head, struck off after the battle, it states:

FAI §423

Rugadh uadh iar t-tain an ceann go honorach d'ionnsoighidh an chuirp bail a rabha Maonach mc. Siadhail, comharba Comhghaill, & rug-saidhe corp Cormaic go Disiort Diarmata, & ro honorach ann sin é, bail a n-dénann fearta & miorbhaille.

After that the head was honourably brought from him to the body, in the place where Máenach son of Siadal, successor of Comgall, was, and he took Cormac's body to Dísert Diarmata, and it was greatly honoured there, where it produces omens and miracles.

It seems that generally Irish dynasties were not particularly concerned to cultivate the reputations of kings or queens who had a reputation for sanctity. The documents celebrating Feidlimid mac Crimthainn seem to be products of the *céli Dé* movement. Cormac mac Cuillenáin seems to be a special case of a holy man who enjoyed a high reputation in many of the churches of southern Ireland after his death. None of the texts celebrating either of these two can be definitely tied to any Eóganachta churches or placed in the context of the reign of a later Eóganacht king. There might be several reasons for this. Firstly, and perhaps most crucially, neither of them left any heirs; no brothers are recorded for either (though they probably existed) so as far as the historical record goes their respective branches of Eóganacht Chaisil died with them; we have seen that Cormac's pedigree could be a complete fabrication. True, Feidlimid had at least one wife but no offspring are recorded. Great play is made in later texts of Cormac's celibacy, to the point where he refused to sleep with Gormlaith.¹⁷² In an age where ecclesiastics routinely produced offspring such devoutness is notable and must only have served to enhance Cormac's reputation. Of course, the Irish system of succession does not require linear descendants, but in the

¹⁷¹ F. Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum in Frankenreich* (Munich 1965), pp. 489-509; for discussion see D. Ó Corráin, 'Foreign connections and domestic politics: Killaloe and the Uí Briain in twelfth-century hagiography' in D. Whitelock *et al.* (edd.), *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge 1982), pp. 213-31.

¹⁷² Harrington, *Women in a Celtic Church*, pp. 261-5.

case of Feidlimid and Cormac any nephews or cousins who existed failed to make a political impact which might have allowed them to make capital of their holy forebears; as stated, they have left a historical blank. It was a different sept of Eóganacht Chaisil which came to dominate Munster politics before the rise of the Dál Cais and whose descendents the Meic Carthaig would reclaim power in Munster in the twelfth century. In that period it was not their saintly ancestors of Eóganacht Chaisil they looked to for the enhancement of their prestige; rather it was a king with a reputation for aggression and action against the vikings, Cellachán Caisil.

Irish kings generally seem to have had little need to cultivate a reputation for holiness in their dynasties. There are a couple of possible cases beyond Cormac and Feidlimid, but neither appear in martyrologies. Fínsnechta (d. 848), king of Connacht, and Cúanu (d. 646), king of Fir Maige Féne are regarded as saints in the genealogies and related tracts, but the traditions seem slight and very localized.¹⁷³ The Eóganacht documents stress the Christian origins of the dynasty and the credentials of Cashel, but no need seems to have been felt for saintly ancestors to be incorporated into this arsenal. Perhaps the answer is simply that Irish dynasties thought of themselves in much more inclusive terms than European dynasties, which tried to exclude collateral branches and maintain the prime royal lineage. Irish dynasts would generally not have had too far to look through the genealogies to find a saint and this might have militated against the charisma and distinction of having saints in one's family. I suspect the reasons for the Irish largely ignoring the opportunities to cultivate royal saints are more varied than this, and the question needs further examination. In the case of the Eóganachta at least, it seems that they and their chief church of Emly were not too concerned to make use of the reputations of Feidlimid and Cormac, but of course the level of surviving documentation is not large.

It is possible that attitudes to royal sanctity among the Irish were beginning to change in the twelfth century under the influence of continental ideas. In his examination of the twelfth-century life of the Dál Cais saint, Flannán of Killaloe, Ó Corráin drew attention to the treatment of Flannán's father Tairdelbach, progenitor of the Uí Thairdelbaig branch of Dál Cais and ancestors of the Uí Briain. In the *Life of Flannán Tairdelbach* is effectively presented as a saint.¹⁷⁴ Part of the context is easily

¹⁷³ K. Meyer, 'Baile Fíndachta ríge Connacht', *ZCP* 13 (1919), 25-7; J.G. Ó'Keeffe (ed.), 'Betha Molaga', in Fraser, Grosjean & O'Keeffe, *Irish Texts*, iii (London 1931), 11-22: 13; for discussion see Ó Corráin, 'Foreign Connections', p. 227.

¹⁷⁴ Ó Corráin, 'Foreign Connections', pp. 226-31.

deduced: the Uí Briain overking of Thomond at the time the S-recension of the Life of Flannán was written was also a Tairdelbach, direct descendant of the holy king in the Life and a figure who could reflect the brilliance of his ancestor. Nevertheless, according to Ó Corráin, the sainting of Tairdelbach 'appears to be unique in Irish hagiological and genealogical traditions'.¹⁷⁵ He sought an explanation among the foreign connections of the monks at Killaloe, connections which were not unique to them in Munster. The twelfth century saw several canonisations of royal saints in Europe – those of the Emperor Henry II and Edward the Confessor among others. The clerics of Regensburg, where the S-recension of the text was reworked, were well aware of current events and according to Ó Corráin saw the value of giving a saintly ancestor to their Uí Briain patrons.¹⁷⁶ We should also note, in this context, the way in which Brían Bóraime is presented in *Cocad Gáedel re Gallaib*.¹⁷⁷ He is effectively martyred at Clontarf and is portrayed as a deeply religious king, comparable with Moses.¹⁷⁸

Ó Corráin further notes of the Life of Flannán that the clerics who produced it were also aware of the reputation of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, for the narrative is interrupted to introduce him.¹⁷⁹ There was no danger, at the dynastic level, in celebrating Feidlimid's sanctity, for the twelfth century kings of Eóganacht Chaisil, the Meic Carthaig, were not his descendents.

The Meic Carthaig and the Church in the eleventh and twelfth centuries

The years following the death of Cormac mac Cuillenáin were difficult times for the Eóganachta in general and Eóganacht Chaisil in particular; these years saw the rise of the Uí Thairdelbaig rulers of Dál Cais and ultimately the Dál Cais takeover of the kingship of Munster, after which the Eóganachta were relegated to an inferior position for over a century.¹⁸⁰ Eóganacht Chaisil, the most successful branch of the dynasty, managed to retain a good deal of power as a local dynasty and their ruling family, who later took the name Mac Carthaig, were ultimately able to become, for a while, the most powerful Munster kings in the twelfth century. In this final section of the chapter I wish

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

¹⁷⁶ D. Ó Riain-Raedel, 'The travels of Irish manuscripts: from the Continent to Ireland', in T. Barnard, D. Ó Cróinín & K. Simms (edd.), *A Miracle of Learning: Studies in Irish Manuscripts and Irish Learning* (Oxford 1988), 52-6.

¹⁷⁷ J.H. Todd (ed. & transl), *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaib: The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill, or, The Invasions of Ireland by the Danes and other Norsemen* (London 1867).

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 196-204.

¹⁷⁹ Ó Corráin, 'Foreign Connections', p. 227.

¹⁸⁰ Kelleher, 'The rise of the Dál Cais', p. 236-41.

to examine some of the ways in which the Meic Carthaig attempted to project the prestige and distinction of their dynasty in the face of the supremacy of the Uí Briain.

Beforehand, some historical background must be sketched in. It seems that Munster power took some time to recover from the defeat at Belach Mugna. We have little evidence for the activities of Flaithbertach mac Inmainén. He was succeeded by the nonentity Lorcán mac Coinlígáin of Eóganacht Chaisil, who was in turn succeeded by Cellachán mac Búadacháin. Cellachán was the last Eóganacht king of Cashel of any significance; the chronicle-record shows him to have been an aggressive and ambitious king. The most impressive document concerning him is *Cathréim Chellacháin Chaisil* 'The Battle-career of Cellachán of Cashel', a product of the twelfth century and therefore of doubtful direct value for the history of the tenth.¹⁸¹ This text has been shown to be largely propagandistic, written in the mould (and under the influence of) *Cocad Gáedel re Gallaib* to glorify the illustrious ancestor of the Meic Carthaig, in the same way *Cocad* was written to glorify Brían Bóraime, ancestor of the Uí Briain.¹⁸² Cellachán was chosen because he was the last Eóganacht Chaisil king of substance. Though the Meic Carthaig took their name from Cellachán's great-grandson Carthach, the latter lived in the shadows of the powerful Uí Briain kings and little is known about him. In the *Cathréim* Cellachán is presented as a uniter of Munster factions, tireless campaigner against vikings and merciful benefactor of the church; all these motifs occur to a greater or lesser extent in *Cocad Gáedel re Gallaib* and tell us more about Meic Carthaig concerns in the twelfth century than the Eóganacht kingship of Cashel almost two hundred years earlier.

During the eleventh century the Meic Carthaig (with the aid of outside interventions, principally by Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair of Connacht) consolidated a hold on the southern part of Munster, the area known as *Desmumu* (Desmond), with a centre at Cork, against the northern part of the province (*Túadmumu*, Thomond) which was the Uí Briain heartland, with its main centres at Kincora, Limerick and the royal-inauguration site at Mag nAdair (Moyare, Co. Clare). It is most likely that Uí Briain expanded their territories eastward towards the vicinity of Cashel and must have paid some attention to the ancient site; it has even been suggested that they maintained a house there in the late eleventh century.¹⁸³ On the other hand, one might expect that the

¹⁸¹ Ed. & transl. A. Bugge, *Cathreim Cellachain Caisik: The Victorious Career of Cellachan of Cashel, or, the Wars between the Irishmen and the Norsemen in the Middle of the 10th Century*, Christiania [Oslo] 1905. Note that the title itself was provided by Eugene O'Curry.

¹⁸² Ó Corráin, 'Cathréim Chellacháin Chaisil'.

¹⁸³ Candon, 'Barefaced Effrontery', 1-25.

Uí Briain had something of an ambivalent attitude toward Cashel, for it was a symbol of prestige of the Eóganachta kingship and the former order in Munster. This is the context normally invoked for the significant events of 1101, when Muirchertach Úa Briain, overking of Munster and high-king of Ireland 'with opposition' held a synod at Cashel.¹⁸⁴ This occasion is generally viewed as the formal beginning of the reform movement in the twelfth-century Irish church, the success and significance of which remain matters for considerable debate.¹⁸⁵ In the words of CS, there was 'a gathering of the men of Ireland with Muirchertach Úa Briain in Cashel i.e. with laity and clergy, and Muirchertach Úa Briain then gave Cashel of the kings as a gift to the Lord'.¹⁸⁶ There is no doubt that Muirchertach had genuine piety and a zeal for reform, but by donating the ancient centre of the Eóganachta to the Church he has been seen to have been attempting to deprive the Meic Carthaig of political prestige.

I do not think that this is the whole of the story. It is not certain who lived at Cashel around 1100; the main centres of Meic Carthaig power were in the south of Munster. It is also clear that though Cashel had been a seat of kingship, there was some kind of ecclesiastical presence there from an early date, going on the Patrician references in the texts discussed above. It could be suggested that Muirchertach was concerned not so much for the political prestige of the Eóganachta as for the ecclesiastical prestige. The reform movement is often seen as a twelfth-century phenomenon in Ireland but its beginnings lie some years earlier. A large part of the impetus for reform came from the links between Irish kings and the bishops of the Norse towns of Dublin, Waterford and latterly Limerick. The bishops there had looked across the sea to England for ecclesiastical authority and both Muirchertach Úa Briain and his father Tairdelbach had been concerned with those ecclesiastical appointments. Tairdelbach had corresponded with both Pope Gregory VII (whose strong views on ecclesiastical authority are well-known from other contexts) and Lanfranc of Canterbury on various matters.¹⁸⁷ Muirchertach seems to have been similarly influenced by ideas of ecclesiastical and secular authority coming from England and the Continent, shown by

¹⁸⁴ *AT*, *AFM*, 1101; *AClon* 1100; cf. T. Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *An Leabhar Muimhneach* (Dublin 1940), p. 341.

¹⁸⁵ A. Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Blackrock 1992); Dumville, *Councils and Synods*, pp. 35-46.

¹⁸⁶ CS 1097; cf. Gwynn, *The Irish Church*, pp. 155-79.

¹⁸⁷ H. Clover & M. Gibson (edd. & transl.), *The Letters of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury* (Oxford 1979), pp. 63-73, 154-61; H.E.J. Cowdrey (edd. & transl.), *The Epistolae Vagantes of Pope Gregory VII* (Oxford 1972), pp. 138-41. For discussion see Gwynn, *The Irish Church*, pp. 68-83, 84-98.

his own correspondence with Henry I and Anselm.¹⁸⁸ There can be little doubt that the Meic Carthaig were similarly in touch with continental currents. Their most important links were via the personnel of the Irish Benedictine monasteries in Germany, the *Schottenklöster*. From around the turn of the twelfth century these monasteries were staffed almost exclusively with Irishmen, mainly from Munster, and those clerics kept in touch with the folks back home.¹⁸⁹ These links between the great Munster kingships and the Continent were perhaps partly the result of closer geographical proximity, but also may reflect a tendency of the Irish in Munster to pay more attention to external affairs, a tendency which one might trace back to the *Romani* party in the seventh century or even earlier. In any case, Muirchertach decided to embark on a programme of ecclesiastical reform, which would go hand-in-hand with his (ultimately unsuccessful) attempts to be recognised as high-king throughout the island and consolidate Uí Bríain kingship. Perhaps then Muirchertach viewed Cashel as a symbol of the Christian credentials of the Eóganacht Meic Carthaig, credentials which the Uí Bríain could not match (the presentation of Tairdelbach as saint in the Life of Flannán discussed above may have been a later attempt to remedy this situation). By making Cashel an Uí Bríain gift to the church, Muirchertach was acquiring some of that lustre for himself; surely the most Christian kings would be the sponsors of reform, and those kings had to be Uí Bríain. The earlier literature of the Eóganacht had emphasized place over people; Cashel was the place revealed by the angel of the Lord; Cashel was the rock of Patrick where he had baptized Áengus. Thus, more than just political prestige was at stake. This interpretation of events concurs more with what we know of dynastic take-overs elsewhere in Europe. For practical reasons which have been mentioned in Chapter II it is understandable that Kincora could become the 'capital' of Munster when the Uí Bríain kings were resident there; yet it is in some ways strange that the Dál Cais apparently did not appropriate more of the existing infrastructure when they became kings of Munster. In other parts of Europe, *arriviste* kings and dynasties often appropriated the important centres and symbolic prerogatives of the previous incumbents as well as retaining their own significant places.¹⁹⁰ It might be considered unusual if the Irish did the latter but not the former, but perhaps in the case of Cashel in 1101 we can see this happening.

¹⁸⁸ Kenney, *The Sources*, p. 760-1; Dumville, *Councils and Synods*, pp. 41-4.

¹⁸⁹ D. Ó Riain-Raedel, 'German influence on Munster Church and Kings in the Twelfth Century', in Smyth, *Seanchas*, pp. 323-30.

¹⁹⁰ E.g., Scone in Scotland (which must originally have been a Pictish centre before its appropriation by the kings of the Gaelicizing kingdom of Alba); the Capetians' links with Saint Denis and other sites.

It has been suggested that *Lebor na Cert* was composed around the time of the synod of Cashel or even for recitation at the meeting itself, when Muirchertach was at the height of his power.¹⁹¹ The author highlights the contrast between pagan Tara 'extinguished by the fasting of Patrick and his community' and Cashel.¹⁹² The king of Cashel should normally be high-king of Ireland: 'the heir of Cashel is the common chief of all, as is the heir of Patrick'.¹⁹³ Here we have the same formulation *comarba Caisil* as found in the legal gloss discussed above, paralleled by *comarba Pátraic*. This time however, *comarba Ailbi* is absent. The idea is clear: just as the heir of Patrick is the ecclesiastical superior of all Ireland, so the king of Cashel is the lay superior. By focusing on the site itself, rather than the dynasty (for of course it was Áengus mac Nad Fraích of the Eóganachta who was blessed by Patrick at Cashel), the text seems to make a direct link between Patrick, Cashel and the kingship of Munster and Ireland as held by the Uí Bríain.

We have in this formulation the ultimate development of the parallelism of Armagh and Cashel seen in the Tripartite Life. The value of Cashel as a Christian centre itself had thus come into play, and its association with the kingship of Munster, regardless of the ruling dynasty. The available evidence we have suggests that Cashel was under the control of Uí Bríain by the end of eleventh century.¹⁹⁴ Certainly, Muirchertach Úa Bríain is said to have had a house there, though Kincora remained a primary residence of Uí Bríain.¹⁹⁵ The Meic Carthaig, it seems, were based in Desmumu with a main centre at Cork.¹⁹⁶ The success of the text is to make the Patrick-Cashel-Uí Bríain link explicit and to eliminate the Eóganachta from the picture, something which would have been unthinkable 150 years previously.

Yet, there are a few strange features of *Lebor na Cert* which give us pause before assigning its production to the reign of Muirchertach Úa Bríain or the Synod of Cashel in 1101. In the first place, the text is happy to countenance either Eóganacht or Dál

¹⁹¹ Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 192, Candon, 'Barefaced Effrontery', 9-17.

¹⁹² Dillon, *Lebor na Cert*, ll. 219-22.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, ll. 208-9.

¹⁹⁴ *AT* 1090, which refer to *tigh Hui Briain* 'Úa Bríain's house', *AClon* 1089 which refer to 'the king's house in Cashell', and *AFM* 1091 which refer to *tigh Uí Bhriain hi Caisseal* 'Úa Bríain's house in Cashel'. See Candon, 'Barefaced Effrontery', 9-10 for further discussion.

¹⁹⁵ *AI* 1086.4, 1088.4; *AU* 1107.2, 1119.1.

¹⁹⁶ Candon, 'Barefaced Effrontery', 10; cf. A. Candon, 'Belach Conglais and the diocese of Cork, AD 1111', *Peritia* 5 (1986), 416-18; 417; H.A. Jefferies, 'Desmond Before the Norman Invasion: a Political Study', *JCHAS* 89 (1984), 12-32.

Cais kings of Munster.¹⁹⁷ It seems hard to square this equanimity with a date in the reign of Muirchertach Úa Briain; at his death in 1119 Dál Cais had provided the kings of Munster for a century and a half. Of course, the poems and prose summaries in *Lebor na Cert* are feigned to have been uttered by Patrick's helper Benén, and from his point of view in the fifth century it would be both Eóganacht and Dál Cais kings who would rule in Cashel in the future. In other words, the text is simply recognising a historical fact. The first stipends section of *Lebor na Cert*, which recounts the stipends and refectations of the king of Cashel if he is king of Ireland, follows a circuit of the country which Candon stated to be 'clearly modelled on Muirchertach Úa Briain's great circuit of Ireland in 1101'.¹⁹⁸ This is a distinct possibility, though the circuit described in *Lebor na Cert* is the only way a Munster king could have proceeded *deiseal*, righthandwise, round the provinces. It is just possible that *Lebor na Cert* as we have it belongs to a slightly later date than the reign of Muirchertach, from the period when the Meic Carthaig had made themselves masters of not only Desmumu but also were the most powerful kings in the province. This, to my mind, is easier to reconcile with the fact that *Lebor na Cert* allows for either an Eóganacht or Dál Cais kingship of Munster.

Tadc Mac Carthaig (d. 1124) and his brother Cormac (d. 1138) were able to achieve supreme power in Desmond after the passing of Muirchertach and during the struggles between the Uí Briain and contenders for the high-kingship from other parts of the country. It was in Cormac's reign that Eóganacht power really recovered, and this was when *Caithréim Cellacháin Chaisil* was probably written. Now, of course, Cormac was in no position to trumpet the specialness of Eóganacht origins at Cashel, since the site was no longer exclusively his; nor could he fasten onto famous kings such as Cathal mac Finguine, Feidlimid mac Crimthainn or Cormac mac Cuillenáin as important predecessors, since they were not his ancestors. The trend in historical writing had been clearly signposted by *Cocad Gáedel re Gallaib*: the mark of heroism and distinction was provided by successes against vikings, and Cellachán Caisil provided such an ancestral figure. In fact, Cormac did find an impressive way to make use of the Cashel situation. The most impressive symbol of his patronage is the church at Cashel named after him, built between the years 1127 and 1134, the same period in which the *Caithréim* was ostensibly produced.¹⁹⁹ Cashel had been settled as the second metropolitan see after

¹⁹⁷ Dillon, *Lebor na Cert*, ll. 400-1, 430-3 (on the kings of Dál Cais not being kings of Munster); 403-5, 438-41 (on the king of Eóganacht not being king of Munster). Note that this section of *Lebor na Cert* is not found in all manuscripts (see pp. xx-xxv).

¹⁹⁸ Candon, 'Barefaced Effrontery', 15.

¹⁹⁹ Ó Corráin, *Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil*.

Armagh at the synod of Ráth Bressail in 1111, a status it retains to this day. Cormac's Chapel symbolized Cashel's status as a reformed see and as a symbol of Munster kingship, even if the Meic Carthaig were not normally resident there. Recent archaeological work in the Chapel has shown there to have been friezes on the walls bearing Biblical images of kingship; these date from after the Norman invasions (possibly from the time of the third synod of Cashel in 1172) but there seems to have been earlier imagery of a similar sort underneath. The chapel itself is no longer seen as the earliest example of Hiberno-Romanesque architecture, but it was its first great flowering.²⁰⁰ The influences there probably came via England but the links with the Continent cannot be overlooked. There is a striking example of European influence on Meic Carthaig ideas of kingship in this period. This is a note in the genealogical tracts preserved in the *Book of Lecan*:

Is amlaid seo dlegar rí Muman do ríad: .i. na ceathra hArd-Chomairlich fhichidh is ferr beus asin dá cuiced Muman da thoga amail an tImper Almanach, 7 a breith co Leic Cotraidi i Tempoll Mór Cormaic 7 a gairm rí do tholith airri 7 a breith co Lis na nUrlann i Caisil 7 a gairm rí do thobairt.

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 is chosen, and he should be brought to the stone of Cothraige [=the rock of Patrick] [and] into the Great Church of Cormac and there proclaimed king, and be brought to Lis na nUrlann in Cashel and proclaimed there.²⁰¹

There is no independent record of such a ceremony taking place, yet it shows an awareness of the German model of imperial kingship, and perhaps an attempt to bolster the status of the Munster kings to the levels of emperors.²⁰² Interestingly, the third poem in *Lebor na Cert* offers an interesting point of comparison:

*Caisil do chind ós cach cind,
Acht Pádraic is Rí na rind
Airdrí in domain is Mac Dé,
Acht maid sin dlígid uaisle.*

²⁰⁰ T. O'Keeffe, 'Romanesque as metaphor: architecture and reform in twelfth-century Ireland', in Smyth, *Seanchas*, 313-22.

²⁰¹ Lec. 181 v d 21; transl. in Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 191. All expansions other than suprascript *h* have been indicated; I have slightly emended Byrne's translation. Another version exists in Dublin, RIA 1234 (Stowe C i 2), 44 v b 5.

²⁰² Cf. the description of the inauguration of Bréifne kings; see below, p. 220.

Cashel the head over every head –
 Except Patrick and the King of stars,
 The overking of the world and the Son of God,
 – except for them he is entitled to supremacy. [my translation]²⁰³

This poem recognises the supremacy of Armagh, God and Christ, and ‘the king of the world’ which at that period was an Irish name for the German emperor.²⁰⁴ This recognition of a hierarchy of status and distinction above the king of Cashel is notable, and this idea may have come into *Lebor na Cert* from either Uí Bríain or Meic Carthaig links to the Continent. The description of the inauguration of a king of Munster looks backwards as well as to the Continent. Twenty-four is the number of persons in the household of Patrick in the Tripartite Life, and twenty-four is the number around Feidlimid mac Crimthainn in his *óentu*. The new site of Cormac’s Chapel is one place for the proclamation, but the other is Lis na nUrlann on the green of Cashel. And if we return to where we began, in ‘The Story of the Finding of Cashel’ it is at the same place, Ráth na nUrlann that Dúirdriu blessed and proclaimed Conall Corc. If there is a reference to real practice in each of these texts we might infer a continuity (broken or not) of practice from the eighth century to the twelfth. Whether or not the Eóganachta were an especially Christian dynasty, their distinction was based on an evolving conception of the past anchored in the stone roots of the rock of Cashel.

²⁰³ Dillon, *Lebor na Cert*, ll. 235-8.

²⁰⁴ Cf. *AU* 1023.8.

Chapter V: The Growth of Kingdoms

Thus far the dynasties we have investigated had in common that they were all supreme within their provinces by the middle of the eighth century, even if some of them were to lose their paramount positions subsequently. This chapter will attempt to make a point of contrast by considering kingdoms and dynasties which were not part of the great establishment of the Irish polity by *ca.* 800. We shall examine the process by which certain dynasties and kingdoms were able to come from relatively insignificant origins and go on to acquire a great deal of power. This question has been addressed before, primarily in connection with the Dál Cais of Munster. Here I propose to examine in depth two Irish kingdoms, Bréifne and Osraige, to see what strategies their rulers employed in their bids for power. These examples have been chosen because they represent the 'second tier' of kingship in Ireland; most studies (including other chapters in the present work) gravitate toward the great provincial dynasties, and the lesser lights of the Irish scene are often passed over. These kingdoms were originally fairly small and were dominated by provincial kingships (of Connacht and Munster respectively), but went on to much greater things, becoming, for a time, 'first tier' powers of status akin to Cenél nEógain or Uí Chennselaig. Like Dál Cais they originally occupied land on the margins of provinces, and like Dál Cais their growth in power took place during the Viking Age and after; but it is important to notice that there were many substantial differences among the three. The kings of Bréifne and Osraige did not manage to retain the provincial kingships they briefly secured, unlike Dál Cais who not only kept a grip on the Munster kingship through all of the eleventh and some of the twelfth centuries, but also successfully challenged for the kingship of Ireland. No kings of Osraige or Bréifne achieved this honour, though Tigernán Mór Úa Rúairc of Bréifne was a contender in the twelfth century and his domains had, in a sense, become a province of their own, albeit one that would not long outlast the Norman arrival. Nevertheless, the territorial growth of Bréifne was a unique and spectacular occurrence, and in what follows we shall try to trace it. Both Osraige and Bréifne effectively detached themselves from the provinces to which they had originally belonged, but were never permanently independent, and their kings faced the problems of an intermediate king: asserting control over one's sub-kingdoms while trying to maximise freedom from provincial or extra-provincial overkings.

The following discussions have reference to various sources. First and foremost, of course, are the chronicles, which provide the basic narrative of the course of Bréifne and Osraige history.¹ It is important to note that because these kingdoms were originally of far lesser importance than, say, the Clann Cholmáin of Mide or Uí Dúnlainge of Leinster, that there are considerably fewer annal-entries on events concerning them, particularly in the early period. As a consequence, we cannot be sure that we even have a full list of kings anterior to the ninth century. Even after Bréifne and Osraige gained a degree of prominence, annalists did not necessarily feel it was worthwhile recording many internal events in those lands, and thus occasionally very important events are recorded, with no apparent previous cause or circumstances which can be recovered from the chronicles.² Notable examples of this are the occasions when Uí Briúin Bréifne kings became kings of Connacht, and when Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic made himself king of Leinster.

The annalistic sources may be supplemented with the genealogical materials, with the usual caveats. There is less material available for Uí Briúin Bréifne or Osraige than for some Irish dynasties, and consequently many of the individuals named in the annals, be they kings or minor dynasts, cannot be placed in the genealogical schema. These genealogies were, of course, susceptible to tampering for political reasons just as in the case of the Dál Cais, who famously created a pedigree linking them with the Eóganachta justifying their claim to the Munster overkingship.³ One of the important questions concerns the nature of the early part of the Osraige pedigrees, which has been heavily tampered with. There are few literary sources for the history of Bréifne, but an important literary source for Osraige history and the articulation of images of its kings is the compilation known as the *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, which will be discussed below. I shall treat Bréifne and Osraige separately, before discussing some general points at the end. The time periods covered will be slightly different, due to the nature of the evidence. Bréifne does not really appear in the chronicles until *ca* 800 and we shall follow its history through until the twelfth century; though any more than a brief summary of the long and spectacular career of Tigernán Úa Rúairc lies beyond the

¹ In this chapter more than any other, a good deal of the historical narrative has been retained, for two reasons: firstly, it will better illustrate the processes by which these kingdoms advanced their interests; secondly, for these kingdoms more than any other considered in the thesis there is little existing secondary literature to which the reader may be referred.

² It is interesting to consider to what extent the dynasties of Bréifne and Osraige generated their own sources. As we shall see below the latter certainly did, but it is difficult to assess how far the former actively cultivated their own distinctiveness; the question of survival complicates the issue.

³ This genealogical manipulation was revealed by E. Mac Neill, 'The Vita Tripartita of St Patrick', *Ériu* 11 (1932), 1-41: 34-40.

Original in Colour

50 km

Scale = 1 : 1 280 000

scope of this study; we shall also have recourse to one of the few 'charter'-sources known from pre-Norman Ireland, the Book of Kells. The examination of Osraige is prefaced by a short analysis of the sources for its early history before 800; though strictly speaking beyond the chronological scope of the thesis this study has relevance to our interpretations of how the genealogical past of Osraige was manipulated in the subsequent centuries.

I. Bréifne and the rise of Uí Rúairc

Early Bréifne

Bréifne, in the relatively infertile upland and lake areas of northernmost Connacht, was an unlikely contender for becoming one of the most powerful kingdoms in Ireland by the twelfth century. Like Osraige, it originally occupied a borderland position between overkingdoms, in this case territories on the edge of Connacht, adjacent to the hegemonies of both Northern and Southern Uí Néill. Later, Bréifne expanded across the Shannon into the eastern Midlands of Mide and Brega, and in fact it acquired more territory than any other Irish kingdom in the central middle ages. Previous studies on Bréifne have been limited. The main textbooks give some account of the history of the kingdom, particularly the successes of the later Uí Rúairc kings, but only one comprehensive treatment was ever attempted, that of Mícheál Ó Duígeannáin (who also edited the corpus of Bréifne genealogies).⁴ Unfortunately this article only covered the non-Uí Briúin neighbours of Bréifne and the earliest history of the kingdom, and though a sequel was promised it never appeared. However, Ó Duígeannáin's contribution remains invaluable, because of its thorough treatment of some of the knottier problems of Bréifne's origins. More recently, Nollaig Ó Muraíle has begun to study some of Connacht's 'aboriginal' population groups, providing additional information on Bréifne's neighbours.⁵

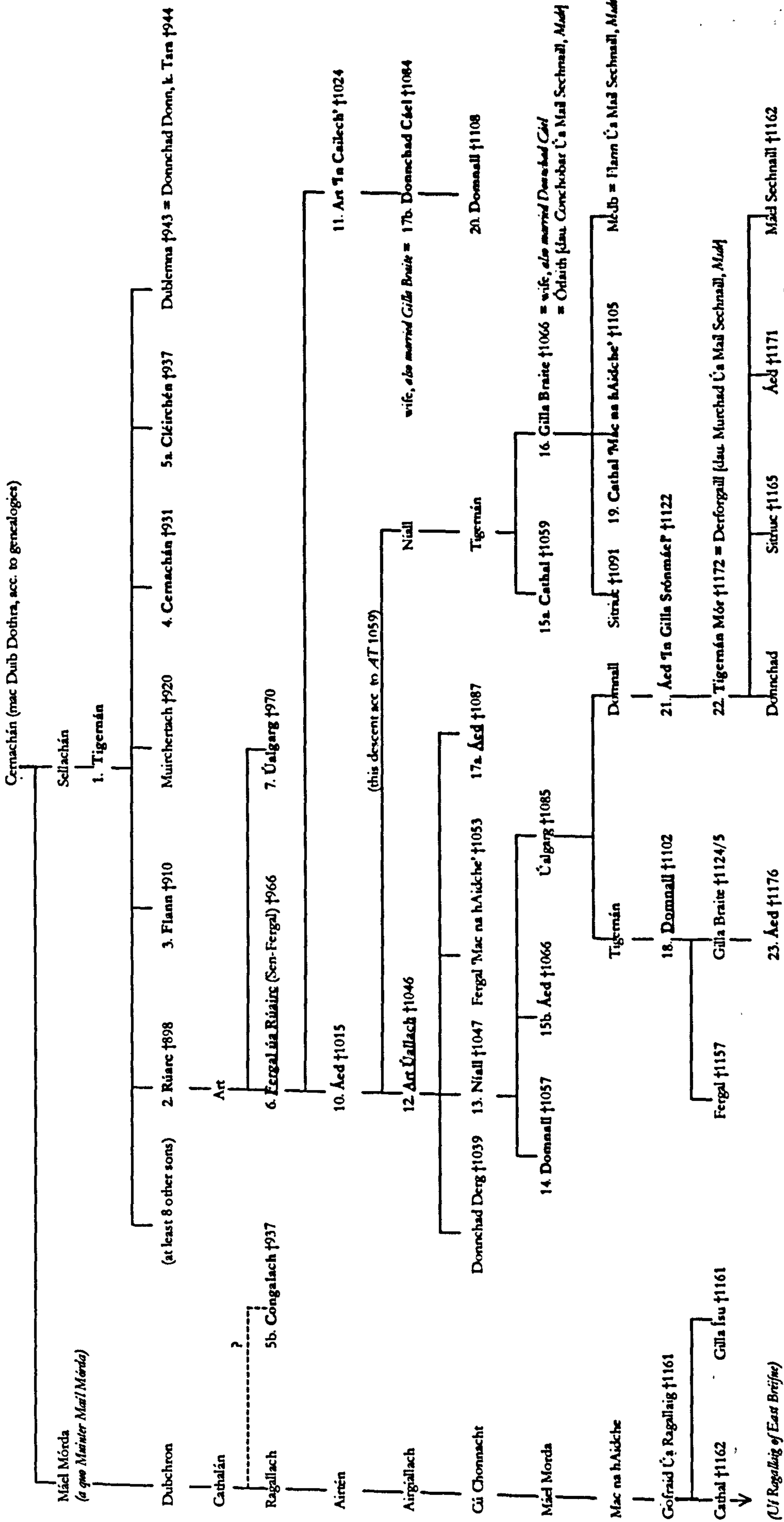
The name of the kingdom is itself of obscure origin. It appears to be compounded of a noun and the suffix *-ne*, a form found in a number of early Gaelic names (e.g. Conmaicne, Maerne).⁶ Some later Irish scholars understood the name to be a derivation from the noun *bréife* meaning 'ring, hole, loop' which itself has a derivative

⁴ M. Ó Duígeannáin, 'Notes on the history of the kingdom of Bréifne', *JRS/II* 65 (1935), 113-140.

⁵ N. Ó Muraíle, 'Some early Connacht population-groups', in Smyth, *Seanchas*, pp. 161-77.

⁶ Cf. W.J. Watson, *The Celtic Place-names of Scotland* (Edinburgh and London 1926), pp. 110-11. Occasionally the genitive *Bréifni* is found but normally texts treat the noun as indeclinable (so *Uí Briúin Bréifne*), which usage I have followed here.

