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The organisation and operation of Uí Néill kingship in the Irish midlands: Clann Cholmáin *c.*550-916.

Eoin O'Flynn

Submitted for the degree of PhD
Trinity College Dublin
2011

Declaration

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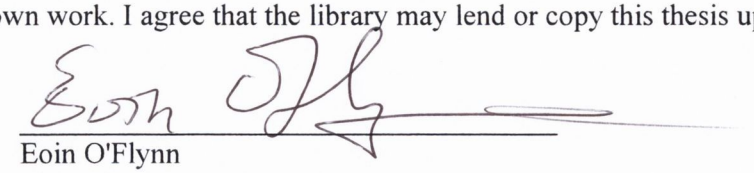
Signed: 

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Summary

This study traces the fortunes of the midland Uí Néill dynasty Clann Cholmáin from the period of our earliest documentary sources, about the mid-sixth century, until the death of the early tenth century king Flann Sinna. It is firstly argued that a recent suggestion that the dynasty's eponymous founder, Colmán Már, represents an eighth century genealogical contrivance is seriously flawed. This study then goes on to further highlight the organised, hierarchical but flexible system of kingship operated by Clann Cholmáin in the midlands. It is argued that deputyship was an important organising principle, as suggested by the use of the title 'king of Mide' and other lesser local kingships. It is also shown that Clann Cholmáin and the system of kingship they operated in Mide can be fitted into existing models on how kingship was organised among the wider Uí Neill grouping.

Contents

Acknowledgments *v*
Abbreviations *vi*
A note on nomenclature and presentation *viii*

Introduction 1

Part 1: Sources

Annals 22

Genealogies 33

Kinglists 42

Saints' Lives 65

Cáin Adomnáin 91

Poetry 95

Topography and Archaeology 101

The Banshenchas 114

Part 2: Clann Cholmáin *c.*550-916

1. The Two Colmáns 120

2. Clann Cholmáin in the seventh century 138

2.1 A kingship of Uisnech? 153
2.2 An early kingship of Mide? 154
2.3 Other options for the earliest period? 155

3. The eighth-century emergence 162

4. Donnchad Midi 182

5. The early ninth century 196

6. Máel Sechnaill 207

7. Flann Sinna 225

Conclusion 240

Appendix 1 (Maps) *244*
Appendix 2 (Genealogies) *248*
Appendix 3 (Kinglists) *260*
Appendix 4 (Family Tree) *263*
Appendix 5 (The 'disturbances' at Óenach Tailten) *266*
Bibliography *281*

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Eoin O'Flynn,
October 2011.

Abbreviations

AC	Annála Connacht: the annals of Connacht (A.D. 1224-1554), ed. A.M. Freeman (Dublin 1944).
AClon	*Annals of Clonmacnoise,* ed. Denis Murphy (Dublin 1896).
AFM	*Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters,* ed. John O'Donovan (Dublin 1848-51).
AI	*Annals of Inisfallen,* ed. Seán Mac Airt (Dublin 1951).
AI (facs)	*Annals of Inisfallen, reproduced in facsimile,* ed. R. I. Best and Eoin Mac Neill (Dublin 1933).
ALC	*The annals of Loch Cé: a chronicle of affairs from A.D. 1014 to A.D. 1590,* ed. W.M. Hennessy, 2 vols (London 1871 repr. Dublin 1939).
AL	*Ancient Laws of Ireland,* ed. W N. Hancock, Thaddeus O'Mahony, Alexander Richey and Robert Atkinson (Dublin and London 1865-1901).
ATig	'Annals of Tigernach', ed. Whitley Stokes *Revue Celtique* 16 (1895) 374-419; 17 (1896) 6-33, 119-263, 337-420; 18 (1897) 9-59, 150-97, 267-303, repr. Felinfach 1993, 2 vols).
AU	*Annals of Ulster,* ed. Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (Dublin 1983).
CGH	*Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae,* ed. M. A. O'Brien (Dublin 1962).
CGSH	*Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae,* ed. P. Ó Riain (Dublin 1985).
CIH	*Corpus Iuris Hibernici,* ed. D. A. Binchy (Dublin 1978).
CIIC	*Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum,* ed. R.A.S. Macalister (Dublin 1945-49).
CMCS	*Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* (nos. 1-25), continued as *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* (nos. 26-).
CS	*Chronicum Scotorum,* ed. W. M. Hennessy (London 1866).
DIL	*Dictionary of the Irish language based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials,* (Dublin 1913-75).
FA	*Fragmentary Annals of Ireland,* ed. J. N. Radner (Dublin 1978).
Heist *Vitae*	*Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae e Codice olim Salmanticensi nunc Bruxellensi,* ed. W.W. Heist (Brussels 1965).

JRSAI	*Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.*
LL	*Book of Leinster,* ed. R. I. Best, Osborn Bergin, M. A O'Brien and Anne O'Sullivan (Dublin 1954-83).
NHI	*A New History of Ireland,* ed. T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin, F.J. Byrne and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford 1976-2005).
Onom.	*Onomasticon Goedelicum locorum et tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae,* ed. Edmund Hogan (Dublin 1910).
Plummer *Vitae*	*Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae,* ed. Charles Plummer 2.vols (Oxford 1910).
PRIA	*Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy.*
VSC	*Vita Sancti Columbae,* ed. A.O. Anderson and M.O. Anderson (Oxford 1961).
ZCP	*Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie.*

A note on nomenclature and presentation

Tara was an important and sacred place long before the Early Christian period and there are strong hints that its kingship was originally an extraordinary, sacral institution around which a great deal of legend developed and to which only the most exceptional kings could hope to aspire. Despite their best efforts to convince us otherwise, it is now quite clear that the kingship of Tara did not always belong exclusively to the Uí Néill or their ancestors. While the prestigious title 'king of Tara' was later appropriated by the Uí Néill and had become synonymous with leadership of that group of dynasties, because our study begins at a period when the kingship of Tara *was* contested by non-Uí Néill kings, it seems best to use a different and consistent nomenclature throughout to avoid any potential confusion. Hence the term 'overking of the Uí Néill' will be used where possible. The term 'overking' will also be used to refer to other Uí Néill kings who exercised some form of authority beyond their immediate grouping, over the wider 'southern Uí Néill' for example. Elaboration accompanying these examples as they arise should make the implications of the terms used clear.

Unless otherwise stated, Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill's edition of *AU* will be used throughout. Where necessary, the decimal point will be used after the year to refer to specific entries found under that year.

Stokes, wisely, did not add his own set of dates to his edition of the *Annals of Tigernach.* Instead, above each Kalend he provided a cross-reference to the year under which the information appears in corresponding annal texts (*AU, CS, AFM* etc). Throughout he refers to the corresponding *uncorrected* date in *AU,* which during the period under consideration here, is generally one year behind the corrected date. Because then the edition of *ATig* does not really have its own set of AD dates, the year will be given in square brackets and will, in effect, correspond to the corrected *AU* date.

Hennessy's edition of *CS* does have its own set of AD dates but these are often several years out. Therefore the practice will be to firstly refer to the year under which an entry is found in his edition of *CS* followed by the corrected date in square brackets where there is a divergence. As an example of the practice to be followed, Murchad Midi's obit will be presented as follows:

AU 715.2; *ATig* [715]; *CS* 711 [715].

Introduction

Clann Cholmáin, a Mide-based branch of Uí Néill, ultimately secured a position of great political importance in Early Christian Ireland and from the eighth century regularly secured the Uí Néill overkingship. This study will attempt to provide a fresh history of the dynasty from the period of our first reliable sources (about the mid-sixth century) until the early tenth century and the death of Flann Sinna (d.916) specifically. Of course the dynasty cannot be considered in isolation from the broader political context of this period and this study will also attempt to contribute to wider debates about political culture and kingship in Ireland during this period. In short, while the central concern will be to consider how kingship was organised and operated by Clann Cholmáin in Mide, this consideration will also be related to wider practice among the entire Uí Néill grouping.

A focussed study of Clann Cholmáin would appear to have some justification in its own right. As yet no detailed study of Clann Cholmáin has appeared on the scale of that provided by Paul Byrne for some of the other Southern Uí Néill dynasties.[1] Indeed in his introduction Byrne explains his decision to omit the Clann Cholmáin from his thesis remarking that 'it became apparent that the wealth of material available on Clann Cholmáin, together with the key rôle which that dynasty played in the political life of Ireland during this period, would justify a work of at least equivalent length to that which I have presented in respect of all the other dynasties.'[2] Byrne's thesis focuses on the constituent branches of Síl nÁedo Sláine as well as Cenél nArdgail, Caílle Follamain, Cenél Lóeguiri, Cenél Maini, Cenél Coirpri and Cenél Fiachach. Considering the dynasty's close relationship to Clann Cholmáin, his chapter on Caílle Follamain is particularly important for this study. Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin has published a detailed and valuable examination of the dynasty's early history as far as the eighth century and several of his central and influential arguments have found their way into the general literature. However his claim that the eponymous founder of Clann Cholmáin, Colmán Már, is an eighth-century product of genealogical contrivance will be disputed in the first chapter and throughout this study.[3] Paul Walsh's work, much of which was focussed on

1 Paul Byrne, *Certain Southern Uí Néill kingdoms* (unpublished PhD thesis UCD 2000).
2 Byrne, *Certain Southern Uí Néill kingdoms* 4.
3 Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, '*Nebulae discutiuntur?* The emergence of Clann Cholmáin, sixth-eighth centuries', A.P. Smyth (ed), *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin 2000) 83-97.

the midlands, remains invaluable but is often concerned with specific texts or types of source material.[4] He did produce a study of the kings of Mide but this is focused on the later (i.e. eleventh century) history of Clann Cholmáin.[5] Indeed this thesis itself developed from an interest in Clann Cholmáin I first pursued in an M.Phil dissertation completed at TCD in 2007 and focussed on one of the dynasty's kings from this period, Máel Sechnaill (d.1022). The fortunes of the later Ua Máel Sechlainn dynasty have been traced through the challenges of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries in Hugh Carey's unpublished thesis.[6]

In terms of focussed study on this dynasty there does then appear to be a gap in the coverage provided by existing scholarship and room for a fresh reappraisal. But since early Clann Cholmáin history is also early Uí Néill history and because of the ultimate success of Clann Cholmáin in providing several Uí Néill overkings, the dynasty does also inevitably feature in a great deal of the broader literature on the political history of Early Christian Ireland. It is therefore important to also trace the significant breakthroughs that have been made in our knowledge of this subject and refer to the scholarship which provides us with the foundations for our own study. It may be useful to then also elaborate on the origins and rise of the Uí Néill with particular emphasis on the midland branches in order to provide us with some essential background.

F.J. Byrne has stressed the earlier significance of Eoin MacNeill's efforts to put the study of Early Ireland on a secure and scientific basis.[7] But it is his own critical assessment of our earliest source material which has placed his subsequent narrative on a secure footing and allowed him to provide what is now a generally accepted account of the origins, early movements and rise of the Uí Néill.[8] His stress on the primacy of dateable early sources such as annals, genealogies and seventh-century hagiographical

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4 Paul Walsh, *The Placenames of Westmeath* (Dublin 1957); idem, 'The Topography of *Beatha Colmáin*', *ZCP* 8 (1910-12) 568-82 .

5 Paul Walsh, 'The Ua Maelechlainn Kings of Meath', *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record* lvii (1941) 165-183. A later article, which owes more than its title to Paul Walsh, takes us on a long journey from the semi-legendary ancestors of the Clann Cholmáin through to various McLoughlin families living in the midlands during the nineteenth century. Liam Cox, 'The Ó Maeleachlainn, Kings of Meath', *Ríocht na Midhe: Records of Meath Archaeological and Historical Society* v (2) (1972) 22-53.

6 Hugh Carey, *The kingdom and lordship of Meath, 1100-c.1215* (unpublished MLitt thesis TCD 1999).

7 F.J. Byrne, 'MacNeill as Historian', F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne (ed), *The Scholar Revolutionary: Eoin MacNeill, 1867-1945, and the making of the New Ireland* (Shannon 1973) 15-36.

8 F.J. Byrne, 'The Ireland of St. Columba', *Historical Studies* v (London 1965) 37-58; idem, 'Seventh-century documents', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 108 (3) (1967) 164-82; and especially, idem, *The Rise of the Uí Néill and the high-kingship of Ireland* (Dublin 1970).

texts, has rendered obsolete the political narratives of those earlier scholars who trusted the testimony of the *Lebor Gabála* or identified ancient historical contexts in early literary texts.[9] Over the opening chapters of his still authoritative *Irish Kings and High Kings,* Byrne is concerned with such issues as the Irish concept of kingship and the relationship between the king and his people.[10] He goes on to consider the kingship of Tara, what it stood for, how and when the Uí Néill secured it and how it was subsequently portrayed by, for example, the seventh-century Patrician biographers.

Many of these themes have since been pursued by Edel Bhreathnach who has sought to explain 'the change in Tara's nature from a political and possibly religious centre to a political and (perhaps solely) symbolic centre, effected by the Uí Néill and their protagonists.'[11] Her bibliography, a product of the Discovery Programme's research on Tara, is of obvious practical utility but several papers which consider the development of scholarly thought about Tara and its kingship are also included.[12] More recently an inter-disciplinary volume has appeared under Bhreathnach's editorship which represents the culmination of much of the Discovery Programme's research on Tara. This volume includes new editions of two Old Irish texts crucial for study of the kingship of Tara, but also for our study, namely the seventh-century vision/king-list *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* and the eighth-century legal contract known as the *Airgialla Charter Poem.* Both are accompanied by essays examining the political context of their production.[13]

The Uí Néill and the kingship of Tara constitute one of the major thematic strands running through Thomas Charles-Edwards' *Early Christian Ireland.*[14] In this work, which covers the period from earliest times until the arrival of the Vikings, the origins and rise of the Uí Néill are reconsidered and it includes an extremely detailed chapter on the kingship of Tara and the sources through which we can examine it. Charles-Edwards' treatment of Uí Néill penetration into the midlands by branches subsequently superseded by, amongst others Clann Cholmáin, is the latest in a series of attempts to examine this

9 For example, T.F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin 1946).

10 F.J. Byrne, *Irish kings and High-kings* (London 1973 repr Dublin 2001). Also see Ó Corráin's valuable review article: Donncha Ó Corráin, 'Review of *Irish Kings and High-Kings*', *Celtica* 13 (1980) 151-68. Jaski has since provided a most thorough and important contribution to this scholarship. While one chapter is devoted to dynastic kingship, his book is much broader in scope. Bart Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession* (Dublin 2000).

11 Edel Bhreathnach, 'Temoria: Caput Scottorum?', *Ériu* 47 (1996) 67-88: 77.

12 Edel Bhreathnach, *Tara: A Select Bibliography* (Dublin 1995).

13 Edel Bhreathnach, *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005).

14 T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge 2000).

important period.[15] In both *Early Christian Ireland* and a subsequent article Charles-Edwards puts forward several interesting ideas about the changes taking place in the relative strengths of the various Uí Néill branches in the early eighth century.[16] These changes saw an increased territorialisation of power, the appearance of deputy and local kingships and ultimately a fundamental and longlasting realignment in power structures amongst the Uí Néill.

While our study will be a case-study clearly focussed on Clann Cholmáin in the first instance, it will also engage with the wider questions outlined above with the aim of providing further insights into the operation and organisation of kingship amongst the Uí Néill more generally. Our aim in this study is then to attempt to respond to the plea for 'more detailed investigation of political developments in particular regions', here the midlands, which might in turn contribute to our evolving understanding 'of the general character of Irish kingship.'[17] The chronological limits imposed on this study owe something to my previous work. My study of Máel Sechnaill (d.1022) began by firstly discussing the challenging political context in which Clann Cholmáin found itself in the period immediately preceding his emergence. Hence the resurgence of Cenél Conaill and Síl nÁedo Sláine about the middle of the tenth century following lengthy periods of exclusion from the Uí Néill overkingship was considered before the focus shifted to the aggressive policies pursued by Domnall (d.956) of Cenél nEógain towards Mide and its rulers during his reign as overking. The reigns of Máel Sechnaill's relatively obscure Clann Cholmáin predecessors from this challenging period for the midland dynasty were then discussed before proceeding to the main focus of the study. To avoid any overlap with that then recently completed study, it was decided at the outset that this one should have a cut-off point somewhat earlier in the tenth-century. That said, it must also be admitted that time constraints and the need to keep this study to a manageable length meant it was also convenient and a little arbitrary to conclude with Flann Sinna (d.916).

Regarding structure, it quickly became apparent that any meaningful study must be based on a sound understanding of what are oftentimes very problematic source materials. Indeed such is the importance of this in pursuing the main research questions

15 See also A.P. Smyth, 'The Húi Néill and the Leinstermen in the Annals of Ulster, 431-516 A.D.', *Études Celtiques* xiv (i) (1974) 121-143; idem, 'Huí Fáilgi relations with the Huí Néill in the century after the loss of the Plain of Mide', *Études Celtiques* xiv (ii) (1975) 503-523.

16 Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743: the Rise and Fall of Dynasties', *Peritia* 16 (2002) 396-418.

17 Colmán Etchingham, 'Early Medieval Irish History', Kim McCone and Katharine Simms (ed), *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies* (Maynooth 1996) 134.

that it has been decided to present the thesis under two broad headings, the first given over to a detailed analysis of the source materials available for our study. The second will then attempt to pursue the research questions outlined above in a traditional style narrative. While this will be broadly chronological, the nature of the sources will require a certain amount of flexibility in terms of structure. There will then be a certain amount of cross-referencing between Parts 1 and 2. The principal research questions will be considered and reconsidered regularly throughout and finally in a concluding chapter. But at this point an initial, brief consideration of the early history of Uí Néill, with specific emphasis on the midlands, may be useful to serve as necessary background for our topic focussed on one of the constituent branches, Clann Cholmáin. Here we can reflect further on the existing historiographical trends which provide the context of our study and touch on the types of source material to be introduced in greater detail later.

Between Patrick's writings in the fifth century and the commencement of contemporary recording in the annals in the later sixth century, there is a yawning gap in our source material at what appears to have been a crucial moment in the rise of the Uí Néill. While the annals do in fact provide information for this intervening period, these entries were retrospectively inserted to provide coverage for a period prior to the commencement of contemporary recording and are of dubious value.[18] By the time we have access to a greater supply of reliable material the Uí Néill are well established. The subsequent creation of elaborate and fanciful early genealogies, heroic ancestors and origin myths further obscure our view of the earliest period. But it is possible to identify, in broad outline, the political landscape which existed prior to the Uí Néill conquest and the chronology and thrust of that conquest. It is clear that the opposition the Uí Néill faced was vigorous and much longer lasting than they would have us believe. When we come to examine the Uí Néill expansion into the midlands itself, it is also reasonably clear that the ancestors of those dynasties who would come to dominate the region, including Clann Cholmáin, did not lead the initial charge.

The political landscape undermined by Uí Néill expansion can be carefully reconstructed from a variety of sources. The ancient kingdom of the Ulaid looms large in the imagination, its capital Emain Macha the only recognisable city on the map of Ireland

18 See my discussion of Annals in Part 1 below.

produced by the second-century Claudius Ptolemy.[19] Interestingly, Tara does not feature, but then few of the remaining names on the map can be identified either.[20] The power of the Ulaid can perhaps be guessed at by referring to the sagas, most notably *Táin Bó Cúailgne*, where they appear in heroic struggle with the Connachta. While these legends are certainly problematic as historical sources, the portrayal of an extensive and powerful kingdom of the Ulaid may well contain a kernel of truth. The Ulster sagas were copied and retold as far away as Munster so the idea of a once mighty northern kingdom must have been generally accepted throughout the island.

The reality is that the ancient kingdom of the Ulaid took much longer to conquer and push back than the Uí Néill would have us believe. Well into the sixth century the Uí Néill were still trying to assert themselves in the north. For example, the Battle of Móin Daire Lothair in 563 shows that the Uí Néill were still winning new lands long after the ancient kingdom of the Ulaid was supposed to have collapsed.[21] Indeed, in this episode the Uí Néill appear as mercenaries and are rewarded for their service with new territories.[22] It appears as though Uí Néill expansion into southeastern Derry only took place after this battle and it is not until the convention of Druim Cett (575) that the question of the relationship between the Uí Néill and the mainland branch of Dál Riata is settled in favour of the former group.[23] It also appears as though the Ulaid ruled as far south as the River Boyne well into the seventh century. The Old Irish law tract, *Bretha Nemed,* warns:

> Mairg d'Ulltaibh madh ala Bóinn beid.[24]
> Woe to the Ulstermen if they be beyond the Boyne.[25]

Another Old Irish law tract, *Bechbretha,* includes the incidental information that Congal Clóen/Cáech (d.637) of the Cruithni was a king of Tara.[26]

That a once powerful and extensive Laigin bloc had existed prior to Uí Néill

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19 F.J. Byrne, 'The Ireland of St Columba', J.L. McCracken (ed), *Historical Studies* v (London 1965) 39.
20 Paul Russell, 'What was best of every language: the early history of the Irish language', Dáibhi Ó Cróinin (ed), *NHI* i 410.
21 F.J. Byrne, 'The Ireland of St Columba', 43-44; Dáibhi Ó Cróinin, *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200* 49; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 295.
22 Dáibhi Ó Cróinin, 'Ireland 400-800', 214-215.
23 Dáibhi Ó Cróinin, 'Ireland 400-800', 217.
24 E.J. Gwynn, 'An Old-Irish Tract on the Privileges and Responsibilities of Poets', *Ériu* 13 (1942) 13-60: 20.
25 Dáibhi Ó Cróinin, 'Ireland 400-800', 212.
26 Thomas Charles-Edwards and Fergus Kelly (ed), *Bechbretha* (Dublin 1983) 68-69; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 495.

encroachment is also discernible. A 'perfectly clear' ogham inscription found north of Tara in the late nineteenth century reads as follows:

MAQI-CAIRATINI AVI INEQAGLAS.[27]

This would appear to refer to a descendant of the eponymous founder of the Laigin dynasty of Uí Enechglais.[28] While using very early annal entries is fraught with danger, the following entered under the year 446 may also be important in considering the ogham inscription:

AU 446 Bellum Femhin in quo cecidit filius Coerthin filii Coelboth. Alii dicunt di Chruithnibh fuis[s]e.
The battle of Feimen in which Mac Cairthinn son of Caelub fell. Some say he was of the Cruithin.

Ó Corráin has shown that aside from the well known Femen in Munster, there was another Femen in Brega.[29] A more plausible identification for Mac Caírthinn than that put forward by *AU* is therefore that he was connected with the Uí Enechglais and died in Brega. Indeed the Mac Caírthinn of the Ogham inscription and annal entry may also feature in a poem on the Laigin kings who ruled Tara (*De Regibus Lagenorum et de Ordinibus eorum*).

Con-gab muru mormaige macri Moenech margein,
mac Cairthinn in cathchobair nathchobair nargein.[30]

The boy-king, Móenach, a great offspring,
took the walls of a great plain;
Mac Caírthinn, succourer in battle,
succourer of poetry, the modest offspring.[31]

Another poem, *Nidu dír dermait* which was probably written in the late seventh century, recounts the breaking of the hosts of the descendants of Conn Cétchathach, i.e. the Uí

27 R.A.S. Macalister (ed), *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum* (repr. Dublin 1996) §40 at 45-6; Robert Cochrane and Professor Rhys, 'Notes on the Newly-discovered Ogam-stones in County Meath', *JRSAI* 28 (1898) 53-60.