Table 10: Uí Rúaire Kings of Bréifne and Uí Ragallaig to 1176



Kings of Bréifne Kings of Bréifne and Connacht
Not all known family members are included in this diagram

bréifnech 'ringed, looped, perforated'; this last is the same form as *Bréifnech* 'Bréifnian, pertaining to Bréifne'.⁷ What such a derivation would imply as a place-name is unclear. Various alternative early forms such as Breithne, Breibne and the like, if not mere orthographical variations, do suggest some other origin for the *bréif-* element, and it may be of very early or even pre-Celtic origin. This territorial name was applied to the less hospitable lands of Leitrim and Cavan, mentioned in some sources as the *Garbthrian Connacht*, the 'rough third of Connacht'.⁸ Ó Duígeannáin described most of Bréifne as 'a wilderness of barren heights and deep narrow glens, of rugged defiles and treacherous marsh, of countless lakes and myriad streams'.⁹ One of the early Irish triads named the three rough places of Ireland as 'Bréifne, Bairenn and Bérré'.¹⁰

Bréifne as such does not figure in the chronicles before the late eighth century, though thereafter obits of a number of their kings are recorded. We should probably therefore concur with Ó Duígeannáin and other scholars that the origins of the Uí Briúin kingdom of Bréifne lay in the eighth century and certainly not much before 700. There is absolutely no annalistic evidence for any earlier kingdom or dynasty ruling Bréifne before the advent of the dynasty there which reckoned itself to be descended from Uí Briúin of Connacht. This pedigree is found in all the extant genealogical materials, but is very problematic. The conventional understanding of the early history of Bréifne is that one particular branch of the Uí Briúin of Connacht moved north-eastwards into Bréifne, perhaps in the eighth century as a result of struggles between Uí Briúin and Uí Ailella. By a simple generational count the various early Uí Briúin pedigrees seem out of step with each other.¹¹ This does not necessarily invalidate them, but does call for an appropriate degree of caution. The first identifiable figure in the Uí Briúin Bréifne genealogies, Dub Dothra mac Dúinchada d. 743, though described as *rex nepotum Briuin* 'king of Uí Briúin' in his obit in *AU*, did in fact belong to the Uí Briúin Cúalann of north Leinster, as shown by the obit in *AFM*.¹² This identification is confirmed by his epithet *dothra* 'of the Dodder', the river which flows from the Dublin mountains to empty into the Liffey by Dublin. This person, therefore, had nothing to do with Connacht or Bréifne at all.

⁷ *DIL*, s.vv.

⁸ Cf. W. McLeod, 'Galldachd, Gàidhealtachd, Garbhchriochan', *SGS* 19 (1999), 1-20: 8-14.

⁹ Ó Duígeannáin, 'Notes on the History', 115.

¹⁰ K. Meyer, *The Irish Triads* (RIA Todd Lecture Series 13, Dublin 1906), pp. 6-7. The other places are the Burren, Co. Clare and Beare, Co. Kerry, both notable wildernesses; of course, the choice of names in the triad is dictated mainly by alliteration.

¹¹ Most easily seen from the table in Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 299.

¹² *AU* 743.9; *AFM* 738.

Quite why he should have been appropriated by later genealogists is a matter which has recently been taken up by Eoghan Ó Mórdha.¹³ In Ó Mórdha's estimation, the portion of the Uí Briúin Bréifne genealogies from Dub Dothra upwards is probably a fabrication made in the interests of the Úa Rúairc dynasty. Furthermore, this genealogical fiction was probably created in the late eleventh century, when we first find the term 'Úa Briúin Bréifne' used in the chronicles. He would specifically associate the production of this genealogy with the struggles of Áed mac Airt Úallaig Uí Rúairc (d. 1046) for the overkingship of Connacht, where such a genealogy linking Uí Rúairc to Uí Briúin would help confer legitimacy on Áed's claim. I agree that the Uí Briúin link was fabricated, but I am not at all sure it was as late as the reign of Áed mac Airt Úa Rúairc. In the first place, the Uí Rúairc had already held the kingship of Connacht in the reign of Áed's great-grandfather Fergal (d. 966), as we shall see below. That the term 'Uí Briúin Bréifne' does not appear in the chronicles until the late eleventh century is not necessarily a problem. The earliest versions of the Uí Rúairc pedigree do not use this terminology, and that the rulers of Bréifne are not called Uí Briúin by annalists earlier does not mean that the concept did not exist; many of the references to 'Uí Briúin' in the annals are undifferentiated, and for example Uí Briúin Seóla and Uí Briúin Sinna only begin to be called by those specific names in the tenth century.¹⁴ Ó Mórdha's assertion that the use of 'Uí Briúin Bréifne' in *AT* 1085 is the first association of Úa Rúairc with Uí Briúin is incorrect, for *AU* award the title 'king of Uí Briúin' to Áed mac Airt's nephew Áed on his death in 1066, and give the same title to Áed's short-lived successor Gilla Braite in the same year. Overall, it is possible that some link between the Uí Rúairc and Uí Briúin was created in or before the time of Fergal in the mid-tenth century, but Ó Mórdha is probably right in suggesting that this link was extended by the use of the term 'Uí Briúin Bréifne' in the late eleventh century. In fact the association became so pronounced that annalists in the twelfth century using the term 'Uí Briúin' unqualified are normally referring to those of Bréifne. Thus whatever the true origins of Bréifne's ruling dynasty, the genealogical fiction of the Uí Rúairc totally overrode it; no evidence survives of alternative traditions linking the rulers of Bréifne with any people other than Uí Briúin. This is in contrast to Osraige, where as we shall see, alternative traditions do survive in confused form.

¹³ E. Ó Mórdha, 'The Uí Briúin Bréifne Genealogies and the origins of Bréifne', *Peritia* 16 (2002), 444-50.

¹⁴ *AU* 912.6, 988.1.

The original extent of the lands known as Bréifne is a complex issue which Ó Duígeannáin's work did much to explain.¹⁵ Lands to the north and northeast were largely under the dominion of Uí Néill and Airgíalla; to the southwest across the Shannon were the Uí Briúin homelands of Roscommon; to the south in Mag Réin were one of the kingdoms of the Connacht peoples called Conmaicne, who were to play an important role in the history of Bréifne. To the southeast of Bréifne beyond the River Erne were the lands of Gailenga and Luigne in eastern Cavan and Louth. Much of Cavan east of the River Erne apart from these territories of Gailenga and Luigne is shown on historical maps as belonging to Bréifne from the beginning, but there is no real evidence for this; as Ó Duígeannáin noted, 'of the parts of Bréifne around Loch Oughter and Slieve Gah we really know nothing whatsoever'.¹⁶

Although the kingdom of Bréifne appears in the sources about 800, its history in the ninth century is exceedingly obscure. The following kings are mentioned in the annals:

AU 792.3 Death of Cormac son of Dub-dá-Chrích, king of Bréifne (*AFM* 787)

AU 805.9 Muirchertach son of Donngal, king of Bréifne, died. (*CS*, *AFM* 800)

AU 822.7 A slaughter of the men of Bréifne, including their king, i.e. Máel Dúin son of Échtgal, was inflicted by the Cenél Feidilmthe.

AU 892.4 Tigernán son of Sellachán, king of Bréifne, dies. (*CS*, *AFM* 888)

AFM 893 [= *AU* 898] Rúarc, son of Tigernán, lord [=king] of Bréifne [dies].

Unfortunately *AT*, which might have provided some independent Connacht information, are lacunose for this period. Of this bare list, we note that only Tigernán mac Sellacháin and his son Rúarc are found in the Uí Briúin Bréifne genealogies, given a descent from Dub Dothra. Tigernán seems to have been an important ancestor for the later nobility of Bréifne, for the genealogies give him no less than twelve sons (four of whom, including Rúarc, are also found in the annals) from which descend twelve of the Uí Briúin Bréifne kindreds.¹⁷ There is obviously an element of schematization here, but if many of the leading families did have historical grounds for tracing their ancestry back to the late-ninth century, it is perhaps in this period that we must place the true beginnings of Bréifne, and the beginnings of genealogical manipulation. As we have seen, the link to Uí Briúin in the generations above Sellachán is another matter.

¹⁵ Ó Duígeannáin, 'Notes on the History', 129-40.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁷ M.V. Duignan, 'The Uí Briúin Bréifni Genealogies', *JRS* 64 (1934) 90-137, 213-256 at 213-15.

The provenance of the other kings found in the ninth-century annals is unknown, but presumably they came from a collateral line or lines of the dynasty which were of little significance after them; the line of Sellachán produced the Uí Rúairc and was therefore the most significant line in later centuries. The traditions of other lineages would have been of less import to the genealogists, and indeed as the successful branch of the dynasty the Uí Rúairc may have encouraged the expurgation of records of competing lines, if those lines did not have descendants still around to have their history preserved. Nevertheless, we should accept Ó Duígeannáin's assertion that although the other kings here are not found in the genealogies, they were indeed members of the same dynasty, for to assume otherwise would imply that some earlier dynasty of Bréifne (who were not noted at all in the chronicles before 792!) were rapidly replaced in the ninth century with not a mention from the annalists.¹⁸

Apart from these kingly obits, we know almost nothing of the history of Bréifne or its external relations in the ninth century. In 815 the men of Bréifne and the Síl Cathail (one of the main branches of Uí Briúin Aí) plundered Cluain Crema. This is most probably Cloncraft, close to Elphin in the Uí Briúin Aí heartlands of Co. Roscommon, but there is a remote chance it could be Cloncrave, Co. Westmeath.¹⁹ This then might be evidence of the beginning of Bréifne's interest in Mide, but is hardly compelling, and Cloncrave is rather to the south of the midland territories Bréifne later conquered. But exactly when those territories were conquered is a matter of debate. The usual view is that Bréifne was expanding eastwards in the ninth century, but the annalistic evidence does not give that thesis any real support. An entry recording the unusually cold winter of 818 records that a large Airgíallan party were able to bring the materials to build an oratory from Connacht into Uí Chremthainn across the frozen Erne.²⁰ Such a trip into Connacht would most probably have taken the Airgíalla into Bréifne, but no mention is made of the Bréifnians. The Erne region suffered from viking-raids, most notably in 837 when 'the churches of all Loch Erne, including Cluain Eóis (Clones) and Daiminis, were destroyed by the heathens'.²¹ The references to viking-activities in this part of Ireland do not give any indications as to conditions in Bréifne at the time. If they had already expanded further into eastern Cavan, there is no evidence of it.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 123-24.

¹⁹ E. Hogan, S.J., *Onomasticon Goedelicum Locorum et Tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae* (Dublin and London 1910), p. 259.

²⁰ *AU* 818.2.

²¹ *AU* 837.6.

The career of Rúarc, son of Tigernán, from whom the rulers of Bréifne later took their family name Uí Rúairc is a total blank. That the family took his name does not necessarily mean that he had a particularly significant or successful reign, but rather that it was his descendants alone who successfully monopolized the kingship of Bréifne in later centuries. We know nothing of his activities; one possible reference occurs in the account of the struggles between the Uí Néill overking Máel Sechnaill mac Maíl Ruanaid and Tigernach mac Fócartai, king of Southern Brega. *AU* 846.7 report 'Tigernach inflicted a rout on Máel Sechnaill and Rúarc, in which many were slaughtered'. Although this might be an indicator of relationships between Bréifne and the Southern Uí Néill kings of the midlands, the Rúarc in question is more probably Rúarc mac Brain, king of Leinster, whose own activities are hardly well documented, but who does appear in the chronicles on a few occasions.

When we arrive in the tenth century we find more information in the sources. The first recorded event is a battle in 910 between Flann Sinna, Clann Cholmáin overking of Uí Néill, and Bréifne, in which Bréifne was defeated and its king, Flann mac Tigernáin fell. According to the Bréifne pedigrees, Flann was a brother of Rúarc and may have directly succeeded him in the kingship; perhaps Bréifne was now becoming a threat to the kings of Mide. The next two named kings of Bréifne in the chronicles are two more of Rúarc's brothers, namely Cernachán mac Tigernáin (d. 931 *AU*, *CS*) and Cléirchén mac Tigernáin (d. 936 [=937] *CS*; he is the only son of Tigernán found in the annals who is not named in the genealogies). A battle in Ciannachta between Donnchad Donn mac Flainn, overking of Uí Néill and viking-forces occurred in 920. It is described in detail only by *CS* and *AFM*, the latter naming one Muirchertach mac Tigernáin, who died in the battle, as *rigdamna* of Bréifne. The wording of the entry on the battle in Ciannachta indicates that Muirchertach mac Tigernáin was fighting on Donnchad Donn's side, and that at this point there was an alliance, or rapprochement, between Bréifne and the Southern Uí Néill. Thus five of Tigernán's sons are named in the annals; four of whom ruled (probably in succession) as kings of Bréifne, and a fifth who was killed in battle but may himself have succeeded to the kingship one day. If all these sons of Tigernán had offspring of their own (as the genealogies indicate, with the exception of Cléirchén), they could have contested the kingship of Bréifne for many years. It is perhaps no wonder then that the descendants of Rúarc mac Tigernáin, in securing the kingship for their own line, chose Rúarc as their family eponym. As we have seen, twelve of Tigernán's supposed sons gave their names to various families of

the Uí Briúin Bréifne dynasty. Cernachán, Flann, Rúarc and Muirchertach all appear in the list; that Muirchertach was said to be progenitor of Muintir Muirchertaig shows that he had some offspring of his own before being killed in 920.

The next known king of Bréifne is named only in *AFM*. Immediately after noting the death of Cléirchén mac Tigernáin they report the death of Congalach son of Cathalán, king of Bréifne. This person is otherwise totally unknown, and if his claims are genuine he must have briefly seized the kingship after Cléirchén, ahead of the claims of Tigernán's many surviving sons or their descendants.²² The next record is another piece of evidence that tenth-century Bréifne had close relations with the Southern Uí Néill. In 943 is recorded the death of Dublé(m)na, wife of Donnchad Donn mac Flainn. She is identified as the daughter of Tigernán mac Sellacháin, and was therefore sister of kings Rúarc, Flann, and Cernachán, and also of rígdamna Muirchertach who died fighting for Donnchad Donn in 920. We shall see below that marriage-ties with Clann Cholmáin continued in subsequent centuries.

The succession in Bréifne after the death of possible kings Cléirchén and Congalach in 937 is unclear. *AU* and *AFM* for 947 have the following entry: 'Scolaige úa hÁedacáin, king of Dartraige, and Gairbíth son of Muiredach, *rígdamna* of Uí Chremthainn, and Áed son of Tigernán úa Rúairc were killed in battle in a counterattack'. The context of this battle is exceedingly unclear; where it took place, or who the enemy was. The other persons involved here were Bréifnian neighbours: The Uí Chremthainn were Bréifne's Airgíallan neighbours to the north-east beyond Upper Lough Erne and the Dartraige were one of their *fortúatha*, the people in the vicinity of Clones. But who was Áed mac Tigernán úa Rúairc? That *AU* 947.3 style him *Áed H. Rúarc m. Tigernáin* suggests that Tigernán was a son of Rúarc, and here we are probably seeing the first usage of 'Úa Rúairc' as a general family surname, applied to all descendants of Rúarc, a usage increasingly employed in the chronicles from the late tenth century onwards. In either case Áed is not specifically named as king, or *rígdamna* of Bréifne.

²² It is possible that Congalach was the son of the Cathalan named in the pedigree of Muintir Maíl Mórda, and I have included him thus in Table 10.

Uí Rúairc and the kingship of Connacht

The following is recorded for 954: 'úa Rúairc inflicted a great slaughter on the Cairpre and Tethba, and Úa Cíardai, king of Cairpre, fell'.²³ In the absence of other evidence, we can assume here that Fergal grandson of Rúarc was intended and that he was king of Bréifne by this time. It is in Fergal's reign that Bréifne first rose to the heights of provincial power. This event of 954 was clearly of some significance, for it is the first clear indication of Bréifne ambitions in the eastern midlands. Tethba and Cairpre were two of the most significant sub-kingdoms of Mide and lay directly south of Mag Réin and Bréifne's territories between Shannon and Erne. Since the death of Donnchad Donn in 944 Clann Cholmáin had been in some disarray; in these years Brega underwent something of a rejuvenation under Congalach Cnogba, and from 956 to 980 Clann Cholmáin were in the shadow of Domnall mac Muirchertaig uí Néill of Northern Uí Néill. As a consequence, Úa Rúairc must have looked to take advantage by encroaching on Southern Uí Néill territory. Earlier tenth-century alliances with Mide were forgotten and whatever undocumented earlier encroachments there may have been it is to this period that we may date the large-scale expansion of Bréifne south and east. Certainly Bréifne's growing power attracted the attention of Domnall úa Néill, as in 955 he led a large force with ships via Lough Neagh, Airgíalla and Lough Erne to Lough Oughter, where he plundered Bréifne and 'took the hostages of Úa Rúairc'.²⁴

This does not seem to have drastically affected Fergal Úa Rúairc's position. In 956 Tadc mac Cathail of Síl Muiredaig, king of Connacht, died and according to the king-lists Fergal succeeded him. This was a striking turn of events about which we know frustratingly little. The Síl Muiredaig dynasty (part of Uí Briúin Aí) had enjoyed an unbroken monopoly of the provincial kingship since the early ninth century, and provided most of the Connacht kings in the eighth century also. They had suffered somewhat at the hands of Congalach mac Maíl Mithig, king of Tara, as well as the growing power of Dál Cais, but it is unclear how much these factors contributed to Fergal's succession. In 957 his fleet is reported as being on Lough Ree, and in 959 he led an army northwards to Mag nÍtha in the territory of Cenél nEógain. In the ensuing battle Áed mac Flaithbertaig, *rígdamna* Ceneóil Eógain, was slain.²⁵ For 962 a laconic *AFM* entry reads 'Fergal úa Rúairc devastated Mide', testament to Fergal's continuing

²³ *AU* 954.5.

²⁴ *AU* 955.3.

²⁵ *AFM* 957 [=959].

ambitions, both as king of Bréifne and more importantly as king of Connacht. In the following year Fergal turned his attention southward to the growing power of Dál Cais. First a victory was gained over the Munstermen at the Shannon, followed by a plunder of the Dál Cais lands: 'A slaughter was made against Mathgamain, son of Cennétig, by Fergal Úa Rúairc, where fell the three grandsons of Lorcán, and seven score along with them'.²⁶ His southern borders secure for the time being, Fergal turned his attention back to Tethba, across the Shannon from mid-Connacht, defeating them in 964. By this time Fergal's power seems to have grown enough to prompt Domnall úa Néill into direct action, for in 965 (almost a decade after Fergal became provincial overking) Domnall came to Connacht, plundered it and took Úa Rúairc's hostages.

This action seems to have precipitated the collapse of Fergal's power. In the following year what seems to have been an internal Connacht rebellion took place, something which had not occurred previously during his reign, as far as the annalistic evidence goes. The king of Uí Fíachrach Aidne in the far south of the province by the Munster border, together with others, inflicted a defeat on Fergal in which 700 were killed.²⁷ *CS* identifies the battle site as Boirenn (the Burren, Co. Clare) in Corcu Mo Druad, the northernmost part of Munster adjacent to Uí Fíachrach Aidne. Whether the Corcu Mo Druad, or the Dál Cais were involved or instigators is unknown, but it seems likely that Uí Fíachrach Aidne were throwing their lot in with their north Munster neighbours against an overking from the far north of Connacht. Later in the same year Fergal, perhaps getting himself involved in eastern midland events again (we do not know the location) was killed by Domnall mac Congalaig, king of Brega. *CS* in reporting his death takes a harsh line: 'Nebuchadnezzar of the Irish...[who died] after committing countless evil deeds'.²⁸ It is uncertain that what we know of his activities justifies such an assertion, though some unrecorded aggression towards Clonmacnoise may have occasioned such hostility. What is more certain is that whatever way this king of Bréifne became provincial king, for almost a decade he successfully acted against neighbours north, south and east, and it is probable that during his reign Bréifne began to acquire territories to the east.

Bréifne was involved in various struggles over the next few decades, and charting these events is a complex business (partly caused by the growing annalistic

²⁶ *AFM* 961 [=963].

²⁷ *CS*, *AFM* 964 [=966].

²⁸ *CS* 964. It is interesting to compare the genealogies, which are equally fulsome in praise of Fergal, comparing him to Hector and Achilles; see Duignan, 'The Uí Briúin Bréifni Genealogies', p. 215.

tendency to use 'Úa Rúairc' without any other indication of identity) which can be glossed over here. As with most of the other Irish kingdoms Bréifne submitted to Bríain Bóraime, and with the 'restoration' of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill to power after Clontarf in 1014 Bréifne re-emerged once more. In 1014 an Úa Rúairc (certainly Áed, son of Fergal the 'Nebuchadnezzar') allied with Máel Rúanaid Úa Maíl Doraid (of Cenél Conaill) to plunder Mag nAí, killing Domnall mac Cathail, the brother of the king of Connacht.²⁹ Úa Rúairc and Úa Maíl Doraid carried off the hostages of Connacht as a consequence of the raid.³⁰ In the same year both kings were in the service of Máel Sechnaill when he campaigned in Leinster and Osraige. Within a few months however, Áed mac Fergaile Uí Rúairc, king of Bréifne and *rigdamna* of Connacht was killed in Mag nAí by Tadc mac Cathail in revenge for the killing of Domnall.³¹

Áed was succeeded by his brother, Art mac Fergaile, known to the annalists and genealogists as *In Cailech* 'The Cock'. As king of Bréifne he continued a policy of submitting to Máel Sechnaill and effectively disregarding the overking of Connacht. Art was ultimately killed in 1024 by his predecessor's former ally, Máel Rúanaid Úa Maíl Doraid, king of Cenél Conaill, at the battle of Áth na Croise (The Ford of the Cross) in Corann (Bar. Corran, Co. Sligo).³² The battle-site lay near the strategic west-coast route from Cenél Conaill into Connacht; Cenél Conaill may have been frequent visitors to Mag Corann, for in 1010 Brían Bóraime had led an army there and received the submission of Máel Ruanaid, before taking him as a 'guest' to Kincora.³³ Máel Rúanaid left Ireland on pilgrimage in 1026 (as was then the fashion; he died in the following year) and was succeeded first by one Muirchertach, and then by Áed Úa Maíl Doraid. Áed was in turn killed in 1030 by Art In Cailech's nephew and successor, Art Úallach, son of Áed mac Fergaile.³⁴

In 1030 Tadc mac Cathail, king of Connacht, was killed in battle against Máel Sechnaill Got of Mide and according to the regnal lists he was succeeded by Art Úallach. For the second time a king of Bréifne had become king of Connacht and once more the evidence of the chronicles cannot furnish us with any detail of the context or circumstances of his succession; Connacht events are sparse in the annals in the years

²⁹ *AU* 1014.7. The genealogical tables in Jaski, *EIKS* 314-15 make Domnall a son of Cathal (d. 973) and therefore second cousin of Tadc, but *AFM* specify that they were brothers.

³⁰ Thus, although Áed did not become king of Connacht, he asserted overlordship there for a time.

³¹ *AU* 1015.7.

³² *AU* 1024.2; *AT*, *AFM* 1024.

³³ *AU* 1011.7, *AFM* 1010.

³⁴ *AT* 1030 state that Áed was killed by *in cailech*, *i.e.* Art but this is clearly an error. Again in 1031 *AT* gloss a reference to Úa Rúairc as *i.e. in cailech*; there was clearly some confusion as to which Art Úa Rúairc the nickname applied.

up to 1030. Art must have built up a large power-base in Bréifne, and perhaps additionally the killing of Áed Úa Maíl Doraid had secured the frontiers of Bréifne and Connacht to the north, allowing Art to shift his attentions southwards. The Uí Maíl Doraid also had problems of their own, primarily a contest with the rival dynasty of Uí Chanannáin for the kingship of Cenél Conaill. Art's path to the kingship of Connacht may also have been made easier by internal dissensions among the Uí Chonchobair (the name by which the main family of Síl Muiredaig were now known); of Tadc mac Cathail's recorded brothers, one 'was killed by his own people' in 1029, a second Tadc blinded in the same year, and the third had apparently entered religion (though this did not prevent him from making a later bid for power). Thus there may have been no strong Uí Chonchobair claimants around when Tadc was killed in 1030.

Once installed as king of Connacht, Art turned his ambitions eastward to the midlands. In 1031 he plundered Clonfert; in 1036 the men of Bréifne killed Domnall úa Flainn, *rígdamna* of Tara. In 1039 Art's son, Donnchad Derg, was killed by the Uí Chonchobair. The annals style Donnchad 'king of eastern Connacht' and it is clear that Art had installed his son as sub-king over part of the province, and that at least some of Uí Chonchobair resisted this. *AFM* say that Donnchad was ruler of east Connacht *fri láimh a athar* 'by the hand of his father', making it very explicit that he was set up as king by Art.³⁵ In 1044 Art Úa Rúairc plundered Clonmacnoise on the Shannon. The only proper account of the event is in *AFM* and is quite unusual, if there is any substance to it. It states that it was the Conmaicne who carried out the plundering, but divine vengeance came upon them in the form of a plague so that all the *buailte* (booleys, i.e. cattle-pens) were laid waste and the cattle and herders died. In recompense was paid to Clonmacnoise the *manchain* (a technical term meaning the dues or personal service from a client) of the son of Úa Rúairc, identified as Mac na hAidche 'Son of Night'.³⁶ Along with this was offered the *manchain* of twelve sons of the *óctbigerna* (literally 'young chieftains', but figuratively 'sub-chieftains, minor lords') of the best of the Conmaicne, as well as a *screpul* (scruple) for every *dún*.³⁷ If there is any substance to the story it shows

³⁵ The phrase is a technical one for a king associating his son in his kingship. See Ó Corráin, 'Irish Regnal Succession', 37 and n. 46. One assumes, of course, that Donnchad was a willing participant in this arrangement.

³⁶ This nickname may be a reference to this son of Úa Rúairc being a *mac doirche* 'son of darkness', which in Irish law refers to the son of an inappropriate or dishonourable mother, or a son whose circumstances of conception or birth were otherwise not totally honourable. See Jaski, *EIKS*, 148-52. If Art Úa Rúairc was offering the *manchain* of one of his 'lesser' sons as recompense to Clonmacnoise it was hardly a great act of contrition.

³⁷ Presumably in Conmaicne rather than Connacht as a whole, though Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill's alleged raising of a tax from every *les* in Mide makes the latter a possibility.

several features of Úa Rúairc rule at the time. Firstly the Conmaicne, most probably the Conmaicne Maige Réin, were acting as close allies and a sub-kingdom of Bréifne. That Art was forced to render such a large payment in atonement suggests that they were not acting independently. Though *AFM* do not explicitly state that Art was responsible for the raid, he was clearly held responsible for it; his obits in all the chronicles state that he died two years after raiding Clonmacnoise, as if his death (at the hands of Cenél Conaill) was a final punishment for the action.

Art was succeeded as king of Connacht by Áed mac Taidc Uí Chonchobair (known as Áed In Gaí Bernaig, Áed of the Gapped Spear). Art's successor in Bréifne was his son Níall, who outlived him only a year, before being killed by Áed Úa Conchobair in Corann. Only *AT* provide Níall with titles, calling him king of Bréifne and 'king of east Connacht', the position his brother Donnchad once held. It could be that he was installed as sub-king before Art's death and held out against the over kingship of Áed Úa Conchobair. For the next few years we once again see the activities of little-known Bréifne dynasts but little of the doings of the kings of Bréifne themselves. Níall appears to have been succeeded in turn by two sons, Domnall (d. 1057) and Áed (d. 1066). In 1059 we also hear the first of Níall's brother Áed Úa Rúairc, who in this year killed Cathal mac Tigernáin.³⁸ We are here faced with a problem, for *AU* and *ALC* call Cathal *rí Íarthair Chonnacht* 'king of west Connacht' whereas the Clonmacnoise-group texts (followed by *AFM*) call him *rí Airthir Chonnacht* 'king of east Connacht'. *AT* complicate things further by giving him a pedigree making Áed mac Fergaile Úa Rúairc (d. 1015) his ancestor, and uniquely state that he was king of Bréifne as well. Given the circumstances 'east Connacht' seems to be correct, and it is possible that Cathal took power here at some point after the death of Níall, while Níall's sons Domnall and Áed ruled in 'Bréifne proper'. In 1063 Ardgar mac Lochlainn led a great army into Connacht and the Connacht kings submitted to him. Those named were Áed Úa Conchobair, Áed mac Néill Uí Rúairc and Áed mac Airt Uí Rúairc. It is very interesting that these are accounted separate sub-kings of Connacht, and the only ones named. This may support the idea that when Áed mac Airt killed Cathal mac Tigernáin he assumed the kingship of east Connacht himself.

³⁸ *AU* 1059.5; *AT*, *AFM* 1059; *CS* 1057.

Áed mac Néill was succeeded by one Gilla Braite.³⁹ *AFM* tell us that he was slain by the Uí Beccon. This is significant, for Uí Beccon were a Mide sub-kingdom, in the north of the province in the vicinity of Lough Sheelin and Lough Ramor (on the southern border of Co. Cavan). This might be more evidence that by this time Bréifne had expanded into eastern Cavan. On the other hand, *AT* report that Gilla Braite was killed at Ailén Duinecharr on Lough Macnean. This is in the Bréifnian heartland and was probably an Úa Rúairc residence, so if Uí Beccon were involved they had travelled some distance. *AFM* also note that Gilla Braite's wife Órlaith, who died in the same year, was the daughter of Conchobar Úa Máel Sechnaill, Clann Cholmáin overking of Mide from 1030 to 1073, the last powerful king of Mide before it went to pieces in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. We recall that a century earlier the daughter of one of the kings of Bréifne had married Donnchad Donn, king of Mide and Uí Néill overking, and note that even if there were hostile relations between Bréifne and Uí Beccon other relationships with Mide could have existed. In *AT* and *AFM* Gilla Braite is provided with a genealogy connecting him to Níall mac Airt Úallaig, with three intervening generations; in other words he was the great-great-grandson of the brother of Áed mac Airt, who outlived him by over twenty years.⁴⁰ As Ó Duígeannáin observed, this is unlikely to be correct. The pedigree survives independently in the genealogical collections, and Ó Duígeannáin suggested that the Gilla Braite of the pedigree is an Úa Rúairc by that name who died in 1124/25. But then what is the provenance of Gilla Braite d. 1066? *AT* 1105 provide a clue. As we shall see below, it records the death of Gilla Braite's son, and gives Gilla Braite a father Tigernán. If we compare the pedigree of Cathal mac Tigernán d. 1059, we can assume Gilla Braite was his brother and they both slot comfortably into the Uí Rúairc genealogies.

It is with some relief that we can now turn back to the career of Áed mac Airt Úallaig, who we last saw in 1059 killing the king of east Connacht. He now became king of Bréifne, and external circumstances favoured him. Diarmait mac Maíl na mBó of Leinster, together with his allies Tairdelbach úa Bríain of Munster and Domnall Mac Gillai Phátraic of Osraige invaded Connacht.⁴¹ Diarmait achieved no great success against Áed Úa Conchobair, but about the same time (and possibly as part of some grand scheme) Áed Úa Rúairc came with his forces to the vicinity of Oranmore in

³⁹ *AU* 1066.2, *AT*, *AFM* 1066. The name is another unusual one, meaning something like 'the thieving lad' 'the plundering lad'; a few Uí Rúairc dynasts were so named in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but the name was apparently not in use among other families.

⁴⁰ *AT*, *AFM* 1066.

⁴¹ *AFM* 1067.

Galway. At the battle of Turlach Adnach Áed mac Airt Úallaig defeated and killed Áed Úa Conchobair, so that he became the third Úa Rúairc king of Connacht.⁴² The partisan Clonmacnoise-group chronicles are full of praise for the dead king, for he had been a protector and patron of that monastery. In the event it was probably opportunism, or at least strategic timing on the part of Áed Úa Rúairc, piggybacking his attack on another invasion (shades of William the Conqueror the previous year) which led to his success.

Áed reigned as king of Connacht for several years, though he was not universally recognised, especially by the Uí Chonchobair. In 1076 Tairdelbach Úa Bríain of Munster came to Connacht and took the submission of Rúaidrí mac Áeda Uí Chonchobair, who in most annals is called 'king of Connacht', suggesting that Áed's authority was already eroded.⁴³ Tairdelbach's policy towards Connacht was to maintain the rivalries between Uí Chonchobair, Uí Rúairc and Uí Flaithbertaig (the leading family of Uí Briúin Seóla, at this stage the rulers of west Connacht). In 1079 Tairdelbach again invaded Connacht and expelled Rúaidrí, who had killed Áed Úa Flaithbertaig. As to the extent of Áed Úa Rúairc's sway, Byrne states that 'at most he merely interrupted the reign of Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair briefly...only the Annals of Tigernach appear to recognise his kingship of the province'.⁴⁴ This ignores the list of kings in *LL* 41 a 12 which make Áed king before Rúaidrí and assign him a reign of seven years, which suggests that he held the overkingship until 1073/4. It is probable that for much of the period 1067-1087 Connacht was effectively partitioned and no single provincial overking was recognised. Moreover, the most prominent Úa Rúairc in these years does not seem to have been Áed, but rather his second cousin Donnchad Cáel, the son of Art In Cailech. It is possible that Donnchad acted as sub-king in (east) Bréifne while Áed was overking of Connacht, but it is more likely that Donnchad was in fact Áed's rival and either temporarily ousted him from the rule of Bréifne or ruled independently in eastern parts.

In 1084 an army was led by Donn Slébe, king of Ulaid, to Drogheda on the Boyne, and there he gave Donnchad *túarastal*, the gesture of overlordship.⁴⁵ There is no immediate prelude to this, and though Donn Slébe was powerful enough in the north it is not clear why Donnchad should submit to him, for Bréifne was theoretically as powerful. The location might afford a clue; Drogheda is on the east coast of Louth not

⁴² *AU* 1067.4, *AFM* 1067.

⁴³ *AU*, *ALC* 1076.4; *AI* 1076.2; *AFM* 1076.

⁴⁴ Byrne, *IKHK* (2nd edn 2001), p. xxviii.

⁴⁵ *AU* 1084.4.

far from the Gailenga territories, and perhaps a conflict of interests in this region has something to do with the meeting. Donnchad may not actually have been king of all Bréifne. Perhaps in response to Uí Rúairc activities in Mide, Tairdelbach úa Bríain invaded in the same year, but in his absence the Conmaicne invaded Thomond and carried off a great deal of booty. The stage was set for large-scale confrontation and it happened on 19th October of the same year at Móin Chruinneóice near Leixlip. A force of all Leth Moga under Tairdelbach met a force led by Donnchad Úa Rúairc (called king of Bréifne in *AT*, though this might merely indicate he was sub-king of Bréifne while Áed úa Rúairc was king of Connacht) comprising the men of east Connacht, Cairpre, and Gailenga, together with Cennétig úa Bríain and others.⁴⁶ Donnchad was soundly defeated and his head was carried to Limerick as a trophy, though it was retrieved by Domnall úa Lochlainn in 1088.⁴⁷

For the next few years the overkingship of Connacht was hotly contested by the Uí Chonchobair and the Uí Flaithbertaig of Uí Briúin Seóla. The kingship of Bréifne apparently passed to Domnall mac Tigernáin Uí Rúairc, who was killed in 1102.⁴⁸ *AT* and *AFM* state that he was 'king of Connacht and Uí Briúin and Conmaicne, for a time'. *CS* simply states that he was king of Bréifne and Connacht, while *AU* call him just king of Conmaicne. In this case we actually know the circumstances by which he came to power:

AI 1095.11

Foslongphort h-ic Muirchertach h-i Maig h-Oa Fiacrach o medon samraid co Feil Michil coro inarbait les Sil Muirethaig & Conmacne a Mag Aí & a Maig Luirg isin Dub-Bréifne síis, co tanic iar sein h-Ua Ruairg h-i teg Muirchertaig & co tucad ardrige Connacht do acht h-Ui Fiacrach & h-Ui Mane & Lugne, & tucad giall each tellaig o Conmacnib & ó Sil Muirethaig do Muirchertach.

Muirchertach had an encampment in Mag Uí Fiáchrach from midsummer until the Feast of Michael [September 29], and he banished Sil Muiredaig and the Conmaicne from Mag nAí and Mag Luirg northwards into Dub-Bréifne. After that Úa Ruairc submitted to Muirchertach, and the overkingship of Connacht, save Uí Fiáchrach, Uí Maine and Luigne, was given to him. And a hostage from every hearth was given to Muirchertach by the Conmaicne and Sil Muiredaig.

We have considered in Chapter III above (p. 102) the possible implications of the final sentence; for our present puposes it is important to note that Domnall was the fourth and final Uí Rúairc overking of Connacht, who owed his position to Muirchertach Úa

⁴⁶ *AU* 1084.6, *AT* 1084.

⁴⁷ *AFM* 1088.

⁴⁸ *AU* 1102.3; *AT*, *AFM*, 1102.

Bríain.⁴⁹ That Muirchertach intended to ‘banish’ peoples is a striking statement of his power. *Dub-Bréifne*, it would appear, refers to the rough parts of Bréifne in northeast Connacht, rather than the better lands they acquired to the south and east; in the next section we shall consider Uí Rúairc expansion into these lands.

The extension of Úa Rúairc power in the eleventh and twelfth centuries

Maps of Ireland on the eve of the Norman *adventus* normally depict Bréifne as a huge salient of Connacht extending eastwards into Co. Louth and toward the Boyne. Tracing how this state of affairs came about is a difficult process, for although there are many accounts of conflict between Bréifne and her neighbours to the east, deducing territorial acquisition from them is another matter entirely. The most important factor here is the status of the Gailenga in the vicinity of Kells, though questions of expansion to the northwest and directly southward are also important.

In 1013 a raiding party from Bréifne, under ‘the son of Níall Úa Rúairc’, together with Úalgarg Úa Cíardai, king of Cairpre Gabra made a great foray into Gailenga.⁵⁰ This is the famous occasion on which the raiders came upon the drunken members of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill’s *teglach* and killed them. Máel Sechnaill’s retribution led to the death of Úalgarg, but we may note here the alliance between Bréifne and the neighbouring Cairpre against the Southern Uí Néill sub-kingdoms, as well as the fact that Gailenga was still beyond Úa Rúairc control. In 1043 Andud Úa Rúairc (another unusual name, perhaps meaning ‘kindling’) plundered Lugmag and Conaille in northern Louth as far as Druim Innasclainn (Dromiskin).⁵¹ These areas are by the east coast, at the southernmost limits of Airgíallan and Ulaid influence and a considerable distance from the Bréifne heartland. This might be slight evidence that Bréifne had begun to encroach on lands in eastern Cavan, on the borders of the Luigne and Gailenga in northern Mide, and Conaille in southern Airgíalla – assuming of course that this Úa Rúairc was a member of the ruling Bréifne dynasty. We recall that Gilla Braite Úa Rúairc, d. 1066, was killed by Uí Beccon according to *AFM*, though other chronicles conflict with this.

⁴⁹ Peculiarly Byrne, *NHI*, ix, p. 207 makes Domnall king of Connacht only from 1098, which is presumably based on Taidc Úa Conchobair’s death in 1097; I assume that Byrne had missed the *AI* 1095 entry.

⁵⁰ ‘The son of Níall Úa Rúairc’; so *CS*, *AFM* but *AU* simply have ‘Níall Úa Rúairc’; if the Níall is the one who died in 1001 *AU* are mistaken. *AFM* add that men of Tethba were also involved on the Bréifne/Cairpre side.

⁵¹ *AT*, *AFM* 1043.

In fact it is not until the later years of the eleventh century that Bréifne control in the Gailenga/Luigne area seems likely, though the first reference to this is again a unique instance in *AFM* which casts a certain doubt on its reliability: *Cinnedigh Ua Briain do ghabháil tighernais Gaileng* 'Cennétig Úa Briain took the lordship of Gailenga'.⁵² This Cennétig, an adventurous exile from Munster, fell, as we have seen, with Áed Úa Rúairc at Móin Cruinneoice in 1084. What may lie behind the *AFM* entry is largely a matter of conjecture; Cennétig previously ruled in Tulach Óc with his brother under the patronage of the Cenél nEógain king Áed mac Néill. Cennétig may have sought Uí Rúairc support, as they were sometime allies of Cenél nEógain against Tairdelbach Úa Briain, and Tairdelbach was of the lineage which had successfully excluded Cennétig and his brother from the Munster kingship.⁵³

At any rate, the Uí Rúairc do seem to have been extending their influence into Mide (including Gailenga, as we shall see below), and attacks by Tairdelbach in the region in 1079 and 1080 may have been aimed at containing them. The difficult times in Mide following the death of Conchobar Úa Maíl Sechnaill in 1073 may well have occasioned an extension of Bréifnian overlordship into the region, but there is no hard evidence of this. It is only in the twelfth century that we have unequivocal evidence of Bréifnian control in Gailenga, a matter to which we shall return below.

Turning briefly to the north-west. The chronicles show that in the early eleventh century Cairpre Dromma Clíab and the northern part of Corann was under the sway of Cenél Conaill, e.g. *AU* (Hand H1) 1011.7: *Slogad la Brian co Magh Corainn co ruc leis ri Ceniuil Conaill* 'A hosting by Briain to Magh Corainn and he brought back with him the king of Cenél Conaill'. In 1029 one Áed Úa Rúairc was burned to death with the *airchinnech* of Drumcliff in Inis na Laine in Cairpre (location unknown, possibly an island in Drumcliff or Sligo Bays, or in Glencar Lake to the east of Drumcliff).⁵⁴ Though Áed is given no title in *AU*, *AT* call him *rí Cairpri* and *AFM* add he was king of Dartraige as well. If these records are to be trusted, this may be the first clear evidence that Bréifne had gained control of the north-western lands between the Shannon and the sea at Donegal and Sligo bays, and had installed one of their own dynasty as sub-king of this area. If so it is hardly surprising that there are several instances of conflict

⁵² *AFM* 1078.

⁵³ For full details of the background and circumstances of the Úa Briain kings in the north, see Hogan, 'The Ua Briain kingship', pp. 406-44; see also below, pp. 283-4.

⁵⁴ *AU* 1029.4, *AT AFM* 1029.

between Bréifne and Cenél Conaill in this region in the first few decades of the eleventh century, but once again further evidence is most scanty until the twelfth.

Identifying the activities of members of the Uí Rúairc family in the early part of the twelfth century is a difficult business, more so than for any of the main Irish dynasties at this period. The chronicles name a large number of Úa Rúaircs, but they are inconsistently given forenames (which in any case are not always helpful, for many members of the family shared the same forename); occasionally patronymics are given but sometimes differ in different annals; to top it all off some of them are referred to only by nicknames. By this stage there is some divergence between *AU* (and *ALC*, based on *AU*'s source) and the Clonmacnoise-group chronicles. This is reflected not just in detail of reporting, but also attitude and styles given. *AU* generally only award the Uí Rúairc kings titles like 'king of Conmaicne', whereas *AT/CS* use more elevated styles. Generally speaking the extant Bréifne genealogies are not a great deal of help in elucidating the relationships of the various dynasts found in the chronicles.

This morass of information may reflect a period of dynastic struggle within the dynasty. Cathal mac Gillai Braite meic Thigernáin (also nicknamed Mac na hAidche by *AU* and *ALC*), styled *rí b-úa m-Briuin Brefne 7 Gaileng* by *AT*, was killed in 1105 by his brothers, or rather 'the sons of his own mother, i.e. by the sons of Donnchad son of In Caillech Úa Rúairc' as *AT* and *AFM* put it.⁵⁵ This seems to hint at a feud between this branch of the dynasty and that represented by the descendants of Art In Caillech; certainly Cathal mac Gillai Braite's brother Sitriuc had been killed *per dolum a suis* in 1091.⁵⁶ For Cathal to have been uterine brother of sons of Donnchad mac Airt, Gilla Braite must have been married to a woman who was also married at some point to Donnchad, though we can do no more than guess at the sequence of marriages.

Cathal's successor was Domnall mac Donnchada Uí Rúairc, who had a similarly brief reign. No Domnall son of Donnchad is known to the genealogies for this period, and it is probable that Domnall was one of the 'sons of Donnchad' who had murdered Cathal.⁵⁷ If so, the fact that Cathal was Domnall's uterine brother did not prevent the latter from killing his way to the top. In 1105, perhaps after Domnall became king, Muirchertach Úa Briáin expelled Donnchad Úa Maíl Sechnaill from Mide and took spoils from Slíab Gúaire. *AI* (perhaps with a hint of Munster partisanship) note that

⁵⁵ *AT, AFM* 1105.

⁵⁶ *AT* 1091.

⁵⁷ It is possible that Domnall's father Donnchad was the Donnchad mac Airt/Áeda who had been killed in 1101, but the circumstances of Cathal's death point to a son of Donnchad Cáel.

Muirchertach 'took innumerable spoils from the Uí Briúin' in Slíab Gúaire and that on account of it Úa Rúairc gave four hostages to Muirchertach.⁵⁸ Apart from indicating Bréifne's place in the politics of the day, this record indicates its extent. Slíab Gúaire was in Gailenga, and thus at this time those lands were under Bréifne control, possibly confirming the title awarded Cathal by *AT*. Domnall mac Donnchada reigned only three years after killing Cathal; he was killed by the Cairpre Gabra in 1108. Whether this was an attempt to extend Bréifne power southwards into this Mide kingdom, or was a rebellion against an already-existing overlordship, or a simple border skirmish is unknown.

Certainly conflict between Mide and Bréifne had become a more important issue in Irish politics. The king of Mide at this time was Murchad Úa Maíl Sechnaill, who had come to power in 1106. As we have seen in Chapter II, he lived until 1153 but was deposed and restored many times, while Mide was partitioned between himself and other rulers. For the first part of this period Muirchertach Úa Bríain of Munster was the most powerful king in Ireland and as we have seen had interests in intervening in Mide; it was his deposition of Donnchad Úa Mail Sechnaill that brought Murchad to power, and it seems that in the first few years Murchad was Muirchertach's protégé if not his puppet. Large scale hostilities broke out between Bréifne and Mide in 1109 and Muirchertach brought a large army to Bréifne to aid Murchad. *AT* and *AFM* state that this army carried off many cows and prisoners, and that they went into the islands of Lough Oughter *co tucsad bruid estib* 'and brought prisoners out of them', which suggests that the Uí Rúairc or other leading kindreds of Bréifne had strongholds there. The king of Bréifne was now Áed mac Domnaill Uí Rúairc, and we must guess between the former kings Domnall who died in 1102 and 1108, or Domnall mac Úalgairg of the genealogies; on balance the latter is more likely. In 1111 Áed enforced a *coinnmed* or forced billeting on the church of Clonmacnoise.⁵⁹ Interference in Clonmacnoise suggests Áed was foraying in southern Mide, though there is no other account of the campaign. Perhaps in retaliation for this southern campaign, Muirchertach Úa Bríain once more went north and plundered Bréifne.⁶⁰

In 1114 Áed, along with the other significant kings of Leth Cuinn, submitted to Domnall úa Lochlainn at Rathkenny. In 1117 Máel Brigte mac Rónáin, abbot of Kells

⁵⁸ *AI* 1105.11.

⁵⁹ *CS* 1107. We shall consider this matter in Chapter VI below.

⁶⁰ *AI* 1111.4.

and a number of the community of the church were killed by Áed.⁶¹ There is no particular context for this incident other than Úa Rúairc's continuing interest in the midlands. We have noted that by this time Bréifne had some hold on the kingdom of Gailenga, and possibly also had some control over neighbouring Luigne. It is unclear how strong a hold Bréifne had on these areas. Despite the occasional award of the title *rí Gaileng* to Úa Rúairc kings, 'native' Gailenga kings are named into the twelfth century, often involved in struggles with the Uí Maíl Sechnaill kings of Mide. By dominating Gailenga and Luigne, Bréifne had control of land around Kells. Consequently, it is unsurprising that this wealthy head of the Columban *familia* of churches would become an object of Úa Rúairc interest.⁶²

Indeed, when in 1122 Áed was killed while on a raid in Mide, *AI* specify that Murchad Úa Maíl Sechnaill was responsible, 'at the instigation of the saints'.⁶³ *MCB* adds that in retaliation Áed's overlord, Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair, attacked Mide.⁶⁴ Áed was succeeded as king of Bréifne by his son Tigernán, easily the most famous Úa Rúairc of the middle ages, and one of the most important figures in twelfth-century Irish history. The general course of Tigernán's career has been studied previously; there is more information about his reign than the entire previous history of Bréifne, and a lengthy study could be written about him. Obviously there is not the space to do that here, but it is important to note that he was so successful because the Uí Rúairc had already gained a great deal of power and territory. Bréifne had risen from a relative backwater to becoming one of the most important overkingdoms in Ireland, and Tigernán did not fight shy of using this position. In the repeated partitions of Mide, Tigernán gained control of large additional tracts of land.⁶⁵ The new order is reflected in the dioceses set up at the synod of Kells-Mellifont in 1152. Ardagh (on which had previously been conferred episcopal status in 1111) became the see for a diocese of Conmaicne, but included the lands of Cairpre Gabra south of Mag Réin which had been incorporated into the Bréifne overkingdom. The vast extension of land eastwards was incorporated into a diocese of Uí Briúin Bréifne or Tír Briúin, presumably at Tigernán's instigation. By this time the Úa Rúairc grip on the lands around Kells tightened, and

⁶¹ *AU* 1117.3, *AFM* 1117.

⁶² See Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, esp. pp. 96-7.

⁶³ *AU* 1122.1, *AFM* 1122, *AI* 1122.4.

⁶⁴ *MCB* 1123.3.

⁶⁵ *AFM* 1144, where Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair settled Tigernán with east Mide (i.e. Brega); this was shared with Diarmait Mac Murchada of Leinster. *AFM* 1150 state that Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn gave Tigernán a third part of Mide; *AFM* 1169 state that Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair gave Tigernán all of eastern Mide. However, as the Kells *notitiae* show, Tigernán controlled a fair amount of territory in Brega before 1144.

Kells became the see of this new diocese, though its status was short-lived.⁶⁶ Tigernán is named as a guarantor in several of the Kells *notitiae*.⁶⁷ This material also gives us some evidence for the relations between Bréifne and its eastern dominions in the twelfth century, and it is with this that I would like to conclude this study.

Úa Rúaircs actually begin to appear in Kells charters before the time of Tigernán. The earliest of the contemporary records, No. 2, is dated 1073x1087 in the reign of Máel Sechnaill mac Conchobair Úa Maíl Sechnaill, king of Mide. As we have seen in Chapter II, the notice records the granting of the *disert* of Colum Cille at Kells 'to God and to pious pilgrims forever'.⁶⁸ The secular guarantors are, in order, Máel Sechnaill 'with the princes and nobles of Mide in addition'; Donnchad mac Airt Uí Rúairc 'king of Connacht and Gaileng', In Garbánach Úa Corráin 'with the lesser lords of Gaileng also'. The grant was also witnessed by Donnchad mac Carthaig, king of Eóganacht Chaisil. The use of titles here is striking. The style 'king of Connacht' applied to Donnchad does make more sense if Donnchad did temporarily oust Áed mac Airt Úallaig from the kingship of Bréifne, or if he had set himself up as rival in the east. Mac Niocaill takes the line that Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair was theoretical overking of Connacht at this time, and Donnchad's use of the title reflects his claims against Rúaidrí, who was ally of Tairdelbach Úa Bríain.⁶⁹ Similarly Donnchad mac Carthaig's style of *rí Casil na rí* 'king of Cashel of the kings' might reflect this opposition between pro- and anti-Tairdelbach parties.⁷⁰

The other Kells *notitiae* which show Úa Rúairc control all feature Tigernán. No. 1 (dated 11 Nov 1133), concerns another grant by the community to the *disert*.⁷¹ It is witnessed by several laymen, in the first place Tigernán Úa Rúairc *ríg fer Brebne uile* 'king of the men of all Bréifne', then Gofraid Úa Ragallaig *rí Macairi Gaileng* 'king of Machaire Gaileng'. This individual, the ruler of Muintir Maíl Mórda, was an ancestor of the Uí

⁶⁶ See Herbert, *Iona Kells and Derry* pp. 96-7, 104-8 for the effects of Úa Rúairc overlordship on the community of Kells; for the new diocesan structures and their context see Gwynn, *The Irish Church*.

⁶⁷ Mac Niocaill, *Notitiae*, and *idem*, 'The Irish "charters"'.
⁶⁸ Herbert, 'Charter material', p. 67.

⁶⁹ Mac Niocaill, 'The Irish "charters"', p. 156 n. 18. Mac Niocaill takes Donnchad to be the son of Art Úallach and therefore brother of Áed Úa Rúairc d. 1087. Though this does make some sense in terms of royal succession, all the genealogies, *AU*, *AT* and *AFM* make Donnchad a son of Art In Caillech. Though this would make him an old man at Móin Cruinneóice in 1084 (he outlived his father by sixty years) it is not impossible and I see no particular reason to disregard the genealogical and annalistic information on his patronymic.

⁷⁰ Mac Niocaill, 'The Irish "charters"', p. 156 n. 19.

⁷¹ For discussion see Herbert, 'Charter material', pp. 68-9.

Ragallaig or O'Reillys who ruled eastern Bréifne in the later middle ages.⁷² Also acting as witnesses were two of Tigernach's sons, Donnchad and Sitriuc. Herbert suggested that Gofraid was acting as Tigernach's 'local man', or sub-king in Gailenga, and this is confirmed by his title in No. 10, where he is called *errí na Macari* 'sub-king of the Machaire'.⁷³ She points to the fact that a king of Gailenga was killed by Tigernán in 1130 as a sign that native power had been extirpated, but this oversimplifies matters; Machaire Gaileng is not the same area as Gaileng generally. Indeed we find a king of Gailenga Breg being killed in 1144, while the Gailenga (of where exactly is unspecified) killed one Domnall Úa Ragallaig in 1157.⁷⁴ Gofraid himself and his son Gilla Ísu were killed in Kells in 1161 by Tigernán's son Máel Sechnaill; what circumstances lay behind this are unclear, but it is probable they had decided to assert independence from Tigernán.⁷⁵ Herbert suggests that as a consequence Úa Rúairc influence in the area declined and local Mide interests reasserted themselves.⁷⁶ Again, the picture is probably more complex; though Tigernán Úa Rúairc is recorded raiding Gailenga more than once after 1161, when his son Áed died in 1171 he is called *rí Machaire Gaileng 7 ridomna h-Ua Briuin 7 Conmaicne*.⁷⁷ If this is not merely a courtesy title it suggests that the Uí Rúairc held on to Machaire Gaileng after 1161, even if other parts of Gailenga continued to go their own way.

The other relevant *notitiae* survive only in later copies rather than the book of Kells itself. No. 8 [1] names Tigernán as a granter but there are other sureties from the Bréifnian aristocracy, including Mac na hAidche Úa Cernacháin, killed at the Battle of Ardee in 1159.⁷⁸ Also named is the cleric Máel Brigte Úa Fairchellaig 'with the Brec Máedóic'. This reliquary was one of the great symbols of St Máedóc of Ferns, whose cult became the most significant in Bréifne.⁷⁹ No. 8 [2] is an extremely interesting glance into the geopolitics of the Bréifne overkingdom in the twelfth century. It states that Tigernán was overking (*airdn*) of Eastern Connacht and of the Telacha, the latter

⁷² Surprisingly, Herbert makes no mention of this fact. See K. Simms, 'The O'Reillys and the kingdom of East Breifne', *Bréifne* 5 (1976-8), 305-19, and K. Parker, 'The O'Reillys of East Bréifne c. 1250 – c. 1450', *Bréifne* 8 (1991), 155-81.

⁷³ Herbert, 'Charter material', p. 72.

⁷⁴ *AFM* 1144, 1157.

⁷⁵ *AT* 1161. See also M. Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Bréifne bias in *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*', *Ériu* 43 (1993), 135-58 at 148-9.

⁷⁶ Herbert, 'Charter material', p. 76.

⁷⁷ *AU* 1171.

⁷⁸ *AU, AT AFM* 1159.

⁷⁹ Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*, i, pp. 190-290: 257, 266. This was carried clockwise around the king of Bréifne three times at his inauguration ceremony, borne by the *comarbai Máedóic*. For discussion see FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, pp. 174-7. On the surviving artefact known as the *Breac Máedhóg*, see R. Ó Floinn, *Irish Shrines and Reliquaries of the Middle Ages* (Dublin 1992), pp. 32, 41.

probably a reference to the lands held by the Bréfnian peoples of Telach nEchach and Telach nDúinchada, represented today by the baronies of Tullyhaw and Tullyhunco in Co. Cavan. Then there is a description of the boundaries of Bréifne, which run *o Thrácht Eothaile co Magh Tlachtgha et o Shinaind co Drochat Átha* 'from Trácht Eóthaile to Mag Tlachtga and from the Shannon to Drogheda'. Trácht Eóthaile is Trawohelly Strand by Ballysadare south of Sligo town, while Mag Tlachtga is the plain around the Hill of Ward, Co. Meath, south of Kells. Drogheda, of course, lies a little above the Boyne estuary. Thus the area claimed by Tigernán was vast, from Sligo bay down to the Shannon, and all the way across Ireland to the Boyne and the Louth coast. This area includes much of Mide, and is fairly represented by the maps which outline the extent of Bréifne on the eve of the Norman invasion.⁸⁰ The text states that Tigernán made his grant by the counsel of all the nobles of Bréifne, 'both Uí Briúin and Conmaicne', which shows that these were still considered to be the two main constituent peoples of the Bréifne overkingdom. The sureties are Gofraid Úa Ragallaig again, and several of the same aristocracy as in 8 [1], together with the coarb of Féichín of Fore, which church was only a few miles west of Kells. This notice, more clearly than any other piece of evidence, affords a glance of what Tigernán Úa Rúairc considered to be his overkingdom in the twelfth century, even if a number of peoples in that overkingdom were not acquiescent in Úa Rúairc overlordship.

Bréifne, then, seems to have expanded from a relatively small area in the northeast of Connacht in the ninth century to what was almost a new province in the twelfth. As we noted at the outset, this success is striking. Various factors may be invoked to account for this: initial expansion into sparsely-populated (and perhaps forested) lands; the ability to cash in on internal problems in Mide and Brega; the ability to gain the support of the great overkings in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. As we have seen however, actually tracing the advance of Bréfnian territory over time is a very tricky business, due to the lack of source-material. This lack may in itself tell us something about the Uí Rúairc, for though their genealogies may be considered dynastic propaganda, little else survives, not even materials associating them in the kingship of Connacht which they held four times. Quite why this is so is a matter for further investigation. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that in comparing the twelfth-century situation with the original 'rough lands' of Bréifne and Conmaicne Maige Réin, the Uí Rúairc were extremely successful.

⁸⁰ E.g. in Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, p. 170.

Map 7: Osraige and its Neighbours

Original in Colour



Scale = 1 : 1 280 000

0 50 km

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II. Osraige

As noted at the outset, Osraige shares some notable similarities with Bréifne. It occupied a liminal position, as a buffer-state between the over-kingdoms of Munster and Leinster, though it was originally subject to Munster. Its kings went from relatively humble origins to achieving provincial kingship. There were, however, important differences. Osraige was based on the valleys of the Rivers Barrow and Nore and had a good deal of rich and fertile land; its boundaries are probably fairly represented by the diocese of Ossory. The ruling dynasty, rather than being a branch of one of the province's leading groups (as Uí Briúin Bréifne claimed for themselves) may have been of some antiquity, though the later manipulation of their genealogies and origin-legends has obscured this. Perhaps more importantly, a good deal more Osraige literary material, primarily that in the *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland (FAI)* has survived, and perhaps affords us a glimpse of Osraige preoccupations and royal ideology when they reached the summit of their power.

The following discussion will come at the Osraige kingship on four fronts. The survey of political history will mainly be concerned with the period from the ninth century to the time of Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic in the eleventh century, under whom Osraige reached the summit of its power. It was probably in or around Donnchad's reign that the Osraige materials in *FAI* were composed or compiled, and our second front shall be an examination of these literary materials. They contain a certain amount of historical fact and where necessary this is incorporated into the main historical narrative. The other main literary-historical sources are the genealogical materials for Osraige. These seem to have been considerably modified, perhaps in Donnchad's era or perhaps in the time of his ancestor Cerball mac Dúngaile. The most important modifications were concerned with the earliest history of Osraige and as a consequence our look at the fortunes of Osraige will be prefaced by a consideration of the chronicle and genealogical evidence for the sixth to eighth centuries, although that is outside the main chronological scope of the thesis. The final section will consider the history of Osraige after 1039, during which time it lost the level of political significance it had attained, though its fortunes were now more closely intertwined with the fortunes of Leinster, whose kings interfered more often in Osraige events, particularly in the twelfth century. One final literary source, the list of Osraige kings in the *Book of Leinster*, will be considered for some of the light it can shed on this late period.

Osraige before the ninth century

The earliest history of Osraige is not our strict concern here, but we must give it some consideration, partly as a background to the political narrative given here, and also because our understanding of Osraige's early history is heavily dependent on later literary materials which were the products of the ninth to twelfth centuries.⁸¹ Several early traditions suggest that Osraige was ruled for a period by the kings of Corcu Laígde, and these traditions are clearly related to those which portray the Corcu Laígde as having considerable dominance in Munster before the supremacy of Eóganachta, which are reflected in several texts.⁸² It is uncertain whether these traditions have a basis in reality, but archaeologically speaking much of Osraige shares characteristics with Munster in the fifth and sixth centuries, and for example Co. Kilkenny has the largest number of ogham stones after Kerry, Wexford, and Waterford.⁸³ The earliest attested Corcu Laígde king in Osraige, Conchrad mac Duach (of Uí Duach Argatrois) is found in literary and hagiographical materials. He is portrayed as father of Mugain, the wife of Díarmait mac Cerbaill and mother of Áed Sláine, and friend of Cíarán of Seirkieran, who was also of Corcu Laígde.⁸⁴ The church of Seirkieran was to remain an important place for the kings of Osraige throughout the period, and several of them were buried there.⁸⁵ If Conchrad were a historical person, our horizons for the Osraige kingship would be in the mid-sixth century. However, kings do not appear in any annals until the death of Feradach mac Duach is entered in *AU* 583 and again in 584. This person appears to have been Conchrad's brother. The Clonmacnoise-group chronicles have the same information but add that he was killed *a suis*. The rest of the information we have about him is of a literary nature. He appears in *FAI*, in a short death-tale of the type found in the so-called 'Cycles of the Kings'; this story is also found in the *Bóruma*.⁸⁶ The

⁸¹ The only real attempt to make sense of early Osraige is still Mac Niocaill, *IBTV*, pp. 84-6.

⁸² The relationship between the Eóganachta and Corcu Laígde is given in the tract *De bunad imthechta Eóganachta* in the Laud genealogies (Meyer, 'The Laud Genealogies', 312-14); for discussion see Byrne, *IKHK*, pp. 180-1, 199-201.

⁸³ R. Ó Floinn, 'Freestone Hill, Co. Kilkenny: a reassessment', in Smyth, *Seanchas*, pp. 12-29 at 28 and n. 12.

⁸⁴ See Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 168; Mac Niocaill, *IBTV*, p. 84. For his connections with Cíarán, see the Latin life in C. Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (2 vols, Oxford 1910), i p. 217 ff., transl. by I. Sperber, 'The Life of St Cíarán of Saigir', in W. Nolan & T.P. O'Neill (edd.), *Offaly: History and Society* (Dublin 1998), pp. 131-51; for the Irish lives see Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉirenn*, i, pp. 130-124, ii, pp. 109-120, esp. §§ 27-30.

⁸⁵ *FAI*, p. xxiv n. 43. See also A. Harrison, 'Séanadh Saighre', *Éigse* 20 (1984), 136-48, for an interesting tale of royal burial and the supernatural at Seirkieran.

⁸⁶ *FAI* §4; W. Stokes (ed. & transl.), *RC* 13 (1892), 32-124: 86-8.

Table 11: Early Kings of Osraige: Annals and King-list Compared

(G indicates an appearance in the genealogies)

Kings in the Annals (AFM only noted where it has unique information)	King-list in LL 40 e 1 (<i>Book of Leinster</i> , i, pp. 189-90)
Feradach mac Duach d. 583/4 (AU AI) G	Feradach Find mac Duach meic (...) G
Colmán mac Áeda/Feradaig d. 605 (AT AFM)	
	Nuadu mac Colmáin (...)
	Ronan Rígflaith mac Colmain G
Scannlán Mór mac Cinn Fáelad d. 643 (AI AT)	Scandlan Mor mac [C]ind Fáelad .xi. ?G
Fáelán mac ? d. 660 (AT) ?G	
Túaim Snáma mac ? d. 678 (AU AT)	Tuaim Snama .xxxi.
Fáelchar úa Máel Odra d. 693 (AU) G	
Cú Cherca mac ? 712/713 (AU AI) G	Cu Cherca mac Faelain .xix. G
	Fland mac Congaile G
	Ailill mac Faelain
Cellach mac Fáelchair d. 735 (AU AI AT) G	Cellach mac Flaind ?G
Forbasach mac Aillela d. 740 (AT)	Forbasach mac Ailella
[Anmchaid] mac Con Cerca fl. 761 (AT) G	Anmchaid mac Con Cerca G
Túaim Snáma mac Flainn d. 770 (AU) G	Tomína mac Flaind G
Dúngal mac Cellaig d. 772 (AFM 767) G	Dungal mac Cellaig .iii. G
Fáelán mac Forbasaig d. 786 (AU 781)	Faelan mac Forbasaig .xi.
	Mael Duin mac Cummascaig .u.
Fergal mac Anmchada d. 802 (AU) G	Fergal mac Anmchada .u. G
Dúngal mac Fergaile d. 842 (AU CS) G	Dungal mac Fergaile .xl. G
Cerball mac Dúngaile d. 888 (AU AI CS) G	Cerball mac Dungaile xl. G

tale is a moralising anecdote on the evil of greed. Feradach had acquired great riches, primarily by confiscating it from the people of Osraige. His sons wished for them, but Feradach, seized with sudden remorse, admits they were ill-gotten and he consented to the torments he would receive as a result. He began fervent penance, then Clann Chonnla (the Osraige; see below) killed him and took the treasures. As a result of his contrition, he went to heaven, and 'was one of three kings who went to heaven during the lifetime of Colum Cille'.⁸⁷ As Radner notes, this tale is an expanded version of the one found in the *Bóruma*.⁸⁸ The author of the *FAI* version added several Osraige details: that Feradach was of the Corcu Laígde, that seven kings of Corcu Laígde ruled Osraige, and that the Osraige people who killed him were Clann Chonnla. Connla is the ancestor of the Osraige kings in the later genealogies which link them to the Leinstermen; Connla's father Bresal Brecc was ancestor of the Laigin. Radner suggested that the author of the source of the entry in the Clonmacnoise-group texts did not appreciate that Corcu Laígde kings had ruled in Osraige, and knowing Clann Chonnla killed him had used the wording *a suis*.⁸⁹ This is fair enough, but a version of the Osraige pedigree does include Duí and Feradach as descendants of Connla, knowledge of which would also occasion a remark that Feradach was killed *a suis*. We shall consider this issue further below.

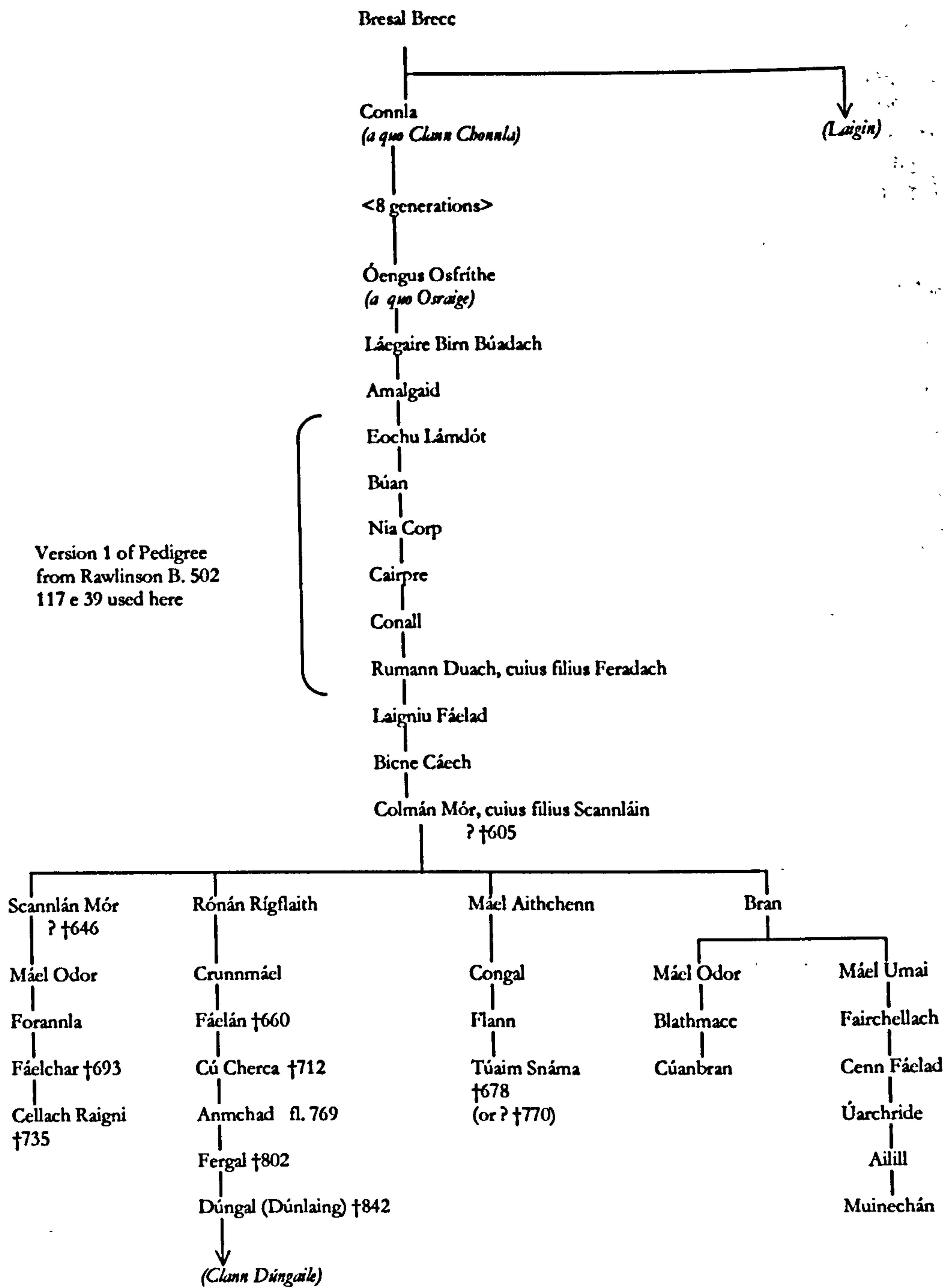
This example illustrates the problems in studying the early history of Osraige and its kings; there is not space here to discuss all the results of such investigations, but some of the findings can be summarised. Table 11 is a comparison of the kings of Osraige named in the chronicles and those found in the king-list. Several discrepancies may immediately be noted; it is not unusual that they exist, for comparisons between annals and king-lists for all Irish dynasties reveal similar inconsistencies. The table also indicates whether the individuals are found in the Osraige royal genealogies; a diagram of the genealogical information is given in Table 12. A few questionable points: Scannlán is consistently found in the genealogies, but there he is always the son of one Colmán Mór, rather than the Cenn Fáelad named in the annals. Rónán Rígflaith has an extremely unusual epithet; it might be no more than a signal of his ancestry of the main royal line, but a closer examination of literary sources might reveal more about it. The Fáelán d. 660 in the chronicles is not given a patronymic, but might tentatively be identified with Fáelán mac Crunnmáel of the genealogies, the father of Cú Cherca.