28 Seán Mac Airt, *The Annals of Inisfallen* (Dublin 1944 repr.1988) 589. For a discussion of all of this material see: Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 453-55.

29 Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Topographical Notes-II: Mag Femin, Femen, and some early annals', *Ériu* xxii (1971) 97-99: 98; F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-kings* (Dublin 1972 repr. 2001) 137.

30 *CGH* 9 ll.46-47.

31 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 454.

Néill.[32] The political claims of early Laigin poetry are hence supported by other types of evidence and it seems reasonably clear that they dominated the Irish midlands until pushed into the southeastern corner of Ireland by the Uí Néill.[33]

While the text of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* (*BCC*), the earliest Tara kinglist,[34] attempts to exclude prehistoric or protohistorical kings of Tara of Laigin and Ulaid origin, this was not carried out entirely successfully.[35] Their complete exclusion would have been considered too far-fetched for contemporaries and a memory of non-Uí Néill kings at Tara was strong enough to necessitate their inclusion prior to Niall Nóigiallach, eponymous ancestor of the Uí Néill.[36] In this source Niall is portrayed reigning from Tara in the fifth century fathering sons who would go on to found Uí Néill kingdoms stretching from Donegal in the northwest as far south as the River Liffey. As we shall see below, this claim and chronology is unconvincing. We can thus sketch out a political geography of Ireland prior to the rise of the Uí Néill which included powerful Ulaid and Laigin blocs meeting somewhere near the River Boyne. As for the actual chronology and progress of Uí Néill expansion, that too can be made out in broad outline.

The Uí Néill dynasties traced themselves ultimately to the Connachta and the person of Conn Cétcathach. The meagre evidence we have would appear to support at least this element of their story. It has been noted that the goddess of sovereignty, Medb, is associated with both Crúachain, the ancient seat of power in Connacht, and Tara which may suggest a link between the two kingships.[37] Ailill Molt (d.482) supposedly reigned over both Connacht and Tara and while the historicity of his reign has been questioned it does illustrate the close links maintained in tradition between the Connachta and Uí Néill. Also, in Tírechán's writings we find Loégaire's daughters in fosterage at Crúachain which would again suggest close links. The distribution of the Uí Néill kingdoms as they emerge in the historical period coupled with our knowledge of their subsequent expansion also points toward a Connacht origin. From here it appears they spread north through Sligo into Donegal, Inishowen and later into Derry and Tyrone. It has been noted that few subject peoples (*Aithech-thuatha*) existed in Donegal which could suggest that

32 Edel Bhreathnach, 'The political context of Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig', 52.
33 Dáibhi Ó Cróinin, 'Ireland 400-800' 187; A.P. Smyth, *Celtic Leinster* (Dublin 1982) 8.
34 The core of the text appears to date to the late seventh century but for detailed discussion see the 'Kinglists' discussion in Part 1.
35 Edel Bhreathnach, 'The Political context of Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig', *eadem* (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005) 52.
36 See: Charles Doherty, 'Kingship in Early Ireland' Edel Bhreatnach (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005) 11-12.
37 F.J. Byrne, 'The Ireland of St Columba', 40.

most of this land was taken over by the Uí Néill for settlement themselves before moving farther east where the existing populations were absorbed and became subject peoples.[38]

Crucial in considering this northern expansion is the relationship between the Uí Néill and the Airgialla. According to a perhaps eighth century story, three brothers (the Three Collas) belonging to the Tara dynasty and hence descended from Conn Cétcathach destroyed the ancient province of Ulaid and stormed Emain Macha following seven great battles, supported in six of them by the Connachta. These brothers had killed a close relative, forfeited their right to the kingship of Tara and were told instead to direct their energies at winning new 'sword land' for themselves.[39] While therefore regarded as related to the Uí Néill, the Airgialla were conveniently ineligible for major political office. While obviously a later fabrication the tale may preserve a kernel of truth about the earliest period and does provide the basis for elaborating more detailed and plausible theories regarding the Uí Néill advance in the north. Immediately there are several fundamental problems with the story of the three Collas. Chronologically it happens before Niall Noigiallach's three sons, Conall, Eógan and Énda, were supposed to have carved out their respective northern kingdoms.[40] The presence of three brothers in both accounts may suggest they were confused or that the three Collas were doublets of the three sons of Niall.[41] If the three Collas are a fabrication the story nonetheless does give the Airgialla a respectable pedigree while conveniently excluding them from the high-kingship. Was the real work of breaking the Ulaid undertaken by Niall and his sons? This raises the obvious question of why having done so the Uí Néill would retire to the northwest leaving their hard-won gains to the Airgialla.[42] Muirchú alludes to an alliance between the Uí Néill and Ind Airthir in his work suggesting perhaps a seventh century (or earlier?) agreement between them aimed at undermining the power of the Ulaid.[43] This would appear to show a relationship of equals or certainly of greater parity than the Uí Néill would have us believe.

The eighth-century *Airgialla Charter Poem* (*ACP*) is much easier to understand in this context. It describes a relationship where the Airgialla are not burdened by heavy

38 F.J. Byrne, *The Rise of the Uí Néill and the high-kingship of Ireland* (O'Donnell lecture series N.U.I. 1969) 19.

39 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 512ff; F.J. Byrne 'The Ireland of St Columba' 40-41; Mac Niocaill *Ireland Before the Vikings* 13; *CGH* 142a19.

40 F.J. Byrne *Irish Kings and High Kings* (Dublin 2001) 72.

41 Dáibhi Ó Cróinin, 'Ireland 400-800', 202.

42 F.J. Byrne *Irish Kings and High Kings* 73; Mac Niocaill *Ireland Before the Vikings* 13.

43 Edel Bhreathnach, 'The Airgialla charter poem: The political context', *eadem* (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 97.

exactions. In fact, they enjoy a great degree of privilege in their relations with the Uí Néill. Hence, perhaps the Uí Néill defeated the Ulaid in alliance with the Airgialla who would essentially become a buffer zone between the two rival blocs.[44] Byrne suggests that vassal tribes of the Ulaid, taking advantage of its weakness, 'may well have thrown off their yoke and given hostages to Niall in return for local autonomy.'[45] A domino effect has also been proposed where the expansion of the Uí Néill from the west ultimately forced the Dál Riata to expand across the channel into northern Britain.[46] Though the evidence is far from conclusive on the exact sequence of events, we can say that the official history of the Airgialla was concocted, perhaps in the eighth century and that it attempts to conceal the true chronology of Uí Néill expansion and the nature of the relationship between Uí Néill and Airgialla.[47] Fabulous though the 'Three Collas' tale may be, it probably sheds light on the Uí Néill's own progress. If we accept a Connacht origin, the Uí Néill can be seen as an off-shoot of the Connachta moving north and east winning 'sword land' of their own.[48] Indeed, could the saga material mentioned earlier depicting strife between Connacht and Ulaid even preserve evidence of a time when the Uí Néill were still operating under their Connachta title?[49] We have already seen that the explicit links between Connacht and the Uí Néill persisted well into the historical period so this is a tempting conclusion.

A series of controversial new theories about the early history of the Uí Néill have recently been put forward by Brian Lacey.[50] He argues that those groupings we now label 'Northern Uí Néill', did not take on the 'Uí Néill' designation until the eighth century, perhaps during the reign of Áed Allán (d.743).[51] Prior to that period, according to Lacey, 'Uí Néill' referred only to those groupings we now label 'Southern Uí Néill'. Instead, he argues that what we term 'Northern Uí Néill' actually descended from the indigenous Ulaid. The terminology around and portrayal of the Uí Néill in the early sources is certainly problematic and a dubious early genealogy would also seem to justify Lacey's scepticism. But while we might question certain specifics in what is now a generally accepted theory on the origins and early movements of the Uí Néill, Lacey's radical new

44 Mac Niocaill *Ireland Before* 14.
45 Byrne *Irish Kings and High Kings* 74; Ó Cróinin also takes this view, Dáibhi Ó Cróinin, 'Ireland 400-800', 202.
46 Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings* 14.
47 See: Edel Bhreathnach, 'The Airgialla charter poem: The political context', 96.
48 Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings* 10.
49 F.J. Byrne, 'The Ireland of St Columba', 40.
50 Brian Lacey, *Cenél Conaill and the Donegal Kingdoms AD 500-800* (Dublin 2006).
51 *Ibid* 149.

theory, though often put forward with conviction and confidence, is highly speculative and not supported by a greater weight of evidence than that underpinning the existing theory. Much of what he says is, by his own admission, based in part at least on 'informed speculation'.[52] While certainly valuable as a fresh, thought-provoking and radical assault on received wisdom, Lacey's book, in Etchingham's words, 'scarcely proceeds beyond speculation, conjecture and hypothesis to solid conclusions'.[53] When we come to consider the changing structure of midland kingship and certain specific individuals (for example Óengus (d.621) described as 'king of the Uí Néill'), we will further engage with Lacey's theory and what implications it might have for our study. But since it does not, on initial inspection at least, appear to command any greater respect than the existing orthodoxy, our discussion will be placed initially on the foundations of the broad scholarly consensus concerning the origins and rise of the Uí Néill, problematic though it is, which has grown up over the past forty or fifty years.

Turning to the midlands specifically, the Uí Néill kingdoms of the region show a much greater diversity of population groups and subject peoples than those of the north which perhaps suggests a less straightforward and structured expansion into this area. The ultimately dominant dynasties of Síl nÁedo Sláine and Clann Cholmáin, though claiming descent from Conall Cremthainne (d.480), realistically could only trace themselves back to Diarmait mac Cerbaill (d.565) and can only have existed as distinct branches from a still later period.[54] This resulted in retrospective editing of the Uí Néill pedigree highlighting such successful branches while downplaying or editing out failed or less successful ancestors and by extension the branches they had founded. *BCC* is a crucial piece of evidence in this context as it mentions only two of the reputed sons of Níall Noígíallach, Coirpre and Lóeguire, and throws interesting light on who were the leading midland Uí Néill branches at this early stage.

Though Lóeguire himself is pitted against Patrick in some early Patrician hagiographical texts, the *Additamenta* in the Book of Armagh tell us that the church of Trim in Co. Meath was founded by Patrick on land granted by Lóeguire's son, perhaps suggesting that Patrick arrived in Ireland after Lóeguire's lifetime.[55] An analysis of the

52 *Ibid* 30.

53 Colmán Etchingham, 'Review of *Cenél Conaill and the Donegal Kingdoms AD 500-800* by Brian Lacey', *Irish Historical Studies* xxxvi (141) (May 2008) 100-102: 100.

54 For genealogical tables covering the legendary/early history of the Connachta and Uí Néill, see: Edel Bhreathnach, *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 337-357.

55 Founded, it is claimed, twenty five years before Armagh. Ludwig Bieler (ed), *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979) 167-71.

elaborate Cenél Lóeguiri genealogies and the succession lists in the *Additamenta* throws up the possibility that Lóeguire lived earlier, perhaps in the fourth century.[56] Paul Byrne notes the wide dispersal of territories associated with the Cenél Lóeguiri 'in such diverse locations as Lower Lough Erne, near Cruachu, in north-eastern Connacht, in and around the church of Drumiskin in Conailli Muirthemni, in northern Mide, to the west of Lough Ennell, between Tara and Trim, in southern Brega around the churches of Kilglin and Cluain Laigen, in northern Mide near Lough Derravaragh and in the territory known as Fir Chell to the north of Slieve Bloom'.[57] In the *Félire Óengusso* one member of this group is named using the archaic proto-surname *moccu* which 'points to an early origin for the dynasty, probably anterior to the rise of Uí Néill'.[58] If Lóeguire lived too early to have been a biological son of Niall it is possible he was later adopted into the dynasty to allow his descendants claim Uí Néill status.[59] Of course one must exercise caution especially when relying on sources compiled by the later Cenél Lóeguiri which would naturally seek to highlight a glorious past and extensive territory.

According to the *Chronicle of Ireland,* the title given to a now lost source accessible via later extant annal collections, Lóeguire was king of Tara when Patrick arrived in Ireland. While we risk being drawn into the Patrick debate, it seems as though 'the chronological problem of Lóeguire may thus be seen as an offshoot of the redating of Patrick.'[60] We know that Patrick's arrival was probably pushed back to follow on immediately from the chronological anchor of Palladius' mission found in the Chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine. We also know that Lóeguire was considered a famous king and one considered appropriate to set against the newly arrived Christian missionary. By the seventh century Cenél Lóeguire had been reduced to a small kingdom around Trim and their political decline could plausibly be attributed to Lóeguire's supposed hostility to Patrick.[61] The annal entries relating to Lóeguire are clustered in the 450s and 60s and are characterised by Lóeguire's conflict with the Laigen.[62] Smyth has argued that the location of Lóeguire's death can be fixed quite precisely to the vicinity of Carbury Hill in north western Kildare.[63] Carbury is named after Lóeguire's supposed brother, Coirpre, so this

56 Paul F. Byrne, *Certain Southern Uí Néill Kingdoms* (unpublished PhD thesis UCD 2000) 164.
57 *Ibid,* 160-61; *CGSH* 126, 128, 288.
58 Byrne, *Certain Southern Uí Néill Kingdoms* 159; Whitley Stokes (ed), *The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee: Félire Óengusso Céli Dé* (London 1905, repr. Dublin 1979) 46-8; *CGSH* 6.
59 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 459.
60 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 459.
61 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 19.
62 *AU* 453; *AU* 458; *AU* 462.
63 Alfred P. Smyth, 'The Húi Néill and the Leinstermen in the Annals of Ulster, 431-516 A.D.', *Études*

might fit in with the idea of a dynasty in the making in conflict with the Laigin. Certainly later traditions emphasise the importance of conflict with the Laigin. For example, in his *Collectanea* Tírechán has Lóegaire tell us his father Niall instructed him to be buried fully armed on the ramparts of Tara facing south toward the Laigin enemy.[64] Indeed we are also told that Niall was himself killed by the Laigin, by Echu son of Énda Cennselach. The annalistic evidence for this, being so early, is of dubious historicity.[65] Niall's death-tale, *Aided Néill Noígíallaig,* is also late but certainly confirms the tradition of ancient enmity between Uí Néill and Laigin.[66]

According to the *Annals of Ulster* (*AU*), widely regarded as best transmitting the *Chronicle of Ireland* text, Lóeguire's death was followed immediately by the reign of Ailill Molt. It has been argued that 'there is no historical basis behind the reign of Ailill Molt at all.'[67] While Ailill does appear in *BCC*[68], he may simply have been included as a later sop to the Uí Néill's cousins in Connacht and represent a link between Tara and Cruachain.[69] Even if he is unhistorical, the battles fought during the period of Ailill's reign are primarily against the Laigin. The battle of Brí Éile which does not mention Ailill, or anyone else for that matter, took place at Croghan Hill on the borders of 'Húi Failgi and Mide' as they stood at a later date and 'fits in well with the pattern of Húi Néill-Laigen hostility at this time.'[70] Later annalistic accounts of Ailill's death at the battle of Ocha claim he faced a broad alliance including the Laigin and Ulaid and 'may reflect the range of dynastic interests that in the fifth and sixth centuries still pursued claims to the Tara kingship.'[71] Though attempts were made to clean up the historical record, the true nature of Uí Néill activity in the midlands and the opposition they faced is hence still recoverable.

Celtiques xiv (i) (1974) 125.

64 Ludwig Bieler, *The Patrician texts in the book of Armagh* 132-133. Specifically 'the sons of Dúnlang in Maistiu in Mag Liphi' and very likely anachronistic.

65 *CS* 411.

66 Certain Old Irish forms preserved in the verse section of the *Aided* suggest some perhaps ninth-century material has survived but the language of the prose is later. See: Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Níall Noígíallach's death-tale', John Carey, Máire Herbert & Kevin Murray (ed), *Cín Chille Cúile- Texts, Saints and Places, Essays in honour of Pádraig Ó Riain* (Aberystwyth 2004) 178-91: 185-86.

67 Smyth, 'The Húi Néill and the Leinstermen in the Annals of Ulster, 431-516 A.D.', 125.

68 Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray (ed), '*Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig:* Edition', *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* Edel Bhreathnach (ed), (Dublin 2004) 83.

69 Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin & Paul Byrne, 'Prosopography I : Kings named in *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* and *The Airgialla Charter Poem* Edel Bhreathnach (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2004) 177. Ailill is an ancestor of Uí Fiachrach.

70 Alfred P. Smyth, 'The Húi Néill and the Leinstermen in the Annals of Ulster, 431-516 A.D.', 126; *AU* 478.

71 Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin & Paul Byrne, 'Prosopography I', 177.

The reign of Lugaid son of Lóeguire seems even more hollow and contrived than that of Ailill. He also features in *BCC* but in *AU* the only record we have in the main hand is that of his death.[72] A much more fully formed figure at this stage is Coirpre mac Néill who appears in *BCC* and in the annals where he appears to be 'the person who did the fighting'.[73] His victories against the Laigin at Granairet in 485 and Tailtiu in 494 appear crucial and highlight the areas where the Uí Néill were imposing themselves. Despite the best efforts of a later hand to turn the second battle of Granairet in 495 into an internal Laigin conflict, Smyth has convincingly argued that it was Coirpre's son who was involved against the Laigin.[74] Coirpre's grandson, Túathal Máelgarb seemingly completed the Uí Néill conquest of Brega begun by his grandfather when he defeated the Cíannachta in 535.[75]

The eponymous founder of Cenél Coirpri does not emerge well from Tírechán's writings (later seventh century[76]) where he and his descendants are cursed to endure powerlessness by Patrick. The appearance of Tuathal Máelgarb of Cenél Coirpre in *BCC* as a king of Tara suggests Patrick's 'prophecy' was faulty. Though Coirpre and his descendants are vilified by Tírechán his mere inclusion suggests that he was regarded as simply too important to be airbrushed away. In short, in spite of his motives, Tírechán confirms the political importance of Cenél Coirpri in the midlands. Tírechán has Patrick meet Coirpre at Tailtiu, an extremely important site for the Uí Néill and linked to the kingship of Tara. When Tírechán was writing, Cenél Coirpri heartland lay far to the west of Tailtiu. However Tírechán may have set the encounter at this location 'inspired by the tradition, which we know from the *Baile Chuind* was current at that time, that Coirpre had been king of Tara'.[77] It would also serve to highlight the lows to which Cenél Coirpri fortunes had fallen in the intervening period. Tírechán quite blatantly attributed this demise to Coirpre's supposed tangle with Patrick. The process of Coirpre's demotion is

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72 *AU* 508.

73 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 447.

74 Alfred P. Smyth, 'The Húi Néill and the Leinstermen in the Annals of Ulster, 431-516 A.D.', 134.

75 *AU* 535; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 451. It has been suggested that the tale *Cath Crinna,* describing how the Cíannachta had been settled in Brega by Cormac mac Airt, was produced to take account of the new political realities on the ground following Uí Néill penetration into the region. Ailbhe Séamus Mac Shamhráin, *Church and Polity in Pre-Norman Ireland: The case of Glendalough* (Maynooth 1996) 53. According to Byrne, 'it is true that too much credence cannot be given to the historicity of this account. It is possibly no more than an origin tale to explain the political situation of the eighth century.' F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* 68. For the tale, see M.A. O'Brien, *CGH* i 403-5.

76 Ludwig Bieler (ed.), *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979) 41-42. Also, see Saints' Lives in Part 1 below.

77 Paul Byrne, *Certain Southern Uí Néill Kingdoms* 217.

completed with the compilation of the Middle Irish king lists where he is absent 'prompting suggestions that he was deliberately expunged.'[78] Much like Cenél Lóeguiri, Cenél Coirpri appear to have had extremely dispersed territories stretching in a broadly diagonal band and still faintly identifiable in the Carbury placenames to be found in Sligo, Kildare and Longford. While it appears there was one kingship of the dynasty originally, as their territories were later encroached upon by more successful branches of the Uí Néill, most importantly Clann Cholmáin, the dynasty fragmented and more localised kingships developed in the eighth century.[79] The process of Uí Néill expansion into the midlands highlights the fractured nature of the dynasty and the dangers in juxtaposing homogeneous Uí Néill and Laigin blocs. That there was great internal conflict within the Uí Néill is still perceptible.

Having left Tailtiu and cursed Coirpre, Tírechán's Patrick moved westward to Uisnech, the traditional centre of Ireland. His voyage is useful in giving us a sense of Mide as an area made up of many plains.[80] If Mide consisted of many plains and many peoples it seems unlikely and impractical that the eventually victorious Uí Néill emptied such a landscape of its indigenous populations. To borrow Mac Shamhráin's phrase, it seems more likely that 'isolated segments of Laigin lineages' became 'stranded like rock pools left by the receding tide.'[81] An accommodation had to be reached and a transfer of loyalties from Laigin to Uí Néill probably took place.[82]

Having reached Uisnech, Tírechán's Patrick encounters an unnamed son of Fíachu son of Níall and he curses him and his descendants to subservience. Much like Coirpre, Fíachu was not a favourite of later hagiographers, but his earlier significance in making the Uí Néill breakthrough in the midlands is clear. Yet again, the older tradition could not be erased but was explained away by Tírechán pitting the Christian missionary against an unfortunate ancestor figure at a symbolically loaded site. Entered under the year 510 in *AU* we find:

Bellum Fremhonn f*or* Fiachaigh mc. Neill. Failghi Berraide uic*tor* fu*it*.

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78 Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin & Paul Byrne, 'Prosopography I', 175-76.

79 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 20 n.43.

80 It stands in striking contrast to the picture of Brega provided by Muirchú:
in campo Breg maximo, ubi erat regnum maximum nationum harum.
in the great plain of Brega, because it was there that there was the greatest kingdom among these tribes.
Bieler, *Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* 82-83.

81 Mac Shamhráin, *Church and Polity in Pre-Norman Ireland: The case of Glendalough* 66.

82 Alfred P. Smyth, 'The Húi Néill and the Leinstermen in the Annals of Ulster, 431-516 A.D.', 140; Alfred P. Smyth, 'Huí Fáilgi relations with the Huí Néill in the century after the loss of the Plain of Mide', *Études Celtiques* xiv (ii) (1975) 505.

The battle of Frému [won] against Fiacha son of Niall. Failge Berraide was victor.

Six years later Fíachu had his revenge.

AU 516.1 Bellum Droma D*er*ge f*or* Failghi. Fiacha uictor erat. Deinde Campus Midhe a Lagenis sublatus est.
The battle of Druim Derg against Failge. Fiacha was victor. Thereafter the plain of Mide was taken away from the Laigin.[83]

ATig [516] Cath Droma Dergaige for Foilgi mBeirridhe ria Fiachaigh mac Neill, 7 is andsa cat*h*-sin ro scaradh a cuid don Midhe fri Laigniu co h-Uisneach.
The battle of Druim Dergaige gained over Foilge Berraide by Fiacha, son of Niall; and 'tis in that battle their portion of Meath as far as Uisnech was taken from the Leinstermen.[84]

Smyth suggests that the use of the word 'cuid' implies that the Laigin lost just their part of Mide, a larger region, though *ATig* appears to be simply rewriting a text roughly as found in *AU*. But Fíachu would certainly appear to have been crucial in pushing the Laigin south from Uisnech and out of Mide.[85] Indeed, Carn Fiachach was located on the hill of Uisnech and it seems quite possible that initially the Cenél Fíachach controlled a much more extensive area than their later kingdom which was restricted to an area to the south of Uisnech. Though Tírechán's Patrick favoured Conall son of Níall and not his brothers, Fíachu and Coirpre, the fact that he met Coirpre at Tailtiu and Fíachu's son at Uisnech confirms the early significance of these groups in the Uí Néill conquests of Brega and Mide respectively. Though Conall was the object of 'hagiographical favour', it could not be claimed that he or his descendants actually made the midland breakthrough, instead, 'they were the divinely approved beneficiaries of victories won by others.'[86]

Smyth notes that many of the earliest battles recorded in the annals between the Uí Néill and Laigin took place in a relatively small geographical area, 'hemmed in between the lakes of Owel, Drin and Derravaragh.'[87] This area, he suggests, may have contained the seat of the 'Húi Failgi or their ancestors in the kingship of north Leinster'[88] and would be an area of obvious sensitivity in the event of an invasion. As the Uí Néill moved into the area Laigin resistance was strongest here and this may have been 'the

83 *AU* 516.
84 *ATig* [516].
85 Alfred P. Smyth, 'The Húi Néill and the Leinstermen in the Annals of Ulster, 431-516 A.D.', 139.
86 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 453.
87 Alfred P. Smyth, 'Húi Fáilgi relations with the Húi Néill in the century after the loss of the Plain of Mide', 515.
88 *Ibid.*

centre of Húi Néill concentration during the early centuries of their conquest in Mide.'[89] In Smyth's opinion, the concentration of battle sites around a supposed ancient centre of Uí Failge kingship suggested that they, having been pushed back 'carried the struggle in defence of their territory well beyond their own borders about Uisneach, and into the Húi Néill lands in the north.'[90] In short, that they struck deep into recently lost territory in an attempt to reclaim their seat of kingship.[91]

Mac Shamhráin has argued convincingly, with the help of several maps, for an alternative pattern to the midland conquest to that proposed by Smyth.[92] The known battle-sites, when plotted, suggest a rolling, progressive territorial conquest from the west and north by the Uí Néill. The concentration of battle sites mentioned by Smyth may not have been due to the presence of a seat of kingship here but simply because this was the border between Uí Néill and Laigin at the time and 'that Laigin overlordship in the area concerned had not yet been lost'.[93] But it is clear that the ultimate Uí Néill victory was the culmination of a complex and long-term process rather than a sudden implosion of Laigin power.

Though many of these specific issues are open to debate, in much of the earliest evidence we get a sense of Mide as a generally geographical unit, a middle area around Uisnech containing a patchwork of plains and peoples but without 'any political, tribal or dynastic connotation.'[94] It will later be argued in detail that the emergence of Mide as a meaningful political unit can only be dated reliably to the late seventh or early eighth centuries. Considering the chronology of Uí Néill penetration into the midlands and the contested nature of the area before their ultimate victory over the Laigin, it perhaps comes as no surprise that a political sense is not identifiable earlier.

Turning now to Clann Cholmáin specifically, the dynasty traced itself back through Colmán Már (d.557), Díarmait mac Cerbaill (d.565) and eventually to Conall Cremthanne (d.480) son of Níall Noígíallach (d. ?). We can be more confident about the

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89 *Ibid.*

90 Alfred P. Smyth, 'The Húi Néill and the Leinstermen in the Annals of Ulster, 431-516 A.D.', 142.

91 In much later Patrician tradition, Patrick encounters Failge, eponymous ancestor of the Leinster dynasty and curses the supposed inauguration *bile* on the royal site of Uí Failge. But this was quite likely 'a later rationalisation of the dynasty's political misfortune' Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Ireland, 400-800', *NHI* i 192; Kathleen Mulchrone (ed), *Bethu Phátraic: The Tripartite Life of Patrick* i (Dublin 1939) 129-30.

92 Mac Shamhráin, *Church and Polity in Pre-Norman Ireland: The case of Glendalough* 59-63.

93 Mac Shamhráin, *Church and Polity in Pre-Norman Ireland: The case of Glendalough* 61.

94 Alfred P. Smyth, 'The Húi Néill and the Leinstermen in the Annals of Ulster, 431-516 A.D.', 138. For example when Adomnán (d.704) mentioned Columba's visit to Durrow, he described the community as lying 'in mediterranea Eberniae', in 'the midland district of Ireland.' *VSC,* 214.

historicity of the later dynasts and, in broad outline, trace the rise of this midland Uí Néill branch at the expense of those discussed above who led the initial midland conquest. The fact that important early ancestors of Cenél Conaill and Clann Cholmáin, Conall Gulban and Conall Cremthanne sons of Níall Noígíallach, share a name and both had sons named Fergus, has led to the suggestion that the early genealogy is contrived.[95] It seems possible that Cenél Conaill and Clann Cholmáin were closely related dynasties descended from a single ancestor. In *AU* the only notice of Conall Cremthanne is his obit.[96] It is in later writings, for example Tírechán, that he is infused with substance and portrayed as the favoured son of Níall whose sons were destined to hold political power and be entitled to the subservience of their cursed kinsmen.[97] If there was just one Conall son of Níall, it would suggest that Díarmait mac Cerbaill was a close cousin of Columba providing a 'convenient explanation for the naming of Díarmait's son as Colmán (Columbán).'[98]

In 544 Túathal Máelgarb, grandson of Coirpre mac Néill, was killed and succeeded by Díarmait mac Cerbaill. Traditionally Túathal's murder is attributed to Díarmait's half-brother which again strengthens the idea that Díarmait and his descendants took control of the midlands at the expense of those who led the initial conquest.[99] As has often been remarked, Díarmait is an obscure figure, accorded far greater significance in the Uí Néill family history than our, admittedly meagre, evidence would suggest he warrants.[100] Indeed, on the contrary the battles Díarmait was involved in invariably resulted in his defeat.[101] Most notably the battle of Cúil Dreimne in 561 where Díarmait faced an alliance of Cenél nEógain, Cenél Conaill and Connachta who prevailed against him 'through the prayers of Colum Cille.'[102] More recently Bhreathnach

95 Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin & Paul Byrne, 'Prosopography I', 17.
96 *AU* 480.
97 Ludwig Bieler (ed), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* 132-133.
98 Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, '*Nebulae discutiuntur?* The emergence of Clann Cholmáin, sixth-eighth centuries', in, *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne,* Alfred P. Smyth (ed), (Dublin 2000) 95.
99 Mac Shamhráin, '*Nebulae discutiuntur?* The emergence of Clann Cholmáin, sixth-eighth centuries', 93; See *CS* [544].
100 Díarmait has been regarded as important in representing a milestone as the last non-Christian king of Tara as well as the first member of the Uí Néill to secure that position. Edel Bhreathnach, 'Temoria: Caput Scotorum?', *Ériu* xlvii (1996) 84. While Díarmait is the last recorded king to have celebrated the 'Feast of Tara', something which clearly originated in the pagan past, it does not necessarily follow that he was himself non-Christian. Parallels from elsewhere in Late Antiquity, for example the Roman festival of Lupercalia, show that for a time at least Christians participated in festivals, rites and ceremonies which had been largely divested of overt pagan religious connotations and regarded as harmless by Christian authorites. See R.A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge 1990 repr. 1998) 131-5.
101 *AU* 561; *AU* 562.
102 *AU* 561.

has also provided a possible alternative reading of Díarmait's background. She has highlighted the links between Díarmait and his family with the north-east and suggests that they may have 'originally belonged to a north-eastern or north-midlands people and that they were involved in a realignment which caused them to emerge ultimately as part of the Uí Néill'. Bhreathnach concedes this theory 'is somewhat difficult to substantiate owing to the absence of direct evidence'.[103] This interesting new contribution to the debate, if accepted, would further confirm the artificial nature of the earliest Uí Néill pedigree. Whether actually of the dynasty, or later grafted on, it is Díarmait's famous associations with Tara which hint at an evolving political situation in the midlands. Though Columba supposedly opposed him at Cúl Dreimne, Díarmait's subsequent murder is not viewed kindly by the Columban community. If we work under the assumption that he was an Uí Néill dynast, his close family ties to his opponents at the battle may have facilitated a quick reconciliation afterwards.[104]

But it may simply have been expedient for Adomnán (d.704) to support the successful descendants of an exceptional king. Adomnán knew his community would benefit from being associated with him and by extension his increasingly dominant descendants. It has been suggested that Díarmait's celebration of the *Feis Temro* signified a change in the nature of his kingship. As we have seen he was in conflict with the Connachta and perhaps his celebration of the *Feis Temro* 'may not merely have marked his success in the midlands but also the erosion of his authority within his own *gens*'.[105] At this early stage it might well be that Díarmait was king of the whole *gens,* effectively *rex in gente Connachtarum* but a king who may have shifted his energies from the western cradle of the Uí Néill to focus on the newly won midland territories. At a time when we know non-Uí Néill kings were in a position to contest the important kingship of Tara, Díarmait was perhaps the first of the Uí Néill to take it and 'this new royal *feis* was a claim to a new form of kingship no longer rooted in the *gens*'.[106] Adomnán's Columba famously warned Áed Sláine (d.604), son of Díarmait, that if he were to commit parricide he would 'lose the prerogative of monarchy over the kingdom of all Ireland, predestined

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103 Edel Bhreathnach, '*Níell cáich úa Néill nasctar géill:* The Political Context of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig'*, Edel Bhreathnach (ed.) *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 57.

104 Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, '*Nebulae discutiuntur?* The emergence of Clann Cholmáin, sixth-eighth centuries', 95.

105 Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh kinship* 164.

106 Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh kinship* 164; See also: Edel Bhreathnach, '*Níell cáich úa Néill nascatar géill:* The Political Context of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig'*, Edel Bhreathnach (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005) 54-55.

for you by God'. While this bold claim can hardly be considered evidence of an institution of national monarchy at this early stage, he goes on to provide further clues about the structure of kingship at the period.

While our understanding of the origins and expansion of the Uí Néill will always remain quite vague, clearly their antiquity was greatly exaggerated as the eventual triumph was projected back onto the 'mythological plane.'[107] Unraveling the rise of the Uí Néill is so difficult due in large part to the success of their subsequent propagandists who wove a tale of an early and heroic rise to prominence from what appear to have been more disparate and messy beginnings. The probably quite humble beginnings of the Uí Néill were carefully covered-up. As Ó Corráin notes, the contemporary holders of power were eager to have access to an antique and prestigious lineage which would accord with their pretensions and ambitions and would underpin their claims to title and property.[108] As political conditions changed, the official history could be tweaked or refashioned to account for these changes. For example, the various accounts of the birth and upbringing of Cormac MacAirt place different emphasis on characters within the story, depending on the contemporary political situation. Hence, the ancestor of one particular population group might be highlighted or downplayed where necessary. Likewise Níall Noígíallach's death-tale, was transformed 'into a celebration of the achievements of the dead man' by 'an enterprising scholar.'[109] In short, 'changes in the tales themselves represent changes in the political world with which they are linked.'[110] Even arguably historical figures have sons and grandsons affiliated to them whom they would not have necessarily recognised.[111] Failed or less successful branches of the Uí Néill were sidelined, down-played or airbrushed from the official history. For example, though we have seen evidence for the importance of Cenél Coirpre in the Uí Néill conquest of the midlands, having later declined in power the grouping was condemned in the hagiographical tradition of both Armagh and Clonmacnois so as to 'explain' the demise.[112] If we return to the battle of Móin Daire Lothair (563) mentioned already, we might note the endurance of such practices. The 'Four Masters', writing in the early modern period, in dealing with this battle omit a line found in *AU* which could be construed as reflecting the parvenu

107 F.J. Byrne, 'The Ireland of St Columba', 48.
108 Ó Corráin, 'Historical need and literary narrative', 142.
109 Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Niall Noigiallach's death-tale', *Cín Chille Cúile* 191.
110 Ó Corráin, 'Historical need and literary narrative', 147.
111 F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings* 52.
112 F.J. Byrne, *The rise of the Uí Néill and the high-kingship of Ireland* 18-19.

status of the Uí Néill. Instead they hold to the then generally accepted position that Uí Néill hegemony in Ulster was long established by this stage.[113]

Having sketched out the current scholarly position regarding the earliest history of the wider Uí Néill grouping, with particular emphasis on the midlands, we are now in a better position to focus squarely on Clann Cholmáin. But before doing so we will begin by firstly examining the source material available for such a study in much greater detail.

113 F.J.Byrne, 'The Ireland of St Columba', 44.

Annals

Our primary focus here will be on the earlier history of the annals and the various problems surrounding the origins and transmission of this source. While general reference will be made to later developments, we will avoid detailed discussion of the later medieval history of the annals and instead focus on the so-called 'Iona Chronicle' and 'Chronicle of Ireland' phases. Later we shall also consider several more specific issues which have a specific bearing on how we will use the annals in studying Clann Cholmáin.

There remains some disagreement about when exactly contemporary annalistic recording began though the importance of the monastic community on Iona is now generally accepted, indeed as Mac Niocaill put it, 'the case for the existence of the 'Iona Chronicle' must be regarded as proven.'[1] The issue is complicated by the existence of the so-called 'Irish World Chronicle' based on various and largely continental sources which is focused on the history of the ancient world. Into this were inserted references to the prehistoric Irish past, the feats and obits of legendary Irish kings for example. The resulting package linked the Irish into Christian world history. For the very earliest period then, the difficulty is in distinguishing genuine contemporary annal records from this type of largely unhistorical material.[2] While some would argue that contemporary records were not kept until the end of the seventh century, or even later, there now appears to be growing confidence in a date much closer to the foundation of Iona in the mid-sixth century.[3] This early period in the history of the annals need not of course have been uniform, indeed it would be quite surprising if it had been. On the basis of chronological inconsistencies, Charles-Edwards suggests that there may have been three main strata to the Iona annals, namely from the start of contemporary recording to *c.*642; from *c.*642 to

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1 Gearoid MacNiocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals* (Dublin 1975) 19. Though it has been argued that the 'Iona Chronicle' developed from brief notes kept in the margins of Easter tables, a number of early sources are possible. Marginal notes, if lengthy, would have cluttered an Easter table, perhaps necessitating the early creation of a dedicated text, ordered chronologically. See Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Early Irish annals from Easter tables, a case re-stated', *Peritia* 2 (1983) 74-86; Nicholas Evans, *The present and past in Medieval Irish chronicles* (Woodbridge 2010) 172-73.

2 Which is not to say that the Medieval Irish thought it was entirely fictional. See Gregory Toner, 'The Ulster Cycle: Historiography or Fiction?', *CMCS* 40 (2000) 1-20.

3 See: A.P. Smyth, 'The Earliest Irish Annals: Their First Contemporary Entries, and the Earliest Centres of Recording', *PRIA* 72C (1972) 7-12; Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources* (London 1972)118-19; T.M. Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i (Liverpool 2006) 7-9; Daniel P. Mc Carthy, *The Irish Annals: Their Genesis, Evolution and History* (Dublin 2008) 132-33, 150, 167.

*c.*710 and from *c.*710 until *c.*740.[4] Significantly, while he argues that these annalistic strata were all Columban and all were eventually brought together in Iona, there is a possibility that one such stratum was kept in Ireland before being joined to the Iona annals as they then stood and before this composite work then came back to Ireland *c.*740. But it is the transfer of *c.*740 which is generally regarded as of the greatest importance in the history of this source.[5] The text from this stage has been dubbed the 'Chronicle of Ireland' and while it no longer survives independently, its existence can be deduced from various surviving daughter texts which all share a common core of material.

The question of where exactly in Ireland the 'Chronicle' was continued following the move from Iona remains to be resolved satisfactorily. An analysis of monasteries mentioned in the annals for this period shows an interest in the region of Brega and Hughes has suggested that this was where the chronicle was kept in the early and mid-eighth century.[6] There is however, from the late eighth century onward 'the liveliest concern with Armagh' and 'this sort of material must have come from Armagh itself.'[7] Hughes highlights a ninth century concern in the annals to emphasise Cenél nEógain interests in Brega and stresses the links between the Cenél nEógain, Armagh and Brega, the most obvious manifestation of which might be Patrick's *máer* or 'steward'. This figure, based at churches in Brega, (Cell Móna and Tréoit for example),[8] would appear to have

4 T.M. Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 38, 56.

5 T.F. O'Rahilly felt compilation of what he termed the 'Ulster Chronicle' began *c.*740 at Bangor incorporating earlier Iona material. T.F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish history and Mythology* (Dublin 1946) 253-55. MacNiocaill, amongst others, has since argued that links between Bangor and Iona adequately account for the inclusion of Bangor related material in the Iona annals. MacNiocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals* 20. Bannerman points out that the very wording of some of the pre-740 entries proves they were being made outside of Ireland. John Bannerman, 'Notes on the Scottish Entries in the Early Irish Annals', idem, *Studies in the History of DalRiada* (Edinburgh 1974) 9-26, esp 12-13. McCarthy has suggested that an annal entry at 744, inserted retrospectively and involving a beached whale, records in allegorical form the arrival of the Iona annals and various other precious books to Ireland. While certainly imaginative, he himself notes that because this entry is not in *AU,* it may have been added to the Clonmacnoise ancestor text at any stage after the tenth-century split in the 'Chronicle of Ireland', to be discussed below. This puts some strain on this notion. McCarthy, *The Irish Annals* 165-66.

6 Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland* 124. While Hughes dates contemporary annal records from no earlier than the late seventh century, she admits that 'there must have been earlier material to draw on'. *Ibid,* 145. It seems at least some of the disagreement regarding the early history of the annals is due to definition. While perhaps unlikely that a dedicated annal text was maintained in the earliest period (see n.1 reference to Easter tables above) this distinction does not seem terribly important if scholars are agreed that we have access to early (i.e. sixth century) records, in whatever form they may have originally been kept.

7 Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland* 130

8 The earliest reference can be found at: *AU* 814.1. For a full list of *Máeir Phátraic*, see the note by Tomás Ó Fiaich towards the end of Gwynn's article. Aubrey Gwynn, 'Brian in Armagh (1005)', *Seanchas Ard Mhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society* 9 (1) (1978) 35-51.

represented the Patrician church and its interests in Brega and may have had some revenue collecting function. The detailed annalistic information about relatively minor ecclesiastical figures in the churches of Brega might be explained if an Armagh annalist, perhaps via the *máer* or some other link, had access to information about local events in Brega. Hughes certainly believes that 'from about 780 or 790 they [the annals] were kept at Armagh.'[9] MacNiocaill argues for 'two annalistic streams' from the mid eighth century.[10] The first he considers was kept at Armagh where the annals were continued both forward and backward to incorporate Patrician interpolations and emphases. The second, a Mide/Brega based element, was maintained at Clonard.[11] Charles-Edwards suggests a more straightforward history. He argues that for the whole period between the transfer from Iona until the early tenth century, the annals were kept in Brega. This view essentially results from considering the links between Brega and Armagh from a different point of view. In short, the movement of information could just as easily have flown in both directions. Hence it is possible that an annalist writing in Brega had access to detailed information about events in Armagh. Indeed, such was the size and importance of the northern community that it would hardly be surprising if news of major events in Armagh were commonly known in Brega anyway. The evidence for larger communities such as Armagh or Clonard 'risks being self-destructive. The more important the monastery or church, the less significant it is that a full record of its abbots should be preserved.'[12] Charles-Edwards is quite adamant that 'there is no convincing evidence to show that the ninth-century annals of the Chronicle of Ireland were written at Armagh rather than in a Brega church with close links to Armagh.'[13] MacNiocaill's two annalistic streams might therefore, 'be brought under one roof.'[14]

If we were to accept this theory, then the location of annalistic recording might be narrowed down still further by considering the records of lesser office-holders. Reference, obits generally, to relatively insignificant office-holders who would only be of very localised interest might point to a probable centre of recording. The notices of minor

9 Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland* 145. Essentially Hughes seems to believe that from *c*.740-80 recording took place in Brega, then shifted to Armagh before the *c*.911 split when a copy of the 'Chronicle' went to Clonmacnoise, while recording continued independently at Armagh.

10 MacNiocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals* 22.

11 MacNiocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals* 21-3; Smyth also argues for an annalistic tradition based at Clonard from *c*.775. A.P. Smyth, 'The Earliest Irish Annals', 28.

12 Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 9. The potential significance of this type of communication between Armagh and Brega/Conaille is also noted by Evans. Evans, *The present and the past* 43-44.

13 Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 13, for the model in general see: 9-13.

14 Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 12.

ecclesiastical figures in Brega, when scrutinised, would suggest that 'Treóit and Lusca remain [...] the most likely candidates.'[15] In other words Southern Brega and the territory of the Uí Chernaig branch of the Síl nÁedo Sláine. Charles-Edwards makes a convincing case that it was here that the annals were kept and where the fifth and sixth century entries were retrospectively amplified on a Patrician basis.[16] We will return to these theories again later but for the moment it is sufficient to note that while it is unlikely scholars will ever reach complete agreement on the origins, development and transmission of the 'Chronicle of Ireland', the debate in itself serves to warn us of the complexity of this source material.

The next significant development in the history of the 'Chronicle of Ireland' is the early tenth-century split. There is greater scholarly consensus about this event than for the preceding period.[17] Early in the second decade of the tenth century a copy of the 'Chronicle of Ireland' as it then stood found its way to Clonmacnoise. From this copy have descended the Annals of Tigernach (*ATig*), the Chronicum Scottorum (*CS*) and ultimately the Annals of Clonmacnoise (*AClon*). MacNiocaill highlights the close links between Clonmacnoise and Clonard including the fact that they often shared abbots and suggests that the text was transmitted between the communities during this period and owing to this link.[18] Subsequently, both this the Clonmacnoise branch of the Chronicle and a separate branch ancestral to the Annals of Ulster (*AU*), would have been subject to retrospective editing, with both the addition and subtraction of material as was considered necessary. There is also some evidence that 'scholarly connections' were maintained between those chroniclers maintaining these two branches.[19] But importantly, if material is present in both *AU* and a Clonmacnoise text it is reasonable to assume that it was

15 Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 15.

16 Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 58.

17 Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland* 107; MacNiocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals* 22-24; Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 6; Evans, *The present and the past* 89-90. McCarthy appears to be alone in seeing no such tenth-century split. Instead he argues that the 'Iona Chronicle' was brought to Moville *c.*740 and soon after, *c.*753, a copy of this 'Iona-Moville Chronicle' reached Clonmacnoise. He considers this was maintained at Clonmacnoise until *c.*1022 when it was used as the basis for the Liber Cuanach, which he attributes to Cúán Ua Lothcháin (a phonetically impossible equation). Dub dá Leithe (d.1064), abbot of Armagh, he argues, subsequently used the Liber Cuanach together with Armagh material covering the period *c.*790-1050 to compile and Armagh chronicle. McCarthy, *The Irish Annals* 196-97, 222. For an in-depth analysis which points out several other flaws in his theory, see Evans, *The present and the past* 67, 148.

18 MacNiocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals* 23. See also: Katherine Grabowski, 'The Annals of Inisfallen, A.D. 431-1092', eadem and David Dumville (ed), *Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales: The Clonmacnoise-group texts* (Suffolk 1984) 55; Evans, *The present and the past* 89-90.