⁸⁷ *FAI* §4.

⁸⁸ *FAI*, p. 185.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Table 12: Early Generations of the Osraige Dynasty in the Genealogies



Dates are supplied from the annals for reference

Collateral lines from the genealogies in Rawlinson B. 502 and *LL* are not shown

Some family members named in annals but not genealogies who are related to persons in this diagram have been excluded

Though Cellach d. 735 is 'mac Flainn' in the king-list, no such person is known to the genealogies whereas Cellach mac Fáelchair is; he is also the father of Dúngal d. 772.

From the point of view of the genealogies, the main area of interest is in the generations around Colmán Mór, who is presented as the ancestor of the various later royal lines.⁹⁰ On a generational count back from known persons Colmán would have lived around 600. Is he to be identified with the Colmán d. 605? Possibly, but then the genealogies disagree with both of the patronymics given Colmán in the chronicles. In fact the pedigree of Colmán exists in two versions:⁹¹

Version 1 (Rawlinson B. 502)

Colmán Mór (cuius filius Scannlán)
 m. Bicne Cáech
 m. Laignech Fáelad
 m. Romainn Duach (cuius filius Feradach)
 m. Conaill

 m. Coirpri
 m. Niad Cuirp

Version 2 (Book of Leinster)

Colmán Mór
 m. Bicne Cáech
 m. Laignech Fáelad
 m. Eochada
 m. Imchada
 m. Con-brothaig
 m. Fir-Chorp
 m. Cormaic
 m. Coirpri
 m. Niad Cuirp

From this point the genealogies are the same, running back five more generations to Óengus Osraige, supposed eponym of the people, and then nine more generations to Connla, eponym of the 'Clann Chonnla' of *FAI*. Connla was son of Bresal Brecc, who was also ancestor of the Laigin. That these genealogies are in large measure fabrications is not to be doubted, but at what point do they become in any real sense 'historical'? Are any of the supposed Corcu Laígde kings of Osraige actually to be found here? We note in Version 1 Colmán's great grandfather, Romainn Duí, 'whose son [was] Feradach'. This is the same Feradach mac Duach we have already met, but here he is a member of Clann Chonnla. Going on the evidence of *AFM* that Colmán d. 605 was the son of Feradach, which agrees with the evidence of the Latin life of St Cainnech, we might posit an 'original' pedigree that ran Colmán m. Feradaig m. Romainn Duach. On the other hand, both surviving versions of the pedigree insist Colmán Mór's father and

⁹⁰ In addition, he is found in hagiographical texts as the friend of Cainnech of Aghaboe, the other great Osraige saint, who supposedly died around 600. See Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, i pp. 152-69, esp. §§ 39-41 which call him *Colmanus filius Fearaide, rex regionis Osraidhe*.

⁹¹ Rawlinson B. 502 117 e 39 and LL 339 a 14, ed. in *CGH*, pp. 15-18.

grandfather were Bicne and Laigniu Fáelad; thus there may well have been two Colmáns, perhaps a 'native' Colmán and a Corcu Laígde Colmán. This parallels a suggestion made by Mac Niocaill that there were two Scannláns, a Corcu Laígde Scannlán mac Cinn Fáelad whose death is reported in the chronicles and whose son Illann went on to be king of Corcu Laígde (eventually becoming a character of saga in *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*), and a 'native' Scannlán Mór son of Colmán.⁹² There is no way of deciding; though it is by no means impossible that there were contemporaries of the same name, the coincidence is rather suspicious. I suspect that the true provenances of Colmán and Scannlán (which may or may not be the ones provided by the annals) have been reworked by genealogists, thus giving the impression that there were two of each. In other words, it seems that if the genealogies of the dynasty originally went much further back than Colmán they were subsequently reworked.

There is a further complication in that Conchrad mac Duach, who we recall as the earliest-named king of Osraige (if he was historical), appears in a different set of genealogies, those of Uí Duach Argatrois or Uí Fíachrach Éile of Munster.⁹³ These people are given no connection to Corcu Laígde and are clearly presented as part of the Eóganachta of Munster. The relevant portion runs:

Concrath (cuius filia Mugain ben Diarmata meic Cerbaill dia Carn Mugaine i nArgatrois)
 m. Duach Cliach
 m. Maine Muncháin
 m. Cairpri
 m. Cuircc
 m. Luigdech.

There is not a great deal to say about this, other than that it is clearly aware of the tradition that Mugain daughter of Conchrad was wife of Diarmait mac Cerbaill. Conchrad's father, Duí Cliach, has an epithet which associates him with the lands west of Cashel, while the fact that the Uí Duach pedigree is associated with those of Uí Fíachrach Éile is of interest, for the plain of Éile (around Thurles) is immediately west of the Osraige heartlands, separated by the Slieveardagh Hills. This region appears originally to have been conquered by the Eóganachta from the Laigin, and some of the peoples known as Arada Cliach had Leinster genealogies.⁹⁴

⁹² Mac Niocaill, *IBTV*, p. 86.

⁹³ Ed. in *CGH*, pp. 222-3.

⁹⁴ Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 181.

Table 13: Pedigrees of kings of Uí Dúnlainge, Uí Chennselaig and Osraige Compared

<div><div>Uí Fáeláin of Uí Dúnlainge (Rawl. B. 502 117 c 16)</div><div><div>Cormac</div><div>Cairpe</div><div>Colmán</div><div>Rónán</div></div></div>	<div><div>Síl Cormaic of Uí Chennselaig (Rawl. B. 502 117 e 6; cf. LL 317 a 11)</div><div><div>Cormac</div><div>Colmán</div><div>Rónán</div><div>Crunnmáel</div></div></div> <div><div>(main pedigree has Fáeláin m. Colmáin; Rónán listed as a son of Colmán at 124 b 36)</div><div><div>(Later Sil Cormaic kings of Uí Chennselaig)</div></div></div>	<div><div>Osraige (Rawl. B 502 117 e 52)</div><div><div>Bicne Cáech</div><div>Colmán Mór</div><div>Rónán Rígflaith</div><div>Crunnmáel</div></div></div> <div><div>(Later kings of Osraige)</div></div>
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Thus, the Uí Duach (whatever their true origins) may originally have ruled a much wider area, but later genealogists 'localised' Uí Duach in particular regions (Éile and Osraige), giving them different origins. An original Duí may have become Rumann Duí in Osraige and Duí Cliach in Munster; or two originally distinct figures and their associated legends have become confused. An east Munster genealogist might have deliberately tried to suggest links between Munster and Osraige, just as the author(s) of the Osraige genealogies created a connection to Leinster.

We may ask what the aims of a revising genealogist would be. Both versions of the Osraige pedigree provide a link with the Laigin, which obviously would support any claims on the part of Osraige's rulers for a share in the kingship of Leinster. Version 2, as well as being slightly longer, seems to have written Rumann Duí (and therefore Feradach) out of the dynasty's history. I am not sure that Version 2 can be proved to be later, but I suspect that Rumann has been edited out to remove the suggestion of a link between the later Osraige kings and the Corcu Laígde. This then would be another aspect of their attempts to minimise Munster associations and maximise links with Leinster. We might compare the Munster tradition which, though accepting the Leinster origin of Osraige, states that Osraige was forfeited to Munster in the sixth century for the slaying of its king, which Byrne has suggested to be 'propaganda dating from the time when Osraige was asserting its Leinster affiliations'.⁹⁵

In fact, I would like to suggest that whoever re-worked the Osraige genealogies not only provided a fictitious prehistoric link with the Laigin, but also knew versions of the Laigin genealogies, Uí Dúnlainge and Uí Chennselaig, and 'borrowed' names from them as source material. These parallels are summarised in Table 13.⁹⁶ For example: a Colmán Mór with a son Rónán is a feature of the Uí Dúnlainge genealogy just as it is for the Osraige. The death of a Rónán mac Colmáin is entered in the chronicles for 624, but they do not award him any title; he could have been of Osraige as much as Laigin. The Colmán Mór of the Osraige materials (if he did die in 605) and his son Rónán Rígflaith, if historical would have lived at the same time, so perhaps these were the same persons.⁹⁷ The Uí Dúnlainge parallel may only be a coincidence of names, but more striking is a pedigree in the Uí Chennselaig genealogies which runs Colmán – Rónán – Crunnmáel, identical to that in the Osraige genealogies which runs Colmán Mór – Rónán Rígflaith – Crunnmáel, and once again these Uí Chennselaig dynasts would have

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ CGH, pp. 13-4, 74 (Uí Fáeláin of Uí Dúnlainge); 14-15 (Síl Chormaic of Uí Chennselaig).

⁹⁷ Note that the LL version of the pedigree (337 h 1) runs Rónán – Scannlán – Cenn Fáelad – Colmán.

lived at exactly the same time as their Osraige namesakes. It is also important to note that the Colmán m. Rónáin m. Crunnmaíl line is the line which produced the later kings of Osraige, including Cerball mac Dúngaile and the Meic Gillai Phátraic kings. Even if they considered their Colmán Mór and Rónán to have been completely different individuals to those in the Uí Dúnlainge and Uí Chennselaig genealogies, the coincidence of names must have given the impression that those early kings of Osraige were to be closely identified with early kings of Leinster, rather than Corcu Laígde. Regardless of whether the historical kings of Osraige were descended from Corcu Laígde or a native dynasty, they acquired a pedigree that connected them with the Laigin, and contexts for this in the reigns of later Osraige kings are not far to seek.

A few historical notes on Osraige in the seventh and eighth centuries may be entered here. The Eóganachta considered Osraige to be a part of Munster, as shown by its presence in the *frithfolad* tracts.⁹⁸ However, Osraige's position between Munster and Leinster inevitably led to conflicts with both. Fáelán was killed by the Leinstermen in 660. The first Túaim Snáma was killed by Fáelán Senchustal, king of Leinster, in 678. This episode has also found its way into literary texts. *FBI* (which also give Túaim Snáma the unusual nickname 'Cicaire', perhaps meaning 'Greedy') state that Fáelán had successfully taken the hostages of Leinster, and insert a short poem to this effect. This matter is also found in the Leinster genealogical materials, which state: *Faelan Senchustal is remi ro mebdatar secht catha for Ossaige. Isin chath dédenach do-cer Tuaim Snáma ri Ossairgi* 'Fáelán Senchustal ... won seven battles over the Osraige, and in the last battle fell Túaim Snáma king of Osraige'; the text then gives the same poem.⁹⁹ In a remarkable display of intratextuality, the exact same phrase is found accompanying the entry for Fáelán in the list of kings of Uí Chennselaig earlier in the Book of Leinster.¹⁰⁰

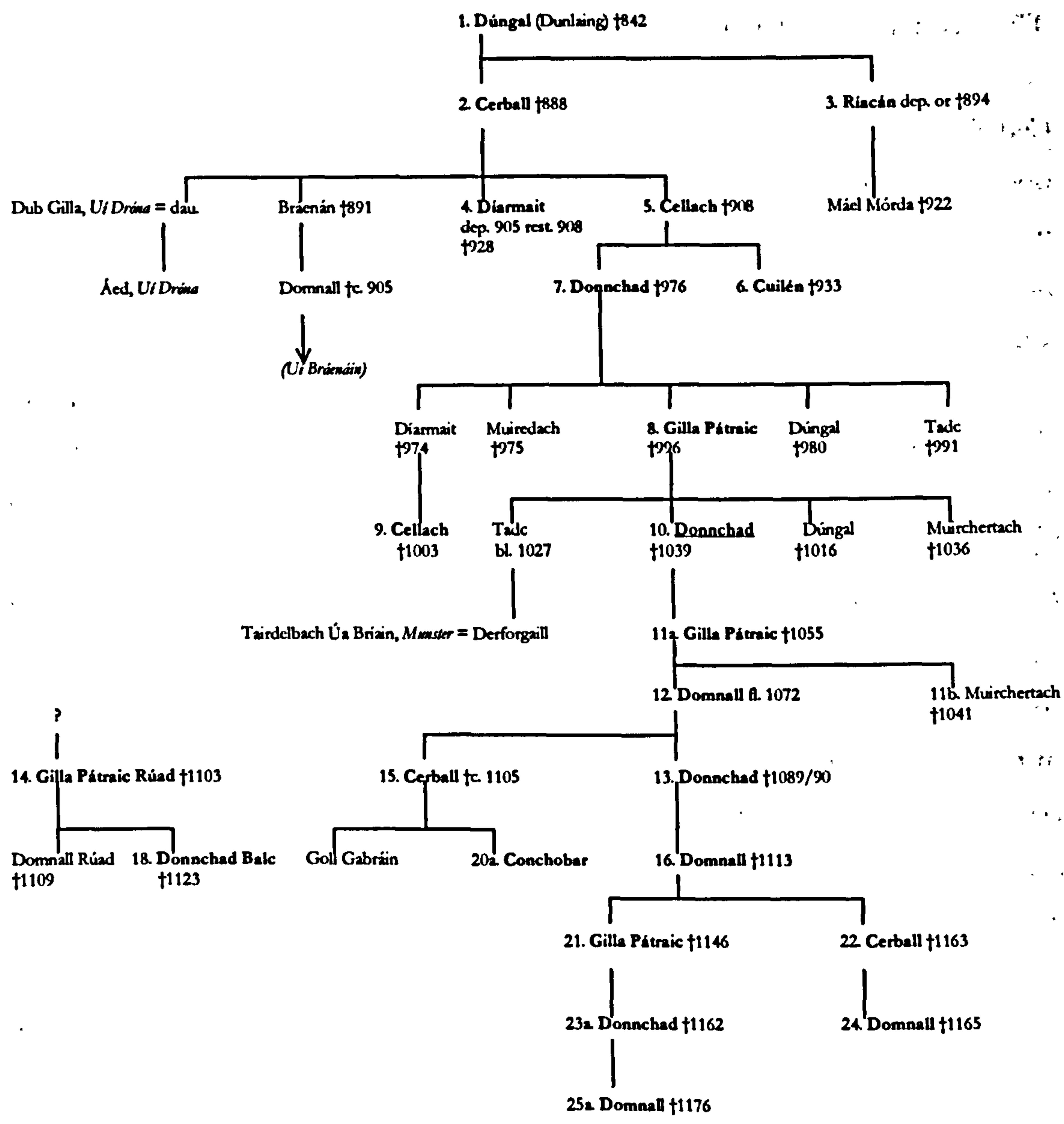
In the later eighth century there appears to have been a struggle between two branches of the Osraige dynasty. In 769 there is a record of a conflict between the second Túaim Snáma (who died the following year) and 'the sons of Cú Cherca', in which the latter were put to flight. This was clearly a contest for the kingship; the only son of Cú Cherca named in the annals is Anmchad. Though apparently unsuccessful in 769, Anmchad's son Fergal (d. 802) and Fergal's son Dúngal (d. 842, also known by the variant name Dúnlaing) were both kings. Dúngal's son Cerball went on to become one

⁹⁸ Though its ambiguous status is reflected by the fact that the kings of Osraige do not give renders and travel to Cashel with the retinue befitting a private individual. For discussion see Mac Niocaill, *IBTV*, pp. 31-2.

⁹⁹ *LL* 317 ab 1; ed. in *CGH*, p. 347.

¹⁰⁰ *LL* 40 a - b, ed. in *BkL*, i, pp. 184-6.

Table 14: Clann Dúngaile / Meic Gillai Phátraic Kings of Osraige 802-1176



Note also: 17. Finn Úa Cáellaide; 19. Donnchad Dub; 20b. Murchad mac Murchada of Uí Chennselaig; 23b. Murchad Úa Cáellaide; 25b. Diarmait Úa Cáellaide

Kings of Osraige Kings of Osraige and Leinster
Not all known family members are included in this diagram

of the most famous kings of Osraige; he was the founder of the fortunes in the ninth to eleventh centuries.

The Reign of Cerball mac Dúngaile

Cerball is probably the most famous of the kings of Osraige, and his fame extended both throughout Ireland and overseas.¹⁰¹ His career has recently been studied in detail by Clare Downham.¹⁰² The intention here is not to rehearse that material, but instead to point to a few key features of his reign, as found from the record of the 'regular' annals and as portrayed in a literary fashion by *FAI*. The contemporary annals paint a vivid picture of his activities; the most significant event of his reign was the transfer of Osraige from the over kingship of the Eóganacht kings of Cashel to the over kingship of the Uí Néill kings of Tara at Rahugh in 859. Hence his reign is of crucial significance to the concerns of this chapter. Cerball's success can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, he took full advantage of the changes in political and social climate occasioned by the advent of the vikings. Secondly, he was able to take advantage of Osraige's strategic position between Munster, Leinster and Southern Uí Néill. He made good use of marriage alliances. Finally we must admit the qualities of the man himself, who was clearly ambitious, able, and ruthless in executing his plans. As is often the case, a certain amount of good fortune was involved; he was to some extent a protégé of Máel Sechnaill mac Maíl Rúanaid, and both before and after Máel Sechnaill's death asserted his authority over Leinster.

It would be useful at this point to consider the nature of *FAI* more fully. It is a compilatory text made in the south-east of Ireland, utilising a number of earlier texts including what Radner termed an 'annals framework' akin to that of chronicles such as *AU* and *AT*, and perhaps derived from annals kept at Kildare.¹⁰³ That *FAI* is, chronologically speaking, divided into five discontinuous fragments makes overall analysis difficult but it seems that the five sections do derive from one text, as distinctive themes and concerns are found throughout. That said, the different sections focus on different subjects; Sections I-III are particularly concerned with the Uí Néill overkings of Tara and their relations with Leinster. To some extent this is also true of

¹⁰¹ E.g. to Wales, where his death is recorded in *Annales Cambriae*, see D. N. Dumville (ed. & transl.), *Annales Cambriae, A.D. 682-954: Texts A-C in Parallel* (Cambridge 2002), s.a. A 888. For Cerball's later fame in Norse texts (principally *Landnámabók*) see Ó Corráin, 'Viking Ireland', pp. 440-44.

¹⁰² C. Downham, 'The Career of Cearbhall of Osraighe', *Ossory, Laois and Leinster* 1 (2004), 1-18.

¹⁰³ *FAI*, p. xiv.

Sections IV and V, but these describe the history of the viking-age and are much concerned with the activities of Scandinavians in Ireland and abroad. They also contain much unique material on Osraige, and Section IV in particular contains extremely detailed and colourful narratives on events in the reign of Cerball. Radner surmised that much of this information derived from an 'Osraige Chronicle', which was also the source of several Osraige entries in *AFM* not found in other chronicles, and that the compiler(s) of *FAI* inserted information from this 'Osraige Chronicle' into the surviving text.¹⁰⁴ Downham has developed this idea further and has argued that the 'Osraige Chronicle' originally had a separate identity, with its narratives running in rough chronological order, and that the compiler of *FAI* divided this text and inserted it into *FAI*, sometimes in incorrect places.¹⁰⁵ The question remains as to the source of this 'Osraige Chronicle'. Radner suggested, followed by Ó Corráin, that it is of a genre with such historicist texts as *Cocad Gáedel re Gallaib* and belongs to a considerably later period than the events it narrates, specifically the reign of Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic in the eleventh century.¹⁰⁶ This theory assumes that the concerns of Donnchad's own time are reflected in the text, and that in glorifying Cerball the text shone light on his descendant Donnchad, just as the portrayal of Brían Bóraime in *Cocad Gáedel re Gallaib* is supposed to glorify his great-grandson Muirchertach Úa Bríain. Certainly, much of the material in *FAI* focuses on Cerball, so much so that one is tempted to characterise it as 'Cerball's Saga' rather than an 'Osraige Chronicle'; we shall consider the historicist purpose of the text further below.

There are three themes in Cerball's reign which shall be highlighted here: his dealings with the Uí Néill overkings, principally Máel Sechnaill mac Maíl Rúanaid; dealing with neighbours, principally Leinster; and relations with various viking-groups. Firstly, the relationship with the Uí Néill, which culminated in the *rigdál* of 859. As we have seen in Chapter II, Máel Sechnaill campaigned in the south on several occasions and successfully took the hostages of Munster. Máel Sechnaill was married to Lann, Cerball mac Dúngaile's sister, and *FAI* makes considerable mileage out of this; when Cerball is first introduced in what survives in *FAI*, after several passages which describe Máel Sechnaill's activities, the link is made clear.¹⁰⁷ This entry states that Máel Sechnaill

¹⁰⁴ *FAI*, pp. xxii-xxvi.

¹⁰⁵ C. Downham, 'The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: portrayals of Vikings in "The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland"', in E. Kooper (ed.), *The Medieval Chronicle III: Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle* (Amsterdam & New York, forthcoming 2004).

¹⁰⁶ *FAI*, p. xxvi; Ó Corráin, 'Viking Ireland', p. 443-4.

¹⁰⁷ *FAI* §246.

sent Cerball to take the hostages of Munster – something unknown to the other chronicles, and which may not have happened – but which illustrates the way in which Cerball is portrayed in *FAI*, as coequal to the king of Ireland and superior to the kings of the other provinces. A later entry makes reference to Máel Sechnaill's campaigns in the south, and Cerball hands his hostages over to him, but only after those of Leinster had been secured.¹⁰⁸ Moreover Cerball had previously been taking the Leinster tribute which had been due to Máel Sechnaill. The next narrative details an invasion of Mide by Cerball and his Danish allies which is reported in the other chronicles.¹⁰⁹ In the *FAI* version, Cerball plunders Mide for three months, so that many poets of Ireland made praise-poems for him.¹¹⁰ Thus the brief *FAI* account of the *rigdál* of 859 at Rahugh, though acknowledging that Cerball submitted to Máel Sechnaill, does so in a very qualified fashion. In fact, the portrayal of the Clann Cholmáin king in *FAI* is not overly positive, at least in comparison with Cerball. Máel Sechnaill deceitfully kills King Cináed mac Conaing of north Brega (also reported in the other chronicles), though to be fair *FAI* is keen to clarify that this was punishment for Cináed's plundering of churches.¹¹¹ When Máel Sechnaill led a great hosting to Mag Macha (known from other sources to have occurred in 860) he was so wary of the Northern Uí Néill king Áed mac Néill that he stayed awake all night, bidding his men to be on guard, and in fact his suspicions were proved correct.¹¹² The overall attitude is ambivalent, and the intended inference is that Máel Sechnaill, despite his power, was not as great as Cerball.

Now let us consider Cerball's relations with his immediate neighbours. There are numerous references to his campaigns against both Munster and Leinster and we shall highlight only a few of them here. Cerball became involved with Leinster fairly early in his reign. The Uí Chennselaig under their king Echtigern invaded Osraige in 848. In 853 Cerball allied with Brúatur, the king of Uí Dróna (by this time Uí Dróna were ruled by a branch of the Uí Chennselaig) to murder Echtigern. Brúatur was killed in turn within eight days. This episode was clearly an attempt by Cerball to install an ally as king of Uí Chennselaig (though in the end very short-lived); the list of Uí Chennselaig kings in the Book of Leinster does not admit Brúatur (though it mentions his murder of Echtigern), but the Laigin genealogies elsewhere in the Book of Leinster call him *rí Húa*

¹⁰⁸ *FAI* §260.

¹⁰⁹ *AU, AI* 859.2.

¹¹⁰ *FAI* §265.

¹¹¹ *FAI* §234.

¹¹² §279; similar motifs are found in *Cath Almaine*, also in *FAI*, perhaps suggestive of influence on this episode.

Cendselaig.¹¹³ Cerball forged lasting links between his family and the rulers of Uí Dróna; his daughter married Brúatar's son Dub Gilla, and as we shall see below there is good evidence of ties between later kings of Osraige and Uí Dróna.¹¹⁴ According to *AFM* and *FAI*, Cerball took the hostages of Leinster in 858 after Máel Sechnaill did the same.¹¹⁵ In 864 Cerball again invaded Leinster in force.¹¹⁶ Another assault in 866 targeted several monasteries (including Sleaty by the Barrow) and a further large-scale attack took place in 870.¹¹⁷ The traffic was not all one-way; the southern Leinstermen invaded Osraige in 878, but were heavily defeated.¹¹⁸ In Downham's estimation, Cerball may have sought a long-term peace with Leinster despite these hostilities, and particularly to make common cause with the south Leinster kings of Uí Chennselaig and Uí Dróna against the northern overkings of Uí Dúnlainge.¹¹⁹ As well as the aforementioned marriage-link to Uí Dróna, Cerball married another daughter, Mór, to the king of Uí Chennselaig.¹²⁰

On the western front Cerball appears to have changed his policies over time. On more than one occasion he attacked Munster, but in the early 870s he allied with Dúnchad mac Duib-dá-Bairenn of Eóganacht Chaisil to raid Connacht and west Munster. This alliance did not persist and Cerball is later seen to ally with the neighbouring Déisi of Co. Waterford to attack the Eóganachta. Downham characterised his policy toward Munster as largely opportunist.¹²¹ Certainly after 859 when any theoretical subordination to the Munster kings was removed, Cerball acted largely as he pleased, though it could not be said that he had any controlling influence in Munster. *FAI* presents a rather different view. As we have seen, it represents him as taking the hostages of Munster on behalf of Máel Sechnaill. With his Danish allies he defends Munster against the Lochlannaig. When the Eóganachta killed Osraige refugees he devastated their lands and took hostages.¹²² It is rather unfortunate that Section IV of *FAI* gives out around 873, for information on Cerball's activities with regard to Munster in the 870s are consequently lacking.¹²³

¹¹³ Title in LL 317 a 22, ed. in *CGH*, p. 347.

¹¹⁴ *FAI* §443.

¹¹⁵ *AFM* 856; *FAI* §262.

¹¹⁶ *AFM* 862 [=864].

¹¹⁷ *AFM* 864 [=866]; *FAI* §365.

¹¹⁸ *AFM* 876 [=878].

¹¹⁹ Downham, 'The Career of Cearbhall', 16.

¹²⁰ *CS* 917.

¹²¹ Downham, 'The career of Cearbhall', 16.

¹²² *FAI* §314. Ó Corráin has suggested that two separate entries in *AFM* 862 may have been the basis for this story; see 'Viking Ireland', p. 443 n. 84.

¹²³ With the exception of §398, also found in *AFM* 869.

Finally we come to Cerball's dealings with viking-groups. Several of the records relate battles between Cerball and various viking-groups; he defeated vikings of unknown origin in 846, those of Dublin in 847, of Waterford in 860, and the followers of Rodolb on two occasions in the 860s.¹²⁴ On the other hand, it is clear that in the 850s Cerball was allied to the viking-leader Ímar; in 858 Cerball and Ímar defeated the Cenél Fíachach (who were apparently allied with the Gall-Gaídil); in 859 they invaded Mide, which as we have seen, *FAI* inflates into a three-month campaign.¹²⁵ In terms of contemporary politics, Cerball's success derived from this pragmatism, fighting both with and against different Scandinavian groups, who were themselves attempting to extend their influence in Munster and the midlands.¹²⁶ The portrayal of Cerball's interactions with vikings in *FAI* clearly reflects the attitudes of that work to Scandinavians.¹²⁷ Broadly speaking, the *dubgaill* 'dark foreigners', normally identified as *Danair* or Danes, are portrayed negatively but at least have some redeeming features, such as occasional leanings toward Christianity. Worse are the *finngaill* 'fair foreigners', or *lochlannaig* who are clearly pagan. Worst were the *gall-gaídil* 'Norse-Irish', products of integration between Irish and Scandinavian groups, who are represented as apostate Christians who plundered churches. They should know better, and as such are seen as more base even than the Lochlannaig. This motif is one of the oldest in Irish literature – Patrick condemned the men of Coroticus in similar terms.¹²⁸ Thus we find that it is the semi-acceptable Danair who under their leader Horm ally with Cerball against the Lochlannaig, of whom they are afraid.¹²⁹ It is these same Danair who fight alongside Cerball in defence of Munster against the Lochlannaig, and who fight so honourably that Cerball actually escorts them to an audience with Máel Sechnaill.¹³⁰ On the other hand it is Rodolb and his Lochlannaig who are Cerball's long-term enemies.¹³¹ In sum then, though *FAI* admits Cerball's alliances with viking-groups and acknowledges that they were part of his success, it makes clear that said vikings were the 'least bad' and that Cerball was a consistent enemy of more terrible viking foes.

¹²⁴ *AFM* 844 [=846]; *AU* 847.4, *AFM* 845; *AFM* 858 (the earliest reference to a settlement at Waterford); *FAI* §§281, 308.

¹²⁵ *AU* 859.2.

¹²⁶ Downham, 'The Career of Cearbhall', 9-13.

¹²⁷ See further Downham, 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly'.

¹²⁸ A.B.E. Hood (ed. & transl.), *St Patrick: His Writings and Muirchú's 'Life'* (London 1978), pp. 35-8, 55-9.

¹²⁹ *FAI* §251.

¹³⁰ *FAI* §254.

¹³¹ *FAI* §§249, 281, 308. Admittedly §265 admits that Cerball's allies in his invasion of Mide were a *sluagh Lochlannach* 'Norse host', but immediately beforehand (263) these allies had helped Cerball defeat the Gall-Gaídil, who in *FAI* are the blackest enemies.

It is interesting that for the last decade or so of Cerball's life we in fact know very little of his activities. After allying with the Déisi in 878 we hear nothing until the report of the death of his son Cuilén by Norsemen in 886.¹³² Then in 888, according to *AU*, 'Cerball son of Dúngal, king of Osraige, died suddenly'. On the face of it, Cerball was less active in his later years, though silence on the part of chronicles is no clear guide. As we have seen, the abrupt end of Section IV of *FAI* means that we cannot fill in the blanks, though the similar lack of information in *AFM* in these years suggests there may not have been much more to tell. Cerball, however, was by any measure a very successful king, and made the most of the opportunities presented by the political circumstances of his time. In his reign Osraige became one of the most important kingdoms in southern Ireland, though we do not need to accept *FAI*'s assertions that Cerball took hostages at a provincial level on behalf of Máel Sechnaill. It is interesting, therefore, that his immediate successors did not seem to capitalize on his gains, and indeed it was over a century before there was another king of Osraige of comparable stature with Cerball. In the next section we shall consider this matter and possible reasons for it.

Osraige in the Tenth Century

It is not entirely clear what happened after Cerball 'died suddenly' in 888. An entry unique to *AFM* (probably for 891) reports that the Déisi slaughtered the Osraige and killed Cerball's son Bráenán.¹³³ Bráenán is not called king and it is not clear whether he succeeded his father; one of the oddities of *AFM* is that it has no record of Cerball's death. According to the king-lists, Cerball was succeeded by his brother Ríacán. Ríacán was succeeded in 894 by Cerball's son Diarmait, though Ríacán's own death is not reported.¹³⁴ Diarmait had to contend primarily with his own brother, Cellach. In 898 Cellach is reported as being part of a force of Déisi and vikings which ranged across Osraige to Gowran and killed a Leinster dynast.¹³⁵ There were more conflicts between Osraige and Leinster, then in 905 'Diarmait mac Cerbaill was driven from the kingship of Osraige and Cellach mac Cerbaill was made king in his place'.¹³⁶ It is not known exactly what occasioned this change, but the best clue is provided by an intriguing

¹³² *AFM* 884.

¹³³ *AFM* 887.

¹³⁴ *AI* 894.1.

¹³⁵ *AFM* 893 [=898].

¹³⁶ *AFM* 900 [=905].

narrative in *FAI*.¹³⁷ In this account Díarmait kills Domnall, son of the Bráenán killed by the Déisi in 891. *FAI* implies that this was done by Díarmait to help secure his own position, but that *do eirgheattar Clann Dungaile uile* 'all Clann Dungaile rose up' against him. Clann Dungaile were the descendants of Cerball's father Dúngal, and must have included collateral lines such as the descendants of Bráenán. *FAI* state that Díarmait's brother Cellach did not rebel, but that Máel Mórda did, because Díarmait had been cruel to his elderly father. We know from Máel Mórda's obit that this father was Ríacán, Díarmait's uncle and predecessor, and the lack of an obit for Ríacán suggests that Díarmait may have taken the kingship by force. In addition, the son of Áed mac Duib Gillai, king of Uí Dróna, cousin of the murdered Domnall (because his grandmother had been Cerball's daughter and thus brother to Bráenán) supported Máel Mórda. *FAI* state that much destruction was wrought in this war, but do not give the outcome. *FAI* places its account among events occurring in 912, but since it mentions Cellach (d. 908), it must be misplaced and probably belongs in 905. Thus, Díarmait was deposed as a result of his own actions and Cellach took his place.

Three years later Cellach took part in the famous battle of Belach Mugna in which Cormac mac Cuillenáin, king of Cashel, was killed. Cellach was himself killed, fighting on the Munster side against the Uí Néill king Flann Sinna mac Maíl Sechnaill and his allies the Laigin and Connachta. Once again we see an Osraige king acting independently of any theoretical allegiance owed to the Uí Néill overking, though on this occasion it proved disastrous for Cellach. The saga of the battle in *FAI* has some interesting Osraige information which may be based on genuine tradition; even if not, the way in which it portrays Cellach is notable.¹³⁸ Firstly it states that the cause of the battle was the mustering of a large army by Cormac mac Cuillenáin and Flaithbertach mac Inmainén 'to demand the hostages of Osraige and Leinster'. The Leinstermen offered a truce, giving hostages as sureties of truce into the keeping of the coarb of St Comgall, Máenach mac Síadail, who acted as intermediary and messenger of the peace offer. These hostages are identified as the son of the king of Leinster and the son of the king of Osraige, but unfortunately no forenames are given. Flaithbertach however rejected the truce out of hand. In the battle itself the Munster army was divided into three battalions, with Flaithbertach and Cellach mac Cerbaill of Osraige leading the first battalion. The battle went badly, and when Cellach saw his own people being slaughtered by the troops of Flann Sinna, he leapt on his horse and attempted to flee,

¹³⁷ *FAI* §443.

¹³⁸ *FAI* §423.

his actions helping to incite the Munster rout; but he and his son were killed early on in the fighting. After listing the slain and victors of the battle, the text states that Flann Sinna came with a troop of horsemen 'and installed Díarmait son of Cerball in the kingship of Osraige'.

Now, there appears to be an inconsistency within the tale itself. On one hand Cellach is fighting with the Munster army and is in fact one of its leaders; on the other, the whole point of the campaign was for Munster to take the hostages (and therefore overlordship) of Leinster and Osraige. Additionally, the hostages given as pledges into the keeping of Máenach are the sons of the kings of Leinster and Osraige. There is no simple way to resolve this problem. It is important to remember that the saga in *FAI* is a complex literary work composed at some remove from the event and we must be wary of accepting all the information it contains. However, it might hint at the conditions in Osraige during the time of Díarmait and Cellach. It is tempting to suggest that Díarmait leant more to alliance with the Leinstermen and against the Munstermen, while Cellach had the opposite policy. Such opposition may have been a factor in the deposition of one by the other. After Díarmait was deposed the most logical place for him to seek help would be the Leinstermen and Uí Néill. After his restoration (whether or not Flann Sinna really was responsible) his career is again illuminated by *FAI*, which report that he campaigned with Áed king of Uí Dróna, father of his erstwhile enemy, in about 910. The account is unusual in that the campaign is against Mag Raigne in Osraige itself, and indeed the two kings sack one of its churches. God's vengeance on Áed was that he should be killed by some peasants of the Osraige (*comhaigthebh d'Osraighibh*). We are given pause by the account in *AFM*, in which Áed is killed by the Uí Bairrche of south Leinster. The implication is that the author of the account in *FAI* may have transplanted the action to Osraige to make negative points about Díarmait, and the common *FAI* theme of divine retribution for abuse of churches is of course present. On the other hand, the record of Díarmait campaigning in south Osraige may be related to the civil war described above. As far as the other chronicles are concerned, Díarmait's main problems in the later years of his reign were occasional viking incursions; Máel Mórda, the other former rebel, died as *tánaise* of Osraige in 922.¹³⁹ Díarmait himself finally died as king of Osraige in 928.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ *AFM* 920.

¹⁴⁰ *AU* 928.6.

He was succeeded by Cellach's son Cuilén, about whom we know nothing other than he died in 933, and *AU* reckon him *optimus laicus*.¹⁴¹ Cuilén was succeeded by his brother Donnchad.¹⁴² Considerably more is known of his reign than Cuilén's, primarily because of a sequence of entries unique to *AFM* which deal with Osraige events, though we cannot discuss them in detail here; it is a nice question as to the source of *AFM*'s information.¹⁴³ Donnchad died in 976; *AT* state that he was *in senili aetate*, which is correct, for his father had died almost seventy years previously.¹⁴⁴ He is not named as an active participant in Osraige affairs after 947 and it seems that for whatever reason, whether old age or illness or something else, it was his sons and nephews (generally styled *tánaisi* by *AFM*, including Máel Rúanaid, a nephew who died in 967, and Diarmait and Muiredach, Donnchad's sons who died in 974 and 975 respectively) who led his forces. During Donnchad's reign the main conflicts were with Leinster, particularly the neighbouring Uí Chennselaig, and viking-forces, which via their base at Waterford on the Barrow and Norse estuaries had easy access to the interior of Osraige.

Donnchad was succeeded by another of his sons, Gilla Pátraic. His name was adopted as a surname by his offspring, yet as is often the case of eponymic ancestors his reign does not seem to have been especially successful; it is the success of his descendents who ruled after him and retained the kingship in their own family which ensured the lasting fame of Gilla Pátraic's name (and we recall a similar situation pertained to Rúarc of Uí Rúairc). During his reign we hear of the death of yet two more sons of Donnchad; Dúngal who died in 980 (called *tánaise* by *AFM*) and Tadc (called *rígdamna* by *AU*), killed by the Munstermen. There were considerable hostilities in the 980s between Munster and Osraige as Brían Bóraime mac Cennétig sought control of Leth Cuinn. In 983 he harried Osraige, captured Gilla Pátraic and took hostages.¹⁴⁵ In the following year, after Bríain made a treaty with the vikings of Waterford to attack Dublin, he again devastated Osraige, and then Leinster, though Gilla Pátraic was released.¹⁴⁶ Gilla Pátraic was killed in 996 by Donndubán mac Ímair, the Hiberno-Norse son of the king of Waterford, and men of the Déisi, whose territory lay to the west of Waterford. Donndubán had already been responsible for the death of the king of Uí

¹⁴¹ *AU* 933.2.

¹⁴² *AI* 934.3 state that Donnchad took the kingship in that year, which would imply there was a gap of perhaps several months between Cuilén's death and Donnchad's succession, for whatever reason.

¹⁴³ *AFM* 938, 939, 960, 962, 965, 967, 973.

¹⁴⁴ *AT* 976.

¹⁴⁵ *AI* 983.4.

¹⁴⁶ *AI* 984.2.

Chennselaig, and the Uí Chennselaig killed him in revenge for that shortly afterwards.¹⁴⁷ Gilla Pátraic was succeeded by his cousin Cellach mac Díarmata. Only one episode during Cellach's reign is noted, in 1000. In that year Bríain Bóraime broke his existing peace treaty with Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill and led a large army of Leth Moga, south Connacht and the Dublin vikings in an invasion of Mide and Brega but was driven off; *AT*, *CS* and *AFM* note that Osraige was part of Brían's force. Cellach was killed in 1003 by his cousin, Gilla Pátraic's son Donnchad.¹⁴⁸

Overall, Osraige in the tenth century did not quite live up to the heights of the reign of Cerball mac Dúngaile. We have seen that possible reasons for this include dynastic feuding and the interventions of external overkings. Nevertheless, Donnchad mac Cellaig's long reign set the kingdom on the road to renewed success; the later kings of Osraige descend from him. His most important actions were his successes against the neighbouring Leinstermen, and these showed that Osraige was capable of taking on the larger kingdoms to the east and winning. In this he paved the way for his grandson Donnchad, whose reign we shall now examine.

The Reign of Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic, 1003-1039

Cerball mac Dúngaile attempted to gain supremacy over Leinster, but it was Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic who became the first, and only, Osraige king of Leinster. We know nothing about his doings during the first decade or so of his reign, but it is most probable that he continued Osraige's submission to Brían Bóraime, who had won recognition as overking in practically all of Ireland in 1002.¹⁴⁹ Viking-forces, possibly coming up the Nore and Barrow from Waterford, were active in Osraige and Leinster in 1013 when Brían spent the last few months of the year campaigning against them.¹⁵⁰ Osraige seems to have minimal involvement in the events of 1013-1014, the revolt of Leinster and Dublin that led to Brían's death in the Battle of Clontarf. After Brían's death Máel Sechnaill was again supreme king in Ireland and in the following year he campaigned in Leinster, installing a king there; he also raided Osraige, taking spoils and prisoners.¹⁵¹ Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic had his own ambitions in Leinster and in

¹⁴⁷ *AFM* 995.

¹⁴⁸ *AT* 1103; *AFM* 1002.

¹⁴⁹ Osraige submission is implied by an entry in *AFM* 1005 detailing a hosting by Bríain into the north.

¹⁵⁰ *AI* 1013.2.

¹⁵¹ *AFM* 1014 [=1015]; *CS* 1012.

1016 killed the brother of the king Máel Sechnaill had installed.¹⁵² In retaliation Máel Sechnaill returned to Osraige and slew King Donnchad's own brother, Dúngal.¹⁵³ This seems to have consolidated Máel Sechnaill's overlordship of the kingdom, for we hear no more of Osraige until after Máel Sechnaill's death in 1022, with one interesting exception: in 1021 'a shower of wheat fell in Osraige'.¹⁵⁴

In 1022 Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic killed Sitriuc mac Ímair, the king of Waterford. We recall that Donnchad's father had been killed by Sitriuc's brother Donndubán in 996. In 1024 a force of Osraige and Leinster went to Tulcainne (the Tolka river) and *do-ratsat seóda & gialla ó Ghallaibh* 'obtained jewels and hostages from the foreigners'.¹⁵⁵ These successes against the vikings may well be of some significance in understanding *FAI*. In 1026 Donnchad mac Bríain of Munster obtained the submission and hostages of Mide, Brega, Leinster, Dublin and Osraige; *AI* report that Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic and the abbot of Armagh were in Donnchad mac Bríain's house at Kincora for Eastertide.¹⁵⁶ In the same year, according to *AT* and *AFM*, Osraige invaded Leinster. First they invaded north Leinster, where the Uí Dúnlainge king was recognised as provincial king, obtained great spoils and killed the king's brother. Then the Osraige went to south Leinster and plundered the Uí Chennselaig lands. Perhaps as a consequence of this Donnchad mac Bríain invaded Osraige the following year, but was heavily defeated; in the battle (at an unknown location) several leading Munster lords and members of the royal dynasty were killed.¹⁵⁷ The independent and pro-Munster account in *AI* try to make the best of things by stating that Donnchad mac Bríain took a number of spoils. *AI* interestingly also states that mac Bríain's losses were not only caused by Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic, but also by one Mac Ráith úa Donnchada 'who was campaigning in Osraige at the time'.¹⁵⁸ This Mac Ráith was possibly the great-grandson of Cellachán Caisil, and died as king of Eóganacht Chaisil in 1052.¹⁵⁹ As we shall see below, he allied with Osraige in the 1040s and it is therefore possible that he could have fought alongside them against the Dál

¹⁵² *AI* 1016.5

¹⁵³ *AFM* 1015 [=1016]. *AFM* actually record two campaigns in Osraige this year, but it is not certain they are separate.

¹⁵⁴ *AU* 1021.2, *AT* 1021.

¹⁵⁵ *AFM* 1024.

¹⁵⁶ *AI* 1026.3.

¹⁵⁷ *AU* 1027.2; *AFM*, *AT* 1027.

¹⁵⁸ *AI* 1027.4.

¹⁵⁹ *AI* 1052.3. Alternatively, Mac Craith may have belonged to the Úa Donnchada sept, and therefore perhaps brother of Dúngal (d. 1025) who briefly became king of Munster.

Cais king in 1027; this is certainly Ó Corráin's deduction.¹⁶⁰ However, the wording of *AI* implies that Mac Ráith was acting independently in Osraige, and though he was later an ally, at this stage he was perhaps raiding Osraige itself.

In 1031 Donnchad mac Gilla Phátraic went on the offensive against Munster, and assaulted Donnchad mac Briáin's fortress of Dún na Sciáth (Co. Tipperary), killing its *rechtaire*.¹⁶¹ In retaliation Donnchad mac Briáin again invaded Osraige, and again was defeated, with several Munster nobles killed (once more *AI* uniquely try to show events in a positive light by stating that Donnchad brought away much booty).¹⁶² Now that Osraige had successfully asserted its independence from the overlordship of Munster (despite a raid by the Munstermen in 1034), Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic turned his attentions back east to Leinster, which he had already successfully invaded in 1016 and 1026. His successes had helped to erode the authority of the Uí Dúnlainge kings, who themselves were beset with internal dynastic troubles. So great was Osraige's power in Leth Moga that Donnchad was able to take the kingship of Leinster, despite being a complete outsider and having no right to do so.

The circumstances of Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic's assumption of the Leinster kingship are frustratingly obscure. With no apparent prologue, *AU* 1033.4 relate that 'The Fair of Carman was held by Donnchad son of Gilla Pátraic after he had taken the kingship of Laigin'; *AFM* add that the chiefs of the laity and clergy of Leinster and Osraige were with him. The Fair of Carman (*Áenach Carmain*) was the primary gathering of the Leinstermen and presiding over it was the prerogative of the king of Leinster.¹⁶³ The theoretical king of Leinster was Donnchad mac Dúnlainge, two of whose brothers had been killed by Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic in 1016 and 1026. He was still alive for the time being, but must have been deposed if mac Gillai Phátraic celebrated *Áenach Carmain*. In fact mac Gillai Phátraic blinded mac Dúnlainge in 1036, 'and he died at the end of a week'.¹⁶⁴ *AI* place the event in 1037.¹⁶⁵ This entry may simply be misplaced; or it could be that the motif of mac Dúnlainge dying within a week in *AFM* was simply a rhetorical flourish and he in fact survived some months before

¹⁶⁰ Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, p. 132.

¹⁶¹ *AI* 1031.7.

¹⁶² *AU* 1031.6; *AI* 1031.7.

¹⁶³ It is most probable that the *dinnsenchas* poem on Carman was written for Donnchad's celebration of the *áenach*; see Gwynn. *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, iii, pp. 3-25. Ó Corráin has noted ('Viking Ireland', p. 444 n. 93) that flattering references to the Osraige (ll. 161-64) most probably date from Donnchad's time. The poem has undergone later revision, as shown by its reference to Diarmait mac Maíl na mBó (d. 1072).

¹⁶⁴ *AFM* 1036.

¹⁶⁵ *AI* 1037.5.

expiring. Interestingly, *AFM* have a second account of the same event (not unusual for *AFM* which was compiled from many sources and has a number of duplicate records) under 1037 which state that mac Gillai Phátraic blinded mac Dúnlainge at Dísert Díarmata (a Leinster church in south Co. Kildare which incidentally features several times in *FAI*) and that he died 'immediately thereafter'. This tradition is also reflected in the list of Leinster kings in *LL AI* award Donnchad mac Dúnlainge the title 'king of Leinster', and if this is not inaccurate, it might imply that in 1036/7 he was striving to recover the provincial kingship; it would then be no wonder that he was blinded. Certainly in 1035 he took a prey of cattle from the Fir Chúalann in northern Leinster, and the king of Osraige would not have been happy to let him build up his power-base.¹⁶⁶

Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic may now have been secure in Leinster, but there is little information on events there during his overkingship other than on various internal struggles in Leinster sub-kingdoms. This information includes the events of the early career of Diarmait mac Maíl na mBó of Uí Chennselaig who later became king of Leinster and challenged for the overkingship of Ireland. In 1036 Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic's son Diarmait was slain but we do not know the circumstances.¹⁶⁷ In the same year 'Muirchertach, son of Gilla Pátraic, lord of half Osraige, was treacherously slain by Úa Cáellaide, one of his own people.'¹⁶⁸ This entry at least implies the divisions of Osraige hinted at in *FAI* and if the Osraige material in *FAI* was composed around Donnchad's reign such an event might have inspired reference to earlier divisions. At any rate, the entry shows that this Muirchertach, presumably Donnchad's brother, was ruling as a sub-king over part of Osraige under Donnchad. Donnchad himself intervened in internal Leinster struggles in 1037 when he took the *tánaise* of Uí Chennselaig prisoner at Cell Chuilinn (Old Kilcullen, Co. Kildare); this *tánaise* was subsequently blinded by Diarmait mac Maíl na mBó. In 1039 Donnchad seems to have turned his ambitions northwards and invaded Brega with an army from Osraige and Leinster. They raided as far as Knowth and Drogheda on the Boyne, but other details of the campaign are wanting. Whether Donnchad would have continued this aggressive policy to his northern neighbours is unknown, for he died in the same year. *AU AT* and *CS* call him *airdrí Lagen 7 Osraige* 'overking of Leinster and Osraige'; *AFM* call him lord (= 'king', in *AFM* usage) of Osraige and *Laighen d'urmhór* 'the greater part of Leinster',

¹⁶⁶ *AFM* 1035.

¹⁶⁷ *AFM* 1036.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

adding that he died after a long illness; *AI* just call him king of Osraige. In his reign Osraige reached a summit of power, which it would not enjoy again. Donnchad's successors failed to retain the overkingship of Leinster, and in fact he was succeeded there by Murchad mac Dúnlainge of Uí Dúnlainge, whose three brothers Donnchad had killed in 1016, 1026 and 1036. However, the Osraige *interregnum* had fatally eroded the authority and prestige of the Uí Dúnlainge kingship, and when Murchad was killed by Donnchad's son Gilla Pátraic in 1042 it was the Uí Chennselaig king Diarmait mac Maíl na mBó who became king of Leinster; the Uí Dúnlainge were permanently excluded.¹⁶⁹

Before moving on we must consider further whether Donnchad's reign provides the best context for the production of the material which has found its way as an 'Osraige Chronicle' into *FAI*. Ó Corráin has stated his belief that 'Donnchad looked back on the victories of his ancestor, Cerball, as a model for his own kingship'.¹⁷⁰ The most obvious echoes of Cerball's reign in Donnchad's are his powerful position in the south of Ireland, and more specifically his taking of the hostages of Leinster. Certain other features in the *FAI* narratives point more closely to Donnchad's reign. The unflattering portrayal of Máel Sechnaill I might reflect the conflicts between his descendant Máel Sechnaill II and the Osraige. The main external power in Donnchad's own time was Munster, and we indeed find in *FAI* references to Cerball's deeds in Munster, such as the taking of its hostages. *FAI* (and *AFM* 859, probably relying on the same source) note Cerball's holding of *Áenach Raigni*, the Fair of Raigne, in 861, which may echo Donnchad's presiding over *Áenach Carmain*.¹⁷¹ We recall that Osraige fought with vikings, probably of Waterford, in 1013, and that Donnchad killed Sitriuc, king of Waterford in 1022; in 1024 he won a victory against the Dublin vikings at the Tolka. Ó Corráin has asserted that as king of Leinster Donnchad saw himself as the overlord of Dublin and that the anti-viking rhetoric in *FAI* was directed toward the Dubliners.¹⁷² This somewhat oversimplifies *FAI*'s conceptions about vikings, but the theory is reasonable.¹⁷³ The sum of the evidence shows that if we are going to seek a context for the production of the 'Osraige Chronicle', the reign of Donnchad is the most likely

¹⁶⁹ *AI* 1042.8, *AFM* 1042.

¹⁷⁰ Ó Corráin, 'Viking Ireland', p. 444.

¹⁷¹ *FAI* §280, *AFM* 859. Mag Raigni was the central plain of Osraige around the Nore.

¹⁷² Ó Corráin, 'Viking Ireland', p. 444.

¹⁷³ On the other hand, Ó Corráin's comments in 'Viking Ireland' at p. 444 n. 95 on *FAI*'s conception of the viking wars as pagan-Christian conflict, though essentially correct, assume that all such episodes in *FAI* derive from the 'Osraige Chronicle' and that they have not been re-worked by the compiler of *FAI*, neither of which assumptions is demonstrable (or even likely).

possibility. It is not the only one, of course; as we shall see presently, Osraige had continuing struggles with the Uí Chennselaig kings of Leinster in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and this later period might also be entertained as a possibility. For, if we accept that the 'Osraige Chronicle' preserved imperfectly in *FAI* was produced before 1039, and that it does belong to the same genre as *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*, *Caithréim Cellacháin Chaisil* and *A Mhuircheartaigh mhic Néill nár*, then by several decades it is the earliest such example of that genre.¹⁷⁴ This has implications for our understanding of Irish literary history, and indeed, if the 'Osraige Chronicle' was produced at Donnchad's behest, implications for the level of his innovation in Irish royal practice.

Osraige in the Later Eleventh and Twelfth centuries

For the remainder of the eleventh and twelfth centuries Osraige remained one of the important overkingdoms of Leth Moga, so that acquisition of its hostages was a desideratum for any aspiring king of Ireland; but it never acquired the provincial heights scaled under Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic. That said, Gilla Pátraic mac Donnchada briefly attempted to retain the position held by his father, and in association with Mac Ráith mac Donnchada, king of Eóganachta, killed Murchad mac Dúnlainge, Uí Dúnlainge king of Leinster, in 1042.¹⁷⁵ Yet Gilla Pátraic was not able to do more, for Díarmait mac Maíl na mBó of Uí Chennselaig took the kingship of Laigin, and his successors retained it. The alliance between Osraige and Eóganachta in 1042 is of note, and indeed we find this policy pursued on several occasions in the following decades. In fact in allying with Mac Ráith the Osraige had become involved in internal struggles among the Eóganacht Cashel between Mac Ráith and Carthach mac Sáerbrethaig. In the following year the Osraige and the men of Aurmumu raided the west of Munster, but were overtaken and defeated by Carthach by the Suir.¹⁷⁶ In 1053 the Osraige killed Donnchad Úa Cellacháin, *rígdamna* of Cashel; unfortunately it is not clear where he fits into the Eóganacht Chaisil genealogies, but as descendant of Cellachán he may also have been involved in succession struggles.

Though there were various political relationships with Munster, Osraige remained in the close orbit of Leinster, a reflection of both its geography and its

¹⁷⁴ For the dating of these texts see Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib'; D. Ó Corráin, 'Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil: history or propaganda?', *Ériu* 25 (1974), 1-69; *idem*, 'Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn'.

¹⁷⁵ *AU* 1042.5.

¹⁷⁶ *AFM* 1043, *AU* 1043.5.

importance. On more than one occasion, kings of Osraige acted in concert with Díarmait mac Maíl na mBó.¹⁷⁷ From the Munster-centred perspective of *AI* Osraige is normally mentioned in the same breath as Leinster, particularly when it submitted hostages to Uí Bríain kings or provided forces for their armies.¹⁷⁸ This is not to say that Osraige was an appendage of Leinster, even during the sway of Díarmait mac Maíl na mBó; Domnall Mac Gillai Phátraic independently submitted to Tairdelbach Úa Bríain in 1070 and according to *AI* received a large stipend of valuables.¹⁷⁹ During the twelfth century the kings of Osraige were often under the overlordship of the leading Irish kings, which for several decades meant the Uí Bríain. Tairdelbach Úa Bríain was married to Derforgaill, daughter of Tadc mac Gillai Phátraic. Tadc was the brother of Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic who the latter blinded in 1027.¹⁸⁰ She might well have been married off to Tairdelbach after the latter had gained supremacy in Munster after 1063, perhaps at the instigation of Díarmait mac Maíl na mBó, but it is possible the marriage was contracted rather earlier. She died at Glendalough in 1098.¹⁸¹ Her son Muirchertach succeeded in Munster and Osraige forces are found in the armies of Muirchertach Úa Bríain.¹⁸² They took part in the great defeat at Mag Coba in 1103 in which Gilla Pátraic Rúad Mac Gillai Phátraic was killed.¹⁸³ After the onset of Muirchertach's illness in 1114 and his temporary deposition, Leinster and Osraige bade for independence but were defeated.¹⁸⁴ However, supremacy had passed to Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair of Connacht, and in 1118 he divided Munster and took the hostages of Dublin, Leinster and Osraige, signalling his dominance over Leth Moga.¹⁸⁵

Generally speaking we do not hear too much about Osraige in the following decades. Tadc Mac Carthaig apparently took the submission of Osraige in 1120 for a large stipend, but his work was undone by the Dál Cais who took the nobles and king of Osraige hostage and handed them over to Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair.¹⁸⁶ Tairdelbach himself took the hostages of Osraige in 1126.¹⁸⁷ By this time Leinster and Osraige had politically gone their separate ways, for in 1134 Díarmait Mac Murchada of Leinster invaded Osraige. He was driven off but in revenge made a slaughter of the

¹⁷⁷ E.g. *AFM* 1053, 1054.

¹⁷⁸ E.g. *AI* 1049.5, 1058.4, 1072.4.

¹⁷⁹ *AI* 1070.9.

¹⁸⁰ *AU* 1027.2.

¹⁸¹ *AFM* 1098.22.

¹⁸² E.g. *AFM* 1101.

¹⁸³ *AU* 1103.5.

¹⁸⁴ *AI* 1115.3.

¹⁸⁵ *AU* 1118.6.

¹⁸⁶ *AI* 1120.4.

¹⁸⁷ *AFM* 1126.

Table 15: Later Part of Osraige King-list

LL 40 e 34 – 41 a 11, edited in *B&L*, i, p. 190.

Dondchad mac Gillai Patraic .xxxi.
 Gilla Pátraic mac Dondchada .xxii.
 Domnall mac Gillai Patraic.
 Dondchad mac Domnaill.
 Gilla Pátraic Rúad xiiii. a marbad i cath Maigi Coba
 Cerball solus prius 7 Domnall 7 Find Hua Caellaide. Insimul.
 Domnall Mac Gillai Patraic. In Goll mac Cerbaill ros marb.
 e. Find Hua Caellaide
 Dondchad Bálcg Mac Gillai Patraic. A marbad don Gilla (...?) do Mac Raith Hua Branain 7 don Gilla
 Scellain Hui Fergaile
 Dondchad Dub acht is tri lar flatha Dondchada Bacaig ar ro gabad Dondchad Bachach la Tairdelbach
 Hua Conchobuir
 Murchad mac Murchada 7 Conchobor mac Cerbaill.
 Gilla Patraic mac Domnaill meic Dondchada xx. Bliadan a marbad la Hú Broenain tre fill 7 mebail ina tig
 fein i Cill Chainnich
 Cerball mac Domnaill. Coro innarbad la Diarmait mac Murchada.
 Murchad Hua Caellaide 7 Dondchad Mac Gillai Patraic insimul
 Cerball mac Domnaill iterum tenuit regnum. 7 Murchad Hua Caellaide uincto Dondchado la Diarmait rig
 Lagen. Postea Cerball 7 Dondchad insimul.
 Dondchad solus iar n-innarba Cerbaill la Mac Murchada rí Lagen.
 Domnall Mac Gillai Patraic a marbad la Laigis
 Domnall mac Cerbaill meic Domnaill.

Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic .31.
 Gilla Pátraic mac Donnchada .22.
 Domnall mac Gillai Phátraic.
 Donnchad mac Domnaill.
 Gilla Pátraic Rúad .14. He was killed in the Battle of Mag Coba.
 Cerball (alone at first) and Domnall and Finn Úa Cáellaide at the same time.
 Domnall Mac Gillai Phátraic. Goll mac Cerbaill killed him.
 Finn Úa Cáellaide.
 Donnchad Balc Mac Gillai Phátraic. He was killed by Gilla (? possibly Branáin) [and] by Mac Ráith Úa
 Branáin and by Gilla Scelláin [=‘the pip lad’] Úa Fergaile.
 Donnchad Dub, except it is during the middle of the lordship of Donnchad Bachach, for Donnchad
 Bachach was taken by Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair.
 Murchad mac Murchada and Conchobar mac Cerbaill.
 Gilla Pátraic mac Domnaill meic Donnchada .20. Of a year he was killed by the Uí Bráenáin through
 treachery and in shame in his own house in Kilkenny.
 Cerball mac Domnaill. He was expelled by Diarmait mac Murchada.
 Murchad Úa Cáellaide and Donnchad Mac Gillai Phátraic at the same time.
 Cerball mac Domnaill held the kingship again with Murchad Úa Cáellaide. Donnchad was imprisoned by
 Diarmait king of Leinster. Afterwards Cerball and Donnchad at the same time.
 Donnchad alone after the expulsion of Cerball by Mac Murchada king of Leinster.
 Donnchad Mac Gillai Phátraic was killed by the Laígis.
 Domnall mac Cerbaill meic Domnaill.

Osraige and the men of Waterford.¹⁸⁸ The Osraige much later were to blind Diarmait's son, Énna.¹⁸⁹ The middle years of the century saw the struggles of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn and Rúaidrí Ua Conchobair for supremacy in Ireland, and Muirchertach took the submission of Osraige in 1156.¹⁹⁰ Rúaidrí however gained the submission of Osraige and Laígis in 1158.¹⁹¹

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries the Osraige were as susceptible to internal feuding as anywhere else in Ireland, and the struggles we have alluded to above continued. In some respects then, Osraige is a model for the second rank of kingdoms, which were beset by both internecine conflict and interference from outside; Mide, Ulaid, and even Munster can be seen to fit this pattern at periods of the twelfth century. King Gilla Pátraic's son Muirchertach was killed by the Uí Cháellaide in 1041, though we do not know further circumstances; this appears not to be a duplicate of the record of Uí Cháellaide killing the other Muirchertach mac Gillai Phátraic five years earlier.¹⁹² In 1089 Gilla Pátraic's grandson Donnchad, king of Osraige, was killed *a suis*.¹⁹³ In 1113 Donnchad's own son, Domnall, was killed by Goll Gabráin ('One-eyed of Gowran'), who was his kinsman according to *AI*.¹⁹⁴ In 1123 yet another king, Donnchad son of Gilla Pátraic Rúad, was killed *a suis*.¹⁹⁵ Gilla Pátraic, son of the Domnall killed by Goll Gabráin, was killed 'in the centre of Kilkenny' by the Uí Bráenáin in 1146; these are most probably the descendants of Bráenán son of Cerbaill mac Dúngaile who was killed by the Déisi.¹⁹⁶ It is striking that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries so many Osraige dynasts seem to have met their end at the hands of relatives or of other families within Osraige. The beneficiaries of these struggles in some measure seem to have been the Uí Cháellaide, who may have had some support from Leinster. To resolve these issues we need to return to the latter part of regnal list in the Book of Leinster, a translation of which is given in Table 15.

If we accept the testimony of the list (and it may not be far wrong, as many of the events would have been in the lifetime of *LL*'s compilers), events in Osraige are seen in a new light. The death of Gilla Pátraic Rúad (whose ancestors are unknown) in the Battle of Mag Coba, together with several of the royalty of Osraige (*rigraidh Osraighi*)

¹⁸⁸ *AFM* 1134.

¹⁸⁹ *AI* 1168.2.

¹⁹⁰ *AU* 1156.4.

¹⁹¹ *AU* 1168.3; *AFM* 1158.

¹⁹² *AU* 1041.4.

¹⁹³ *AU* 1089.6.

¹⁹⁴ *AI* 1113.4.

¹⁹⁵ *AU* 1123.5.

¹⁹⁶ *AFM* 1146.

according to *AU*, seems to have occasioned a division of rule in the kingdom. He was succeeded by Cerball, brother of his predecessor Donnchad. Cerball apparently could not retain complete control and was joined by his nephew Domnall (Donnchad's son), and Finn, one of the Uí Cháellaide who had made a nuisance of themselves in the previous century. Cerball died in 1105 and is styled only *rí descirt Osraige*, king of the south of Osraige.¹⁹⁷ Finn is unknown to the annals, but as we have seen Domnall was killed by Goll Gabráin in 1113; the king-list provides us with the information that this Goll was the son of Cerball, presumably he who died in 1105. Thus in these years there was a vicious three-way tussle for power in Osraige, and with that context in mind the episode we discussed in Chapter II in which Domnall Rúad son of Gilla Pátraic Rúad 'was killed by another youth casting a stone' can be seen in a rather sinister light.

By 1119 Donnchad Balc ('the stout') son of Gilla Pátraic Rúad had taken the kingship, but as we have seen was killed *a suis*; the king-list identifies three assailants, and despite the spelling 'Uí Branáin' may be the same as the Uí Bráenáin. Although given the name 'úa Fergaile', Gilla Scellán may have been a member of the Uí Scelláin, an Osraige family mentioned as one of the septs of Síl nÁengusa in the genealogies.¹⁹⁸ As Ó Floinn has noted, this family gave their name to the cantred of Oskallan in the barony of Gowran.¹⁹⁹ One of the oddities of the list is the presence of an otherwise unknown Donnchad Dub after Donnchad Balc. Donnchad Dub may have been a sub-king or joint king, but the list implies he ruled while the other Donnchad was a prisoner of Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair. Such an imprisonment is not known to the chronicles, but Tairdelbach campaigned in Desmumu in 1121 and this fact coupled with the submission of Donnchad Balc to Tadc Mac Carthaig the previous year seems to have prompted Byrne to make 'c. 1121' the year of Donnchad Dub's rule.²⁰⁰ A further complication is the epithet *bachach* 'lame' given to the imprisoned Donnchad in the king-list, an antonym of *balc*. Perhaps Donnchad Balc was maimed by Tairdelbach or injured in some other way, but this is pure supposition.

After 1123 the kingship again seems to have been shared, by Goll Gabráin's brother Conchobar and one Murchad Mac Murchada. This latter seems to have actually been of the Uí Chennselaig, brother to Énna and Díarmait Mac Murchada, which would imply an imposition on the part of the king of Leinster. There is unfortunately no

¹⁹⁷ *AI* 1105.3.

¹⁹⁸ *LL* 129 a 9, ed. in *CGH*, p. 103.

¹⁹⁹ Ó Floinn, 'Freestone Hill', p. 27.

²⁰⁰ *NHI*, ix, p. 202.

evidence in the chronicles to support this, though the context may be found in the struggles between Diarmait and Osraige noticed above. How long Conchobar and Murchad reigned after 1123 is also unknown. Based on the death of Gilla Pátraic mac Domnaill in 1146 and the alleged reign of twenty years in the king-list Byrne hazarded a guess at 1126, the year in which Diarmait succeeded his brother as king of Leinster and Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair took the hostages of Leinster, installing his son Conchobar as king of Dublin. As we have seen, Gilla Pátraic was killed by the Uí Brácnáin in Kilkenny, and the king-list adds that it was in his own house, a point which has some implications for the early history of that town.²⁰¹ He was succeeded by his brother, but the king-list suggests that Diarmait Mac Murchada took a strong hand in Osraige, installing first one candidate then another in the kingship, including one of the Uí Cháellaide. It is difficult to get a fix on dating these events; the only relevant record is that 'the grandson of Donnchad, grandson of Gilla Phátraic, lord of half Osraige', that is Cerball, was taken prisoner by Diarmait in 1151, which may have occasioned the installation of Donnchad.²⁰² Donnchad died in 1162.²⁰³ Cerball died in 1163, called *rí Deisceirt Osraighi* by *AU*.²⁰⁴ Murchad Ua Cáellaide's dates are unknown. The next Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic, killed by the Laígis, is ruler of all Osraige in *AFM*, but only king of north Osraige in *AU*.²⁰⁵ A final note may be added to Leinster intervention in Osraige; Diarmait Mac Murchada expelled Domnall Mac Gillai Phátraic in 1170 and briefly installed one Diarmait Ua Cáellaide as king.²⁰⁶ Diarmait was killed in 1172, and Domnall regained the kingship of Osraige (he died in 1176).²⁰⁷ Aside from the clear annalistic references to Leinster patronage of Uí Cháellaide ambitions, it is interesting that two of the briefly-reigning Ua Cháellaide kings (possibly both sons of Flann) had forenames typical of Uí Chennselaig (and the Meic Murchada in particular), suggesting close links between the two families. Confirmation of this is given by *AU* 1170:

Braighde Mic Murchadha, .i., a mac fein & mac a mic, .i., mac Domhnaill Chaemhanaigh & mac a comaltha, .i., mac h-Uí Chaellaidhe, do mharbhadh la Ruaidhri h-Ua Conchubhair, tre aslach Tighernain h-Uí Ruairc.

²⁰¹ The point has also been appreciated by John Bradley with regard to the entry in *AFM* 1146; see J. Bradley, 'The early development of the medieval town of Kilkenny', in W. Nolan & K. Whelan (edd.), *Kilkenny: History and Society* (Dublin 1990), pp. 63-73.

²⁰² *AFM* 1151.

²⁰³ *AFM* 1162.

²⁰⁴ *AU* 1163.

²⁰⁵ *AU AFM* 1165. This person is called Domnall in the chronicles, but the king-list may well be more accurate.

²⁰⁶ *AFM* 1170.

²⁰⁷ *AU* 1172; *AFM* 1176.

The hostages of Mac Murchada, namely his son and grandson, i.e. the son of Domnall Cáemanach and the son of his foster-brother, i.e. the son of Úa Cáellaide, were killed by Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair through the suggestion of Tigernán Úa Rúairc.²⁰⁸

III. Conclusions

This chapter has traced the fortunes of two Irish dynasties and their kingdoms over several centuries, from positions of subordination to larger overkingdoms to positions of great strength, and in the case of Osraige into a period of subsequent decline. Various external circumstances facilitated their political growth and expansion: dynastic feuding in neighbouring kingdoms; the irruptions of vikings. The most important element of royal practice was that the kings of Bréifne and Osraige were willing to seize the initiative and challenge the dominance of their neighbours. In Bréifne, this was partly achieved by expansion into new lands, which for all their 'roughness' must have brought increased resources. In Osraige such expansion was virtually impossible because the fertile lands to east and west were densely settled; thus on one hand direct attacks on neighbours, and on the other canny use of alliances were the tools of choice. Of course, the fact that Osraige itself was similarly fertile perhaps meant that there was no particular incentive to expand territorially. Political ambition was the stock-in-trade of all Irish kings, but the kings of these two lesser kingdoms were very successful compared with their peers. Kings of Uí Maine never became kings of Connacht. On the other hand, one king of Uí Failge appears to have become king of Leinster, if only briefly: Conchobar Úa Conchobair Failge celebrated *Áenach Carmain* in 1079.²⁰⁹ As with Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic, the lack of circumstantial detail on this event is unfortunate. The Uí Chennselaig were able to regain the provincial kingship, but Conchobar was able to continue his ambitions against them; he slew his rival and contemporary, Donnchad son of Domnall Remar, in 1089.²¹⁰ Nevertheless, the Osraige seem to have been more successful at a provincial level than Uí Failge over the course of the period.

The posthumous fame of Cerball mac Dúnlainge is well-deserved; though circumstances in the neighbouring provinces favoured him to some extent, his strategies of aggression and alliance allowed him to acquire power far beyond what any previous king of Osraige had achieved. It was only Cerball's successors in every other generation

²⁰⁸ For an investigation of Mac Murchada-Uí Cháellaide links, see D. Ó Corráin, 'The Education of Diarmait Mac Murchada', *Ériu* 28 (1977), 71-81.

²⁰⁹ *AFM* 1079.