19 Evans, *The present and the past* 114.

originally in the 'Chronicle of Ireland'.[20]

It seems as though the 'Clonmacnoise Chronicle', the no longer extant ancestor of *ATig*, *CS* and *AClon*, was composed between 911 and 954.[21] While obviously closely related it has been suggested *ATig* and *CS* are 'different abstracts of a fuller core-text.'[22] *ATig* is found in a variety of 'fragments', the most important of which for our purposes, are contained in the fourteenth-century MS Rawlinson B.488. Having examined the material in some detail, MacNeill concluded that 'fragment IV including the so-called 'continuation', is a transcript of a contemporary chronicle kept at Clonmacnoise during the period 975-1178, one of the contemporary chroniclers being Tigernach.'[23] *CS* survives in a number of different copies, all of which can be traced to a single authoritative copy by the seventeenth-century Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh.[24] While the traditional view has been that there 'is in total very little [...] in *CS* which is not also in *Tig*'[25] more recently it has been noted, that 'CS is an *abbreviated* copy of a text *like* AT.'[26] Indeed, 'far from 'sometimes' lacking an entry which the other chronicle has, CS is ignorant of some 45% of AT's 943 entries for the period (AD 974-1178), while AT fail to share 25% of CS's 696 entries.'[27] Both *ATig* and *CS,* it seems, 'altered their common source considerably'.[28]

Returning to the tenth century split in the 'Chronicle of Ireland', we may now consider our most important annalistic text, the Annals of Ulster (*AU*), regarded as preserving the 'Chronicle of Ireland' most completely.[29] *AU* survives in two MSS, the more important dating from the late fifteenth century and written for the vicar general of

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20 Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 1-2. Unfortunately there is a considerable lacuna in the Clonmacnoise text (*AT* 766-974 and *CS* 722-804) complicating matters still further.

21 David Dumville, 'When was the 'Clonmacnoise Chronicle' created? the evidence of the Welsh annals', Katherine Grabowski and idem (ed), *Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales: The Clonmacnoise-group texts* (Suffolk 1984) 226.

22 David Dumville, 'Where did the 'Clonmacnoise Chronicle' originate?', *Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland* 182.

23 Eoin MacNeill, 'The Authorship and Structure of the Annals of Tigernach', *Ériu* vii 108. Stokes's edition of the *ATig* has been much criticised. For example, Paul Walsh, *Irish men of Learning: Studies by Father Paul Walsh* Colm O'Lochlainn (ed) (Dublin 1947) 223. Most importantly, the belief that one Tigernach Ua Broein (d.1088) was responsible for the entire work led Stokes to divide the text at this date.

24 For a discussion of his transcription of *CS,* See: Nollaig Ó Muraile, *The Celebrated Antiquary Dubhaltach MacFhirbhisigh (c.1600-1671). His lineage, Life and Learning* (Maynooth 1996) 97ff.

25 Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland* 106.

26 Katherine Grabowski, 'The Annals of Inisfallen, A.D. 431-1092', 6 (Her italics).

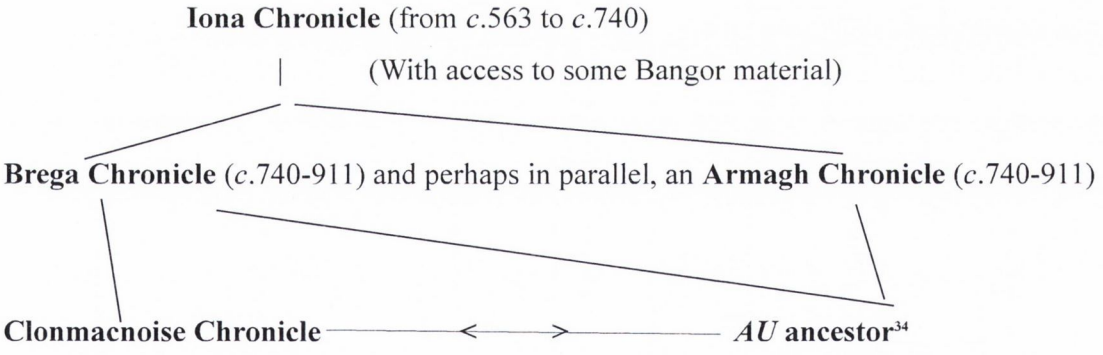
27 David Dumville, 'Where did the 'Clonmacnoise Chronicle' originate?', 155.

28 Evans, *The present and the past* 65, also see 89-90.

29 Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 7. The title *Annals of Ulster* seems only to date from the early seventeenth century, See: Aubrey Gwynn, 'Cathal Mac Maghnusa and the Annals of Ulster: Part I', *Clogher Record* 2 (2) (1958) 230; This and a second article by Gwynn on the topic have been republished together with an introduction by Nollaig Ó Muraile, See: Aubrey Gwynn, *Cathal Óg Mac Maghnusa and the Annals of Ulster* Nollaig Ó Muraile (ed), (Enniskillen 1998).

the diocese of Clogher, Cathal mac Maghnusa (d.1498).[30] Mac Niocaill considers *AU* to be a composite of the two main annalistic strands he had earlier isolated, firstly material recorded at Armagh from the eighth century following the move from Iona, as well as much of the Clonard material.[31] However for the period covering the mid tenth to mid eleventh centuries there are sufficient entries of close similarity or indeed identity to suggest some continued interaction between the two branches of the 'Chronicle of Ireland' probably due to 'contamination of an ancestor of AU by a Clonmacnoise-group text now lost'.[32] Indeed this process continued down to the late fifteenth century as it is visible in the main *AU* MS as we have it today. Many entries recorded in a separate hand appear to have come from a Clonmacnoise-group text.[33]

Irrespective of what particular model we choose to adopt, it seems reasonably clear that from *c.*740 contemporary annalistic recording was continued in Ireland and from that period the 'Chronicle of Ireland' shows a great deal of interest in the affairs of the Southern Uí Néill. The following basic diagram represents the generally accepted path of transmission:



For the purposes of our study, there are a few obvious but important points to be made. Firstly, as regards the early Iona phase, Columba and his successors were Uí Néill aristocracy, closely related to powerful kings, so an interest in the Uí Néill comes as no surprise. Adomnán's well-known comments on Díarmait mac Cerbaill (d.565) and Áed Sláine (d.604) in his *Life of Columba* also confirm that the Iona community had a

30 Aubrey Gwynn, 'Cathal Mac Maghnusa and the Annals of Ulster: Part I', 230.
31 Gearóid MacNiocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals* 22.
32 Katherine Grabowski, 'The Annals of Inisfallen, A.D. 431-1092', *Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales: The Clonmacnoise-group texts* 56.
33 Grabowski, 'The Annals of Inisfallen, A.D. 431-1092', 43.
34 Though of course much more detailed, Evans' diagrams also illustrate these major and generally agreed events in the textual history of the annals. Evans, *The present and the past* 247ff.

knowledge of and interest in the Southern Uí Néill.[35] Once recording had transferred to Ireland interest in Mide and particularly Brega intensified. As noted, this may have been due to recording based in Brega, or at least at a centre with access to detailed information about the region. Either way, the interest in this region during a period of significant change within the Uí Néill is important for this study.

While his overall ideas about the history of the annals have fallen out of favour, because several specific points have a direct bearing on our topic, John Kelleher's work requires particular attention. He is of the opinion that 'everything in the annals up to about 590 and a large number of entries from thence to 735 (the entry on Bede's death) were either freshly composed or wholly revised not earlier than the latter half of the ninth-century.'[36] He then memorably compares the shortcomings of the annals to those of the Soviet encyclopedia. In a later and more detailed article he considers the dating of the annals in the context of a wider discussion about the *Táin*, the *Lebor Gabála* and the genealogies. He argues that these texts show the creation of an ancient and entirely fictitious 'alternation' in the overkingship of Ireland which while interrupted was then 'restored' in the mid-eighth century as the kingship of Tara passed regularly between Clann Cholmáin and Cenél nÉogain.[37] As a result he attributes the earlier fictional 'alternation' to a pseudohistorical 'workshop' which churned out *Do Fhlathiusaib hÉrenn*, *Lebor Gabála* and the prehistoric portion of the genealogical corpus sometime 'toward the end of the reign of Donnchad mac Domnaill (c.770-797).'[38] Kelleher refers to 'the Iona Chronicle which was inserted wholesale into the annals from the early seventh-century to 736, apparently to compensate for large excisions of Irish material which, it may be suspected, conflicted with the claims of the newly (and to us, mysteriously) exalted Mide kings.'[39]

Firstly, it is impossible to engage with the suggestion that this hypothetical 'Irish material' was removed and replaced with the 'Iona Chronicle' because we have no evidence it existed in the first place. In a further note to his last comment, he adds that

35 For example, see: Alan Orr Anderson & Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (ed), *Adomnan's Life of Columba* (London 1961) 38-39 (Columba's warning to Áed), 64-65 (Adomnán's favourable view of Díarmait); Also see the discussion of this text in Saints' Lives (Part 1) below. Of course we need to be aware that Adomnán's specific comments tell us more about his contemporary concerns rather than events a hundred years before he was writing.

36 John V. Kelleher, 'Early Irish history and Pseudo-History', *Studia Hibernica* 3 (1963) 122.

37 John V. Kelleher, 'The Táin and the Annals', *Ériu* xxii (1971) 113.

38 Kelleher, 'The Táin and the Annals', 115.

39 Kelleher, 'The Táin and the Annals', 115.

> If the Scottish entries are subtracted from the annals a remarkably thin chronicle of Irish events is left, and in this a significant number of entries have been rendered useless by deleting what would identify the persons mentioned. Particularly in the sixth and early seventh centuries there has been much deliberate suppression of information on Tethba, Cenél Cairbre, Cenél Lóegaire, and Cenél Fiachach. We are left with no adequate account of what was certainly the most significant political process in early Christian Ireland, the rise of Clann Cholmáin Móir and the emergence of Mide as a major state.[40]

Firstly, it is quite probable that a thin chronicle remains following the removal of Scottish entries because the Chronicle was being kept at Iona at this point and is therefore very much concerned with events in the region. Kelleher argues for deliberate suppression affecting 'every possibly competing line within the descent from Diarmait mac Cerbaill (d. 565), and that for the sixth and early seventh centuries the annals seem to have been largely cleared of entries relating to the other southern Uí Néill tribes.'[41] Information about these other Southern Uí Néill 'tribes' certainly is scanty in the sixth and early seventh centuries but the same is true for the Clann Cholmáin over the corresponding period.[42] Adopting Kelleher's position forces us to admit that those carrying out this later wholesale revision made a very bad job of their work. For example, surely such an undertaking would ensure that an accurate reconstruction of early Uí Néill expansion in the midlands would be impossible. On the contrary, as we have already seen there are enough entries about these other Southern Uí Néill groupings to allow us reconstruct the conquest of the midlands and show that the ultimately less successful branches of the dynasty were the main driving force behind the initial Uí Néill expansion into the region.[43] If partisans of a Clann Cholmáin king were involved in large-scale revision they would surely have doctored the annals to glorify their ancestors more thoroughly. While attempting to narrow down the time in which his pseudohistorical workshop was operating, Kelleher also argues unconvincingly from statistics. He states, 'the number of entries per decade rises rapidly from an average of about twenty-five in the latter half of the sixth century to nearly a hundred and forty in the decade 741-50.'[44] At the earliest, the annals were only starting to be kept in the latter half of the sixth-century, and initially

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40 Kelleher, 'The Táin and the Annals', 115 n.2.

41 John V. Kelleher, 'The Pre-Norman Irish genealogies', *Irish Historical Studies* xvi (1969).

42 Strictly speaking it is unlikely that Clann Cholmáin existed as an independent grouping this early anyway but rather, along with the descendants of Áed Sláne, were part of a grouping identified through their descent from Díarmait mac Cerbaill and ultimately Conall mac Néill.

43 Alfred Smyth,'The Húi Néill and the Leinstermen in the Annals of Ulster, 431-516 A.D.', *Études Celtiques* xiv (i) (1974) 121-143.

44 Kelleher, 'The Táin and the Annals', 115.

surely in a fairly adhoc manner. A low figure at such an early date is hardly surprising. It would not seem appropriate to contrast this with the period immediately after the annals had moved to Ireland. Kelleher's conclusions seem suspect and are coloured by and dependent upon his overarching thesis, i.e. belief in the existence of a great pseudohistorical 'workshop' operating in the late eighth century. In short, he believes the earlier annals are sparse due to later wholesale revision and the most detailed decades correspond with the date of that revision, 'a year around 790.'[45]

While we have discussed the probable origins and development of the annals, where they were kept and the probable path of transmission, we might now consider how they deal with and treat Clann Cholmáin. In short, what biases should we be aware of in using this source and how might we account for them? Not surprisingly, while the annals are often more or less obviously partisan, the biases are certainly not uniform but rather reflect the particular concerns of individual annalists or communities and the contexts in which entries were written. Charles-Edwards approached the annals and king-lists together as part of his study of the kingship of Tara and questioned what biases are evident toward particular dynasties.[46] In terms of the kingship of Tara, in the pre- *c.*740 period, i.e. when record keeping was taking place at Iona, the treatment of various Uí Néill branches appears generally even-handed, though non-Uí Néill kings are not admitted as kings of Tara.[47] As these individuals were often in opposition to a Cenél Conaill king, a dynasty with which the community of Iona was closely associated, this is hardly surprising.

It has also been suggested that certain annalists may have been concerned with the manner of an individual's death and hence its spiritual quality. In short, the death of a king who died naturally in his bed was regarded more favorably than that of a king slain by treachery or in an individual act of violence, particularly if at the hands of a kinsman. This concern influenced the practice of record keeping and is reflected in a hierarchy of terminology used in recording death in the annals.[48] Such a hierarchy, informed by theological ideas, warns us against blaming annalistic bias simply on dynastic affiliation.

In the post *c.*740 period, when the 'Chronicle of Ireland' was being kept in Ireland,

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45 Kelleher, 'The Táin and the Annals', 115.

46 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 501-07.

47 Even though we know that some non Uí Néill kings were in a position to challenge for the position as late as the seventh century. See: Fergus Kelly and Thomas Charles-Edwards (ed), *Bechbretha: an Old Irish law-tract on bee-keeping* (Dublin 1983) §32 at 68.

48 For discussion and examples, see: Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 24-32.

its biases change. From *c.*740-847 the annals show a marked preference for Clann Cholmáin as opposed to Cenél nEógain. While these two dynasties would appear to have alternately secured the Uí Néill overkingship (the kingship of Tara), it is only those from Clann Cholmáin who are explicitly recorded as kings of Tara. Those from Cenél nEógain are not granted this explicit designation until the second half of the ninth century, though this prejudice 'does not extend to excising from the record entries which imply Cenél nÉogain tenure of the kingship of Tara'.[49] This point has implications for the location of annalistic recording as proposed by Charles-Edwards and sketched out at the outset. If, as he argues, recording took place at a church in Brega with links to Armagh and that this link accounts for the inclusion of detailed information about Armagh, it seems unlikely that the text would also discriminate against the Cenél nEógain and in favour of the Clann Cholmáin considering the former dynasty's close association with Armagh. The latter bias *is* present, therefore the obvious solution is to partially abandon the model proposed by Charles-Edwards and instead admit the possibility that several centres of midland recording may well have contributed to the 'Chronicle' as we receive it today.

There are several other specific issues we must be conscious of in using annalistic data. The first is the language of the annals. An entry in the *Annals of Ulster* written entirely in the vernacular during the earliest period of coverage is very unusual and must be regarded with suspicion as a possible later interpolation or elaboration. We will encounter several such examples. While there might well be Irish elements in early entries, to record names for example, entries appearing entirely in the vernacular account for less than four percent in the *AU* for the first two hundred and seventy years or so.[50] A related and crucial problem is the appearance and use of titles. For example, let us consider the following entry:

AU 618.2	iugul*atio* Fergusa filii Colmai*n* Magni.
CS [618]	iugulatio Fergusa mic Colmain Móir, Rí Mid*he*.

At this early point in the text's coverage it would appear unwise to suggest that we have here evidence for a kingship of Mide in the early seventh century. Rather, it seems that

49 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 501. See also: Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 12.

50 The Irish annalists working in a Latin medium had, of course, difficulty dealing with native names. Occasionally they might attempt to use the Latin 'filius' followed by the father's name with a genitive termination, in either Latin or Irish. But by far the more common policy was to use the vernacular 'macc'. David Dumville, 'Latin and Irish in the *Annals of Ulster*, A.D. 431-1050', Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamond McKitterick & David Dumville (ed), *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in memory of Kathleen Hughes* (Cambridge 1982) 323.

AU best preserves the underlying *Chronicle of Ireland* text while the title has been added to someone recognised as an ancestor of later kings of Mide by *CS*. But from about the middle third of the eighth century *rí* is used quite frequently in *AU* and while *rex* is more common, at this later stage we can have greater confidence in the political titles found in the annals.[51]

Overall we appear to be relatively well served by the annals in their treatment of Clann Cholmáin. Pre-*c*.740, there does not appear to be any evidence that the source is biased against Clann Cholmáin though the location of Iona means the midlands is perhaps not of the utmost importance to the annalists then at work. Post *c*.740 the 'Chronicle of Ireland' is being kept much closer to Mide with the result that we have access to far greater detail about the political history of the midlands. It is also clear that there were strong links between Clann Cholmáin and the Columban church from this period.[52] The annals certainly are composite and highly stratified and we must deal with them critically but we need not adopt Kelleher's hyper-sceptical viewpoint. Instead, it seems we have a reasonably full and accurate record for the eighth century from a source with detailed knowledge of local events. For the seventh century and still earlier however, the record is patchy and unreliable and must be approached with caution.

51 Dumville, 'Latin and Irish in the *Annals of Ulster*, A.D. 431-1050', 325.

52 *AU* 753.4; *AU* 778.4; Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford 1988) 64 ff.

Genealogies

The vast corpus of Irish Genealogies is highly stratified in the form we receive it today. Though the earliest surviving genealogical manuscripts are as late as the twelfth century, they do probably contain information from the seventh century or perhaps even earlier. Even manuscripts from as late as the modern period often contain much ancient information.[1] It is necessary to consider the very nature of this type of source material before examining those genealogies which relate specifically to Clann Cholmáin,

The origin of genealogy keeping has been much debated. It has been described as an essentially oral form of record, later transferred into written form following the arrival of Christianity and it has been claimed that it continued to be 'an orally cultivated profession throughout the Gaelic middle ages.'[2] The problems associated with oral genealogy have themselves been examined with the conclusion that 'six, or at the utmost eight, generations seem to be the maximum that can be accurately preserved by oral transmission, and that under the most favourable conditions. [...] Beyond this limit, and much sooner (as will be seen) in times of change, syncopation - the telescoping of generations- and confusion set in.'[3] While the oral transmission of genealogical material may have carried on through the middle ages, Ó Corráin has argued convincingly that the genealogical sources we use today are 'based on written transmission',[4] and probably inspired by biblical example.[5] As sophisticated, multi-purpose creations, they were products of a learned elite and of a written cultural environment. For our purposes, the key is to understand these written genealogies, how and why they were created and to grasp their potential and limits as source material.

In an oral culture defective memory might well play a part as one moved farther and farther from the 'start' of the genealogy but political expediency and necessity, conscious or unconscious, also played a part. However 'syncopation' or 'telescoping' is not limited to oral genealogy. These points apply equally to the written genealogical source material. Genealogy served as a form of title deed, to land or to religious or political office. In terms of the latter it could provide justification for

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1 For example, see the seventeenth-century collection of Mac Fhirbhisigh: Nollaig Ó Muraíle (ed), *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies (Leabhar Mór na nGenealach) compiled (1645-66) by Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh* (5 vols Dublin 2003). For the genealogies from the earliest MSS, Rawlinson. B.502 and the Book of Leinster, see: M.A. O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin 1962) which also contains variant readings from later MSS.

2 David N. Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal lists', P.H. Sawyer & I. N. Woods (ed), *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds 1977) 84.

3 Kenneth Nicholls, 'Genealogy', Neil Buttimer, Colin Rynne, Helen Guerin (ed), *The Heritage of Ireland* (Cork 2000) 156.

4 Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past: The Early Irish Genealogical Tradition', *Peritia* 12 (1998) 188; See esp. 188-192 for the evidence against an oral origin.

5 See Ó Corráin's foreword in: Nollaig Ó Muraíle, *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies* i, ix.

the continued monopolisation of political power or position. Reference to an ancient, respectable and royal bloodline could be a powerful argument for the maintenance of the status quo. Partly because of this and also due to a desire to plug themselves into biblical world history (the genealogical exemplar), the Irish concocted an elaborate prehistoric genealogical story linking their ancestors with, ultimately, Adam. While the genealogies for the historical period are quite different, often containing genuine information which can be checked against other sources, we must be wary of viewing them simply as raw data for 'they may seek to conceal, rather than merely to convey, information.'[6] The use of genealogy as a form of support for contemporary claims obviously meant they were subject to revision and editing as circumstances changed and as the need arose. We should view them, in Ó Corráin's words, as 'socio-cultural instruments devised to serve social ends: title, inheritance, status in church and in secular society.'[7] Rather than viewing them as static, objective records they must be viewed as malleable, because 'changes in the social and political structure will necessitate changes in the genealogical expression of that system.' To reiterate, they are tools and 'do not merely express present relationships but also validate them.'[8] This interpretation of the genealogies has now long replaced a previous view that considered the maintenance of genealogy an antiquarian practice, the unthinking retention of a fossilised product of no use.[9] Linked to the above problems is the fact that, as has often been noted, the importance of a political dynasty often stands in inverse proportion to the complexity of its genealogy. For a very successful dynasty the genealogy would need to be pruned regularly in order to emphasise the lineage of the contemporary holders of power. In the context of this study, this process has had particularly depressing results.

But firstly some definitions might be helpful. Two broad types of genealogy exist, the *Craobhsgoileadh* and the *Geinealach.* The *Craobhsgoileadh,* sometimes termed 'ramification', is essentially segmentary and can provide considerable detail by including more than one name per generation. This detail might allow us to construct a detailed genealogical table of a given family, sept or dynasty.[10] However such an undertaking is not possible with Clann Cholmáin as the *Craobhsgaoileadh* format is not used. The *Geinealach* is generally more common and we find the Clann Cholmáin genealogy in this format. The *Geinealach* has also been described as a 'linear retrograde patriline', or more succinctly, a 'pedigree'.[11] In short, this type of genealogy records a

6 David N. Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal lists', 72.
7 Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past: The Early Irish Genealogical Tradition', 189.
8 David N. Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal lists', 85. See also: David Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies and Genealogies: Studies in the Political History of Early Medieval Ireland and Wales* (Oxford 2003) 23.
9 See: Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past', 185-86 and John V. Kelleher, 'The Pre-Norman Irish genealogies', *Irish Historical Studies* xvi (1969) 147.
10 Nollaig Ó Muraíle, *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies* i, 10.
11 David Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies and Genealogies* 15; David E. Thornton, 'Kings, Chronicles, and

direct line of ancestors for a single individual, that is, one member per generation, usually in the familiar 'X son of Y son of Z' fashion. Later we will come to consider kinglists as a form of source material but must here immediately distinguish the linear pedigree from the kinglist. Since the Clann Cholmáin were a very successful political dynasty from the eighth century, oftentimes their genealogy seems little different from a kinglist and indeed there is some interaction between these two genres.[12] However there is an important distinction to be made. Though those included in the Clann Cholmáin genealogy were often important kings, this is not the reason for their inclusion in the genealogy but rather because they were the direct ancestors of the dynast who headed it. For example, the Clann Cholmáin genealogies in Rawlinson B.502 and *LL* are continued down to the twelfth century. Those included are hence the direct ancestors of these twelfth-century dynasts. Indeed, as Thornton has shown, when compared with other available sources these genealogies omit many prominent members of the dynasty.[13] Among those omitted are several kings we know led the dynasty. To reiterate, their omission is because their twelfth century descendants found themselves excluded from power. This highlights the rationale but also the limitations of the linear genealogy. This form of genealogy is strict and has no room to accomodate collateral lines, irrespective of their onetime importance. As a result, its usefulness as source material is limited. It does however highlight a desire at the time of composition to link the contemporary rulers to a distant and appropriate ancestor and build political credibility from that tradition. The ruling line at the time of compilation ignored dynastic predecessors who were not direct ancestors irrespective of their onetime importance.