²¹⁰ *AT AFM* 1089.

who equalled, or surpassed his achievements: his grandson Donnchad mac Cellaig, and Donnchad's grandson Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic. It is unclear to what extent the latter was innovating with his policies toward Leinster. The links between Osraige and its eastern neighbour had a long history and as we have seen Cerball made marriage ties to Uí Chennselaig and Uí Dróna. Thus, it is quite difficult to detect exactly when the Osraige pedigrees, whatever their original form, were altered to make a clear link with the Laigin; it may have begun as early as Cerball's reign, though that of Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic is seen as the most likely. The saga-material underlying the 'Osraige Chronicle' in *FAI* is normally associated with Donnchad's reign, and if so this is most striking as the earliest instance of this kind of historicist propaganda, two generations before the Uí Bríain and Meic Carthaig got in on the act. A more general question is the practicality of employing such texts in royal practice. Are we to suppose episodes from them were read aloud, as the Ulster Cycle and other tales are supposed to have been? If so, the complex ideas and themes in them must have been intended for a sophisticated audience of political elites, not merely the clerical authors of those texts. It also seems clear that these texts travelled quickly and were modified to reflect changing political circumstances. Máire Ní Mhaonaigh has shown that a text of *Cocad Gáedel re Gallaib* found its way to Bréifne not long after that text's production in the early twelfth century, and was substantially interpolated with material favourable to the Uí Rúairc.²¹¹ As Uí Rúairc were normally enemies of Uí Bríain, it is most likely that this was done during the period of *rapprochement* between Tigernán Ua Rúairc and the Uí Bríain in the 1140s.²¹² This re-working of a text for an audience far removed from its origins suggests a considerable unity of political culture; as one might expect from their numerous encounters and submissions recorded in the chronicles, the great Irish leaders (and their followers) in the eleventh and twelfth centuries knew each other very well.

The motivation normally given for the modification of genealogies is the conferring of legitimacy. That this should be done as late as the ninth to twelfth centuries shows that, however dynamic Irish kings were, there was still a considerable level of conservatism in the attitude toward kingship itself. Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic became king of Leinster mainly by killing off the Uí Dúnlainge royal family and by virtue of his power, but to hold Áenach Carmain a respectable pedigree explaining his right to do so had to be produced. Again, we must consider the audience; would the production of an ancient kinship between Osraige and Laigin out of a hat really have

²¹¹ Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Bréifne bias', 142-4.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 148.

fooled anyone? Perhaps not, but the existence of such a pedigree must have bolstered the conviction of the usurping king himself. The test was whether the new order could be made to stick; the Dál Cais passed, but the Osraige failed. Nevertheless they were permanently integrated into the Leinster overkingdom, and the Meic Murchada took an intervening hand in Osraige on more than one occasion, safe in the knowledge that they had the right to do so, for the Osraige were really Laigin!

The situation in Bréifne was rather different; if the ruling dynasty were not originally Uí Briúin, they forged that link so well that no trace of any other origin can be found. On more than one occasion the Uí Rúairc took the over kingship of Connacht, but in the end were defeated there by the Uí Chonchobair. This may not have mattered in the end, for the massive eastern extension of Bréifne had effectively created a new province, and Tigernán Úa Rúairc was at least the peer of the kings of Leinster and Munster, and certainly the superior of the Uí Maíl Sechnaill of Mide whose lands he acquired. The geographical gains of Bréifne are a unique feature of pre-Norman Ireland; the only real comparison is the acquisition of Airgíallan territory by the Cenél nEógain, but there the scale is rather less and the indigenous dynasties generally retained a degree of power and independence. Of course, much of the land Bréifne acquired was poorly populated and had no kingdoms of note. It is rather difficult to trace this expansion from the chronicles, but a reassessment making use of hagiography (such as the *Tripartite Life* of Patrick) and place-name evidence might yield greater results.²¹³ We are fortunate indeed that the evidence from the Book of Kells allows a glimpse of the situation in Gailenga in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, but the three centuries before that are largely a blank. In this regard it is important to note the several marriage-alliances between Uí Rúairc and Clann Cholmáin. We should not necessarily think of Bréifne expansion into the midlands as being only a matter of hostility and conquest.

Though with different origins and in very different situations, the kings of Bréifne and Osraige were able to make a considerable difference to the 'classical' Irish polity which had come into relatively settled existence by the ninth century. Though the stability of the classical polity is to some extent a myth, it should not detract from the achievements of these kings, which though perhaps not as successful as Dál Cais certainly merit far greater attention than they have previously been given.

²¹³ The second Irish life of Máedóc reflects Bréifne after it had grown to its greatest extent, but provides useful evidence of settlement and economy; see C. Doherty, 'Some aspects of hagiography as a source for Irish economic history', *Peritia* 1 (1982), 300-28.

Chapter VI: The Development of Royal Practice

In the four preceding chapters we have examined particular dynasties with respect to their strategies in different aspects of kingship. In this final chapter we shall take a more overarching view of the development of the practice of kingship across Ireland. It has long been proposed that in certain general and substantial ways the nature of kingship changed in the Viking Age and after. A reassessment of some of the evidence for this theory would be useful, and if we can establish a general framework for the differences which might be perceived in the practice of kingship, one can return to detailed studies of kingdoms and dynasties with a better grasp of the overall context. Though it would be very surprising if major changes did not take place in a period of some four centuries, we must also be wary of bringing preconceived notions of evolution with us.¹ The likelihood is that changes in royal practice appeared independently in different areas at different times, may have been spread by emulation, and in some cases may have been impermanent. We do not have to ascribe, as much earlier scholars once did, many of the new developments in royal practice to the masterful hand of Brían Bóraime, though he was an undoubted innovator.² Many of the more subtle changes are impossible to pinpoint chronologically and need not be fathered on any particular inventor. In any case, the first appearance of phenomena in chronicles does not imply their novelty on the scene, as we have seen in Chapter III.³

The classic statement on the development of kingship is Ó Corráin's 'Nationality and Kingship', now over twenty-five years old, but still frequently quoted in surveys and general statements on kingship.⁴ This is as it should be, for though Ó Corráin had published several of his theses six years earlier in *Ireland Before the Normans*, the format of that work precluded him from including some of the evidential bases for his arguments, which had themselves evolved in the interim; thus 'Nationality and Kingship' became a key work on the subject. It is important to remember that it was not a study of the evolution of kingship *per se*, but rather, as the title suggests, an examination of several social and cultural phenomena in the pre-Norman centuries of which the supposed evolution of kingship was only one facet. The substance of the discussion of kingship was coupled with consideration of the evolving place of the

¹ Etchingham, 'Early Medieval Irish History', pp. 130, 133-4.

² J. Ryan, 'Brian Boruma, King of Ireland', in Rynne, *North Munster Studies*, pp. 355-74.

³ Above, pp. 86-7.

⁴ E.g. Doherty, 'The Vikings in Ireland', pp. 312-13.

learned classes and their perceptions of the Irish people and their place in the world, among other matters. As a consequence, to save space the evidence on kingship was tightly focused and drawn principally from annalistic sources. In the present chapter we shall review some of this evidence, as well as more recent discussions of the changing nature of Irish kingship, and consider some matters not attended to in Ó Corráin's *locus classicus*, or indeed in F.J. Byrne's 'the Trembling Sod' and Charles Doherty's 'The Vikings in Ireland', two important survey papers which incorporate Ó Corráin's findings into their discussions. In what follows, various aspects of development in the practice of kingship will be examined. Firstly, we shall consider to what extent, if any, ecclesiastical ideas about kingship influenced actual royal practice; this subject was investigated briefly in Chapter IV with reference to a few texts and the kingship of Munster; here we shall broaden the discussion to include a greater variety of vernacular compositions. From there we shall move on to look at territorial expansion, the utilization of resources and royal administration, all areas in which the scale of kingship may be considered to have developed in the pre-Norman period. Finally we shall examine to what extent some Irish kings may have suffered a decline in their status as a result of the growing power of certain overkings, before discussing further the ways in which kings articulated their self-image, aspirations and status.

Ecclesiastical Influence on the Practice of Kingship

It is not the purpose of this work to debate the merits of Ó Corráin's theory that secular and ecclesiastical scholarly groups fused at an early date to become a single but eclectic body.⁵ For my part the evidence suggests that though secular lawyers and poets did exist, many of the surviving texts are the products of ecclesiastics who were additionally educated in native poetry, law and *senchas*.⁶ In the preceding chapters we have examined several of the ways in which royal and ecclesiastical interests interacted, and indeed this

⁵ The infamous 'mandarin class'; for a summary of references see Etchingham, 'Early Medieval Irish History', p. 125 n. 1; the most strongly presented view *contra* (though with little exposition) is that of D.N. Dumville, review of *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies*, *Peritia* 11 (1997), 451-68.

⁶ The discussions of the late Proinseas Mac Cana ('Y Canu Mawl yn Iwerddon cyn y Normaniaid', in M.E. Owen & B.F. Roberts (edd.), *Beirdd a Thywysogion: Barddoniaeth Llys yng Nghymru, Iwerddon a'r Alban Cyflwynedig i R. Geraint Gruffydd* (Cardiff 1996), revised in 'Praise Poetry in Ireland Before the Normans', *Ériu* 54 (2004), 11-40) are important in this regard. He suggests that whatever functions and training clerical scholars acquired, the genre of praise-poetry was not one of them, and this explains the relative lack of pre-Norman praise poetry which survives (except, e.g., for stanzas quoted in the metrical tracts and the chronicles). If this argument can be sustained it has implications for our understanding of some of the better-represented genres of poetry, for example the elements of *dinnsenchas* or the king-list poems which contain panegyric elements.

has been one of the more productive fields of Irish historical investigation over the years. An important question is how far Christian notions of kingship, derived from the Bible, patristic writings, and early hagiography, may have influenced Irish kings. Various statements have been made on the matter, mostly focused on the period anterior to that covered by this thesis. A central point is Adomnán's *Vita Sancti Columbae*, which has clear ideas about the ideal of royal practice and includes, among other motifs, a description of royal anointing.⁷ In this area of kingly practice, namely royal inauguration, ecclesiastical intervention seems undeniable. Elizabeth FitzPatrick has assembled a body of evidence for clerical influence in ceremonials from the twelfth century onwards.⁸ This is manifested primarily in two ways: the participation of churchmen in inauguration rituals (e.g. in that of Úa Rúairc, as described in the second life of Máedóc, which text also adverts to the use of the *Brec Máedóic* in the ceremony), or in the performance of the ritual at a church-site rather than a traditional place (the inauguration of Úa Conchobair at Áth in Termonn in 1106 or the later medieval inaugurations of Úa Domnaill at Raphoe).⁹ Despite this clerical encroachment, more often it was a hereditary secular *ollam* or royal vassal who performed the main functions of the ceremonies, and despite occasional forays into churches (occasioned in part by efforts of ecclesiastical reform), traditional secular inauguration-sites remained in use.¹⁰ However, we should probably not view such occasions as either-or situations; both lay and clerical elements could be involved, just as in elsewhere, for example the coronation of Otto I, which involved both a cleric-officiated ceremony and a symbolic feast for the secular magnates.¹¹

FitzPatrick refers briefly to the group of texts to which brief attention was paid in Chapter IV, namely the texts of royal advice, *tecosca* or *admonitiones*, and wonders how far the 'theoretical thrust' of these texts was put into practice.¹² We have briefly considered the poem *Ro-chúala la nech légas libru* attributed to St Mo Ling and purportedly addressed to King Máenach mac Fíngin of Munster; though the date of that text is uncertain (and perhaps rather later than the theoretical seventh-century context), there are other poetic texts which certainly do date from between the ninth and twelfth

⁷ See above, p. 164.

⁸ FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, pp. 174-93.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 174; 179-81, 187-8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹¹ See B.H. Hill Jr, *Medieval Monarchy in Action: the German Empire from Henry I to Henry IV* (London 1972), pp. 113-15 for a translation of Widukind of Corvey's description of this event.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 174.

centuries. Perhaps the most important example is the poem *Cert cech rí co réil*¹³ This poem of advice is addressed to Áed mac Néill of Cenél nEógain and in the oldest copy (in *LL*) is attributed to Fothad na Canóine. He was contemporary with Áed Oirdnide, and medieval Irish tradition understood that it was at Fothad's behest that Áed Oirdnide freed churches from secular imposition. This poem certainly makes it clear that kings should not tax churches, and this chimes with the *LL* ascription, which would date the poem to around 800. Several points tell against such an early date. The first is the language, which as it stands is largely of Middle Irish character. Another are two references to *gaill*, which, if taken as meaning Scandinavians (certainly the case in §70 which refers to a *cath Góedel is Gaill*, though this stanza is not found in all copies) places the poem in the viking age. Ó Corráin suggested that the poem was 'hardly earlier than the tenth century'.¹⁴

Several stanzas are directly addressed to an Áed mac Néill and include sentiments which seem to reflect the addressee's circumstances (such as an exhortation in §68 to seek a *rígán* 'queen' to provide *sídh is go suth* 'peace and offspring') so closely that it would be difficult to imagine that they could apply to a different audience. The most obvious solution is to disregard the unique attribution in *LL* and to find another Áed mac Néill of later date. The most famous is Áed Finnlíath (d. 879), Áed Oirdnide's grandson. He is known to have allied with *gaill* (e.g. *AU* 861.1, though more often he fought against them) and to have attempted to impart his authority over the Southern Uí Néill, which solves some of the historical problems of the poem.¹⁵ On the other hand, this Áed was married before he came to the kingship of Ailech, which is difficult to reconcile with the poem's injunction to seek a queen (§68). The only other appropriately-named candidate is Áed mac Néill meic Maíl Sechnaill king of Ailech d. 1083; he is the most likely subject of the poem.¹⁶

It is probably impossible to arrive at a firm conclusion as to date, but the poem certainly belongs somewhere in the period from the ninth to eleventh centuries and its sentiments are worth examining, for it contains the clearest exposition of the 'habits of highly effective kings' as perceived by an author in sympathy with church ideals; this

¹³ Ed. & transl. by T. O'Donoghue, 'Cert Cech Ríg co Réil', in Bergin & Marstrander, *Miscellany Presented to Kuno Meyer*, pp. 258-77.

¹⁴ Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', p. 17.

¹⁵ §59 considers Áed's property to be *ó Beinn Éitair áin / cossin tráig i Clúain* 'From bright Howth to Clúain (Mac Nois), a variant of *ó Sinann co muir* 'from the Shannon to the sea' as a term for Mide plus Brega.

¹⁶ One problem with this suggestion is that this Áed belonged to the Clann Domnaill branch of the dynasty, rather than Clann Néill; the poem uses the phrase *Clann Néill* (e.g. §56), but it is probably a poetic usage for '(Northern) Uí Néill'; cf. the poem on Domnall úa Néill discussed above, pp. 136-7.

person was most probably an ecclesiastic of Armagh. Thus §2 makes it clear that no tribute is due to Áed from *Abb Aird Macha móir*.¹⁷ §14 states *na cella cen cáin* '[be] the churches without taxation'; §15 *ná hacair for cill* 'do not sue the church'. Very striking is §20:

Almsa menic maith

Don relic díantoic

Do P[h]traic do Día

Bail imbía fo chloic.

'Give frequent and generous alms to the church for which it is right, for Patrick and God, where you will be buried'.

This, of course, is a reference to the *cimiterio regum* at Armagh. One sentiment shared with *Ro-chúala la nech légas libru* is the imperative to royal justice: §8 *tabair gemeal crúaid for cimbid do chéin* 'put harsh gyves on a prisoner from afar'; §42 *gemel crúaid i coiss* 'a hard fetter on the foot'; §61 states that a thief should not get sanctuary (*dín*) in the house of a king. A point of particular interest is found in §46: *díanotecma slait do bachla sdo chluic*, which O'Donoghue renders as 'if your staff and your bell happen to be stolen'. Such a reading implies that Áed bore clerical regalia (a *bachall* 'crozier' and a bell) and we are reminded of the stanza preserved in *AU* 841.5 and *AFM* 840 which refers to the *bachall* of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn being left in the thorn-bushes.

It is important to note that the poem does contain much material which can be closely paralleled by *Tecosca Cormaic* and *Audacht Morainn*. Thus the theme of Ruler's Truth is present and correct (*fíréin flaith* §15, *cen gúbreith do breith* '[be] your judgements without false judgements' §17); hostages should be taken (*geb lait gíallu* §6). Though the relationship of the various witnesses is unclear and the order and originality of some stanzas open to question, the poem does present a remarkably cohesive programme of practice for a Christian king of Ailech.¹⁸

We have mentioned the poem *Díambad messe bad rí réil*, which has similar sentiments.¹⁹ Again the work is Middle Irish and the dating is unclear; one ascription is in *Laud* 610 which states *Fingin cc. do Cor. m. Cuilen* 'Fíngen sang it for Cormac mac

¹⁷ Two other persons are exempt: the kings of Cashel and Tara. We have seen in Chapter IV that the kings of Cashel accepted the importance of the Patrician cult at an early date; however this reference might indicate an eleventh-century date (i.e. postdating Brían Bóraime's patronage of Armagh in 1005 and the retention of the title *rí Temrach* by the kings of Mide).

¹⁸ For discussion of manuscripts see O'Donoghue, 'Cet Cech Ríg', pp. 258-9.

¹⁹ Above, p. 161.

Cuillenáin'. Other attributions make the author Dub-dá-Thúath, most likely the literary figure of that name who figures in several texts.²⁰ In terms of content, to some extent it occupies a halfway house between *Tecosca Cormaic* (whatever the date of that compilation) and *Cert cech rí co réil*, inasmuch as it contains certain ecclesiastically-informed sentiments (e.g. §11 *tairgnim do chill* 'provision for churches', §17 *termann cell* 'protection of churches'), though these are not as well-developed as *Cert cech rí*, as well as more general gnomic sentiments of the type common in *Tecosca Cormaic* (to which *Díambad messe bad rí réil* refers in §4). The theme of Ruler's Truth is more prominent here (e.g. §§ 8, 15), though again this sentiment so central in *Audacht Morainn* is absolutely compatible with the other elements.

If we are to assume that these poems are clerically-informed compositions which attempted to convey certain ideals to Irish kings, we must ask questions about their reception and performance. Was *Cert cech rí co réil* performed in front of an Áed mac Néill? Or is the mode of direct address merely one of poetic conceit? It is interesting that several Irish advice-texts, *Tecosca Cormaic* most notably but also *Tecosca Cúscraid*, 'The Advice to Doidin' and *Bríatharbecosc Con Culainn* are fathered on legendary authors who existed in prehistoric narrative contexts.²¹ It is possible that this de-personalising made the texts applicable to more audiences. The embedding of *Bríatharbecosc Con Culainn* within *Serglige Con Culainn* presents some interesting possibilities. If the narrative matrix, or some form of it, was indeed performed in some way for a royal or aristocratic audience, the inclusion of maxims of advice for kings is surely not accidental. Though the sentiments of this text are not overtly Christian (hardly surprising, given the prehistoric setting!) one might suggest that one of the modes of *Serglige Con Culainn*, and indeed many narrative tales, was to provide exemplars for the audience of good and bad royal practice. This suggestion brings us immediately to sagas such as *Togail Bruidne da Derga*, *Fingal Rónáin*, and *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*.²² The first of these is often invoked as an example of the conception of the semi-divine ancient Irish king, hedged around with taboos. This is true of the narrative at one level. But the extant version was compiled in the eleventh century, when fear of supernatural beings and *geasa* may not have been the first concern of an Irish aristocratic audience. Though Conaire Mór may have shown exempla of 'bad practice' by breaking his *geasa*,

²⁰ Clancy, 'King-making', p. 99; cf. *idem*, 'Mac Stelène and the Eight in Armagh: Identity and Context', *Éigse* 26 (1992), 80-91.

²¹ The unedited poem of advice put in the voice of Torna Éices is an exception.

²² Edd. E. Knott (Dublin 1936), D. Greene (Dublin 1955), D. A. Binchy (Dublin 1963).

the text makes it clear that he showed bad judgement in excusing his foster-brothers from hanging; this idea, at least, chimes with more overtly ecclesiastical ideas of royal justice such as those we have found above. This poor decision, surely an example of *gúbreith*, is the focal point of the story.²³ Thereafter Conaire breaks all of his *geasa*, and though the tragic mode of the tale makes it clear from early on that Conaire is fated to do this, his failure to pursue adequate justice leads to his downfall. This is very deliberate choice by the author, whether or not he subscribed to ecclesiastical ideals. *Fingal Rónáin*, also a tragic tale though different in many ways, also focuses on good and bad judgements of kingly practice. Though Máel Fothartaig is the son, he shows more wisdom in suggesting Rónán should take a wife of similar age to himself. But Rónán is not to be dissuaded, and his decision proves to be incorrect. The encounters between the queen's maid, Máel Fothartaig and Congal, to say nothing of the climactic scene in the royal hall, have much to tell us about the public nature of royal business and its protocols which cannot be discussed here, but which surely had resonances for the putative royal audience of the tale.²⁴ An alternative example is provided by the hero of *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*, who, despite suffering many injustices, comes finally into kingship by his stoicism and forbearance.²⁵

I do not wish to suggest that clerical authors must have been responsible for these tales as we have them, nor that ideals of kingship presented in them are necessarily 'Christian'.²⁶ Rather, it is possible that these stories too could have functioned in a more subtle way as a *speculum principis*, inasmuch as they present examples of kingship, good and bad, whose deeds and fates had something to say to the audience. Again, there is no need to suppose that the audience actually paid much heed to the models they found in sagas, nor that any king styled himself on Cano. On the other hand, certain characters certainly were considered ideals of kingship in different respects, Cormac mac Airt above all. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries new historical models were created, most notably Brían Bóraime, and he is explicitly presented as a king who practiced Christian ideals. We shall return to this matter below with respect to the 'dynastic propaganda' of the period.

²³ Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Semantics of *Sid*', pp. 44-8.

²⁴ Cf. T. Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Rhetoric of *Fingal Rónáin*', *Celtica* 17 (1985), 123-44; E. Poppe, 'Deception and Self-Deception in *Fingal Rónáin*', *Ériu* 47 (1996), 145-54.

²⁵ T. Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Rhetoric of *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*', in Ó Corráin, Breatnach & McCone, *Sages, Saints and Storytellers*, pp. 233-50.

²⁶ See also McCone, *Pagan Past*, pp. 131-2, 138-43, 155-60.

On the face of it, one must answer that clerical influence on royal practice was not particularly large. Byrne asserted that ‘all attempts to christianise Irish kingship were to amount to little more than enamelling’.²⁷ The problem is that we have little evidence with which to gauge such influence. Annalistic records are mostly given to the description of outrages or occasionally to conspicuous generosity, and the casual instances of almsgiving, generosity or everyday dispensation of royal justice have not been recorded. There are a few instances where we may see kings putting precepts like those found in the advice-poems into practice. We recall the many occasions when peace was ecclesiastically brokered between Úa Bríain and Mac Lochlainn. There are many instances of *dála*, some of which were peacemaking exercises. It would be nice to suppose that leading kings had been listening to the precept of *Díambad messe bad rí réil* that *is ferr síd sochocad sruith* ‘peace is better than [even] the war of a wise man’.²⁸ But it is impossible to show this. One of the recurrent themes of these ‘*specula*’, paralleled many times over by continental examples, is the need to protect churches and not subject them to imposition.²⁹ This precept clearly was not followed, as abundant annalistic evidence shows, despite the supposed actions of Fothad na Canóine and Áed Oirdnide, and the lack of progress on this front was one of the motivations of the church reformers in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries.³⁰

On the other hand, there were several areas in which ecclesiastics must have had a hand in developing the practice of kingship. We have seen such practices as the building of churches, the erection of inscribed high-crosses, and royal patronage of ecclesiastical metalwork and other artefacts. In these areas clergy and royalty worked together for mutual benefit. FitzPatrick has considered the ways in which clergymen involved themselves in royal inauguration rituals.³¹ Also important must be the links between Irish churches and those on the Continent; as we have seen in Chapter IV, these provided avenues for ideas to enter Ireland from elsewhere. Irish kings were aware of what their contemporaries in Britain and on the Continent were doing, and emulated these ideas when they considered it to be in their best interests. In other areas inherited ideology and tradition prevailed; though some Irish kings may have been

²⁷ Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 255.

²⁸ ‘Advice to a prince’, §18; this phrase is interesting, given that in some manuscripts the poem is addressed to Cormac mac Cuillenáin.

²⁹ Nelson, ‘Kingship and Empire’, pp. 54-63.

³⁰ The sequence of stanzas on ‘following a father in his trade’ in *Díambad messe* (§§ 27-33), if original to the text, state *mac ind abbad issin aill* ‘[let] the son of the abbot [be] in the church’ (§27), hardly a reformist principle, which suggests the text predates the reformers or was produced by a traditionalist.

³¹ FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, pp. 173-82.

anointed on Biblical models, it was not felt significant enough to have become a common feature of Irish inauguration. On the other hand models of ideal kingship, such as the near-saintly character of Bríain Bóraime in *Cocad Gáedel re Gallaib*, or the striking concept that a king of Munster should be elected in the manner of the German emperor, may be a development of traditional ideas about the wise Cormac mac Airt or the patient Cano mac Gartnáin. The exposition of dynastic ideology in later texts, (whether or not clerical hands were responsible) is an important topic to which we shall presently return.

The Territorial Expansion of Lordship

The most notable feature of kingship in the viking-age and after is the increasing ability of Irish kings to campaign at considerable distances from home and to assert their power over kingdoms at great geographical removes. This, essentially, is the basis of the provincial wars and competition for the overkingship of Ireland. The actual mechanics of how all this worked are little understood and there are more questions to ask than can be addressed here.

The principle of itinerancy became even more important. Kings, and lesser lords, were often on the move in Ireland as elsewhere in the medieval west. This was a product of various conditions, in Ireland principally the need for kings to consume renders or hospitality which would not easily be brought from far afield to the king; secondarily for the king to interact with local nobility and people and to project his power at ground level, so to speak. Charles-Edwards set up an important distinction between Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England (and by extension, the Frankish world). In his view one or more royal households in England could go on circuit through the kingdom, making use of *villae regis* as centres to consume rents. This situation also pertained in Ireland within a king's own immediate realm, but for Charles-Edwards, hospitality was rather more important in an Irish overking's sub-kingdoms.³² These interim conclusions as to the level of difference between Ireland and England have been questioned by Dumville, but the general points as to the nature of lordship in Ireland itself are confirmed by several texts.³³ Sub-kingdoms whose rulers claimed a relationship with the overking's dynasty had more favoured status, and this was an

³² Charles-Edwards, 'Early Medieval Kingships', pp. 28-33, 38-9.

³³ D. N. Dumville, 'Anglo-Saxon and Celtic Overkingships: a Discussion of Some Shared Historical Problems', *Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental and Occidental Studies, Kansai University* 31 (1998), 81-100: 85.

imperative for genealogists to create links between dynasties. This lies behind the 'Poem on the Airgíalla', which conceives of the relationship between Airgíalla and Uí Néill as a way to minimize the burdens imposed on Airgíalla. We see these ideas again in the *Frithfolad* texts, while Byrne considered this a contributing factor in the collapse of Mide. The loss of territory in northern Mide to Conmaicne and Bréifne which caused the 'crowding' of Uí Néill dynasties into the rump of Mide (and their appropriation of lands previously ruled by *fortúatha*) was disastrous, for now there were few subject kings to pay tribute; the dynasties claiming kinship with Uí Maíl Sechnaill were exempt.³⁴

One point about which we are still unclear is to what extent the power of an overking was mediated through his clients. This must have varied over time and place, though the indicators are that within his own overkingdom the overking could have a considerable level of power down to the lower levels of the aristocracy.³⁵ We are less well-informed as to what pertained when an overking gained the submission of a 'foreign' territory. Was he able to call directly on the service of local kings, or could he only do this through their immediate overking? This must have depended on the nature of the hostages rendered. If, for example, the king of Ulaid submitted to the king of Ailech and rendered only his own hostages (members of his immediate family or dynasty), then the Ulster sub-kings may have felt little constrained to obey the king of Ailech. The retention of hostages from the sub-kings and nobles of the whole kingdom may have been required to ensure their acquiescence: this is what happened in the case of Eochaid Mac Duinn Sléibe's submission to Mac Lochlainn in 1165, when in addition to his own daughter *mac cech toísigh d'Ulltaibh* were given up.³⁶ The relationships in these submissions must have been very complex and dependent on the relative power of overking and sub-king. An overking with a positive attitude to his vassal, who thought his vassal could enforce overlordship on the sub-kings of the vassal territory might require only a couple of hostages from the vassal directly. Though it is not made explicit in much of the secondary literature, one gets a sense that overkings may be masters within their own realms (if subject to challenge from dynastic rivals) but their hold on external kingdoms was highly contingent. Sub-kings repeatedly rebelled, and had to be

³⁴ Byrne, 'The Trembling Sod', p. 20.

³⁵ For a case study see M.T. Flanagan, 'Strategies of Lordship in Pre-Norman and Post-Norman [sic] Leinster', in C. Harper-Bill (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Studies XX: Proceedings of the Battle Conference in Dublin 1997* (Woodbridge 1998), pp. 107-126.

³⁶ *AU* 1165.

repeatedly brought to submission.³⁷ Almost no Irish king ever gained the submission of the entire island. This brings us to the question of royal authority, as distinct from power. Generations of Anglocentric historians once posited that there was something in the Irish character which made them inherently difficult to govern. In this they took their cue from Giraldus, for whom the Irish were a *gens fidei tenerrime*.³⁸ The topos of the untrustworthy race was far older of course: it is found in Gildas' description of the Britons and has a venerable Biblical pedigree.

There are two tests of the power wielded by an overking in his external dominions. The first is the presence of kings of those lands in his armies on military service. This can be examined in some cases using annalistic evidence, that is by the lists of those taking part (and dying) in battles. As we have seen, there are difficulties in handling this information, principally in that it is patchy and may not give even a moderately full record of who took part in a battle, and also in that we cannot necessarily tell whether a named participant is acting as a subject (i.e. someone who has submitted) or as a free ally. For example, the list of the fallen at Clontarf in 1014 includes a smallish south Connacht contingent, including two kings of Uí Maine and the king of Uí Fíachrach Aidne.³⁹ Bríain Bóraime had been overlord of Connacht before the death of its king, Cathal mac Conchobair, in 1010, but it is unclear whether Cathal's successor Tadc ever submitted to Brían. Is the presence of these south Connacht kings a signal that Brían was able to impose his authority in the areas neighbouring Túadmumu without recourse to the Connacht overking? Or were these kings acting as allies rather than clients on military service? At the battle of Mag Coba in 1103 several Leinster nobles perished, including the king of Uí Dróna, but the king of Leinster (Donnchad mac Murchada) was apparently not present.⁴⁰ An *erri* 'viceroys' of Leinster was present (see below), which suggests that in this case Muirchertach Ua Bríain was able to impose his authority directly on Leinster sub-kings without recourse to that province's overking.

The second test, harder to observe in the historical record, is the extent to which an overking was able to extract resources from his external dominions, in terms of guesting-rights or perhaps more directly. Here, one might suppose, hospitality

³⁷ For similar resistance among Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, see P. Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*', in Wallace-Hadrill, *Ideal and Reality*, pp. 99-129: 117-19.

³⁸ A.B. Scott & F.X. Martin (edd. & transl.), *Expugnatio Hibernica: The Conquest of Ireland* (Dublin 1978), p. 248.

³⁹ *AU*, *AI* 1014.2.

⁴⁰ *AU* 1103.5, *AI* 1103.4.

remained a more important element. If, say, Úa Conchobair of Connacht travelled in Mide after he had received its submission, he would be provided for by the king of Mide or local kings of Tethba, Fir Chell or Uí Forannáin to name but three. Could an external overking impose his authority at a lower level? Could he levy tribute or rent directly from the people of Mide? It is difficult to judge. He might utilize a local king's centre to do this. *Betha Colmáin*, in which Domnall mac Áeda, Cenél Conaill king of Tara, is described as using a local centre when in Mide, might be evidence of the twelfth-century situation; though there Domnall is overking of all Uí Néill and thus occupies a position different to that which Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair would have held. An important institution in terms of external overkings' resources is that of *coinnmed*, which we shall consider further below.

The question of the extent to which overkings controlled acquired lands as opposed to their sub-kings is a very important one. For both Byrne and Ó Corráin eleventh- and twelfth-century kings were very much *domini terrae*.⁴¹ This is most clearly shown by the dividing of overkingdoms between various rulers, of which Mide is the most obvious example, but also important is the division of Ulaid in *AU* 1113.7:

Slogadh la Domnall H. Lochlainn co Ceneol Eogain & Conaill & Airgiall .i. co Glenn Ríge co ro innarbsatur Donnchadh a righe Uladh & co ro rannsat Ulltu eter H. Mathgamna & maccu Duinn Sleibhe, Dal n-Araide & h-Ui Eachach aice fein.

A hosting by Domnall úa Lochlainn with the Cenél nEógain & Cenél Conaill & Airgíalla to Glenn Ríge so that he deposed Donnchad from the kingship of the Ulaid and so that he divided Ulaid between Úa Mathgamna and the sons of Donn Slébe; Dál nAraide and Uí Echach [he kept] with himself.

That Domnall could retain two of the Ulaid sub-kingdoms *aice fein* presupposes that he had the means to do this directly without recourse to their own kings. This would have required some kind of administration, to which matter we shall return presently. It is necessary to remember, however, that the division of kingdoms had begun rather earlier than the twelfth century. We recall that in 802 Áed Oirdnide divided Mide between the two sons of Donnchad Midi, though on that occasion Áed may have been acting as arbiter because of his position as king of Tara. More significant are the divisions of Leinster made by Áed in 805 and 818.⁴² However, in all these cases native kings were set up and Áed did not retain any territory *aice fein*; he was not in a position to do so in the

⁴¹ Byrne, *IKHK*, p. 271; Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship' p. 24.

⁴² *AU* 805.7, 818.6.

early ninth century. After this there appears to be a considerable gap before kings employed division of kingdoms as a tactic of power. Though several kings were deposed or set up by external overkings in the period 800-1200, it seems that it was not until the eleventh and twelfth centuries that the splitting of overkingdoms (in this case normally provinces) became at all common. Instances of kings adding external territories to their own by conquest (i.e. as sword-land, *claideb tír*) are not numerous. The territorial expansion of Bréifne may be one instance, though it is largely unrecorded and difficult to trace. Mac Lochlainn activities in Ulaid such as in 1113 are clearer, while the re-divisions of Mide in the twelfth century provide some of the best examples, both of kings granting land to their subjects (*AFM* 1144) and also retaining land for themselves (*AFM* 1169). In 1153, shortly after the accession of Máel Sechnaill Úa Maíl Sechnaill to the kingship of Mide, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn gave him the territories of Uí Fáeláin and Uí Failge, which Ó Corráin has interpreted as an attempt to prop Mide up against Connacht.⁴³

An important issue connecting all these instances of territorial settlement is that of enforcement. In every case the overking responsible must have put measures in place to ensure the new arrangement would persist, even if he were not very optimistic of its permanency. Were the divisions of Leinster in the early ninth century guaranteed by oaths and hostages, or simply the threat of force by Áed Oirdnide? The chronicles do not say, but from one point of view it would be surprising if hostages were not handed over. Yet hostage-giving is infrequently noticed in the annals until the eleventh century. Again, the question of what annalists took for granted obstructs us.

At a lower level than entire kingdoms kings certainly acquired mensal lands in faraway places. About 1086 Donnchad mac Domnaill, king of Leinster, granted lands in Co. Dublin to Christ Church Cathedral; these were at a considerable distance from his own territory of Uí Chennselaig.⁴⁴ In her study of Leinster under Diarmait Mac Murchada, Flanagan has shown that as well as mensal lands in Uí Chennselaig, Diarmait also had control of lands in other parts of the province, such as the estates granted to Baltinglass Abbey at its foundation in 1148.⁴⁵ Diarmait's four surviving Latin charters, as well as documents post-dating the Norman *adventus*, show that he could act as *dominus*

⁴³ *AFM* 1153; Ó Corráin, *IBTN* p. 161. When Máel Sechnaill's father Murchad died in 1153 he is styled king of *urmoir Laighen & Airgiall fri athaidh* 'the greater part of Laigin and Airgialla for a time' by *AT* and *AFM*, which might suggest an earlier aggrandizement of territory.