Considering the political success of the dynasty, it is hardly surprising that collateral branches were ruthlessly pruned from the Clann Cholmáin genealogy. Though an extreme case, it illustrates Dumville's point that 'genealogy allowed the ruling dynasties to present the past (and, by implication, the future) in terms of their own history; such total exclusion of other lines was a powerful propaganda weapon.'[14] Clann Cholmáin's genealogy is almost entirely of the linear, 'pedigree' type and we shall now examine the surviving versions in turn. Since there is confusion in certain copies between the genealogies of Clann Cholmáin and the closely related midland dynasty of Coílle Fallomuin, we will discuss both here.[15]

Genealogies: Reconstructing Mediaeval Celtic Dynasties', K.S.B. Keats-Rohan (ed), *Family Trees and the Roots of Politics: The prosopography of Britain and France from the tenth to the twelfth century* (Woodbridge 1997) 25.

12 David N. Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal lists', 85.

13 David E. Thornton, 'Kings, Chronicles, and Genealogies: Reconstructing Mediaeval Celtic Dynasties', 33. Perhaps the most obvious example is the exclusion of Conchobar, who reigned from 1030-73, from the Clann Cholmáin genealogy. His descendants were not as successful and had been long ousted by the twelfth century.

14 David N. Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal lists', 83.

15 The more important pedigrees crucial for this study have been grouped together and reproduced linearly in two tables in Appendix 2. A fuller transcription which includes various other shorter strands of genealogical material, much of it covering the eleventh and twelfth centuries, is also included for completeness.

The Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae texts.

O'Brien's Corpus draws on the two earliest genealogical manuscripts, MS Rawlinson B.502 and the Book of Leinster, both dating from the twelfth century.

Rawlinson B.502

This genealogy is titled 'Genelach Clainne Colmáin' and is essentially a single pedigree stretching from the early twelfth century back to Níall Noígíallach and beyond. It tells us that in the early twelfth century the dynasty was led by four sons of Domnall son of Flann, namely Murchad, Máel Sechnaill, Murcherdach and Díarmait. It omits one generation later included in *LL*, i.e. Domnall abbot of Clonard (d.1019).

Book of Leinster

The relevant *LL* genealogy is entitled 'Genelach Ríg Mide', was put together about 1160 and is an update of that found in Rawlinson B.502.[16] The Máel Sechnaill who heads this genealogy would appear to have reigned until about 1155.[17] The names of his uncles, included in the slightly earlier Rawlinson copy, are now omitted as the pedigree has been brought up to date and forward another generation. However this example clearly shows how the linear pedigree works, necessitating the regular pruning of less successful branches.

TCD MS 1298 (H.2.7).

The genealogical material in this MS was written down before 1351.[18] H.2.7 does preserve several lines not found in the *CGH* MSS and while these generally only occur in small, later sections of the genealogy, it is nevertheless a valuable supplement. A line excluded by the *CGH* MSS heads the main section of this genealogy, i.e. one 'Concobar mac Mail Sechnaill' who reigned about 1105. His grandfather, also Conchobar, reigned 1030-73. Once beyond him we are back to Domnall abbot of Clonard (d.1019) and his father Máel Sechnaill Mór (d.1022) and have

16 See: William M. O'Sullivan, 'Notes on the scripts and make-up of the Book of Leinster', *Celtica* 7 (1966) 1-31; *Idem*, 'Manuscripts and Palaeography', Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (ed), *A New History of Ireland* i 546. These two copies of this genealogy are used to illustrate how genealogies were updated and developed in: Katharine Simms, *Medieval Gaelic Sources: Maynooth research guides for Irish Local history* (Maynooth 2009) 42.

17 F.J. Byrne and K. W. Nicholls, 'Genealogical Tables', T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne (ed), *A New History of Ireland, Maps, Genealogies, Lists: A Companion to Irish History Part II* (Oxford 1984) ix, 131.

18 See Donnchadh Ó Corráin's foreword in: Nollaig Ó Muraíle, *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies* i, x.

effectively reconverged with the other twelfth-century pedigrees presented in *CGH*.

However the H.2.7. compiler also had access to the traditions found in the *CGH* texts. Having taken the main body of the genealogy from Conchobar back to Niall Noígiallach, the compiler returns to the eleventh and early twelfth centuries by tacking on the lines that head the *LL* and Rawlinson B.502 versions. Much later in MS H.2.7. we also get another long Clann Cholmáin genealogy which in its earlier sections confirms the main genealogy discussed above. However, once into the later eleventh and twelfth centuries this genealogy includes many obscure figures from the later history of the Ua Máel Sechlainn dynasty, some of whom have been identified.[19] But between these fuller sections are a large number of short strands of Clann Cholmáin genealogy. In a few cases the individuals included date back as far as the ninth century.

H.2.7 (1298) contd. (The Colmán Confusion)

Several of these shorter strands appear to be paralleled in other sources. A short section of genealogy in Rawlinson B.502 appears to parallel one of these shorter H.2.7 strands. However the genealogy in the Rawlinson MS occurs under the title 'Genelach Caílle Fallomain' (cf: spreadsheet 1 column F and spreadsheet 2 columns A and C). While the other short MS H.2.7. strands do not have parallels in the earlier MSS, they do appear, and in the same order, in the slightly later *BB* and much later *LMG* and *O'C*. Again in these cases the material is found under a 'Coílle Fallomuin' heading. The difficulty is therefore in deciding whether these sections of genealogy do actually refer to the Clann Cholmáin or rather, should we like *BB*, later reflected in *LMG* and *O'C*, consider them as Coílle Fallomuin genealogies. This issue is further complicated by the evident confusion surrounding the sons of Díarmait (d.565).

Hence, for example, one section of genealogy from H.2.7 (Spreadsheet 1 column F), ends with Colmán Mór. In the *BB* version, the genealogy is brought back simply to Colmán (Spreadsheet 2 column C), which appears a little ambiguous. However Walsh suggests that this Colmán was originally identified as 'Bec' but that this descriptor has been misplaced in *BB* and can be found four lines further down after Flann (Spreadsheet 2 column D).[20] Unfortunately the much earlier Rawlinson B.502 version was not carried back as far as Colmán but ends several generations later.

In short, H.2.7 (Spreadsheet 1 column F), traces a group of dynasts generally considered part of the Coílle Fallomuin back to Colmán Mór. But there is also a directly contradictory genealogy in

19 See: F.J. Byrne and K. W., Nicholls, 'Genealogical Tables', 131.

20 Paul Walsh, 'Ancient Meath according to The Book of Rights', *Leaves of History* i (Drogheda 1930) 51. This Flann is in column D of the Coílle Fallomuin spreadsheet. If Walsh is right, then it seems the mistake was carried into *LMG* and *O'C* too. (Spreadsheet 2 columns K and S).

H.2.7. (see spreadsheet 2 column B) which appears under the heading 'CENEL COLMAIN BIC' with the following note written directly above:

'qui prius magnus fuit'.

This short genealogy includes several dynasts who had already (above) been traced to Colmán Mór but instead it now travels through Colmán Bec to reach Díarmait. The short note, which might be translated as 'who was previously (the) great', could be a comment on or explanation of the confusion surrounding the Colmán Mór/Beg issue. This may be significant when we come to consider the 'Two Colmáns'.

Other short strands of genealogy in H.2.7. would also appear to be paralleled in *BB*, *O'C* and *LMG* though again under a heading referring to Coílle Fallomuin (cf. Spreadsheet 1 column I and Spreadsheet 2 columns G, N and V). The short H.2.7. strand (Spreadsheet 1 column L) is particularly interesting providing one of the few instances of variation in the earlier sections of the Clann Cholmáin genealogy. This tradition is not to my knowledge preserved anywhere else. An extra generation is inserted between Colmán Már and his son Suibne, i.e. one 'Cummaene'. The later individual named with the element Cáech, probably refers to Airmedach (d.637) while Catal and his brother Muredach were probably early eighth century dynasts. Two further tiny off-shoots of this early genealogy are also preserved in H.2.7. (Spreadsheet 1 columns M and N). Again, discussion of the potential value or implications of this evidence for the earliest history of the dynasty will be deferred until the other sources have been examined.

NLI MS G2 (Ó Cianáin).

It is believed that originally NLI MSS G2 and G3 constituted a single manuscript which dates to the earlier part of the life of the principal scribe, Ádhamh Ó Cianáin (d.1373), perhaps to the mid 1340s. This then predates such better known MSS as the Books of Lecan, Ballymote and Uí Maine.[21] The relevant genealogical material for our study (See Spreadsheet 1 columns P and Q) finds some parallels in MS H.2.7 discussed above and this tradition was later carried into the seventeenth-century collections of Ó Cléirigh and Mac Fhir Bhisigh to be discussed below.

The Book of Uí Maine, i.e. MS D ii 1 (The Royal Irish Academy).

The older part of this MS, which contains the genealogy we will be concerned with, was written before 1372.[22] The relevant genealogy occurs early in the MS (See Spreadsheet 1 column R)

21 Nessa Ní Shéaghdha (ed), *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland, Fasciculus I* (Dublin 1967) 12-28: 13; James Carney, 'The Ó Cianáin Miscellany', *Ériu* xxi (1969) 122-47: 123.

22 Françoise Henry and Geneviève Marsh-Micheli, 'Manuscripts and Illuminations, 1169-1603', Art Cosgrove (ed), *A New History of Ireland: Medieval Ireland 1169-1534* ii (Oxford 1987) 781-815: 801.

on a badly stained page with several large holes. It is impossible to make out the Clann Cholmáin genealogy from the facsimile but most of it is visible on the ISOS version. Still more can be made out with the naked eye from the MS directly. While there are still several characters which are difficult to make out with certainty, no entire name has remained undecipherable and *UM* would appear to preserve the same tradition found in the twelfth-century MSS.

The Book of Ballymote, i.e. MS 23 P12 (The Royal Irish Academy).

The genealogical section of *BB* was copied between 1383 and 1397.[23] The main Clann Cholmáin pedigree is quite similar to that found in MS Rawlinson B.502. Following it there is a brief section explaining the origin of various Uí Néill branches. However, much like H.2.7., *BB* then tacks on a different late eleventh and early twelfth century branch beginning with Conchobor which is followed by mention of the seven sons of Flann Sinna (Spreadsheet 1 columns S and T). As regards the main pedigree, it is defective and the earlier sources are to be preferred. For example Máel Sechnaill Mór's father is given as Flann Sinna, a dynast who died over thirty years before Máel Sechnaill's birth. Flann was in fact Máel Sechnaill's great grandfather. The pedigree is then carried back to Colmán Mór and does not contain any alternative traditions or valuable contradictions. But as we have seen above it does have several valuable strands of genealogy relating to the Coílle Fallomuin (Spreadsheet 2, columns C-I) which can be contrasted with the Clann Cholmáin genealogical material in H.2.7.

The Book of Lecan, i.e. MS 23 P 2 (The Royal Irish Acadamey).

Lec dates from the early fifteenth century.[24] The Clann Cholmán genealogy it contains does not differ markedly from those found in the earlier manuscripts (Spreadsheet 1 column U). It is more complete and reliable than that found in *BB*. It is carried down slightly farther than the *CGH* texts beginning at one 'Diarmaid' who lived to the late 1160s. However, other than this extra coverage, it is really very similar to the *CGH* MSS and does not contain any genealogical information regarding Coílle Fallomuin.

An Leabhar Donn, i.e. MS 23 Q 10 (The Royal Irish Academy).

This manuscript dates to about the middle third of the fifteenth century[25] (Spreadsheet 1 column V).

23 See Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'The Book of Ballymote', *Celtica* 14 (1981) 15-25: 20; Donnchadh Ó Corráin's foreword in Nollaig Ó Muraíle, *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies compiled,* i, x.

24 See Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'Scríobhaite Leacáin Mhic Fhir Bhisigh', *Celtica* 19 (1987)141-175:145; Ó Corráin's foreword in Nollaig Ó Muraíle, *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies* i, x.

25 Kathleen Mulchrone & Elizabeth FitzPatrick (ed), *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*

The relevant genealogy, with the title 'Genelach Conaill Cremthainne', would appear to be close to traditions found in H.2.7 and NLI MS G2 (cf: Spreadsheet 1 columns O and P).

The O'Clery Book of Genealogies, i.e. MS 23 D 17 (The Royal Irish Academy).

This is a collection put together by Cú Choigríche Ó Cléirigh (d.1664).[26] For the purposes of this study, there are two main sections of Clann Cholmáin genealogy (Spreadsheet 1 columns W and X) as well as two shorter strands (column Y with accompanying note). The first section headed 'G*ENELACH* SIL COLMAIN MOIR' is defective and appears related to *BB*, also giving Máel Sechnaill Mór's father as Flann Sinna. The O'Clery book also contains a significant amount of genealogical material relating, or claiming to relate to Coílle Fallomuin (Spreadsheet 2 columns J-Q).

Leabhar Mor na nGenealach, i.e. Add Irish MS 14 (UCD).

This is a mid seventeenth-century collection by An Dubhaltach mac Fhir Bhisigh (d.1671). As regards Clann Cholmáin, Dubhaltach's text provides us with no new information or alternative tradition and is very similar to that found in earlier MSS (Spreadsheet 1 columns Z-AE). There is much material in *LMG* under the heading of 'Genealach Lucht Chriche na Cétoch <.i. Cétach>' (Spreadsheet 2 columns R-X), some of which has been classified as pertaining to Clann Cholmáin in other sources.

The Clann Cholmáin pedigree is among several which have been 'radically recast', in the later Cuimre section of LMG, i.e. 'set out in the reverse of the usual order of son: father: grandfather and so on; instead they begin with a more or less distant ancestor and progress from father to son to grandson, and so on down.'[27] While an interesting innovation, the data has not changed and little new information is forthcoming from the '*Cuimre*'. (Spreadsheet 1 columns AF and AG)

Overall impressions

The Clann Cholmáin genealogies contained in the two earliest, *CGH* MSS, are virtually identical. Walsh states that there 'is not the slightest doubt about the accuracy of this line [of Clann Cholmáin dynasts] until we get back to about the beginning of the sixth century.'[28] There is not the slightest doubt that *LL* and MS Rawlinson B.502 confirm each other almost exactly but in light of

Fasciculi xxvi-xxvii (Dublin 1943) 27.3407-13.

26 Séamus Pender (ed), 'The O'Clery Book of genealogies', *Analecta Hibernica* 18 (1951) 57-58.

27 Nollaig Ó Muraíle, (ed.), *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies,* i, 40.

28 Paul Walsh, *Irish Leaders and Learning through the Ages* Nollaig Ó Muraíle (ed) (Dublin 2003) 91-92.

our understanding of how and why genealogies were kept and updated, we must be more sceptical than Walsh. Of those genealogical MSS from the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, H.2.7 and the *Lec* are the most complete and detailed. That contained in the *UM*, while in part illegible, appears to confirm these two. *BB* can be discounted at this stage due to its obvious errors. Overall we can broadly agree with the sentiments of John Kelleher who said that

> The greatest disappointment of all, and by far the most serious for the student of early Irish history, is the genealogy of Clann Colmáin Móir.[29]

It certainly appears to have been thoroughly standardised and this is hardly surprising. It has often been noted that the Uí Néill genealogies account for very little of the surviving genealogical corpus. They do certainly stand in inverse relation to the Uí Néill's political importance.

There are some inconsistencies in the earlier sections of some of these genealogies, in part at least related to the problem of Colmán Mór/ Bec. There are also several interesting short strands in H.2.7. These would appear to be the most promising avenues for further examination once analysis of the other sources has been completed. In contrast, the fuller or 'standard' Clann Cholmáin genealogy found across many of the MSS is essentially set in stone from Níall Noígíallach down as far as the early eleventh century with only a little variation and segmentation for the very late history of the dynasty.

To conclude, taken together as a body the Clann Cholmáin genealogies are dissappointing. They do however illustrate, in a very stark way, the very nature and limitations of genealogical compilation discussed at the outset. David Thornton used the Clann Cholmáin as a case study in discussing the Celtic genealogical tradition. He concluded that 'only about 50% of the discoverable male members of the dynasty of Clann Cholmáin who flourished between *circa* 900 and *circa* 1100 are named in the genealogies of the dynasty; the rest were omitted.'[30] Those omitted include several kings we know to have led the dynasty. While this must have something to do with the very structure of the genealogies, an underlying political motivation is also probable. The linear pedigree is certainly quite rigid and inflexible when it comes to accommodating greater detail. The strict father to son format results in the omission of very many important dynasts who were unlucky enough to have less illustrious or successful descendants. However that said, it was not compulsory to adopt this strict linear structure of genealogy. Instead, as discussed earlier, we must consider that decision as one motivated by a desire to highlight one particular line to the exclusion of all others. The compiler chose a format that would deliberately limit the amount of material that could be presented. These limitations are clearly exposed on comparison with other sources such as annals.

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29 Kelleher, 'The Pre-Norman Irish genealogies', 149-50.

30 David E. Thornton, 'Kings, Chronicles, and Genealogies: Reconstructing Mediaeval Celtic Dynasties', 33. See also *ibid,* Fig.1 at 34-35.

Kinglists

While closely related, the king or regnal list constitutes a 'distinct genre from genealogy, describing the succession to a given kingship over time.'[1] While many of the lists available to us are concerned with the kingship of Tara, we also have several lists more narrowly focused on Mide. In what follows, an attempt will be made to consider these various lists in turn, to comment on their make-up, date and possible interrelationships. These general observations will be followed by a consideration of the value of king-lists for our study of Clann Cholmáin.

In theory at least, the king-lists are a promising type of source material. The rationale behind their compilation, to record the holders of a given kingship, irrespective of segmental affiliation, circumvents one of the main problems we encountered with the linear genealogy. There, as we saw, the compiler was only concerned to record the direct ancestry of the contemporary holder of power and excluded cadet branches, irrespective of their onetime importance.

But like the genealogy, the compilation of a king-list had an ideological motivation of which we must be conscious. The desire to highlight both the antiquity of a given kingship and its monopolisation by a particular dynasty, or group of dynasties, was a strong one. Some of the Middle Irish 'High-King' lists form part of the *Lebor Gabála* and while the historicity of many of the individuals included in these lists is not in question, the way in which they are presented must be considered in the context of that greater project.

While relatively straight forward, the lists examined below often contain extra detail such as regnal years, genealogical relationship or reference to significant events during a given reign. If this information is independent, it might constitute a valuable supplement to sources such as the Annals and Genealogies.

Note: Reference should be made to the accompanying Table (Appendix 3) where a basic list of names has been extracted from the various kinglists under discussion for ease of comparison. Where possible, the names have been transcribed as found in the original text with individuals important for our study appearing in bold. However in some sources, particularly in the versified lists, names often appear in an oblique case. In these instances the nominative forms are used.

1 David Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies and Genealogies: studies in the political history of early medieval Ireland and Wales* (Oxford 2003) 21.

Year	**King-List**[2]
	Baile Chuind (675-95)
700	
	Laud Synchronisms (743-63) ?
800	Rig Uisnig (commenced about 800, added to subsequently?)
	Baile in Scáil (*c.*862) (original text?)
900	Source for Marianus Scottus (879-916) ?
1000	
	Flann Mainistrech (d.1056)
	Gilla Cáemáin mac Gilla Samthainne (*fl.* 1072)
	Annals of Inisfallen (1092)
1100	
	MS Rawlinson B.502 (1130)
	Gilla Mo Dutu Ua Casaide (1143)
	Do Flaithesaib hÉrend Iar Creitim-*LL* (1198?)
1200	

2 Where there are doubts concerning the date of composition for some of these sources, these will be discussed in detail in what follows.

Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig.

See: Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray (ed), '*Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*: Edition', Edel Bhreathnach (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005) 73-95.

Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig, [*BCC*], is not simply a king-list, but rather belongs to a specific genre of Irish literature, *Baili,* or visions.[3] It purports to record a prophecy listing the successors of Conn Cétchathach as king of Tara. Though only surviving in late MSS,[4] the work is generally thought to date from the reign of Fínsnechta Fledach (675-95), though possibly including additions from the early eighth century.[5] *BCC* is very significant because of its great age and because it contradicts the 'official' succession to the Tara kingship found in the Middle Irish king-lists. For our purposes, *BCC* was compiled during a period anterior to the real emergence of the Clann Cholmáin as a significant political force. Nevertheless this source does throw some light on the very earliest history of the (proto) Clann Cholmáin. The recent edition of this text also contains a prosopographical study and suggested identifications for those included in *BCC*.

Crucial is the inclusion of one 'Óengus'.[6] One quite plausible suggestion has been to identify him as a son of Colmán Már/Bec.[7] Óengus is described in *AU* as 'regis nepotum Neill' on his death in 621 and was evidently a figure of some, albeit ill-defined, importance.[8] After mention of 'Snechta Fína'[9], i.e. Fínsnechta Fledach, the remaining kings are referred to by vague kennings. If one admits the possibility that *BCC* was added to in the early eighth century, then it may be possible to propose identifications for those kings who come after 'Snechta Fína'. The contributors to the recent *Kingship and Landscape of Tara* volume have done so though these are often, by their own admission, quite tentative. For example, for 'Furbaide'[10], they have suggested, 'based solely on the grounds of sequence', that he may have been Murchad Midi (d.715).[11] While some of the other post

3 Knowledge of which was an essential part of the *filid's* repertoire. See: Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin 1980) 56.

4 RIA 23 N 10 and BL Egerton 88 (both sixteenth-century). See: Kevin Murray, 'The Manuscript Tradition of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* and its Relationship with *Baile in Scáil*', *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 69-72.

5 Carey suggests 688-9. John Carey, 'On the interrelationships of some *Cín Dromma Snechtai* texts', *Ériu* xlvi (1995) 89. The dating of *BCC* is further strengthened by its association in manuscript transmission with the very early 'Cín Dromma Snechtae' texts. See Rudolf Thurneysen, *Zu irischen Handschriften und Literaturdenkmälern* (Berlin 1913) 23-31.

6 Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray, '*Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*: Edition', §23 at 78, 84-85.

7 Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin and Paul Byrne, 'Prosopography I: Kings named in *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* and *The Airgíalla Charter Poem*', *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 196. The difficult problem of identifying his father will be discussed elsewhere. Murphy took 'Óengus' as an epithet of the following Domnall, i.e. 'Domnall shall be a glorious Óengus', but both the more recent edition and scholarship prefer to see a simple list with 'Óengus' representing a separate individual. See: G. Murphy, 'On the dates of two sources used in Thurneysen's Heldensage', *Ériu* xvi (1952) 148; Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 492.

8 *AU* 621.2.

9 Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray, '*Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*: Edition', §27 at 79, 84-85.

10 Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray, '*Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*: Edition', §32 at 79, 84-85.

11 Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin and Paul Byrne, 'Prosopography I', 206.