⁴⁴ Byrne, 'The Trembling Sod', p. 12.

⁴⁵ Flanagan, 'Strategies of Lordship', pp. 115-16.

terrae at a considerable remove from his 'home territory' of Uí Chennselaig.⁴⁶ Some of this land had originally belonged to local rulers, and the granting of such land to the church was a phenomenon far older than Díarmait's time – for example, Charles-Edwards has suggested that Durrow (and other churches in Fir Chell) was endowed by the king of Tara at the expense of the local Cenél Fíachach, who previously had controlled rather more territory in Mide.⁴⁷ It is probably fair to infer that kings held more lands in external kingdoms than the ones they granted to the church – indeed, those which were given to the church were probably those over which they had least control, while more securely-held units were probably retained.

The Utilization of Resources

We can say a little more about royal abilities to acquire resources to support their households and military forces. Firstly within the 'home' overkingdom itself. As we have seen, *Betha Colmáin meic Líacháin* provides interesting information on how some of these processes were perceived to work in the early twelfth century. Though in later periods the term *máer/maor* is often used of the secular collectors of rents, here it is the *rechtaire*. In fact the renderers, namely Colmán's family, are expected to transport their rent to the royal centre (equivalent to a *villa regis*?). We have seen that there were a few named centres in Mide; it is an important question as to whether there were (many) more, whose existence has not been recorded, or whether in fact the few named instances do represent the centres of power of the local dynasty, in this case Clann Cholmáin/Uí Maíl Sechnaill. One might then propose that even if hospitality was of greater significance in the seventh and eighth centuries (at least within the home kingdom), by the beginning of the twelfth century royal control was focused on certain primary locations, to which rents were sent. Important in this regard is continuity of use; as we have seen at least two of these places (including Ruba Conaill) were in use in the early ninth century and still in the twelfth, though one cannot necessarily infer unbroken continuity.

This is to consider only the secular side. Irish kings had residences at church-sites, and spent time there. In the twelfth century Durrow does seem to have been the most important residence of Uí Maíl Sechnaill, and Kilkenny was a place of considerable significance for the kings of Osraige. The Cenél nEógain dynasty had one

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-19.

⁴⁷ Charles-Edwards, *ECI*, pp. 554-5.

or more residences in Armagh (to say nothing of the *cimiterio regum*) from the ninth century, though the splitting of the dynasty into Mac Lochlainn and Uí Néill factions may have attenuated the range of bases from which their kings could operate in the later eleventh and twelfth centuries. The acquisition of Kells, previously a Clann Cholmáin centre, by Uí Rúairc was perhaps a more important factor in their control of much of northern Mide than has been allowed. Royal advice-literature often made it clear that kings had a duty to protect churches and ensure their revenues, though it is clear such advice did not have a huge effect. But, if we allow that tithes and other church-revenues were successfully levied and gathered into important churches, one wonders whether kings were able to exploit these existing mechanisms to facilitate the collection of their own dues, or indeed whether churchmen utilized putative royal collectors to help their own ends. We read on many occasions of coarbs of Patrick coming to an overkingdom for the first time and collecting dues (whether proceeds from *Cáin Phátraic* or otherwise) and it is difficult to imagine that this could be accomplished without the assistance or at least acquiescence of the local overking.⁴⁸ On several occasions overkings levied extraordinary taxes, sometimes to provide gifts for the church or indeed in payment for abuse of church property or personnel. It would be interesting to know how Máel Sechnaill II did go about collecting a hide from every *les* in Mide; whatever the level of exaggeration in the *CS* account, if there was a levy on this scale one imagines the populace bringing it to several local centres, rather than Máel Sechnaill's agents (perhaps supervised by a *rechtaire* of Mide?) going door-to-door across the country.⁴⁹

An interesting passage discussed by Flanagan and Doherty occurs in *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*, and provides more suggestive evidence for the early twelfth century. In this passage Ímar, leader of the vikings, *do ordaich ... rigu ocus taisechu, maeru ocus rechtairedu in cach tir* 'appointed kings and chiefs, *máir* and *rechtaire* over every land', *ocus da thogaib in cis rigda* 'and he levied the royal tax'.⁵⁰ Doherty suggests that this passage really refers to the taxation structure in Munster in the early twelfth century.⁵¹ Though we do not need

⁴⁸ E.g. *AU* report that Cellach, abbot and archbishop of Armagh went on circuit in Cenél nEógain (1108.3), Munster (1106.6, 1120.4), Connacht (1108.3, 1116.1), Mide (1110.12).

⁴⁹ However, *AFM* 1213 has just such an account of the *maor* of Úa Domnaill collecting dues from individual residences in Cairpre Dromma Clíab, including the house of Muiredach Albanach Úa Dálaig. Additionally, in Scotland, arrangements for collecting the king's *cáin* in Galloway describe a *máer* visiting debtors *cum brevi* 'with a brieve' and if necessary returning bearing a *virga regis* and seizing goods. See T. Thomson & C. Innes (edd.), *The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland A.D. MCXXIV – A.D. MCCCCXXIII*, i (Edinburgh 1864), p. 378 (§23).

⁵⁰ *Cogadh Gáedel*, pp. 48-9.

⁵¹ Doherty, 'The Vikings in Ireland', pp. 319-21. I do not agree that the Irish *rechtaire* and *máer* need have operated at different levels in a manner analogous to the *maer* and *maer biswail* of the Welsh laws; there is too little evidence for the secular Irish *máer* in the pre-Norman period.

to take the schematization in the text too literally, the concept of a hierarchy of lordship within the overkingdom, with the king at the top exacting *cís rígha* is plausible enough.

The annals report the occurrence of long-range warfare more frequently in the viking-age and after, and a host campaigning over larger distances required logistical support. In Charles-Edwards' view, having dominion over lands neighbouring the 'target' kingdom was often an essential factor; Cenél nEógain overlordship of Airgíalla effectively extended their frontier to the northern borders of Mide and Brega, while a Cenél nEógain overking able to effect authority over the Southern Uí Néill (or Brega, at least) could march through allied territory all the way to the border of Leinster.⁵² Doherty has suggested that in the ninth and subsequent centuries there was a militarization of Irish society.⁵³ Flanagan has undertaken a detailed study of military practices in twelfth-century Ireland.⁵⁴ Many of these had previously been commented on by Byrne, Ó Corráin and others. Innovations included the engineering works of Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair: his construction of castles, and engineering works such as the famous diversion of the River Suck.⁵⁵ The creation of fortifications was itself nothing new; Domnall úa Néill had tried to keep control in Mide and Brega with the help of forts (*dúine*) until Clann Cholmáin ejected him.⁵⁶ That some of Ua Conchobair's twelfth-century works merited the title *caistéil* shows that these were projects of a different order to the *dún*. Normans brought the practice of systematic large-scale castellation to Ireland, but the concept arrived considerably earlier; Irish travellers in Britain and the Continent must have been impressed by such works, while continental mercenaries (who we know to have existed in Ireland before the first load of Flemings arrived in 1167) would have been completely familiar with the technologies required.⁵⁷

In the rest of this section I shall not attempt another reassessment of developments in Irish military capability except for a few points connected most directly with overlordship and resource utilization. The first is connected with the increasing trend to campaign over large distances, and the question of how much an overking could exact from external territories. When a host was on campaign various strategies were employed to support it, and no doubt varied with the type of military activity being

⁵² T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Irish Warfare Before 1100', in T. Bartlett & K. Jeffery (edd.), *A Military History of Ireland* (Cambridge 1996), pp. 26-51.

⁵³ Doherty, 'The Vikings in Ireland', pp. 312-14, though most of the matter in that section have little bearing on 'militarization' as such.

⁵⁴ M.T. Flanagan, 'Irish and Anglo-Norman Warfare in Twelfth-Century Ireland', in Bartlett & Jeffery, *A Military History*, pp. 52-75.

⁵⁵ Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, pp. 150-2; Flanagan, 'Warfare', pp. 61-3.

⁵⁶ Byrne, 'The Trembling Sod', p. 8.

⁵⁷ Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', p. 29.

undertaken. There are two obvious tactics for an army on the move: to carry one's supplies as baggage, or to exploit the surrounding countryside. The latter appears to have been the most common in Ireland, as elsewhere in Europe. Cattle-raiding remained the most common form of military activity in pre-Norman Ireland; sometimes we hear of the raiders, slowed by the prey of cattle they were driving, caught up by the enemy and engaged.⁵⁸ Raiders like this could obviously have supported themselves by butchering some of the cattle as they progressed, though there are no specific references to this effect. Troops could have victualled themselves on the people of the vicinity; in 'allied' territory these may have been an extension of cliental obligations to provide renders for lords and kings, though presumably not often popular. This was particularly the case among churches, for whom release from these kinds of imposition was a prime motivator for reform, particularly in the twelfth century. Several of the Kells *notitiae* are concerned with guaranteeing immunities; this is also found in Latin charters of the twelfth century.⁵⁹ CS's account of the great panic in 1096 states that *Tugsat rígha Erenn saoire do ceallaibh imdha ro battur a ndocur* 'the kings of Ireland gave freedom to many churches that were liable to loss'.⁶⁰

In enemy territory these impositions must have been carried through by threat or actual force. §9 of *Cert cech rígh co réil* advises a king:

déna ingeilt ois
narbat timtheirc tais
déna coinmed crúaid
do shláig ar cech aiss.

Practise grazing of cattle; do not forage gently; make a strict billeting of your host on every side. [My translation]

There are many chronicle-accounts of cattle raids and the size of the prey driven off.⁶¹ In terms of the institutionalised support of armies references are rather fewer, and mainly involve the practice referred to in the stanza above of *coinmed*, which would become a burden for many in the later middle ages.⁶²

⁵⁸ E.g. *AU* 1013.2, 1021.3, 1125.4; *AI* 1095.5.

⁵⁹ R. Butler (ed.), *Registrum prioratus omnium sanctorum* (Dublin 1845), p. 50.

⁶⁰ *AT* 1096.

⁶¹ E.g. *AU* 962.1, 999.7, 1009.6, 1012.2, 1027.6.

⁶² Discussed by Simms, *FKTW*, pp. 131-3.

It is first noticed in the annals in the mid-eleventh century and occurs sporadically thereafter. Many of these are forced billeting upon churches: the earliest instance tells of the king of Calraige dying of an unknown disease three days after enforcing a *coinnmed* upon Clonmacnoise.⁶³ In 1072 Murchad, son of King Conchobar Úa Maíl Sechnaill, enforced a *coinnmed* on Ísel Chíaráin and its Céli Dé community, so that the *rechtaire* of the poor was killed, and Mag nÚra given to the poor in atonement.⁶⁴ This suggests that the imposition of *coinnmed* (which *AFM* here describe as *trén* 'forcible') was sometimes resisted, if not successfully. In 1063 is reported a *coinnmed mór* by Ardgar mac Lochlainn over Bréifne and into Connacht so that the kings of Connacht (two Uí Rúairc and Úa Conchobair) came into his house.⁶⁵ In this instance it seems that mac Lochlainn was able to impress his military might on the Bréifne and Connacht kings by exacting the resources of their lands. *AT* 1131 describe how after peace was made between Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair and the invaders of Connacht, the Ulaid were to be billeted in Mag nAí for three days and three nights en route back to Ardee.⁶⁶ In this case the *coinnmed* was in fact enforced by the provincial overking as an act of generosity toward his erstwhile enemies. In 1153, after Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn had led a great army of the north to Connacht to relieve Tairdelbach Úa Briain, the king of Desmumu fell ill and was unable to immediately return home; thus the men of Munster were billeted on the men of the various northern and midland kingdoms.⁶⁷ In 1159 Mac Lochlainn billeted two battalions (*cath*) on Mide for a month, one on east Mide and one on west Mide.⁶⁸ The last twelfth-century instance is an interesting example: in 1163 Mac Lochlainn's son Níall billeted himself and his men on Uí Maine, while on circuit in Leth Cuinn, but his men were killed and he himself taken prisoner.⁶⁹ *AT* call this simply *coinnmed* but *AFM* use the term *coinnmedh ríogdhambna* 'royal heir's *coinnmed*', and names several territories through which Níall had passed before reaching Connacht, as well as noting that he had committed acts of violence in several churches; *AT* picks up this theme and suggests the actions of Uí Maine were a miracle of Cíarán, for *connmedh égne do-rindi* 'he had made a forced billeting' of Clonmacnoise beforehand.

⁶³ *AT*, *AFM* 1045.

⁶⁴ *AFM* 1072.

⁶⁵ *AU* 1063.4, *ALC* 1063. Cf. above, p. 210.

⁶⁶ *AT* 1131.

⁶⁷ *AFM* 1153.

⁶⁸ *AFM* 1159.

⁶⁹ *AT* *AFM* 1163.

These kinds of billetings on churches and people must have existed in some kind of form before the ninth century, but it is particularly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries when they are imposed by external overkings that we hear of them. In terms of resource utilization the developments of the ninth to twelfth centuries seem to be more a question of increased scale than a fundamental change in the nature of royal practice, but the matter remains wide open for debate.

The Growth of Royal Administration

The extension of lordship over greater territories is normally presumed to have been accompanied by a development in the mechanisms of administration. Simms in *FKTW* discusses royal administration in the later medieval Gaelic polity.⁷⁰ For a considerable time scholars have been aware of a few pieces of evidence pointing to the existence of certain kinds of officials in the Gaelic world. We have already met the *rechtaire* in Chapter II, as well as the *rannaire* who apparently enjoyed an Indian summer in the administration of the twelfth-century kings of Scots. Brían Bóraime's confessor Máel Suthain acted as his scribe in the *Book of Armagh*, but I would hesitate to use terms like 'secretary' and 'latimer' which have been employed by some historians.⁷¹ It is probable that several of the great Irish overkings of the later period employed clerics in this capacity, though whether on a continuous or *ad hoc* basis is uncertain. In the later twelfth century royal officials of Mac Murchada and Úa Conchobair sported styles such as *cancellarius* and *notarius*.⁷² The temptation is to consider these stray references to be the tip of a larger iceberg, the beginnings of a sophisticated system of government which would stand comparison with contemporary systems in Britain and on the Continent. However, Ó Cróinín has pointed out that complex societies can be administered with a minimum of written apparatus, and Mary Valante has noted the tendency of scholars to equate the image of early Irish society as lacking complex governmental structures with a charge of 'backwardness'.⁷³ We know that several military officials (commanders of the cavalry, fleets or the royal household as a fighting unit) were members of collateral branches of the overking's dynasty or originally kings in their own right – such as the

⁷⁰ Simms, *FKTW*, pp. 79-95.

⁷¹ E.g. Ó Corráin, *IBTN*, p.173; Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 291.

⁷² W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum* (6 vols in 8, London 1817-30), vi, 2, pp. 1141-2; C.M. Butler & J.H. Bernard, 'The Charters of the Abbey of Duiske', *PRLA* 35 C (1919-20), 1-188: 7.

⁷³ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 291 (however, the comparison with certain African societies (of whose anthropology he does not claim to have read) is too casual to be of use); M. Valante, review of Clarke, Ní Mhaonaigh & Ó Floinnn, *Ireland and Scandinavia*, *Peritia* 14 (2000), 434-41: 439.

kings of Uí Flaithbertaig, who in the twelfth century acted as fleet commanders for the Úa Conchobair kings.⁷⁴

Certain of these officials only make their appearance towards the end of the pre-Norman period, and it is difficult to say much about their 'prehistory'. In 'Nationality and Kingship' Ó Corráin focused particularly on two kinds of 'official' who make appearances in the chronicle-evidence. It would be useful to reconsider both of these in turn, but in advance it is worth stating that perhaps too much weight has been placed on the (very) few instances of these persons in the chronicles; their exact functions, and how common they were, are still unclear.

(i) *Airrí*

The term *airrí* is an interesting one, though it occurs most infrequently in annalistic sources. Ó Corráin discussed the emergence of the term in 'Nationality and Kingship', and though in the later medieval period it mainly meant 'sub-king,' many of the pre-Norman instances seem to be persons acting as viceroys.⁷⁵ Here we shall consider a few of Ó Corráin's examples in more detail. In 1003 and 1021 are noted the deaths of *airrí* of Mide, namely Cathal mac Labrada and Branacán úa Maíl Uidir.⁷⁶ Ó Corráin was unable to trace the family connections of these two, but we can say a little more about them. Cathal joined with Máel Sechnaill to kill Echnech úa Leócháin, king of Luigne, in Donaghpatrick according to *AT* and *AFM* 992. *AFM* also provide more detail on his death. Donnchad, son of Donnchad Finn (Máel Sechnaill's predecessor but one in the kingship of Mide) had joined with Uí Méith to plunder Dunleer, but were overtaken by Cathal with the men of Brega and were defeated. The king of Uí Méith and Cathal were both killed. We shall meet Branacán again further below.

That Ó Corráin was unable to establish the 'class or connections' of these two is in itself suggestive, in that, as he concluded for the Munster *airrí*, these belonged to middling aristocratic families who were in no position to challenge for the kingship itself, and were thus safe pairs of hands to whom a 'vicerealty' could be entrusted. The information on Cathal is most notable in this regard. He assisted Máel Sechnaill in removing a (restive?) client-king ('by treachery', as *AT* have it), and with the men of

⁷⁴ Byrne, 'The Trembling Sod', p. 34. Perhaps we may also consider the 'counsellors' in Munster who were themselves kings (e.g. *AI* 920.1, 929.1).

⁷⁵ Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', pp. 26-8.

⁷⁶ *AU* 1003.2, *AT* 1003; *AU* 1021.4.

Brega pursued a raiding party who were led by the son of a previous king, who may have been in exile in Uí Méith or simply had another tie which led to their alliance against the overking of Mide.⁷⁷ The sensible deduction is that Cathal acted as a viceroy or governor of Mide territories, or perhaps Brega especially (which by this stage was already coming to be known as (east) Mide. As for the unfortunate Branacán, we can say little other than that he may have been Cathal's successor.

There are two Munster examples: one Díarmait mac Echach *airrí Muman*, and *Úa Failbe .i. rídomna Corco Duibne agus erri Laighen*.⁷⁸ In both cases Ó Corráin traced their affiliations, Díarmait to Clann Scannláin, distant relatives of Uí Bríain (*AFM* call him *cend Cloinde Scandláin*) and *Úa Fáilbe* to the ruling dynasty of Corcu Duibne. The first case is fairly clear-cut and Ó Corráin's conclusions are sound. The second case is a little more complicated. *Úa Fáilbe* fell in the battle of Mag Coba, and his name is part of a large list of the slain. In *AU* the list of fallen Munstermen includes *H. Failbhe .i. rídomna Corco Duibhne & erri Laigen*. *AFM* has substantially the same record. *AI* award *Úa Fáilbe* no titles, but gives him a forename, Gilla Finn. As Ó Corráin noted, a *rídamna* of Corcu Duibne in the far south-west of Munster could in no way be a sub-king of Leinster, and thus must have been Muirchertach *Úa Bríain*'s governor of the province. Further proof is provided by the nature of *AI*'s account. The battle of Mag Coba was preceded by a long stand-off between Muirchertach *Úa Bríain* and Domnall *úa Lochlainn*. Muirchertach made the disastrous decision to split his forces, and took his Munster contingents off on a raid. This allowed Domnall to fall upon the remainder, made up largely of Leinster contingents, who were heavily defeated. Though *AU* and *AFM* list Gilla Finn as among the Munstermen slain, *AI* report the crushing of the Leinstermen separately and include him in that list, showing that he was fighting among them rather than as a noble in the personal retinue or troops of Muirchertach.

It is worth considering one final example, missed by Ó Corráin. This occurs in *AU*'s account of the Battle of Ardee in 1159, wherein fell *mac Aedha na n-Amus, airrí Conmaicne* among the Connacht forces.⁷⁹ It is difficult to find the provenance of this 'son of Áed'; *AFM* has a very full list of the fallen (and one of its sources lies behind the shorter list in *AT*); several *taísig* of Uí Briúin are among the fallen, and it is tempting to identify this person with one of those, or possibly even to make him a son of Áed *úa*

⁷⁷ If so, Donnchad mac Donnchada Finn was later reconciled to Máel Sechnaill, for he was a member of the *lucht tige* massacred in 1013.

⁷⁸ *AI* 1032.4, *AFM* 1032; *AU* 1103.5, *AFM* 1103.

⁷⁹ *AU* 1159. Note the epithet *na n-amus* 'of the mercenaries', which might suggest something about his military practices.

Rúaire, 'king of Conmaicne' and father of Tigernán Mór; though in the latter case one would expect him to have been identified as an Úa Rúaire. Alternatively, there were a couple of Áed Úa Conchobairs around who might provide a link.

Let us consider *airrí* in a more general way. If these persons were very important viceroys or governors, essential to the business of large-scale over kingship in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, why are so few mentioned in the chronicles? There are a few possibilities. If *airrí* did act as administrators in the king's absence, one would not expect them to fight, and die in the king's own battles very often. Hence they would not often be mentioned in the chronicles. Another possibility is that there were many individuals who acted as *airrí* but the chronicles do not identify them as such, perhaps because they had more significant titles of their own. To take a more reductionist view, it could be posited that in this case absence of evidence is indeed evidence of absence, and that *airrí* were simply not very common.

(ii) *Rechtaire*

As we have seen, this person was often the major-domo of the king's household, who also was involved in collecting the king's renders. Such persons are not commonly mentioned in the annals, though they occur more often than *airrí*. Ó Corráin has listed most of them in 'Nationality and Kingship'.⁸⁰ As with the *airrí* there is a limited body of evidence, and it was re-discussed by Simms in *FKTW* pp. 79-81. We shall reappraise a few of the examples here.

We have noted above that Branacán úa Maíl Uidir was styled *airrí Mide* by *AU* in recording his drowning in 1021. *AT* repeat *AU*'s record, but here he is styled *ard-rechtaire Mide*. *AFM* state:

Branacán na Maíl Uidhir airrí Midhe, do bhábadh dia Bealtuinne b-i Loch Aindind, & Mac Conailligh, primh-rechtaire Maíl Sechnaill, do éir, iar n-orráin Scrine Ciarán dóibh a n-dis. b-I c-cinn nómhaidhe iarsan orrcain.

Branacán úa Maíl Uidir *airrí* of Mide was drowned at May-day in Lough Ennell, and Mac Conailligh, *primh-rechtaire* of Maíl Sechnaill died, after the plundering of the shrine of Ciarán by them both. This was at the end of nine days after the plundering.

⁸⁰ Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', pp. 28-9.

A majority verdict suggests *AT* have conflated two persons into its *ard-rechtaire*. This suggests Mac Conaillig, or perhaps better 'the son of Conaillech', was chief *rechtaire* of Máel Sechnaill. The patronymic is also an adjective used to refer to persons from Conaille and a few ecclesiastics of Clonmacnoise are so-named, beginning with Abbot Colmán Conaillech mac Ailella who built the stone church of Clonmacnoise in association with Flann Sinna.⁸¹ There was also Díarmait, the lector who died in 1000 and Abbot Bresal, who died in 1030.⁸² It is conceivable that our *prím-rechtaire* was linked with one of these two, though that is no more than a guess; it would at least provide a context for the alleged plundering of *scrín Chiaráin*, and might hint that some kind of royal justice at Máel Sechnaill's hand was responsible for the death of *airí* Branacán (though we might be dealing with no more than a boating accident).

Some three *rechtairi* of Tulach Óc are mentioned in the annals, and all were members of the same family. Gilla Muru mac Ócáin died in 1056, Ragnall úa hÓcáin in 1103 and Donn Slébe úa hÓcáin in 1122.⁸³ *AFM* notes that the latter was also *taisech* of Cenél Fergusa. Another member of this family, Mac Cráith úa hÓcáin is named *muire* of Cenél Fergusa at his death in 1081.⁸⁴ Cenél, or Clann Fergusa were a branch of Cenél nEógain and apparently came to Tulach Óc when this area was acquired from Uí Thuirtre by the kings of Ailech.⁸⁵ Thus again members of middling nobility filled the hereditary position of *rechtaire*. The Uí Ócáin were to have a long career in subsequent centuries as guardians of the Ó Néill inauguration-site.⁸⁶

Both Ó Corráin and Simms drew attention to Gilla na Náem Úa Birnn, *ríg-rechtaire Érenn*, a distant relative of Uí Chonchobair.⁸⁷ Simms has suggested that Úa Birnn was not *ríg-rechtaire Érenn* because he had some wide administrative portfolio among his king's dominions, but rather because his status was dependent on Úa Conchobair's own status. There is one further person named *rechtaire* in the annals; Gilla Áengusa Mac Gillai Epscoip, *rechtaire* of the Monaig in south Co. Down. He was responsible for the death of Magnus Úa hEochada in 1171 and the accession of Magnus's brother Donn Slébe, though the latter put Gilla Áengusa to death in the

⁸¹ *AFM* 904.

⁸² *AFM* 999, 1030.

⁸³ *AU* 1056.7, 1103.4, *AFM* 1122.

⁸⁴ *AU* 1081.2.

⁸⁵ For discussion see Hogan, 'The Ua Briain kingship', pp. 423, 443.

⁸⁶ FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, pp. 141-2.

⁸⁷ Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', p. 29.

following year.⁸⁸ The nobles of Ulaid however put Donn Slébe himself to death for this action.

As with the *airrí*, we are left with a question posed neither by Ó Corráin nor Simms: why are so few *rechtaire* named in the annals? Here the answer must more clearly be that most *rechtaire* remained functionaries of lesser status who were mostly employed by kings at a local or personal level; their honour-price was dependent on the status of their king.⁸⁹ The Uí Ócáin were not necessarily 'governors' of Tulach Óc, because several kings of Tulach Óc existed at the same time; they might simply have been hereditary managers of the royal residence there, the role they fulfilled at a later date.

We return to the perennial problem of annalistic evidence, namely to what extent presence or absence of phenomena in chronicles is indicative of reality. That several of the important positions in the later middle ages – of military captain, admiral, *ollam* – were held by families who were (or had been) kings has been interpreted as being the outcome of two processes. The first is that it is inevitable that an overking might grant these functions (if not yet stabilized as 'offices') to his relatives or vassals. This appears to be the case for some of the *airrí*. It is normally assumed that as time went on the power and status of kings at the lower levels was eroded, and thus the second process is that these (ex-)kings secured official functions as a way of maintaining their position in the new hierarchy. This would explain why naval functions were assumed by the kings of Uí Flaithbertaig. That the power of lower levels of kings was eroded is not in doubt, but the question of status is a different one which we shall consider in detail below. In terms of establishing chronologies for the development of 'officialdom' the chronicles are a most unsafe guide. The impression is that Irish overkings were experimenting with systems and were no doubt prepared to make arrangements on differing bases as it suited them. No doubt several royal relatives or sub-kings acted as viceroys for periods of time, but only a couple of such persons are specifically called *airrí* by annalists. The *rechtaire* named in the chronicles seem to have been drawn from a lower, but still aristocratic, level of society, and though they may have acted as 'governors' or 'constables' (rather than managers comparable with the Welsh *maer*) of important strongholds the evidence is rather doubtful. The term *airrí* seems to have continued in use into the later period, though more normally with the

⁸⁸ *AU* 1171; *AFM* 1172.

⁸⁹ *CIH*, v, 1607.6, 35-9.

meaning of 'sub-king', but the *rechtaire* does not appear to have had such a long existence.⁹⁰

The Declining Status of Local Kings?

Concomitant with the increasing power of a few overkings must be the decreasing power of the rest. This conclusion seems inescapable. What seems less certain is the dependent thesis that these kings also suffered an absolute decline in their status, rather than merely a relative degradation of their position in Irish society. Ó Corráin argued that the lesser kings became less than kings. This argument deserves to be examined in some detail, as it has profound implications for our understanding of Irish society and the Irish polity. For all external models of Irish kingship, from the so-called *Song of Dermot and the Earl* onwards, have accepted that there were many kings in Ireland.⁹¹ If this plurality of kings can be reduced in number, Ireland looks less like the odd man of Europe.

Ó Corráin's evidence came mainly from the use of titles, as employed in annals and certain other texts. He pointed out that from the eighth century onwards, kings and even overkings are referred to as *dux* rather than *rex*.⁹² Wendy Davies rightly concluded that this evidence is of little consequence; instances of *dux* make up a tiny percentage of the total, and is not used consistently for the rulers of any territories.⁹³ Similarly, Etchingham has written that 'where "chief, leader, lord" is preferred to "king" in the usage of the contemporary annalist of the first millennium, it is not apparent that this constitutes any consistent or systematic indicator of the progressive subjugation of lesser polities'.⁹⁴ This is evident from a casual perusal of the annals, but a more rigorous study is required. As a test I have collected all the royal titles used in *AU* (*rex*, *rí*, *dux*, *rigdamna*, *taísech* etc.) from 800-1200. A few points about this methodology. We have already noted that *AU* and indeed all the chronicles are not uniform records; the interests, styles and density of their reporting changes over time. However, what we are interested in are relative and qualitative changes in the usage of titles; though the rulers

⁹⁰ Simms, *FKTW*, pp. 69, 79-82, 94. The obit of last recorded *rechtaire* is in *AC* 1301.7.

⁹¹ The classic quote is of course *En yrland erent reis plusur / cum alures erent les cunturs*. See G.H. Orpen (ed. & transl), *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* (Oxford 1892), ll. 2191-2; new ed. by E. Mullally, *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland: La geste des Anglais en Yrlande* (Dublin 2002).

⁹² Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', pp. 9-10.

⁹³ W. Davies, 'Celtic Kingships in the Early Middle Ages', in A.J. Duggan (ed.), *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe* (London 1993), pp. 101-24 at 106 n. 11.

⁹⁴ Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 147.

Table 16: Titles in the *Annals of Ulster*, 800-1200

Years	Rex	Dux	Rí	Ardrí	Leth-Rí	Rígdamna	Airm	Taisech	Muire	Rechtaire	Other	Total
800-825	47	2	8	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	60
826-850	46	0	23	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	1	74
851-875	38	2	17	0	7	2	0	2	0	0	1	69
876-900	40	6	12	0	5	7	0	0	0	0	0	70
901-925	11	1	50	0	0	13	0	4	0	0	0	79
926-950	5	4	35	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	1	50
951-975	0	0	55	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	60
976-1000	0	0	52	1	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	61
1001-1025	0	0	102	2	0	20	2	2	1	1	2	132
1026-1050	0	0	90	3	0	8	0	1	1	0	1	104
1051-1075	0	0	72	6	0	14	0	3	4	1	0	100
1076-1100	0	0	84	3	0	9	0	2	7	0	1	106
1101-1125	0	0	57	1	0	15	1	5	0	1	1	81
1126-1175*	1	0	57	10	0	2	1	16	1	1	0	89
1176-1200	0	0	38	2	0	6	0	17	0	0	1	64
TOTAL	188	15	752	28	17	113	5	53	14	4	10	1199

* Gap in *AU* 1132 - 1154

Rex 1126 includes Henry II

Taisech 1126 includes 1 *Ard-Toisech*

Taisech 1176 includes 1 *Ard-Toisech* and 3 *Ríg-Toisig*

Others - *Satrap* 814.10, *Imperator* 840.2, *Rígnia* 869.4, *Íarla* 932.2 1014.2 1176 (discounting *Tomrair Erll* 848.5),

Normaer 1014.2 1032.4, *Cothigerna* 1089.5, *Prim-Óthigern* 1124.1

Tánaise only occurs at 848.5

of a kingdom might be mentioned more often later on than earlier (or indeed *vice versa*), if the style of title awarded them changes we might infer something about how the annalists conceived their status. In this case, of course, we can only make detailed observations about the perceptions of the compilers and redactors of *AU*, and the exercise should be repeated for the other chronicles. *AU* refer to many kings by name without giving them a title, or talk about persons taking the 'kingship of X' without styling them 'king of X'; however it is the use of titles we are specifically interested in here. From a technical point of view, certain limitations can be applied. The usage of Latin and Irish changes over time and it is not clear that there are always exact equivalences, particularly in the case of an Irish equivalent for *dux*, so we shall consider these terms separately. Multiple instances of an identical style e.g. 'king of Ailech' in a single annal-entry are counted only once, but if an individual is given more than one style in an entry these count separately. I have also included usages such as 'two kings of Connacht' or 'two *rígdamna* of Ulaid'. Titles such as 'wife of the king of x' or 'son of the king of x' are ignored. A tabulation is shown in Table 16. Using these criteria, some 1199 titles have been collected for the period. Of these *rex* and *rí* make up by far the majority, as one might expect, constituting 75.4% of the total. Of the remainder only *rígdamna* makes any real impression. These bald statistics do not really tell us anything, so let us consider certain points in detail.

Firstly, the changing usage of *rex* and *rí* broadly accords with the switch from Latin to Irish studied by Dumville.⁹⁵ Apart from the borrowed Latin title of Henry II used in 1171, *rex* is last used in 937.6, interestingly also of an English king, Æthelstan. *Ardrí*, shown by Liam Breatnach to have been an old compound, first makes an appearance in 980.2 and increases in frequency thereafter.⁹⁶ We shall return to its usage below. *Dux* is a significant issue. Ó Corráin showed that it was used of rulers who one might expect to be called *rex* or *rí*. He particularly points to ninth-century entries in which the overkings of Mugdorna, Cenél Conaill and Uí Meic Úais are all called *duces*.⁹⁷ Whatever the annalists responsible for these styles thought about these rulers, the usage is not sustained. All subsequent references to the rulers of these three overkingdoms call them *rí*, with one exceptional reference to the Mugdorna. Similarly, references to

⁹⁵ D.N. Dumville, 'Latin and Irish in the Annals of Ulster, A.D. 431-1050', in Whitelock, McKitterick & Dumville, *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe*, pp. 320-41.

⁹⁶ Breatnach, 'Ardrí as an Old Compound'.

⁹⁷ Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', p. 9. These rulers are so-named at *AU* 883.5, 870.3, 872.2. Ó Corráin's reference to a *dux* in *AU* 869 (*ibid.*, n. 40) is incorrect, though he repeats it in 'Corcu Loígde: Land and Families', in P. O'Flanagan & C.G. Buttner (edd.), *Cork: History and Society* (Dublin 1993), pp. 63-81: 79 n. 10.

rulers of Uí Chennselaig, Ind Airthir and Fir Arda Ciannachta as *duces* are one-offs. In other words, as far as *AU* is concerned, the rulers of these places were kings down to the twelfth century. Rulers of Uí Chormaic are referred to as *dux* more than once, in 877 and 934. The only other reference to an Uí Chormaic ruler names him as king, in 814. These Uí Chormaic (probably of Airgíalla) fade from history after the ninth century, so we cannot say much more about them. A few other instances of *dux* may be explained on particular grounds, e.g. *dux Gaileng Collumrach* refers to a small group of Gailenga within Ard Ciannachta, who might not be expected to have had their own king.⁹⁸ Similarly the ruler of Uí Meic Úais 'of the north' might be called *dux* because he did not rule all of Uí Meic Úais.