'Snechta Fína' suggestions are more plausible, overall one wonders why someone adding to or updating *BCC* in the early eighth century would not adopt the policy we find with the later *Baile in Scáil.* In that text, an explicit identification appears to have been added after the vague kenning as the text was brought up to date.

In the context of this study therefore, the importance of *BCC* lies with the inclusion of 'Óengus'. A consideration and interpretation of this will of course form an essential element in any investigation of the earliest history of the Clann Cholmáin.

The Laud 'Synchronisms'.

To consult the manuscript directly, See:
http://image.ox.ac.uk/images/bodleian/mslaudmisc610/113r.jpg

See: Kuno Meyer (ed), 'The Laud Synchronisms', *ZCP* ix (1913) 471-85.

Laud 610 is a mid fifteenth-century MS some of which, it seems, was copied from the now lost Psalter of Cashel.[12] While the 'Synchronisms' will be under investigation here, they constitute just a small fraction of a much larger genealogical collection, also edited by Kuno Meyer.[13] Of this genealogical material, the northern dynasties of Cenél nEógain, Airgialla, Dál nAraide and Dál Fiatach are given extensive coverage. Cenél Conaill, Síl nÁedo Sláine and Cenél Maini are treated briefly but the 'other Ui Néill septs and those of Connacht are not represented.'[14]

The 'Synchronisms' proper appear to begin at the top of fol.113r and are laid out in three columns containing the names of the kings of Assyria, Judaea and Ireland respectively.[15] However Eoin MacNeill has argued convincingly that the material immediately preceding this columnar section, which is now displayed in a 'continuous paragraphic form' was also originally presented in a synchronic 'tabular order'.[16] He proposes that in the original arrangement the Irish column was far more detailed and that this led to the insertion of notes in the less crowded columns. He provides

12 See: Brian Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish Language Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and Oxford College Libraries* (Dundalk 2001) 62-87; Dillon argues that all of the section relevant for our study comes from the Psalter. Myles Dillon, 'Laud Misc 610', *Celtica* v (1960) 64-77:66. Also see: Pádraig Ó Riain, 'The Psalter of Cashel: a provisional list of contents', *Éigse* 23 (1989) 107–30; Bart Jaski, 'The Genealogical Section of the Psalter of Cashel', *Peritia* 17-18 (2003-2004) 295-337.

13 Kuno Meyer (ed), 'The Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories', *ZCP* 8 (1912) 291-338; See also: John [Eoin] MacNeill, 'Notes on the Laud Genealogies', *ZCP* 8 (1912) 411-18.

14 MacNeill, 'Notes on the Laud Genealogies', 412.

15 Kuno Meyer, 'The Laud Synchronisms', *ZCP* 9 (1913) 474. As we shall see below, Daniel MacCarthy has difficulty with the term 'synchronism' and prefers 'canon'. I will use the earlier term under which this material was published for convenience. Incidentally, Meyer appears to have omitted two names from the second column at the bottom of fol. 113r. See: Meyer, 'The Laud Synchronisms', 475. cf: http://image.ox.ac.uk/images/bodleian/mslaudmisc610/113r.jpg

16 John [Eoin] MacNeill, 'On the reconstruction and date of the Laud Synchronisms', *ZCP* x (1915) 81-96: 81.

several examples of where the scribe creating the newer 'paragraphic' recension, misunderstood his exemplar as he unthinkingly mixed together material which should have been kept separate.[17]

While the method of presentation remains the same throughout the surviving 'tabular' sections, the information presented changes so that at fol.114r, it is the Roman emperors, Popes and Irish kings who are now listed. By the end of fol.114v these three lists have been carried down as far as 'Teothosius', 'Xistus' and 'Lōegaire' respectively. The next folio, 115r, sees another change in the information presented. The Irish kings now appear in the first column starting with 'Lægair[e]' while the second column contains a list of the archbishops of Armagh beginning with 'Pātraic'.[18] The third column contains kings of Cashel beginning with 'Nadfrūich'. These columns are carried down as far as 'Domnull m. Murc[h]ada', 'Cēle Petair' and 'Cathassach m. Et*er*sceoil' respectively.

Fol.115v marks a radical break from what has gone before.[19] While the information is in the same hand, the method of presentation has changed with the effective abandonment of any attempt to 'synchronise' the names in the respective columns with each other. We are essentially dealing with several stand alone lists. Whether this material can be considered as part of the 'Synchronisms' proper will be discussed below. The lists in this section include Dál nAraidi kings, Mide kings, kings of Ireland, abbots of Armagh, Cashel kings, Connacht kings, Aileach kings and Ulaid kings.[20] Clearly three of these lists, the kings of Ireland, abbots of Armagh and kings of Cashel are essentially continuations of the 'Synchronised' lists in the preceding, tabular section.[21] These three lists are brought from the mid-eighth century down to the early eleventh terminating with 'Mæl Sechna[i]ll', 'Mæl Maire' and 'Brīan' respectively. The others, what we might term 'provincial' king-lists, are not carried down this far but rather terminate in the mid-eighth century.

In turning to the Mide provincial list, which does not have a title or heading, we might note firstly that the spacing of the names is quite erratic. The scribe certainly appears to have been ill at ease with his material and there are several mistakes and clumsy corrections. Fergus son of Colmán is followed by Conall Guthbind and then Óengus son of Colmán. Óengus should come before Conall and this correction is indicated to the left of the list in red ink. However, just to be safe, the scribe then continues with another Conall Guthbind so that we are quite sure that Conall came *after*

17 MacNeill, 'On the reconstruction and date of the Laud Synchronisms', 80-81.

18 It is from this point that the information presented in the accompanying Table begins.

19 Meyer, 'The Laud Synchronisms', 480.

20 The crucial 'Midland list' can be viewed directly at: http://image.ox.ac.uk/images/bodleian/mslaudmisc610/115v.jpg. For minor errors in Meyer's edition, see: Daniel P. MacCarthy, *The Irish Annals: their genesis, evolution and history* (Dublin 2008) 273 n.6. To these we might also suggest that Meyer should not have separated the names on p.480 line 10 from the preceding Dál nAraide section. His decision to silently correct the apparent confusion surrounding Óengus mac Colmáin, which will be discussed presently, is also unhelpful.

21 It is therefore important to note that the list of 'High-Kings' presented in the accompanying Table (Appendix 3) masks a division in the presentation of these names in the MS. Namely that the Dál nAraide and Mide provincial lists intervene between Domnall mac Murchada and Niall Frosach.

Óengus. Slightly further on there is another mistake. An unusual line reads simply 'Diarmait Airmedach', which unlike the other entries, has no corresponding number of regnal years. There is no evidence from any other source of two such individuals at this period. Instead, as T.F. O'Rahilly has plausibly suggested, 'these names appear to be corruptions of *Diarmait m. Airmedaig*, which would appear to be a blundering repetition of the name of the king who was slain in 689.'[22] As we shall see later, this error is also found in various other king-lists suggesting they are linked either directly or through a common source.

Some problems with the Laud material.

Firstly, what exactly constitute the 'Synchronisms'? Is this label to be restricted to those three lists carried down in the tabular format? On first inspection it would seem reasonable to think so and to consider the material which follows as simply tacked on later. However, as noted, Mac Neill has shown that the tabular arrangement was originally used much more extensively before being partially abandoned in favour of a paragraphic approach which resulted in a certain amount of 'derangement'.[23] It might be possible therefore to widen our definition of the 'Synchronisms' to include the 'provincial' lists. Other than the three 'continuations' to the eleventh century, the remainder of these lists conclude with individuals who lived in the mid-eighth century. This fact has been central to the scholarly debate surrounding the date of this Laud material.

Mac Neill argued that 'the date of compilation of the Laud tract is established by the terminal reigns of the dynasties.' Hence, in his view, while we have access to information from the lost *Saltair Chaisil,* this information dates ultimately to 'about the middle of the eighth century'[24], i.e. to the reign of Domnall Midi. He considered the post-eighth century continuations to three of the lists as the work of an early eleventh-century redactor. O'Rahilly dismissed this interpretation as 'superficial and untenable'[25] and saw this as yet another example of MacNeill's tendancy to 'exaggerate, sometimes to the extent of hundreds of years' the date of 'our early historical documents.'[26] Firstly, O'Rahilly refers to a colophon in Laud which he says suggests that the Psalter was in a poor condition in the mid-fifteenth century and of considerable age at that time.[27] But it

22 Thomas F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin 1946) 416. Alternatively, MacNeill sugests that the entry derives from an interlineation, 'm. Diarmato m. Airmedaich' referring to Áed and Colgu on the next line. See: MacNeill, 'On the reconstruction and date of the Laud Synchronisms', 94. For Áed and Colgu see: Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 188 [s.a. 714.1].

23 MacNeill, 'On the reconstruction and date of the Laud Synchronisms', 81.

24 MacNeill, 'On the reconstruction and date of the Laud Synchronisms', 90.

25 O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* 414.

26 O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* 409.

27 Meyer, 'The Laud Synchronisms', 485; http://image.ox.ac.uk/images/bodleian/mslaudmisc610/116v.jpg .

also, he says, shows us that the scribe knew 'the regnal lists were left uncompleted at this point, and he gives us to understand that he has already transcribed the remainder of them elsewhere in his MS.' While the remainder are *not* to be found elsewhere in Laud 610, this absence 'is no matter for surprise, for the fifteenth-century MS. has in its turn suffered from wear and tear of time, and has lost many of its folios.'[28] Perhaps more significantly, O'Rahilly also noted that 'there is no date to which all the lists can be assigned'[29] undermining MacNeill's argument about the 'terminal reigns'. While the reigns all date to the mid-eighth century, this is hardly precise enough. O'Rahilly correctly notes that there is no single year in which all of the material sits together comfortably.[30]

However this problem need not be so significant if we consider the 'Synchronisms' in a slightly different light. For example, Majorie Anderson has argued that O'Rahilly has misunderstood the rationale behind the material 'which was not to make lists that should be up-to-date in any particular year, but to synchronize the provincial kings and the successors of Patrick with the 'Kings of Ireland.'[31] However O'Rahilly also noted significant faults at the end of three of the provincial lists. For the Connacht list for example, we find a 'serious misplacement in the order of succession' as three kings are listed in the wrong order.[32] This he argues, tells against a mid-eighth century date as one would not expect such mistakes in dealing with figures who lived so close to the supposed date of composition. As noted earlier, there are also several mistakes in the Mide list and that disorder could also be interpreted in the same way. For O'Rahilly, taken together, there is clear evidence that the material is much later than the mid eighth and 'probably not earlier than the latter half of the tenth century.'[33] MacNeill was aware of these problems with the lists and goes to some lengths to account for them. However his suggestions are not particularly convincing.[34] He was unwilling to allow 'the supposition of a gross inaccuracy', 'for the date of these men is too near the time of compilation.'[35] However Anderson, very succinctly, questions O'Rahilly's scepticism and supports MacNeill's early dating. Firstly, regarding the disorder in the lists, which is O'Rahilly's 'main evidence of lateness', she simply points out that 'this could well be the doing of copyists.'[36] As regards the colophon, she suggests that 'it can be seen to refer, not specifically to the regnal lists, but to the whole, evidently considerable body of matter which had been copied from the *Saltair*

28 O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* 414.
29 O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* 414-5.
30 O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* 415.
31 Majorie O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh 1980) 223.
32 O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* 415.
33 O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* 418.
34 For example, as regards the problems with the Mide list, See: MacNeill, 'On the Reconstruction and date of the Laud Synchronisms', 94-95.
35 MacNeill, 'On the Reconstruction and date of the Laud Synchronisms', 94.
36 Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* 223.

Chaisil.'[37] It need not therefore, necessarily suggest that the scribe is alerting us to the uncompleted state of the regnal lists. In short, Anderson concludes that 'the Laud lists can in fact represent a set of synchronisms that originally ended with the reign of Domnall son of Murchad as "king of Ireland", and with the other reigns that were completed within the same period (743-763). Apart from the three continuations to the eleventh century, the whole collection could have been made in or soon after 763.'[38]

Daniel McCarthy has considered the Laud material most recently as part of his analysis of the Irish Annals, and takes a somewhat different approach. The principle behind the Laud 'canons', as he prefers to call them, 'was to have a central 'spiritual' dynasty flanked on either side by a secular dynasty.'[39] Hence, 'obviously the canons of provincial kings [...] do not belong within this scheme and must be considered a subsequent accretion'.[40] McCarthy goes on to consider the ultimate source, the Psalter of Cashel, which he believes is the work of Cormac mac Cuileannáin. The Munster king was using McCarthy's proposed 'Moville chronicle' as 'his primary source for the regnal successions of the Christian era.[41] In short, McCarthy's treatment of this material is tied in with his various other overarching theories about the development of the annals, theories which are in themselves problematic. For the moment we need merely note that he does not believe the 'provincial' lists in Laud date from the eighth century.

As outlined, a scholarly consensus has not been forthcoming regarding the date of the Laud material. A more specific point not considered is whether the compilation of a Mide king-list would be likely in the mid-eighth century anyway. The first secure reference to the kingship of Mide in the annals is from 766, the holder 'Follamhain m. Con Congalt', who does not make the Laud list, did not belong to Clann Cholmáin but rather a closely related local grouping, Coílle Fallomuin.[42] There is no secure evidence for the earlier existence of a Mide or midland kingship. Of course, it is quite possible that as such an institution developed in the mid-eighth century, well known Clann Cholmáin ancestors were accorded the dignity of having held the position in the 'Synchronisms'. In short, it is possible that the Midland king-list *was* originally drawn up in the mid-eighth century but backfilled with Clann Cholmáin dynasts. If this was the case, then the list cannot be regarded as

37 Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* 224.

38 Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* 224. But as F.J. Byrne notes, while 'it is just possible that the synchronisms in the fifteenth-century MS Laud Misc.610 [...] derive from a list originally drawn up in the reign of Domnall Midi (743-63), [...] they too have suffered the attentions of an eleventh-century editor and reflect the official doctrine too closely to have any independent value.' F.J. Byrne, 'High kings and provincial kings', *NHI* ix 190.

39 MacCarthy, *The Irish Annals* 273.

40 MacCarthy, *The Irish Annals* 274.

41 MacCarthy, *The Irish Annals* 302.

42 *AU* 766.2. There are earlier references to the kingship of Mide but these are found only in the Clonmacnoise group of annal texts. These entries occur in *AU* but without the kingly title. For the references, see: Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* ii 162.

independent of the Clann Cholmáin genealogy anyway.

Marianus Scottus

See: B. MacCarthy (ed), *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus* (Dublin 1892) 93-97.

Marianus Scottus, or Máel Brigte (born *c.*1028), entered the monastery of Magh-bile *c.*1052. Several years later he was banished from Ireland by the abbot 'for some trifling offence.'[43] Following a brief period in Cologne, Marianus came to Fulda where he was walled up as an incluse. He later held a similar position in Mainz where he died in 1082. Marianus is known for his Chronicle which survives, in part at least, in autograph.[44] The so-called Codex Palatino-Vaticanus contains some 170 folios. For the purposes of this study the most important is fol.15 where we find a kinglist with the following title:

> hi sunt flathi [principes] hiberniae qui ex dimedia parte eius, id est, do Leth Chuinn [ex dimedio Connii], regerunt, o Chuinn cetchatach co Fland, mac Mail-Sechnaill.[45]

After the name of Áed Oirdnide mac Néill (797-819), there is a break in the text, before the remaining five kings are listed as far as Flann (879-916). The list as we have it then, would seem to date to Flann Sinna's reign though perhaps extended from an earlier source compiled during Áed's.[46] To what extent, if any, this material was tampered with in the eleventh century seems impossible to determine. However, while this list is not focused exclusively on the Clann Cholmáin it does preserve some interesting information. Colmán Bec, not Már is given a joint reign, with Áed mac Anmirech, of thirteen years. Suibne son of Colmán Már is included as is Óengus son of Colmán.

Baile in Scáil

See: Kevin Murray (ed), *Baile in Scáil: 'The Phantom's Frenzy'* (Dublin 2004); Kuno Meyer, 'Baile in Scáil', *ZCP* 3 (1901) 457-66; Kuno Meyer, 'Das Ende von Baile in Scáil', *ZCP* 12 (1918) 232-38; Kuno Meyer, 'Der Anfang von Baile in Scáil', *ZCP* 13 (1921) 371-82; Rudolf Thurneysen, 'Baile in Scáil', *ZCP* 20 (1936) 213-27.

Baile in Scáil (*BS*) survives in two MSS, Rawlinson B 512 (R) and Harley 5280 (H). The former is believed to date from the fifteenth or early sixteenth century, the latter from the early sixteenth century.[47] A complete copy of the text (traditionally broken into sixty-five sections by

43 James F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical* (New York 1966) §443 at 614-16.
44 See also: Brian Ó Cuiv, 'The Irish Marganalia in Codex Palatino-Vaticanus no.830', *Éigse* xxiv (1990) 45-67.
45 B. MacCarthy (ed), *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus* (Dublin 1892) 93.
46 Byrne, 'High-Kings and Provincial Kings', 190.
47 Kevin Murray (ed), *Baile in Scáil: 'The Phantom's Frenzy'*, (Dublin 2004) 1-2. Murray's is the only edition to refer to both MSS, the earlier editors focusing on one or other MS copy or sections thereof. Murray provides diplomatic

modern editors) occurs only in R while the text breaks off mid way through §41 in H.[48] For our purposes the text is of interest as it includes a 'prophecy' delivered to the legendary Conn Cétchathach listing those who would succeed him as king of Tara and includes often quite detailed information on these kings. An analysis of the historically identifiable kings in *BS* suggests that the text as it stands dates to the early eleventh century, perhaps to the period following the death of Máel Sechnaill (d.1022) and before that of Flaithbertach Ua Néill (d.1036).[49] Clearly then there are similarities between *BS* and *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* (*BCC*) and the relationship between the two texts has long been recognised.[50] As we saw when discussing *BCC*, the appearance of vague kennings after 'Snechta Fína' has been used to date the core of *BCC* to the late seventh century and to the reign of Fínnachta Fledach (d.695). Since the H copy of *BS* breaks off at §41, which deals with the reign of Fergal mac Máele Dúin (d.722), it is to the complete R copy that a similar investigative procedure has been directed. Gerald Murphy argues that by examining the kennings in *BS* we can identify a textual core which is quite a bit older than the early eleventh century.

> after Máel Sechlainn (†862) [...] kings are normally referred to by a vague kenning, whereas up to Máel Sechlainn the true name of the king is alone given, without any kenning preceding it.[51]

Hence it is argued that the core of the text was drawn up *c.*862 while those kings who followed Máel Sechnaill were necessarily described by vague kennings. It is then argued that as the text was subsequently brought up to date, explicit designations were provided.

> The vague kenning is, indeed, as a rule immediately identified in the text as we have it. But the text as we have it admittedly contains redactors' additions, often in the past tense (not the future of the original).[52]

Hence this interpretation, which seems to have been generally accepted,[53] identifies a core of later

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transcriptions of both MSS copies and an edition which is based largely on R. For the critical reception of his edition, his subsequent defence of his editorial method and a final reply by the original reviewers, see: Liam Breatnach, 'Review of *Baile in Scáil 'The Phantom's Frenzy'* Edited by Kevin Murray', *CMCS* 55 (Summer 2008) 75-82; Jürgen Uhlich, 'Review of *Baile in Scáil 'The Phantom's Frenzy'* Edited by Kevin Murray', *Éigse* xxxvi (2008) 228-234; Kevin Murray, 'Reviews, Reviewers, and Critical Texts', *CMCS* 57 (Summer 2009) 51-70; Liam Breatnach, 'Reviews, Reviewers, and Critical Texts: A Brief Final Response', *CMCS* 57 (Summer 2009) 71-73; Jürgen Uhlich, 'Reviews, Reviewers, and Critical Texts: A Brief Final Response', *CMCS* 57 (Summer 2009) 75-79.

48 Some interlinear glosses which appear as such in R are incorporated into the body of the text in H while H would appear to be more heavily abbreviated than R. Rudolf Thurneysen, 'Baile in Scáil', *ZCP* 20 (1936) 213-27: 213-14.

49 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 4-5; Gerald Murphy, 'On the dates of two sources used in Thurneysen's Heldensage', *Ériu* xvi (1952) 150 n.1; Byrne, 'High-Kings and Provincial Kings', 190.

50 See: Kevin Murray, 'The Manuscript Tradition of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* and its relationship with *Baile in Scáil*', *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 69-72.

51 Murphy, 'On the dates of two sources used in Thurneysen's Heldensage', 150 n.1.

52 Murphy, 'On the dates of two sources used in Thurneysen's Heldensage', 150 n.1.

53 Byrne, 'High-Kings and Provincial Kings', 190.

ninth-century material in *BS* but would regard the text as we find it as the work of a later redactor. But the evidence does not appear to be as clear-cut as Murphy argues. Below are several sections from either side of the proposed Máel Sechnaill (§50) dividing line:

§35 Dáil de forsin rúanaid (.i. a ruidiud ig gabáil láma Mo Chuta), for Díarmait Daithi [...].
Bestow some of it on the timid one (i.e. his blushing at the expelling of Mo Chuta), on Díarmait Daithi [...].

§41 Dáil de forsin cailech (.i. i n-aín dídin a cath Almaine), for Fergal, clethblugaid hÉrenn [...].
Bestow some of it on the cock (on a Friday in the battle of Allen), on Fergal, spear-breaker of Ireland [...].

§50 Dáil de for Máel Sechlainn.
Bestow some of it on Máel Sechnaill.

§51 Dáil de forsin cóel crésen (.i. Cléirech do-gníd), for Óed Olach (.i. Finnlíath mac Gormlatha ingeni Dondchada 7 Néill Chailli).
Bestow some of it on the slender pious one (i.e. who became a cleric), on Áed Olach (i.e. [Áed] Finnlíath son of Donnchad's daughter, Gormlaith, and Níall Caille).

§52 Dáil de forsin mend mbrécach, for Fland Sindæ firfes bróen fingaile for a bráithri.
Bestow some of it on the lying stammerer, Flann Sinna, who will wreak kin-slaying on his kinsmen.

§53 Dáil de for Níell nGlúndub glanfus roí Rúadra [...].
Bestow some of it on Níall Glúndub who will complete the rout of Rúadair [...].

Clearly then at §35 and §41 there are examples of kings mentioned before Máel Sechnaill identified firstly by kennings which are then followed by explicit identifications.[54] On the other hand at §53 we have a king, Niall Glúndub (d. 919), listed after Máel Sechnaill who is identified explicitly without a kenning. It should be said that Murphy's point still stands in general terms as there is a perceptible shift towards the use of kennings about this point in the text but the changeover is not as clear cut as he suggests. It seems that a dating argument based solely on the kennings could just as easily support an early tenth as a later ninth-century textual core.[55]

It seems that the author of the original text, labelled 'X' by Murray, drew upon several sources. Linguistic archaisms may suggest he had access to materials dating to earlier in the Old

54 The bracketed sections in Murray's edition are interlinear glosses. But the initial kennings and subsequent identifications are in the main text. See fol.103v at: http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msrawlb512 . Of course we must also remember that we have only one MS copy of the text at this stage, H having broken off after §41.

55 Murray recognises that the evidence is not as straight-forward as Murphy argues: 'In §§ 51-65, *most* of the kings are first identified by vague kennings followed by their names.' [My italics]. Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 4 and later 'From §51 to the end (apart from §§53, 56, 60 & 65), the kings are first referred to by vague kennings before their names are given, often in an incorporated gloss'. *ibid* 24.