The obvious question is then to ask what vernacular term *dux* was supposed to be equivalent to, and whether it had much mileage after the abandonment of *dux*.⁹⁹ Though Ó Corráin did not explicitly connect *dux* with any single Irish term, he offered *taísech* and *tigerna* as possibilities, and implied that the main twelfth-century equivalent is *taísech*.¹⁰⁰ In fact the term *taísech* is mostly not used in *AU* for rulers whose predecessors had been called *ríg*. The majority of *taísig* named in *AU* are rulers of aristocratic families of Cenél nEógain such as Clann Díarmata and Muintir Birn. Most of the instances come in the late twelfth century when *AU* and its Derry annalists were particularly concerned with local politics. There are, however, several pre-twelfth century instances where *taísech* is used of rulers of kingdoms. These include *taísech Mugdorna m-Breg* 869.5 (and we recall the Mugdorna Breg are awarded a *dux* in 883), *taísech Oa Forindan* 869.5, *taísech Cenél Máelche* 914.3, *taísech H. Lomain Gáela* 916.4. The title for the ruler of Uí Forannáin seems consistent inasmuch as they are awarded a *dux* in 824.1; they are not mentioned elsewhere in *AU*. The last two are little-known kindreds (of Ulaid, and probably Laigin) who are not mentioned elsewhere as possessing kings.

In other cases, the rulers are named chronologically first as *taísech* and then as *rí*. For example, the *taísech* of Síl Duibthíre died as part of Áed mac Néill's northern army in 914; the only other mentions of rulers of this dynasty are three successive *úa* Laithéins in the late eleventh century, all called *rí*.¹⁰¹ Similarly, the *taísech* of Uí Bresail Macha fell in the same engagement in 914, but his successors in the eleventh century are

⁹⁸ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 273, Table 6.6 n. 5.

⁹⁹ A further question is the source of the Irish use of *dux*, whether taken from the Bible or elsewhere; this matter, however predates the period with which we are presently concerned.

¹⁰⁰ Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', p. 10. Cf. G. Mac Niocaill, 'À propos du vocabulaire social irlandais du bas moyen âge', *EC* 12 (1971), 512-46.

¹⁰¹ *AU* 914.7; 1062.6, 1086.7, 1089.4.

all called *rí*.¹⁰² This variation is not restricted to Airgíallan peoples in the vicinity of Armagh. Two brothers reigned successively as leaders of *Síl nAnmchada* in *Uí Maine* in the early eleventh century; the first died in 1007 and is called *taísech* whereas his brother who died in 1027 is called *rí*.¹⁰³ A later ruler of *Síl nAnmchada* is also called *rí*.¹⁰⁴ Overall, as far as the evidence of *AU* goes, though there are some hints that certain rulers were downgraded in status from *rí* to *taísech*, it is hardly conclusive that such a process was in continual progress across Ireland. Most *taísig* were not successors of kings, but rather rulers of kin-groups or districts at a level more local than the kingdom. When rulers of such groups are occasionally called *rí* one wonders if the annalists are acknowledging a temporary rise in status due to circumstances not made clear in the historical record.

Ó Corráin's other main piece of evidence for the downgrading of kings is the tract known by various titles but perhaps most simply as *Dúchusaich Corcu Laídi* 'the hereditary proprietors of the Corcu Laígde'.¹⁰⁵ This short text gives a list of the districts (*túatha*) making up the kingdom of Corcu Laígde, in most cases the rulers (*taísig*) of those districts, and the *óclaig dúthaig* 'hereditary lords' i.e. landed gentry of each *túath*. It is hard to define the genre and indeed purpose of this text; in some respects it shares features with parts of the somewhat later text *Nósa Ua Maine* 'The Customs of Uí Maine' which names the lords of various districts (though the term there is normally *flaith*) and does not go as low as the level of *túath*.¹⁰⁶

Ó Corráin's main point is that the six listed *túatha* are each said to be ruled over by a *taísech*, and indeed some of the *túatha* are named after the families of which the local *taísech* is head. In his introduction to the text, Ó Corráin, after taking a paragraph to dispose of Binchy's 'tribal' *rí túaithe*, states that the *taísig* of Corcu Laígde were equivalent to the *rig túaithe* of earlier times.¹⁰⁷ *Taísech* could be used as the term used for a ruler of a *túath* in the late twelfth century; the terminology is also found in a roughly-

¹⁰² *AU* 914.7; 1018.8, 1037.3, 1044.2, 1047.3 (the last two illustrating a feud among *Uí Bresail*), 1054.2.

¹⁰³ *AU* 1007.5, 1027.2. The last-named king of *Síl nAnmchada* in the pedigrees (ed. *CGH*, p. 439) is Godra mac Dúnadaig. It is possible he is the same as Dogra mac Dúnadaig who died in 1027, though *AFM* refer to a 'grandson of Gadhra úa Dúnadaigh' in 1069. A third brother, Diarmait mac Dúnadaig, was killed in 998 according to *AFM*.

¹⁰⁴ *AU* 1096.6. For discussion, see Kelleher, 'Uí Maine in the Annals and Genealogies'; M. Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Nósa Ua Maine: Fact or Fiction?', in Charles-Edwards, Owen & Russell, *The Welsh King and his Court*, pp. 362-81.

¹⁰⁵ Ed. J. O'Donovan, 'The Genealogy of the Corca Laidhe', in *Miscellany of the Celtic Society* (Dublin 1849), pp. 48-56; re-ed. by Ó Corráin, 'Corcu Loígde: Land and Families'.

¹⁰⁶ Ed. & transl. P. Russell, 'Nósa Ua Maine: "The Customs of the Uí Mhaine"', in Charles-Edwards, Owen & Russell, *The Welsh King and his Court*, pp. 527-51; for discussion see Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Nósa Ua Maine'.

¹⁰⁷ Ó Corráin, 'Corcu Loígde', p. 64.

contemporary tract on the lands of Fir Maige Féne.¹⁰⁸ The question is whether the component *túatha* of twelfth-century Corcu Laígde were once ruled over by kings or not. As far as I can see, this cannot be demonstrated from chronicle-evidence, but we should not necessarily expect small local sub-kings in Corcu Laígde to be noticed by annalists. The genealogies of Corcu Laígde suggest that some of these families claimed relationship with the royal dynasty, but this does not require them to have been kings themselves.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin* refers at one point to the ruler of Corcu Laígde as an *airdrí*.¹¹⁰ Leaving aside the complexities of that term for a moment, the usage, in admittedly a literary context, suggests that there were sub-kings of Corcu Laígde. Yet nowhere else in that text are sub-kings of Corcu Laígde alluded to; when its king, Illann mac Scannláin, gathers together the leading people of his realm they are called *maithi* 'nobles'. The employment of *ardrí* (in the context of Illann's son acquiring kingship after dynastic feud and murder) may well be rhetorical; yet, it is suggestive.¹¹¹

The biggest difficulty is Ó Corráin's starting point: that the normal term for the ruler of a *túath* in the earlier period was *rí*. The *rí túaithe* of the laws has become such a feature of modern historiography that it is doubtful whether we shall ever get rid of him. In Ó Corráin's estimation, *túath*-kingdoms were losing their kings (and by implication, independence) as early as the period of the law-tracts.¹¹² He cited for this the famous legal maxim *niba tuath tuath gan eagna gan egluis gan filidh gan rígh* 'a *túath* without a scholar, church, poet and king is no *túath*'.¹¹³ Of course, there is no reason to require that *túath* here has the technical sense of 'small kingdom' rather than 'people', or even if it did that the *rí* should be unique to that individual *túath*. In the twelfth century the *táisech* was the lord of a local district, often called a *túath*, but it is not certain that all such districts had once been kingdoms immediately ruled by kings. Indeed, as Ó Corráin showed, the *túatha* of the tract on Corcu Laígde are 'more like a group of local parishes

¹⁰⁸ J. G. O'Keeffe (ed. & transl.), 'The Ancient Territory of Fermoy', *Ériu* 10 (1926-8), 170-89. It is not certain that *Dúchusaich Corco Laídi* dates to the latter part of the twelfth century rather than the thirteenth, but it is very likely the conditions described pertained in the period shortly before the Norman *adventus*.

¹⁰⁹ CGH, pp. 260-1.

¹¹⁰ Binchy, *Scéla Cano*, 1444.

¹¹¹ In this regard it might also be relevant that the Uí Eterscéoil kings of Corcu Laígde managed to make Ross an episcopal see in the twelfth century. Though Byrne suggests this might be connected with their former power in Munster (*IKHK*, p. 180) it probably has more to do with internal Munster politics of the period.

¹¹² Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship', p. 9.

¹¹³ *CIH*, iv, 1123.32; for context see E.J. Gwynn (ed.), 'An Old-Irish Tract on the Privileges and Responsibilities of Poets', *Ériu* 13 (1942), 1-60, 220-36.

than a kingdom'.¹¹⁴ The confusion arises from the fact that two different questions have been elided. One is as to the nature of *túath*, and how that term evolved over the centuries; the question of *rí* as opposed to *taísech* is a related, but separate issue. If we are really to suppose that somewhere as small as Corcu Laígde was made up of six or more *túatha* and that each was once ruled by a king, and that this was typical, then the 185 kingdoms which Ó Corráin scoffed at suddenly become something in the order of several hundreds. This cannot be correct, at least in the historic period. The greatest difficulty, alluded to in Chapter I, is that the terminology of Irish kingship remains frustratingly obscure. The *túath* in the legal maxim might mean simply 'a people', i.e. a population group such as Corcu Mo Druad, Uí Chennselaig, Dál nAraide. This at any rate chimes with the evidence of ecclesiastical organisation, where styles like 'bishop of *túath* x' are uncommon.¹¹⁵ We simply do not understand enough of the building blocks of the Irish polity to be able to judge social developments such as these, and a considerable amount of work needs to be done on the pre-800 period. How did land-measures such as *trícha cé* fit into the picture?¹¹⁶ In the tract on Fir Maige Féne the territory is made up of two *trícha cé* each composed of eight *túatha*. At the moment it is impossible to state what the primary units of the Irish polity were, whether kingdoms named in annals and literary texts or smaller entities which may or may not be represented by *túatha*.¹¹⁷ It is likely that the pyramidal model of kingship derived from *Críth Gablach* cannot be employed to describe accurately conditions in the ninth and subsequent centuries. The Irish political scene was far more variegated; there were numerous kingdoms, some larger, some smaller, many in relations of subordination to others, and these relationships were complex and often shifting, though occasionally very stable over long durations. In this context Etchingham has suggested that we should envisage 'a cycle of agglomeration, fragmentation and new consolidation, with the corollary that greater and lesser polities alike were in the process of emerging at all times'.¹¹⁸

It seems then that we cannot detect a degradation of the status of the *rí* across the board. However, there are a few hints (beyond the references noted above) that this

¹¹⁴ Ó Corráin, 'Corcu Loígde', p. 64.

¹¹⁵ Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 141-8, 178-94.

¹¹⁶ The key study remains J. Hogan, 'The Trícha Cé and Related Land-Measures', *PRLA* 38 C (1929), 148-235. Though some of his speculations on the origins of the term in the military organisation of Iron-Age Ireland derive from then-held notions about the historical value of the Ulster Cycle tales and must be dismissed, his important work in gathering together lists of named *trícha cé(a)* provide a useful basis for further work.

¹¹⁷ Dumville, 'Anglo-Saxon and Celtic Overkingships', 85-6.

¹¹⁸ Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 148.

took place in some circumstances. The styles used in the Kells *notitiae*, an important indicator (along with inscribed monuments and metalwork) as to how eleventh- and twelfth-century kings perceived themselves, provide further evidence in this regard. As Davies pointed out, the local kings named in these records (e.g. of Brega, Luigne, Saitne) all retain the title *rí*; they are not downgraded to *taísech* or *tigerna*, even when named alongside overkings of Mide or Bréifne.¹¹⁹ The one exception, picked up by Ó Corráin, is in one of the reconstructed Kells *notitiae*, which was witnessed by Cellach Úa Cellaig, king of Brega, and one Úa Donngaile, *taísech túaithi Cnogba* 'lord of the *túath* of Knowth'.¹²⁰ This person's affiliations are entirely unknown. Úa Cellaig's ancestors (or rather, collateral ancestors) had occasionally used the title *rí Cnogba* as rulers of north Brega or all Brega, but are mostly just termed *rí Breg* by annalists. Byrne noted that other groups are noted as being lords in the Knowth area in the later medieval period, implying that Úa Donngaile was not a member of a longstanding family in the area; Byrne suggests he was related to the kings of Gailenga, but this is a guess.¹²¹ Taking the text on Corcu Laígde as a comparison, one might suggest that *túath Cnogba* simply implied the district immediately around Knowth, and need not be equated with any earlier kingdom.

On the other hand, the twelfth-century Latin charters (and occasionally Latin hagiography) do award inferior status to kings called *rí* in Irish.¹²² In these cases points are probably being made about the superior king's status. We must also allow for the influence of continental models and practices (of the Augustinians or Cistercians) in the writing of these few surviving documents. The earliest example is Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn's charter to the Cistercians of Newry; though he is styled *rex totius Hiberniae*, his magnates retain the title of *rex*.¹²³ Of course, throughout the colonial period rulers known as kings in Irish were afforded lower status by the English administration.

One further point on the question of *taísig*. Ó Corráin, and other scholars, have treated *rí* and *taísech* as mutually exclusive. Yet is it not possible that a kingdom or royal kin-group could have both a *rí* and *taísech* in some instances?¹²⁴ The idea is difficult to sustain, but it has been noted that administrative and military titles were often based on

¹¹⁹ Davies, 'Celtic Kingships', p. 106 n. 11.

¹²⁰ Mac Niocaill, 'The Irish "Charters"', No. 9.

¹²¹ Byrne, 'Historical Note on Cnogba', 398-9.

¹²² E.g. Díarmait Mac Murchada's charters to Killenny, which style Úa Ráin *dux* of Uí Dróna. For discussion see Flanagan, 'Strategies of Lordship', p. 116.

¹²³ Byrne, 'The Trembling Sod', p. 12.

¹²⁴ One objection is that the legal tract *Míadslechtsa* speaks of the *aire tuiseo* as one who 'leads his own kindred to the king and speaks for them' (*dofet fine comcenel do co rig 7 aroskaba*, CIH, ii, 583.28). *Críth Gablach* states this man is *taísech a ceniul* 'chief of his kindred'; but an equivalence is not required.

the term *taísech* e.g. *taísech marcsluaige* 'chief of the cavalry-host'.¹²⁵ The term *taísech* is used in a general sense of 'chieftain' for Scandinavians (e.g. *AU* 837.9) thus we should not necessarily expect it to always refer to a role mutually exclusive with kingship. The existence of a few persons named *ríghaísech* in the north in the very late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries is a further complication which would repay investigation.¹²⁶ Evidence from Scotland suggests that functionally, the positions of *rí* and *taísech* were different. The *notitiae* in the Book of Deer note grants of a *cuít toíseg* and a *cuít rígh*, translated by Jackson as '*taísech*'s dues' and 'king's dues'; the grantors were separate people.¹²⁷ Yet in the same notice someone is said to be both a *mórmáer* and a *taísech*; thus, even though the functions (and appropriate donations) of certain noble ranks were different, they could be combined.

Finally we must briefly consider the reverse situation, namely the terminology employed at the top of the scale by the overkings who aggrandized their power at the expense of these local *ríg*. The most important term is *ardrí*, literally 'high-king' but here normally translated as 'overking'.¹²⁸ It has long been recognised that this term was not simply used of the great provincial kings competing for island-wide lordship, but also for local overkings. In *AU* it is used sparingly, making an appearance in 980 but otherwise occurring in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It is used most often for overkings of Airgíalla, several times for overkings of Ireland or Scotland, four times for overkings of Connacht and once each for Ailech, Ulaid, Mumu and Laigin (the last as *airdrí Laigen & Osraigi*). The only oddity is the appearance of *airdrí H. n-Echach Muman* in 1063.3, and this occurs very close to the one mention of *airdrí Muman* (of Donnchad mac Briáin dying in Rome) in 1064.4. The term occurs more frequently in *AT*, which one might expect as *AT* have a greater fondness for *ard-* compounds (e.g. *ard-saí*, *ard-epscoip*, *ard-taísech*). The usage broadly agrees with *AU* in terms of kings of Ireland, Scotland and the Irish provinces (here a couple of kings of Mide are named: *airdrí Temrach* 1094, *airdrí Midhe* 1153). Generally speaking the formulation is relatively rare, and again there are a couple of oddities, namely *airdrí Teftha* in 1067 and *airdrí h-Úa Maine* in 1074. These are one-offs, and that they are references to kings with overlordships at no great distance from Clonmacnoise might suggest an honorific use of the title. The problem is what annalists (and other writers) thought *airdrí* signified. Its

¹²⁵ E.g. *AU* 1170.

¹²⁶ *AU* 1181, 1185; *AFM* 1202. The term also occurs in *AFM* 1047, where it clearly refers to members of royal families.

¹²⁷ Jackson, *The Gaelic Notes*, pp. 30-1, 34.

¹²⁸ Ó Corráin discusses the term briefly in his review of *IKHK*, 153-4.

meaning most probably varied and like many Gaelic titles could often carry an element of rhetorical force unmatched by reality (this could be the case for *airdrí Úa Echach Muman* and our *airdrí Corcu Laígi* of *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*).¹²⁹

To summarise, in the late twelfth century as much as the ninth, the normal term for the ruler of a kingdom was *rí*, while certain overkings could be awarded more inflated titles, on the significance of which point more work is needed. Though there is slight annalistic evidence for kings (and even overkings) being awarded lesser titles, principally *dux*, the use is sporadic, and unsustained. In fact, one wonders whether it was more common occasionally to upgrade the titles of lesser nobility, rather than downgrade the status of kings; if such a tendency could be found, it could explain the rare (and sometimes hapax) references to such rulers as *rí Úa Dorthainn* and *rí Úa Gobla*.¹³⁰ These persons were probably rulers local to the respective centres of annalistic recording; we might expect the annalists to award more impressive styles to local nobility, but one could posit *contra* that the local annalists were noticing genuine kings who escaped the attention of records kept further afield.

There were only a few occasions in which overkings attempted to set up complete outsiders in a kingdom. The overlordship of Dublin was the only one of these which seems to have met with any success, for example the reign there of Muirchertach Úa Briain (1075-1086).¹³¹ Several later kings were imposed from Dublin from the outside, including Muirchertach's own son Domnall, several kings of Leinster, and Conchobar, the son of Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair.¹³² Yet Dublin was not a historic Irish kingdom. Attempts to install outsider kings in such kingdoms largely did not meet with success; Conchobar Úa Conchobair, who had been king in Dublin, was installed by his father Tairdelbach in Mide, but he was dead within months.¹³³ We may also consider Conchobar and Cennétig Úa Brián, two members of the branch of that dynasty descended from Donnchad mac Briain which had lost the civil war in Munster in the closing years of Donnchad's reign.¹³⁴ Apparently driven into exile, these two found

¹²⁹ Of course the rhetoric was more often conceived in terms of territorial sway, rather in terms of the office itself; such explanations are normally invoked for the alleged kings of Ireland anterior to Máel Sechnaill I (for discussion see Dumville, 'Anglo-Saxon and Celtic Overkingships', 88-92). At all periods poetic texts could massage royal egos by means of inflated styles; for interesting late medieval examples (including the application of *rí Temrach* to a ruler in the Isles) see W. McLeod, 'Rí Insi Gall, Rí Fionnghall, Ceannas nan Gàidheal: Sovereignty and Rhetoric in the Late Medieval Hebrides', *CMCS* 43 (Summer 2002), 25-48.

¹³⁰ *AU* 1009.3; 1072.5.

¹³¹ *AI* 1075.5; 1086.7.

¹³² Summarised in *NHI*, ix, pp. 208-9.

¹³³ See above, p. 44.

¹³⁴ Hogan, 'The Ua Briain Kingship', pp. 428-30.

favour with the Cenél nEógain kings such that Conchobar was installed in the sub-kingship of Tulach Óc. Yet he and his queen were killed by the Cenél mBinnig Glinne, *AI* adding that this was done *iar n-gabáil ríge* 'after he had taken the kingship', though not necessarily immediately afterward.¹³⁵ Here again the wishes of an overking (Áed mac Néill) were apparently resented by a local people. Conchobar was succeeded by his brother Cennétig, whose daughter Béinn married Áed's cousin Domnall úa Lochlainn; it is possible that this marriage was contracted around 1078.¹³⁶ It is interesting then, that according to *AFM* 1078 Cennétig assumed the kingship of Gailenga, possibly under the patronage of Áed or Donnchad Cáel Úa Rúairc. This arrangement may have persisted until the battle of Móin Chruinneóice in 1084, in which Cennétig fell.¹³⁷ The political circumstances surrounding these events was admirably analysed by Hogan, but a reappraisal may be timely, particularly in terms of what it might tell us about the changing nature of kingship. Yet, all these outsiders were very much in a minority. Though Tairdelbach Úa Conchobair did install his son in Mide, this was only after he had attempted to settle the kingship on native rulers several times.¹³⁸ This perseverance may also reflect the continuing importance of the status of long-established kingships.

Developments in the Articulation of Royal Ideas

One area in which the kings of the ninth century and later can definitely be seen to innovate is in the field of dynastic propaganda. Máel Sechnaill mac Maíl Rúanaid, as we have seen, had his name carved upon imposing high crosses at significant church-sites in the landscape. Other kings emulated his example. In literary terms, authors articulated the authority of kings and indeed dynasties in complex ways. Praise-poetry is the most obvious, but panegyric was an ancient mode and the kings of our period inherited a fully-developed tradition.¹³⁹ Other poetic forms, those of genealogy and regnal list (which also existed in prose, of course) we shall turn to below. What is normally seen as a new development is the beginnings of a genre of historicist texts, specifically the great twelfth-century texts *Cocad Gáedel re Gallaib*, *Caithréim Cellacháin Chaisil* and *A Muirchertaig mac Néill náir*. These works operated at several levels, but the basic intention seems to be that in glorifying the deeds of a significant ancestor they

¹³⁵ *AU AI* 1078.3; Hogan, 'The Ua Briain Kingship', pp. 432-3.

¹³⁶ *AU* 1110.8; Hogan, 'The Ua Briain Kingship' p. 434.

¹³⁷ See above, pp. 213.

¹³⁸ See above, pp. 43-4.

¹³⁹ For further discussion see Mac Cana, 'Canu Mawl', and *idem*, 'Praise Poetry'.

secondarily praised his current descendant and justified his actions by historical precedent. *Cocad Gáedel re Gallaib* is the most sophisticated of these works, and quickly circulated in Ireland where it was subject to revision in the interests of keeping its relevance to different audiences.¹⁴⁰ It was originally written in the interests of Muirchertach Úa Bríain, who in several respects, principally his embrace of Church reform, was a moderniser. Yet we have also seen that there is reasonable circumstantial evidence that much of the Osraige material preserved in *FAI* was composed in the reign of Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic, which if correct makes him (or his advisors) the true innovator in this regard. He certainly made a new departure in celebrating *Áenach Carmain* in 1033. On the other hand, we should not imagine that these historicist texts suddenly emerged from nowhere in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Many of their themes and occupations already existed in Irish literature. The stories of Níall Noígíallach at whatever period served historicist purposes for Uí Néill. We have seen that the Uí Néill origin-legend *Temair Breg, Baile na Fíán* may be associated with the reign of Máel Sechnaill II. The deeds of other legendary and historical heroes must have played well in the halls of kings who considered themselves descendants. The particular developments of the eleventh and twelfth centuries included a particular focus on recent history as opposed to the distant past, and the incorporation of overtly 'historical' evidence as justification (such as the annalistic material in *Cocad Gáedel re Gallaib*). We have seen that *Lebor na Cert* is a schematized conception of the nature and transactions of over kingship in Ireland in its time, but one which may well have some basis in reality. Again, this work did not appear out of the ether but is clearly a development of the old genre which includes the 'Poem on the Airgíalla', and the genre would have a productive life into the later middle ages.¹⁴¹

We have made points about the consolidation of genealogies and the use of surnames. On the genealogical side, several motivations for connecting peoples may be discerned. The first, as we have already mentioned, is intimately connected to the nature of overlordship: peoples claiming kinship with the ruling dynasty were subject to less burden than *aithechthúatha*. The primary ruling dynasty was subject to segmentation, and the segmentary families gained control of territory (possibly extirpating 'native' rulers in the process). It is a paradox that segmentation and conquest, the methods by which it is

¹⁴⁰ Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Bréifne Bias'.

¹⁴¹ E.g. M. Dillon (ed. & transl.), 'Ceart Uí Néill', *Studia Celtica* 1 (1966), 14-18; J.G. O'Keeffe (ed.), 'Quartering Rights of the Uí Domhnaill over Ulster', in J. Fraser *et al.* (edd.), *Irish Texts*, iv (London 1934), pp. 29-30.

usually imagined that the great dynasties acquired control in their provinces, should also be cited by Byrne as a source of economic deprivation for Mide. The other main problem, particularly for the earliest centuries which are beyond the scope of this work, is the question of the genuineness or otherwise of dynastic links. The genealogical scheme linking the Uí Néill was largely in place by the time of Tírechán, but we are far less certain about the antiquity of supposed relationships among the Eóganachta and particularly the Uí Briúin. This brings us to another possibility: that originally 'native' local ruling groups were co-opted by the primary dynasty and had links provided for them, in return for nominal submission, which from the point of view of the native group had the attraction of giving them more honourable status, and removing from them burdens such as tribute. Moreover, the creation of such a link might, theoretically, have dangled the prospect of overkingship in front of the native dynasty.

In practice, external peoples probably acquired kingship first by dint of power and then provided the legitimating tools later, but there is no way to be certain. Our main examples of this phenomenon are well-documented because they operated at or near the provincial level – Dál Cais, Osraige and Bréifne – but one can imagine it happening at the level of smaller kingdoms too. It is still unclear at what point the ruling dynasty of In Déis Túaiscirt created the link via Cormac Cass to the Eóganachta. Mathgamain was their first king to take the kingship of Munster, but *AI* call his father Cennétig *rígdamna Caisil* at his death.¹⁴² *AI* are a partisan compilation and this use of terminology need not be accepted at face value, but it does suggest that a putative genealogical qualification was in place by the mid-tenth century. There was no question, of course, of a 'genuine' hereditary qualification for the kingship of Munster, i.e. that ancestors of the Dál Cais kings had ruled Munster within the last three generations; in this respect *Realpolitik* carried the day. It is striking however, that in the cases of Dál Cais, Osraige, and possibly Bréifne, a linking pedigree was felt necessary to legitimise rule. As noted above, one wonders to what extent these re-writings of history fooled anybody or were simply an 'accepted lie'. The guardians of genealogical *senchas*, whether secular or ecclesiastic, were often related to these ruling dynasties and played an important role in the promulgation and acceptance of these doctrines. The ultimate arbiter was whether the arriviste dynasty could make their usurpation stick. Dál Cais were very successful; Uí Rúairc of Bréifne occasionally so, but ultimately excluded by the power of Uí Chonchobair; the dynasty of Osraige were only able to retain the

¹⁴² *AI* 951.2.

kingship of Leinster for a few years, and ultimately their success in realigning Osraige with its eastern rather than western neighbour was to backfire on them, when in the twelfth century Mac Murchada arbitrated in their kingdom as if it were a petty component of Leinster.

As a final thought we can turn to the 'antiquarian' or 'synthetic history' movement of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹⁴³ This is in some measure considered to have been a scholastic exercise, and certainly as a process of collecting the mass of Irish pseudohistorical material and fitting it into a framework of world history it is removed, in some respects, from the direct propaganda needs of contemporary dynasties. Yet these matters became interconnected. The poetic king-lists of the dynasties of Ailech, Mide and Brega attributed to Flann Mainistrech might have acted as a tool for glorifying those venerable kingships just as much as genealogies did.¹⁴⁴ The poetic epitomes of the deaths of those kings (often in heroic battles, almost mini-catalogues of *aideda* or death tales) certainly acted as frameworks for understanding the history of kingdoms and dynasties.¹⁴⁵ It is clear that the Irish were well aware of themselves as a *natio*, even if they originally comprised diverse elements such as *Féni*, *Gaileóin*, *Érainn* and *Ulaid*.¹⁴⁶ As time went on the traditions epitomised by the various recensions of *Lebor Gabála Érenn* gradually linked all these peoples with each other, and the perception of the *Gáidil* as a distinct race was no doubt hastened by the arrival of the Scandinavian *gaill*. By the twelfth century all the significant peoples and dynasties in Ireland had been awarded descent from the sons of Míl Espaine.¹⁴⁷ If a pseudo-historical genealogical legitimation such as that created for Dál Cais (Cennétig was twenty generations from the nodal point at which Dál Cais met Eóganachta) or Osraige (Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic was thirty-three generations removed from common ancestry with the Laigin) was felt to carry with them some kind of title or hereditary right, then the creation of a unified genealogical myth may well have been more closely linked with the developing idea of a 'kingship of Ireland' than has previously been

¹⁴³ As exemplified by the production of *Lebor Gabála Érenn*. See R.M. Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála – Part I: The Growth of the Text', *Ériu* 38 (1987), 81-142; *idem*, 'Leabhar Gabhála – Part II: The Growth of the Tradition', *Ériu* 39 (1988), 1-66; J. Carey, *A New Introduction to Lebor Gabála Érenn* (London 1993). See also P.J. Smith, 'Early Irish Historical Verse: the Evolution of a Genre', in Ní Chatháin & Richter, *Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: Texts and Transmission*, pp. 326-41.

¹⁴⁴ MacNeill, 'Poems by Flann Mainistrech'.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, No. IV.

¹⁴⁶ Ó Corráin 'Nationality and Kingship', pp. 6-8; cf. Charles-Edwards, *ECI*, pp. 579-80.

¹⁴⁷ B. Jaski, 'We are of the Greeks in our Origin: New Perspectives on the Irish Origin Legend', *CMCS* 46 (Winter 2003), 1-53.

thought.¹⁴⁸ Influence probably proceeded in both directions at different times, but this must be a matter for future study.

¹⁴⁸ I use the term 'nodal point' as a technical term for where pedigrees link; the Irish texts themselves occasionally use the term *léithreann* (probably originally referring to string sockets on a harp or similar attaching points on harnesses) for these points, which D. Broun (pers. comm.) has translated as 'apical link'.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined a number of questions in detail and it is now time to take stock. Throughout, it has become clear that the dynamic model of kingship can be refined in several ways. Irish dynasties were not monolithic institutions, even when they had been in existence for several hundred years. It is notable that Clann Cholmáin, despite the centrifugal forces which attended the claims of the several branches of the dynasty, retained the kingship of Tara within what was effectively a single line for many generations. Moreover, we have seen that successive kings from that dynasty employed various strategies to consolidate and promote their overkingship, whether marriage-alliance, literary expression, or church patronage. It is apparent that the notion that Mide 'collapsed' after 1022 is rather wide of the mark. For Clann Cholmáin, as for all dynasties, certain royal centres were key to the practice of kingship. In the case of the Eóganachta, Cashel became the pole about which the profoundly Christian construct of their kingship revolved. The stories about Corc and Cashel did not come *ex nihilo* but reflected the sophisticated early Christian culture of southern Ireland, a culture that was in touch with currents on the Continent. Even when the Uí Bríain had become the paramount kings in Munster, the Meic Carthaig were still able to utilize the special dignity of the site of Cashel, and the level of continuity is striking. The early Eóganachta hegemony, as mediated to us through literary texts such as *Frithfolad Caisil*, was a negotiated settlement between the overkings and the local kingdoms. Yet throughout our period, capable rulers strove to extend their overlordship, and here we have gained a more nuanced understanding of how the processes of peacemaking, hostage-taking and submission worked. The struggles of the Meic Lochlainn kings, at both a regional level with respect to the Ulaid, and at an interprovincial level with respect to the Uí Bríain and other kings, illustrates the determinedness with which the great overkings of the eleventh and twelfth centuries set about competing for an island-wide overlordship. *Lebor na Cert* is one of several texts which attempt to articulate such an overlordship, and we have seen that it has a good deal more applicability to historical reality than some previous commentators have supposed.

It was not only the great provincial overkings who provide significant examples of royal practice. The kings of Bréifne and Osraige, both 'second-tier' kingdoms, achieved considerable success at the provincial and even interprovincial levels. Bréifne's acquisition of territory is remarkable, while the kings of Osraige seem to be important

innovators in the matter of dynastic literary expression and propaganda. The self-awareness of the kings of Osraige (or their supporters) apparently demonstrated by the narratives in *FAI* is notable, and if those narratives are really to be associated with the reign of Donnchad mac Gillai Phátraic then Osraige produced this kind of historicist material two generations before the Uí Bríain or Meic Carthaig.

In the final chapter we reassessed the extent to which kingship itself could be said to have developed during the Central Middle Ages. That the great provincial kings extended the area under their theoretical overlordship is not in doubt, nor that local kings suffered a corresponding decline in political importance. Several of the mechanisms by which overkings attempted to control their domains have been re-examined. On the evidence of titulature, at least, local Irish kings did not undergo a decline in status concomitant with their decline in power, and in most cases they were not relegated to the level of *taisech* by the end of the twelfth century. This attests to a remarkable persistence of very old political units, namely the local kingdoms, even in the face of aggression from overkings. Though a local king in one district may well have had no more power than a *taisech* somewhere else, he was still called a king and there was still something special about the nature of his office, even if he also served in a military or administrative capacity for an overking. Doherty has asserted that 'many of these officials [such as *airríg* and *rechtaire*] were given the honorary title of "king" within their own lordship, but effective political power was exercised by their overlords the greatest kings'.¹ The second part of this sentence receives ready assent from the present writer, but the first part is startling. This seems to be an extraordinary imposition on the evidence – namely that local kings were still called kings, but were not in fact kings. If one extended such logic backwards, one could suggest that there were no kings of consequence below the provincial level at any time after the eighth century, and that *rí* was simply a matter of courtesy. The present study shows that this was not the case. Certainly, there are numerous instances of powerful overkings disregarding the historical dignity of a kingdom or kingship: dividing territories and appropriating lands for themselves; putting other kings to death, even in violation of oaths and guarantees; installing different kings, or dividing a kingdom between rival members of the same dynasty. Yet it was extremely rare for an overking to impose an outsider; those who did generally met with little success. Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair only did so in Mide after attempts to accommodate (from his point of view) the native dynasty failed.

¹ Doherty, 'The Vikings in Ireland', p. 313.

At the outset, the stated aim was to examine closely the practices and strategies of Irish kings in different aspects of kingship over a period of several centuries. There are several ways in which the practice of kingship did develop, and innovate. In other respects the nature of kingly practice remained qualitatively similar, even if the stages of action became much larger, and this thesis has attempted to highlight the different kinds of development. An additional aim was to add to our understanding of the history of dynasties and kingdoms, and this has in large measure been achieved (though constraints of space have meant that the detailed reconstructed narratives which underlie much of the analysis have not appeared here). There are several logical extensions for future work. Firstly, other dynasties could be studied in the manner which has been done here. Secondly, one could move backwards into the period from the fifth to the eighth centuries and development of kingship in that period. It must be said however, that sources for the period studied here are exceptionally rich in comparison, and many more investigations of texts and contexts within the central middle ages could be undertaken. In several respects, here we have gained a better appreciation of a number of texts, and what they have to tell us about the practice of kingship. The chronicles themselves, though the bedrock upon which this study is based, give us a useful framework within which to understand royal practice, but there is much they cannot tell us. However, it is clear that in most cases the disparate bits of literary, historical or even inscriptional evidence from the different regions of Ireland can be given contexts within the practice of kingship as it changed over time. The analyses here have confirmed the validity of the dynamic model of kingship, but have also helped to refine and particularise it. Future accounts of the nature of Irish kingship will need to take greater account of the multifaceted and polycentric nature of the Irish polity and of the Irish kingships, as well as the need for diachronic appreciations of those institutions. In discussing early Irish kingship we should always be aware of the various elements it could accommodate – it looked both back to the ancestral past, and forward to new kinds of political structures – inwards to the native Irish institutions which shaped all levels of society, and outwards to ideas coming from Britain and the Continent, places which in turn benefited from Irish ideas. Above all, Irish kingship was distinctive, and though we might be inclined to minimise the differences between Irish kings and their European neighbours, their distinctiveness, whether or not due to ‘the way they’re raised’ will always single them out for special investigation.

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