Irish period and a surviving elegy to Labraid Loingsech, perhaps from the eighth century, may allude to the opening section of *BS*.[56] It seems the author drew upon a metrical and rhetorical source in fashioning *BS* and at one point it is explicitly stated that more than one source was used.[57] The original author also seems to have had access to an extensive battle-list. The majority of these battles involve the prehistoric kings included in the text.[58]

As mentioned above, analysis of the historically identifiable kings in *BS* suggests that the later redactor of the text was working in the early eleventh century.[59] Many stereotyped phrases to do with burial which appear throughout the text might also point towards this later intervention. The use of the past tense Latin phrase 'sepultus est' to provide information on the burial places of various kings is suspicious since, because the text is a 'prophecy', we would expect the verbs to be in the future. This phrase, or the vernacular equivalent 'ro-adnacht'[60] occurs almost regularly in §§40-55 of *BS* and these phrases would seem to be later additions.[61]

One example at §40 where the 'sepulti sunt' formula is used to tell us that Fogartach and Congal were buried at Clonard is followed by 'ut Pátríni dixit'.[62] A poem by this figure (dúan Pátríni) is also cited at §50 of *BS* dealing with Máel Sechnaill I (d.862) and which also includes a burial phrase, (hi Clúain mac Nóis ro adnacht).[63] In two marginal notes to a poem edited as 'The Kings Buried in Clonmacnois' which is headed 'Patriní .cc.' and which is contained in a seventeenth-century Franciscan MS, Pátríne is identified as identical to 'Malpatric presbyter Cluan qui obiit an. 1028'.[64] The note has been variously attributed to Míchael Ó Cléirigh and John Colgan.[65] If the identification of Pátriní is accepted, then the burial phrases and information are likely to date to the later reworking of the text.

As we have it the text would seem to display a Cenél nEógain bias and interest. After mention of Máel Sechnaill and Brian, the text makes a claim for one Flaithbertach, probably Ua Néill (d.1036). In this period of high-kings 'with opposition' the text could plausibly have included Donnchad mac Briain (d.1065) who would seem to have had as much claim to the dignity. After this come various named but unhistorical kings culminating with Flann Cinuch, the last ruler of Ireland,

56 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 4-5, 9 n.9.
57 'Sic exemplaria uariantur' appears in §61, which Murray argues was part of the original 'X' text. Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 4, 9-10.
58 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 26.
59 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 4-5; Murphy, 'On the dates of two sources used in Thurneysen's Heldensage', 150 n.1; Byrne, 'High-Kings and Provincial Kings', 190.
60 The perfect of *ad-anaig*, 'to bury' or 'to entomb'. See *DIL* s.v. ad-anaig.
61 Rudolf Thurneysen, 'Baile in Scáil', *ZCP* 20 (1936) 213-27: 214; Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 8.
62 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 42, 60 §40.
63 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45, 63 §50.
64 J Fraser, P. Grosjean and J.G. O'Keefe (ed), *Irish Texts IV* (London 1934) 44 n.1.
65 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 87.

a prophetic creation who appears in various other texts.[66] Though the final seven kings named in the text are unhistorical, it is 'prophesied' that four of them would be from Cenél nEógain.[67] According to the text's heading in R, it was copied from the lost book of Dub dá Leithe (d.1064), *Fer Léiginn* and later abbot of Armagh, whose own grandmother belonged to the Cenél nEógain family of Ua Brolcháin.[68] Identifying the perspective of the older textual core is less straight-forward and we should note the probability, supported by linguistic evidence, that the later redactor's efforts were not restricted to the sections added to the end of the text but that his influence is 'to be found all through the text.'[69] In short, while likely containing earlier elements, the entirety of the text as we find it has been through the hands of an eleventh-century redactor. In reality the order of kings presented by *BS* corresponds closely to that found in the various copies of the Middle Irish high-king list.[70] Of those ignored by *BS,* four are from Cenél Conaill, one from Síl nÁedo Sláine and one from Cenél nEógain. Coirpre mac Néill, who is present in *BCC,* is omitted from *BS* as he is from the Middle-Irish list. It seems at least possible that sentiment unfavourable to Cenél Conaill was not characteristic of the original 'X' text but rather reflects the activity of the eleventh-century redactor whose sympathies clearly lay with their northern rivals, Cenél nEógain.

For our purposes reference to Clann Cholmáin figures begins with Domnall mac Murchada (d.763).[71] This is significant as it means the relevant sections of *BS* for our study are only contained in the full R copy of the text as the H copy has broken off by this point. As well as Domnall, his Clann Cholmáin successors Donnchad, Conchobar, Máel Sechnaill I, Flann Sinna, Dond (probably Donnchad Donn) and finally Máel Sechnaill II all feature. The portrayal of Domnall, Donnchad, Conchobar and Máel Sechnaill is neutral and indeed positive at times but in contrast that of Flann Sinna is generally quite negative. For example, Flann is initially referred to as the 'lying stammerer'. One notable exception where Flann is described as a 'peaceful wealthy ruler' is at odds with the general tone of his section in the text.[72] Donnchad Donn and Máel Sechnaill II, like their earlier ancestors, are portrayed in a positive light. The value of this source is not of course restricted to the sections dealing with Clann Cholmáin kings and the text will be considered over the entire period covered by our study. It should however be noted that the coverage and detail provided by *BS* varies greatly from one reign to another. For example, Domnall mac Murchada's reign is covered in three

66 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 21.
67 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 29.
68 F.J. Byrne, 'Church and Politics, c.750-c.1100', *NHI* i 677.
69 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 5.
70 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 22-23.
71 The interesting figure of Óengus, who features in *BCC* and who might be identified as a son of Colmán Már/Bec, is not included in *BS.*
72 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45-46, 63-64 §52.

lines whereas twenty-four lines are given over to that of his son Donnchad.[73]

Rig Uisnig

To consult the manuscript directly, See:

http://isos.dias.ie/libraries/TCD/TCD_MS_1339/tables/3.html#042 (p.42).

See: R.I. Best, Osborn Bergin and M.A. O'Brien (ed), *The Book of Leister* i (Dublin 1954) 196-98.

This list begins with Conall Cremthaind and is carried down to various Clann Cholmáin dynasts living quite close to the manuscript's compilation, i.e. in the mid-twelfth century. The title of the king-list refers to the prominent midland site of Uisnech.[74] There is no evidence, however, that the name of this site was used in the title of any kingship. This peculiarity is perhaps understandable on reference to the broader context.

The 'Rig Uisnig' list is last in a series of provincial lists. Hence after 'Ríg Hérend'[75], we find 'Ríg Lagen', 'Ríg Hua Cendselaig', 'Ríg Hua Falge', 'Reges Ossairge', 'Ríg Connacht', 'Ríg Ulad', 'Ríg Dail Araide' before finally reaching 'Ríg Uisnig'. This ordering of the material would certainly apppear to reflect the compiler's Leinster bias and underlying agenda. It is quite possible that the name of the midland list can be seen as part of that project. According to F.J. Byrne,

> when Áed Mac Crimthainn compiled his regnal lists in the Book of Leinster, he pointedly entitled them [i.e. the Ua Maeleachlainn] 'kings of Uisneach' after the mythological umbilical centre of Ireland that was the focus of ancient Mide. This title is never found in the contemporary annals; by using it, Áed wished to deny Ua Maíl Sechnaill whatever prestige still clung to the kingship of Tara.[76]

Aside from the title however, the 'Rig Uisnig' list is comparable with the various other 'Mide' or midland kinglists under discussion here and can be considered along with them. As well as listing the so-called kings of Uisnech, the text also includes extra information such as regnal years and/or reference to significant episodes during a given reign. Of particular note in this regard is the level of detail found for the reign of Donnchad mac Domnaill (d.797) which is far in excess of anything found for the preceding or following kings. Therefore Paul Byrne suggests the list was originally drawn up at or soon after Domnall's death and subsequently updated.[77]

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73 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 43-44.

74 This site would appear to have been important during the Uí Néill's early conquest of the midlands and also features in some early hagiography. See: Alfred P. Smyth, 'The Húi Néill and the Leinstermen in the Annals of Ulster, 431-516 A.D.', *Études Celtiques* xiv i (1974) 139; T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 28; Ludwig Bieler (ed), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979) 137.

75 Not surprisingly this does not list the familiar succession of Uí Néill kings but restricts itself to the legendary period. Hence we find reference to Partholon, the Fir Bolg, Tuatha Dé Danann and Míl etc.

76 F.J. Byrne, 'Ireland before the battle of Clontarf', *NHI* i 861.

77 Paul Byrne, *Certain Southern Uí Néill kingdoms* 77.

Flann Mainistrech (d.1056) :

Ríg Themra tóebaige iar tain

See: R.I. Best and M.A. O'Brien (ed), *The Book of Leinster,* iii (Dublin 1957) 509-15.

This poem is attributed to the mid-eleventh century Flann Manistrech, described as 'airdfer leighinn ⁊ sui senchusa Er*enn*' on his death in 1056, and associated with the church of Monasterboice, Co. Louth.[78] In the opening quatrain the poet announces his intention to enumerate the kings of Tara from Lóegaire to Brian. However based on internal evidence, the poem would appear to have been written, or updated at least, when Máelsechnaill II had reclaimed the high-kingship, i.e. between 1014 and 1022.[79] The first Clann Cholmáin king to feature is the mid-eighth century Domnall.

Mide Maigen Clainne Cuind

See: Peter J. Smith, '*Mide Maigen Clainne Cuind:* A Medieval Poem on the Kings of Mide', *Peritia* 15 (2001) 108-44; John [Eoin] MacNeill, 'Poems by Flann Mainistrech on the dynasties of Ailech, Mide and Brega', *Archivium Hibernicum,* ii (1913) 37-100; Dóra Pődör, 'Twelve Poems attributed to Fland Manistrech from the Book of Leinster', (unpublished PhD thesis TCD 1999) 154-201.

This poem, which survives in various MSS, the earliest the twelfth-century Rawlinson. B.502, is again attributed to Flann Mainistrech.[80] Like some of the texts discussed thus far, this poem is concerned exclusively with the midlands. There are several introductory stanzas referring to such figures as Míl of Spain, Eochu Feidlech and Conn Cétchathach. Their mention is perhaps designed to 'convey to the audience a sense of the antiquity of a tradition so old that dates cannot be assigned to it.'[81] However the remainder of the poem is concerned with 'the descendants of Níall son of Eochu' and is carried down to the eleventh-century king, Conchobar.[82] This regnal poem would

78 *AU* 1056.8. See: Margaret E. Dobbs, 'The Pedigree and family of Flann Manistreach', *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society* v (3) (1923) 149-153.

79 Byrne, 'High-Kings and Provincial Kings', *NHI* ix190; Byrne, 'Ireland and her neighbours, c.1014-1072', *NHI* i 866.

80 While the most recent editors of this poem would accept Flann as the probable author, some scholars are unconvinced. See: Peter J. Smith, '*Mide Maigen Clainne Cuind:* A Medieval Poem on the Kings of Mide', *Peritia* 15 (2001) 110; Dóra Pődör, 'Twelve poems attributed to Fland Manistrech from the Book of Leinster', (unpublished PhD thesis TCD 1999) xii-xiii; Byrne, 'Ireland and her neighbours, c.1014-1072', *NHI* i 865.

81 Smith, '*Mide Maigen Clainne Cuind*', 109.

82 Smith, '*Mide Maigen Clainne Cuind*', §5 at 115, 129. The poem was subsequently added to and carried down to the early twelfth century. On the accompanying spreadsheet I have only carried the list down as far as Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (d.1022).

appear to be related to the Laud 'provincial' list discussed above. An error in that source where an unusual entry suggesting two separate individuals ('Diarmait Airmedach') appears to be a corruption of Diarmait son of Airmedach (d.689) was incorporated and indeed elaborated upon by Flann.[83]

Gilla Cáemáin mac Gilla Samthainne (*fl.* 1072):

While the identity of this poet is not known with certainty, it has been suggested he may have been from the midlands, perhaps a devotee of Cóemán Brec of Ros Ech in Co. Westmeath.[84] Dating is made somewhat easier by the fact that the poet, in *Annálad anall uile,* tells us he is writing in 1072.[85] That poem as well as *At-tá sund forba fessa,* are of some relevance for this study. These poems survive in various manuscripts, the earliest being the twelfth-century *Book of Leinster.*[86]

Annálad anall uile

This poem is of a wide scope involving reference to events beyond Ireland. In the second quatrain, for example, the poet tells us that 1656 years passed from the beginning of the world to the flood.[87] The poem concerns itself, for some time, with reckoning time between these notable events in the far distant past. Occasionally these events are 'synchronised' with a famous Irish event. For example,

'sind amsir-sin, ci at-ber,	In that time–though I may say it–
ro gníd cath Maige Tured;	the battle of Mag Tuired was fought;
'sind amsir-sin, cen goí ngá,	in that time–without false deception–
ro toglad Troí Troíanna	Trojan Troy was sacked.[88]

Following the birth of Christ the poem takes on a more Hiberno-centric aspect, discussing the time that passed between such famous reigns as that of Túathal Techtmar, Conn Cétchathach and Níall Nóigíallach for example. The historical period does not, as is usually the case, begin with Lóegaire but rather Túathal Máel Garb. But this poem makes no claim to be comprehensive, instead certain reigns are selected and linked to important events, often the death of a notable cleric. So for example with the aforementioned Túathal:

83 Smith, *'Mide Maigen Clainne Cuind',* §20 at 117, 130. As Flann brings his text down to the eleventh century, whereas the Laud text ends with Domnall (d.763), it seems unlikely that the simple list found in Laud was extracted from Flann's verse.

84 Peter J. Smith, *Three Historical Poems Ascribed to Gilla Cóemáin: A Critical Edition of the Work of an eleventh-Century Irish Scholar* (Münster 2007) 32.

85 Smith, *Three Historical Poems* 33.

86 Smith, *Three Historical Poems* 23.

87 Smith, *Three Historical Poems* 189.

88 Smith, *Three Historical Poems* 194-5.

bás Túathail Maíl Gairb co ngráin	the death of hated Túathal Máel Garb,
blíadain ria n-estecht Chíaráin.	a year before the passing away of Cíarán.[89]

Hence, in-built in the poem are chronological chasms. Nevertheless four Clann Cholmáin kings would appear to feature, Domnall, Flann, Donnchad and Máel Sechnaill (II).[90]

At-tá sund forba fessa

As the first quatrain states, this poem sets out to enumerate 'the reign of every king who took a hostage from Lóegaire until heroic Brian'.[91] Essentially a versified high-king list, the first Clann Cholmáin king to feature is the mid-eighth century Domnall Midi.[92] In total, seven Clann Cholmáin kings are included.[93]

Annals of Inisfallen:

See: R.I. Best & Eoin MacNeill (ed), *The Annals of Inisfallen, Reproduced in Facsimile from the Original Manuscript (Rawlinson MS. 503) in the Bodleian Library* (Dublin 1933); Seán Mac Airt (ed), *The Annals of Inisfallen* (Dublin 1944 repr. 1988) 42-44.

This list, headed 'Nunc de regibus Hiberniae ex tempore Patricii incipit', sits between the pre-Patrician world chronicle and the commencement of the Irish Annals from the coming of the faith. This material is contained in our oldest Annalistic MS, dating to 1092. The *AI* king-list is in broad, though not absolute agreement, with the other Middle Irish king-lists.[94] These anomalies have been considered important in dating the text. Hence, rather than list the reigns of Domnall ua Néill and Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill before that of Brian, we find 'Ruadri ⁊ Congalach' referring no doubt to the mid-tenth century Ruaidrí Ua Canannáin of Cenél Conaill and Congalach mac Maile Mithigh of Síl nÁedo Sláine. As Mac Neill pointed out, while the other high-kings listed are given 'defining terms (epithets or patronymics', these dynasts are simply named, 'as they would be spoken of in their own time.'[95] Hence, it has been suggested that the *AI* kinglist was originally

89 Smith, *Three Historical Poems* 202-3.
90 Smith, *Three Historical Poems* §§ 44, 48, 50, 51, 52, at 205-09. Máel Sechnaill is not mentioned explicitly but there does appear to be reference to the battles of Tara and Glenn Máma, fought in 980 and 999 respectively. Oweing to the chasms in coverage, only the relevant Clann Cholmáin kings have been entered in the accompanying spreadsheet.
91 Smith, *Three Historical Poems* 171.
92 Smith, *Three Historical Poems* §13 at 176-77.
93 Smith, *Three Historical Poems* 185.
94 Byrne, 'High-Kings and Provincial Kings', *NHI* ix 190.
95 R.I. Best & Eoin MacNeill (ed), *The Annals of Inisfallen, Reproduced in Facsimile from the Original Manuscript (Rawlinson MS. 503) in the Bodleian Library* (Dublin 1933) 28.

drawn up in the mid-tenth century before the names of Brian and Maelsechnaill mac Domnaill were added, bringing the list's coverage to 1022.

As regards the Clann Cholmáin, the *AI* list includes the same seven kings, from the mid-eighth century Domnall, found in the other high-king lists.

MS Rawlinson B.502:

See: M.A. O'Brien (ed) *CGH,* i, (Dublin, 1962) 124-25.

This list, headed 'Haec Sunt Credentium Regum Nomina' is found in the twelfth-century MS Rawlinson B.502 and lists the high-kings from Lóegaire to Brian.[96] The familiar seven Clann Cholmáin kings are admitted. Directly following from and seemingly related to this prose list follows a versified enumeration of the dynastic affiliation of the high-kings of Ireland, and includes '.vii. ō Cholmān'.[97]

Gilla Mo Dutu Ua Casaide:

Ériu Óg inis na naem

See: 'Ériu Óg inis na naem' B. MacCarthy (ed), *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus* (Dublin 1892) 408-37; R.A.S. Macalister (ed), *Lebor Gabála Érenn; the book of the taking of Ireland* v (Dublin 1956) 540-65.

This poem by a twelfth-century poet, which survives in the fourteenth-century *Book of Ballymote* can, it seems, be regarded as an updated version of earlier Middle Irish regnal works. Once named, the authority and trustworthiness of our poet is stressed.

Ocus nir ċan gó, na claen-senċais riam	And he sang not false or misleading history ever.[98]

The order of succession presented is essentially the same as that found in the other Middle-Irish lists down as far as Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill's second period as high-king. There then follows an enumeration of the dynastic affiliation of the kings of Ireland, including a quatrain which claims to list seven 'Ri Erenn a Mid*h*i amaċ'.[99] In fact eight kings are then named, beginning with Díarmait (d.565). There then follows what is essentially an extensive update as the poet continues the list

96 See: Byrne, 'High-Kings and Provincial Kings', *NHI* ix 190.
97 *CGH* 126-27.
98 MacCarthy, *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus* 408-09.
99 MacCarthy, *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus* 428-29.

down to his own day concluding with the twelfth-century Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobair and also mentioning Tigernan O Ruairc.[100]

Do Fhlaithesaib hÉrend Iar Creitim

See: R.I. Best, Osborn Bergin and M.A. O'Brien (ed), *The Book of Leinster* i (Dublin 1954) 94-99.

This text, as the title suggests, begins with the reign of Lóegaire mac Néill and concludes with that of Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair (d.1198). It has been suggested that the notice of Ruaidrí's death may have been added by a later hand.[101] This text is not a bare list but contains extra detail, generally mentioning significant episodes in a given reign.

As regards the Clann Cholmáin, the kings listed are the same as those found elsewhere. While 'Niall Kalle' is mentioned under the reign of Conchobor mac Dondchada, he is not given credit as 'high-king' in his own right. Hence, Máel Sechnaill follows directly on from Conchobor, something not found elsewhere.

Comaimserad rig n-Erenn 7 rig na coiced iar cretim:

See: R. Thurneysen, 'Synchronismen der Irischen Könige', *ZCP* xix (1933) 81-99.

This text was edited by Thurneysen from three manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, namely RIA MS D iv 3, the Book of Lecan and MS Rawlinson B.512. The text divides up periods of history according to the reigns of various high-kings and then information is provided to synchronise these reigns with those of various provincial kings. As an example, in the fourth section of the text we are informed that there were thirty-six years from the death of Díarmait mac Cerbaill to that of Áed mac Ainmerech. The seven kings of Ireland who reigned during this period are then listed before separate sections on the kings who reigned 'for Albain', 'Ultu', 'Laignib', 'Ossraigib', 'Mumain' and 'Connachta' during the same period.[102] Then a separate section begins, structured in the same way, covering the period from the death of Áed mac Ainmerech to that of Domnall mac Áedo. In total the text provides coverage from Laegaire to Muirchertach Ua Briain (d.1119). The kingship of Mide, or a midland Uí Néill kingship, is never included for synchronisation. For our purposes then this text includes another high-king list which has been extracted and presented as such in the accompanying Table. The now familiar group of seven Clann Cholmáin kings,

100 MacCarthy, *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus* 434-35.
101 Byrne, 'High-Kings and Provincial Kings', *NHI* ix 190.
102 R. Thurneysen, 'Synchronismen der Irischen Könige', *ZCP* xix (1933) 87.

beginning with Domnall (d.763), is again found.[103]

Impressions

The Tara king-lists

In theory at least, the king-lists should be a valuable supplement to the Clann Cholmáin genealogies. As noted elsewhere, the predominantly linear nature of those genealogies precluded the preservation of information about cadet branches. The king-lists, recording holders of a particular kingship regardless of segmental affiliation, do not suffer from that particular weakness. As is now fairly clear, the great majority of the king-lists under discussion relate to Tara, a kingship which represented the over-kingship of the Uí Néill from the eighth century. This brings us to an important point. We know from other sources that the kingship of Tara was *not* the exclusive preserve of the Uí Néill prior to that period but this fact is not recognised in the Tara king-lists.[104] We must therefore be aware of the ideological motivations underlying these lists. Not surprisingly the motivations of compilers, revisers and updaters changed over time. Charles-Edwards identifies three distinct groups of Tara king-lists. The first contains *BCC*, the second what might be termed the 'Middle Irish king-lists', generally associated with the huge genealogical collections surviving in MSS from the twelfth century onwards, and finally an intermediate group comprising the regnal list in *AI* and that of Marianus Scottus.[105]

In general terms the earliest, *BCC,* is biased against the Cenél Conaill and towards the Síl nÁedo Sláine.[106] For our purposes the greatest problem, if we can call it that, is the early date of *BCC.* It reflects Síl nÁedo Sláine dominance in the midlands anterior to the real emergence of the Clann Cholmáin in the eighth century. One interesting possibility is that the 'Óengus' included in *BCC* can be identified as a son of Colmán Már/Bec. However, other than the doubtful case of Óengus, no individual features who would appear to belong to the dynasty.

The Middle Irish king-lists, while at least partly independent, are nevertheless very closely related to the Annals. As well as a 'striking general agreement' in the order of succession, both king-

103 A straightforward list headed 'Rig hErend iar creitim' and covering the period from Laegaire to Ruaidrí mac Tairdelbaig (d.1198) is also found in MS Rawlinson B. 512. It is the last section in a version of the *Lebor Gabála* and also includes the now familiar sequence of seven Clann Cholmáin kings. See: http://image.ox.ac.uk/images/bodleian/msrawlb512/97r.jpg .

104 An exception is Ailill Molt of the Connachta who is usually admitted. See: Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 503.

105 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 483-5. His Middle-Irish group includes the lists in MS Rawlinson B.502, *LL* and MS Laud 610. The versified regnal lists of Fland Manistrech and Gilla Cóemáin 'correspond closely to those in Rawlinson B 502 and other MSS.' *BS,* 'differs little from the Middle Irish king-lists except in confusion and wrong ordering.' *ibid* 483 n.72.

106 Though even several Síl nÁedo Sláine dynasts are omitted probably because Fínnachta had taken power by clashing violently with his first cousins. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 492.

list and Annals also appear to share 'general shifts both in the fullness of the record and in the degree of partisanship.'[107] Kelleher considered this evidence for the existence of a single pseudohistorical workshop churning out a variety of revised, or wholly invented texts emphasising the immemorial supremacy of the Uí Néill.[108] However he would appear to have been overly sceptical. While retrospective interpolation and editing certainly took place, we do appear to have access to an Iona Chronicle, perhaps dating from as early as the sixth century. According to this interpretation, the 'close relationship between the annals and the king-lists can now be seen as evidence, not for some major rewriting of the past *c.*900, but for a long evolution of a record originating close to the events, sometimes contemporary, sometimes edited a generation or two later.'[109] The generally accepted textual history of the Chronicle of Ireland explains the shifts in bias and emphasis evident in the Annals and the Middle Irish king-lists. Hence, pre- *c.*740, when record keeping was taking place at Iona, the treatment of various Uí Néill branches appears generally even-handed, though non-Uí Néill kings are not admitted as kings of Tara even though we know from other sources that some could claim that dignity. As these individuals were often in opposition to a Cenél Conaill king, with whom the community of Iona was closely associated, this is hardly surprising. Post *c.*740, with the Chronicle of Ireland now being kept in the Irish midlands, by most accounts, the material appears more partisan towards the Clann Cholmáin.

For our purposes, this raises certain problems. Is the appearance of Clann Cholmáin dynasts in the Middle Irish king-lists more a reflection of the compiler's bias from the mid-eighth century, rather than a genuine record of a changing political reality? The only way to test this, it seems, is to consider the possibility that they held the kingship of Tara before this period but were not recorded as such in the lists. As noted above, there is a possibility that Óengus, included in *BCC,* was considered a king of Tara. But the likelihood of an anti Clann Cholmáin bias, or simply that they had been overlooked in the earlier sections of the Middle Irish lists, seems small. As noted, in the earlier period the compilers of the Middle Irish lists were relatively even-handed in their treatment of the respective Uí Néill branches, if not non Uí Néill claimants. There does not seem to be any reason why they would fail to recognise Clann Cholmáin claims if they had existed prior to the mid-eighth century. We might also cite the speculative suggestion that the early Uí Néill genealogy masks the common origin of Clann Cholmáin and Cenél Conaill. This possibility coupled with the admittedly later evidence of alliance between Clann Cholmáin and Columban church, tells against a failure by an Iona compiler to recognise Clann Cholmáin claims to the Tara kingship.[110] It seems

107 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 503.

108 See: John V.Kelleher, 'Early Irish History and Pseudo-History', *Studia Hibernica* 3 (1963) 113-127; John V. Kelleher, 'The Táin and the Annals', *Ériu* 22 (1977) 107-127.

109 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 506-07.

110 We might also make reference to the aforementioned suggestion that the name of the eponymous founder of the

reasonable to suppose that the mid-eighth century Domnall mac Murchada was the first Clann Cholmáin dynast to secure the Uí Néill overkingship. He is the first of seven from the dynasty who did so down to and including Máel Sechnaill (d.1022). Of these, the ninth-century Conchobar is the only king who is not also found in the Clann Cholmáin genealogy.[111]

Finally, to the third group of king-lists relating to Tara. The list of Marianus Scottus has a distinct Clann Cholmáin bias, listing several dynasts as kings of 'Leth Cuinn' not accorded the dignity elsewhere. Considering the structure of the list it does seem reasonable to suggest it was drawn up during the reign of Flann Sinna and probably in the midlands.[112] The inclusion of Colmán Bec in a joint reign with Áed mac Ainmerach seems extremely unlikely and is not supported by any other source. If we are to believe the Annals, Colmán Bec in fact fell in battle against Áed, perhaps the sequel to the killing of another Cenél Conaill dynast shortly before at Colmán's instigation.[113] While the inclusion of Óengus son of Colmán might be supported by *BCC,* the presence of Suibne is also unsupported by any other source. When laid out, Marianus Scottus' list is a little longer than the Middle Irish lists. MacCarthy highlights the fact that slayer and slain are placed together in what appear to be errors. Hence, Colmán Bec is placed with Áed mac Anmerach while Suibne mac Colmáin appears directly before Áed Sláne.[114] There is the possibility that the usual joint reign from this period, which did involve an Áed and a Colmán, namely Sláne and Rímid, was miscopied. But rather than view these inclusions as simple errors, it is possible that they also reflect the compiler's bias. It seems unlikely that such basic mistakes would be made that, crucially, all result in the inclusion of extra Clann Cholmáin dynasts in the list. There would appear to be the possibility that the compiler of this list, writing during the reign of Flann, a very powerful Clann Cholmáin king with at least pretensions to reign over all Ireland, referred to the Clann Cholmáin pedigree and inserted a few of Flann's ancestors into the earlier sections of the list, in effect boosting Clann Cholmáin's high-king count. The king-list found in *AI* differs from the Middle Irish lists in a number of respects but not as regards the Clann Cholmáin.[115] For our purposes the information presented and order of succession listed is identical to that found in the 'Middle Irish king-lists'.

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dynasty, Colmán, seems to be a diminutive form of Columba.

111 His descendants were relatively unsuccessful and excluded from power.

112 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 486. There is a possibility that it was extended to Flann having originally finished at Áed Oirdnide. See: Byrne, 'High-Kings and Provincial Kings', 190.

113 *AU* 587.1. See also *AU* 593.3 for an alternative date for Colmán's death added in a later hand.

114 B. MacCarthy (ed), *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus* 335-36.

115 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 486-87.

The Midland king-lists

We might now turn to those lists focused more narrowly on the midlands and purporting to list the kings of Mide/Uisnech. We have three lists, the Laud 'Provincial' list, 'Rig Uisnig' from *LL* and Flann Mainistrech's poem *Mide Maigen Clainne Cuind.* It seems that Flann cannot be regarded as independent of the other midland lists and that they are all in fact part of the same tradition. How exactly the three texts are related is more difficult to establish. Smith says that Flann had access to 'an earlier, intact version of 'Ríg Uisnig' rather than that now preserved in the Book of Leinster, and that this was the poet's immediate and chief source.'[116] The opposite, that the compiler of 'Ríg Uisnig' had access to Flann's poem and extracted a bald list from it, seems unlikely since 'Ríg Uisnig' finishes earlier than the poem. Both sources would however seem to have drawn on the tradition found in the 'provincial' list of MS Laud.610. As noted above, this has certain mistakes which appear to have been incorporated and indeed elaborated upon in both 'Ríg Uisnig' and Flann's poem. The Laud list is quite possibly the earliest of the three lists but as discussed above, its limitations as a source are manifold.

While on first inspection the midland lists appear to be quite promising, they are certainly anachronistic in their claims. From the Annals it does not appear that the kingship of Mide existed before the eighth century. Lists claiming to record kings of Mide before that period cannot be taken at face value. We need not entertain their claims to record holders of a kingship we know did not exist in the sixth and seventh centuries. Which is not to say that the data itself is of no value and any extra information that can be extracted will be considered.

116 Smith, '*Mide Maigen Clainne Cuind*' 113.

Saints' Lives

While Saints' Lives are a potentially rich source of information about Early Christian Ireland, they must be approached with considerable caution. Firstly, it is now generally agreed that these Lives tell us little or nothing about the actual Saints involved. The Lives were usually written at a considerable remove from a Saint's supposed floruit and cannot be taken as a guide to conditions in, say, the fifth century.[1] Rather, these Lives are best considered as products of their own time and as such are a valuable source of information about that particular context. For example, incidental details included by the hagiographer constitute an invaluable source of information for the historian. In short, the Life, in these incidental details and particulars forms 'a true picture of the hagiographer's own age.'[2]

However before any meaningful interpretation of the information contained in a given Life can be attempted we must of course establish when the hagiographer was writing. Unfortunately this is a far from straightforward undertaking. The majority of Lives, written in Latin, are virtually undatable on linguistic grounds alone. Named authors or other individuals forming part of the milieu surrounding the Life's composition are priceless when they can be identified. For example, Muirchú, who wrote a Life of Patrick, is listed among the ecclesiastical guarantors of *Cáin Adomnáin*, promulgated in 697.[3] Very occasionally the Life will survive in an early manuscript which obviously limits the period of composition. For example, Tírechán's Patrician dossier survives in the famous TCD MS 52 (Book of Armagh) dating from the early-ninth century while the Schaffhausen copy of Adomnán's Life of Columba appears to have been made prior to 713.[4] But unfortunately the great majority of Irish Saints' Lives in Latin provide no such clues and are difficult to date so precisely. These are contained in several massive later medieval collections. While these collections appear to derive from a twelfth-century exemplar, Richard Sharpe argues that it is possible that they include at least some material from as early as the eighth century.[5]

When reading the Lives we can easily identify the hagiographer's more obvious aims. Hence

1 This general principle requires some qualification in the case of Adomnan's *Life of Columba* to be discussed below. For an introduction to this type of source material, See: Kim McCone, 'An Introduction to Early Irish Saints' Lives', *Maynooth Review* 11 (1984) 26-59; Máire Herbert, 'Hagiography', Kim McCone and Katharine Simms (ed), *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies* (Maynooth 1996) 79-90.

2 James Kenney, *Sources for the early history of Ireland: ecclesiastical* (New York 1929) 297. See also: Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources* (London 1972 repr. Cambridge 1977) 220. Ó Cróinín dismissed the Saints' Lives as follows: 'Despite their incidental value as sources of information for the way-of-life and social and economic conditions at the time they were composed, most of the hagiographies have little claim to strictly historical importance.' Here he arguably sets out exactly why they are of historical importance. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200* (London 1995) 210.

3 Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin*, 697', *Peritia* 1 (1982) §36 180.

4 See: Ludwig Bieler (ed), *The Patrician texts in the book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979) 2-4, 35; Alan Orr Anderson & Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (ed), *Adomnan's Life of Columba* (London 1961) liv-lvi.

5 Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives. An Introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford 1991) 320-

the various episodes involved will usually serve to highlight the Saint's holiness, thaumaturgical skill, compassion, power and so on. But the adoption of increasingly sophisticated approaches to these texts has allowed scholars to highlight how they often reflect and comment upon the particular context of their production.[6] The hagiographer will infuse his Life with the concerns of his own day and will use his Saint as a potent vehicle to defend or extend his community's interests. Hence as well as the incidental detail mentioned earlier, we also have access to contemporary comment on political matters. In short, if we manage to successfully decode the information, Saints' Lives often contain valuable information about the contemporary political landscape.[7] In firstly considering the earliest datable Lives, it is hoped both to illustrate some of these general points as well as highlighting the specific and valuable material available for our study.

Brigit

There remains some disagreement among scholars about how exactly the early (seventh-century) Lives of Brigit are related and which of them is the earliest.[8] While the Life by Cogitosus is an invaluable source of information on, for example, life in a major ecclesiastical city (almost certainly Kildare) or early ecclesiastical architecture, it contains nothing of obvious relevance for our study.[9] The *Vita Prima* on the the other hand is of considerable interest including as it does several episodes involving Conall mac Néill or members of his family. In the first of these Brigit, living at a church in Mag mBreg, is visited by 'the wife of King Conall's son'[10] who comes in search of a blessing as she is childless. Brigit is cold at first, refusing even to leave the church to greet the woman. When pressed by her community to explain her attitude she says:

> Filii vero regum serpentes sunt et filii sanguinum filiique mortis, exceptis paucis electis a Deo.[11]
>
> The sons of kings are serpents and sons of blood and sons of death apart from a few who are chosen by God.[12]

But having made this point Brigit notes the Queen's earnestness in requesting her blessing and

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324, 329, 384.

6 Máire Herbert, 'Hagiography', Kim McCone and Katharine Simms (ed), *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies* (Maynooth 1996) 80.

7 Charles Doherty, 'The Irish hagiographer: resources, aims, results', Tom Dunne (ed), *The Writer as Witness: literature as historical evidence* (Cork 1987) 11.

8 Richard Sharpe, 'Vitae S. Brigitae: the oldest texts', *Peritia* 1 (1982) 81-106; Kim McCone, 'Brigit in the seventh century: a saint with three lives?', *Peritia* 1 (1982) 107-45; David Howlett, 'Vita I Sanctae Brigitae', *Peritia* 12 (1998) 1-23. However McCone's article would appear to have persuaded Connolly, editor of both Vita I and II, to change his mind about their relative dates and argue for the priority of Cogitosus's Life. See: Sean Connolly, 'Cogitosus's Life of Brigit: Content and Value', *JRSAI* 117 (1987) 5 and *idem*, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigidae', *JRSAI* 119 (1989) 5.

9 The same is true for the probably somewhat later *Bethu Brigte,* largely in Old Irish but about a quarter of which is in Latin. See: Donncha Ó hAodha, *Bethu Brigte* (Dublin 1978).

10 I provide references to Connolly's unpublished critical edition and his published translation: Sean Connolly, 'Vita prima Sanctae Brigitae: a critical edition', (unpublished PhD thesis UCD 1970) 34-35; *idem,* 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigidae', *JRSAI* 119 (1989) §62 at 31.

11 Connolly, 'Vita prima Sanctae Brigitae: a critical edition', 35.

12 Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigidae', *JRSAI* 31.

relents, albeit with a significant caveat attached:

> Semen habebit, sed tamen sanguineum et maledicta stirpis erit et multis annis regnum tenebit[13]
> There will be offspring but it will be offspring that sheds blood and will be an accursed stock and will hold sway for many years.[14]

We might begin by attempting to identify those involved. If we assume that Conall is none other than Conall mac Néill, then the woman visiting Brigit, the wife of his son, was most probably the wife of Fergus Cerrbél.[15] While not named in the Life, this woman is named as Corbach in the *Banshenchus.*[16] She was the mother of Díarmait mac Cerbaill.[17] Bearing in mind our general discussion of Saints' Lives above, we can hardly claim that this Life tells us anything about the historical Conall, his son Fergus or the latter's wife. Instead we must attempt to interpret the hagiographer's motivations in bringing these individuals into contact with Brigit.

Brigit's description of the 'sons of kings' as 'sons of blood' appears to be a comment on certain practices then contemporary among the nobility. There is some evidence that young nobles, before coming into their inheritance and settling down to participate in the ordered life of the *túath*, might join roving warrior-bands and lead a life devoted to 'hunting, warfare and sexual licence in the wilds outside the *túath*'.[18] These practices, perhaps with pagan overtones, were inimical to the church which had a significant vested interest in the ordered *túath* system which these young men left and subsequently threatened. Indeed Brigit's views perhaps reflect a then current church attitude to early Irish kingship, or at least aspects of it, which considered it as irredeemably sinful and resistant to Christianity.[19] The pagan element is also present in a later episode where Conall mac Néill comes to Brigit

> cum suis satellitibus circumdatus, sub stigmatibus malignis[20]
> with his accomplices wearing sinister amulets[21]

The wearers of these amulets or marks could only be released from their power when they killed. Conall, about to leave to do just that, first asks for Brigit's blessing, which he receives. He then

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13 Connolly, 'Vita prima Sanctae Brigitae: a critical edition', 35.
14 Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigidae', *JRSAI* 31.
15 Another son, Ardgal, is recorded as falling in battle in 520 and the Cenél nArdgail claimed descent from him. This grouping left little trace in the historical record and remain quite obscure though they do seem to have been based in Brega. For some discussion of this group See: Paul Byrne, *Certain Southern Uí Néill kingdoms* (unpublished PhD thesis UCD 2000) 138-143.
16 (Prose) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234:180; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Banshenchus* (unpublished PhD thesis UCG 1980) § 289 at 242, 361. (Metrical) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 305, 330; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchus filíochta* (unpublished MA dissertation UCG 1977) § 153 at 118, 188.
17 See: Anne Connon, 'Prosopography II', Edel Breathnach (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005) 290-292.
18 Kim McCone, 'Werewolves, cyclopes, *díberga* and *fianna*: juvenille delinquency in early Ireland', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 12 (1986) 13.
19 Richard Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *laicus,* Irish *láech* and the devil's men', *Ériu* 30 (1979) 91-92.
20 Connolly, 'Vita prima Sanctae Brigitae: a critical edition', 36.
21 Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigidae', *JRSAI* 32.

proceeds to lead his men into the territory of the Cruithni, storm a fort and kill many enemies before returning home with their heads. This, it turns out, was simply a vision, the residents of the fort having suffered no such attack. Conall lays aside the amulets or marks and Brigit vows to protect him whenever he is in danger. This appears to be a reference to the practice of *díberg,* a word used to describe both the wearing of these marks and the seemingly related vow to kill.[22]

So what do these two episodes tell us? They are certainly intriguing in their references to the life of young royals, to social structure and the survival of quasi pagan practices or, perhaps more accurately, to the church's thinking on these issues. However one would be reluctant to suggest that the hagiographer was making a specific comment about Conall or his descendants or was suggesting that they were involved in such practices, though they might well have been. It seems more likely that the hagiographer was using Conall as an example to illustrate a more general point about practices abhorrent to the church. As the descendants of Conall had established their hegemony in the Irish midlands by the time of the Life's composition, perhaps it is unsurprising that Conall was chosen in illustrating the point. The hagiographer certainly hoped to influence and temper contemporary practice by involving the ancestor of a grouping who were in a position to realise that change. The point is made very forcefully, particularly in the first episode involving Fergus Cerrbél's wife, where Brigit describes 'an accursed stock'. But this immediately gives way to a pragmatic recognition of political reality as she admits that they 'will hold sway for many years.' In the second episode, having released Conall from his diabolical mark, Brigit and Conall come together as the Saint promises him her protection which he gratefully accepts.

Elsewhere in the *Vita Prima* there is another episode where Brigit acts as a mediator between the brothers Conall and Coirpre mac Néill. Conall approaches her asking for a blessing 'lest my brother Cairpre who hates me should kill me.'[23] The blessing is granted but soon after Coirpre approaches also asking for a blessing 'because in these parts I'm afraid of my brother Conall.'[24] Disaster is averted as the brothers meet but fail to recognise one another through the power of Brigit. This episode reflects the political situation on the ground in the seventh century and the community of Brigit's comment on it. More specifically, we might note that the above episodes are grouped closely together in the *Vita Prima.* This may reflect the interest of Ultán of Ardbraccan, one of three earlier sources which McCone proposes were used in the compilation of the *Vita Prima.*[25]

Overall it seems probable that Conall was used as an exemplary figure to express criticism

22 McCone, 'Werewolves, cyclopes, *díberga* and *fíanna*', 13.
23 Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigidae', *JRSAI* 31; Connolly, 'Vita prima Sanctae Brigitae: a critical edition', 35.
24 Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigidae', *JRSAI* 31; Connolly, 'Vita prima Sanctae Brigitae: a critical edition', 36.
25 McCone, 'Brigit in the seventh century: a saint with three lives?', 135-36.

about certain contemporary practices. While quite forceful in making this point, Brigit is ultimately reconciled with him. The depiction of the rivalry between the brothers Coirpre and Conall is evenhanded and is perhaps motivated by a desire to steer a path between these two groupings. Elsewhere Brigit blesses the king of the Laigin who is concerned about his ongoing feud with the Uí Néill.[26] It seems as though the *Vita Prima* attempts, among other things, to make allowance for the awkward position in which the Brigidine paruchia had found itself, i.e. straddling rival power blocs.

Tírechán

Tírechán's *Collectanea* contains several relevant sections for the purposes of this study. In a general sense Tírechán, writing in the latter half of the seventh century, was motivated to promote and defend the interests of the Patrician paruchia.[27] More specifically, he was very much concerned with the territory of what we would term the 'Southern Uí Néill'. His Patrick meets several of Níall Noígíallach's sons and these encounters provide us with a valuable insight into contemporary concerns. Throughout the text Tírechán appears to suggest that the lordship of the community of Patrick is comparable to or complementary with the lordship of the Uí Néill kingdom, both described using the word *regnum*.[28] Lóegaire, who Patrick meets at Tara, is portrayed as Níall's most powerful son and there are hints that some authority over Connacht was also claimed for him.[29] However the text is quite clear that Lóegaire's descendants were not to enjoy lasting power because he had refused the faith saying:

> Nam Neel pater meus non siniuit mihi credere, sed ut sepeliar in cacuminibus Temro quasi viris consistentibus in bello.
> My father Níall did not allow me to accept the faith, but bade me to be buried on the ridges of Tara [...] in the manner of men at war.[30]

Lóegaire's brother Coirpre is singled out for Patrick's invective. Patrick meets him at Tailtiu, surely a significant detail considering this site's close association with Tara, and realising that Coirpre was

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26 Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigidae', *JRSAI* 40-41; Connolly, 'Vita prima Sanctae Brigitae: a critical edition', 54-55

27 See: Bieler (ed), *The Patrician texts in the book of Armagh* 36; Catherine Swift, 'Tírechán's motives in compiling the *Collectanea*: an alternative interpretation', *Ériu* 45 (1994) 53–82 ; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 251-254.

28 Swift, 'Tírechán's motives', 72.

29 See: Bieler (ed), *The Patrician texts in the book of Armagh* 134, 144; Swift, 'Tírechán's motives', 72-78. While he may have sought to claim jurisdiction for the Uí Néill over Connacht, and was perhaps influenced by contemporary attempts by the Síl nÁedo Sláne to do just that, Tírechán's efforts can be regarded as largely aspirational. Indeed a clear sense of distinction between Uí Néill and Connachta territories emerges through the wording of several passages and even in the overall arrangement of the work. The first book is concerned with deeds 'performed in the territory of the Uí Néill' while the second with those 'performed in the regions of Connaught'. Bieler (ed), *The Patrician texts in the book of Armagh* 139. Admittedly there remains some debate on whether this division is actually Tírechán's or that of a later editor. See Catherine Swift, 'Tírechán's motives in compiling the *Collectanea:* an alternative interpretation', *Ériu* xlv (1994) 53. Muirchú's *Life of Patrick* contains a more dramatic encounter between Patrick and Lóegaire but the text contains nothing of direct relevance for our study.

30 Ludwig Bieler, *The Patrician texts in the book of Armagh* 132-133.

intent on killing him, Patrick made the following prediction:

> Semen tuum serviet seminibus fratrum et non erit de semine tuo rex in aeternum.
> Thy seed shall serve the seed of the brothers, and there shall be no king of thy lineage for ever.[31]

An unnamed and unidentifiable son of Fíachu son of Níall is also chastised when some of Patrick's companions are killed, apparently near Uisnech.

> Non erit de stirpe tua rex, sed servies semini fratrum tuorum.
> There shall be no king from thy progeny, but thou shalt serve the seed of thy brothers.[32]

As it stands this is an empty statement but it seems likely that we should, like with the previous examples, take it that the the entire line of Fíachu son of Níall are being punished and placed in contrast with the line of Conall son of Níall, to be discussed below. This slight confusion is cleared up in the later *Vita Tripartita* where it is Fíachu himself rather than his son who comes up against Patrick and indeed refuses baptism from the saint.[33]

In marked contrast when Patrick meets Conall at his house he is received warmly and Conall accepts baptism.

> babtitzavit illum et firmavit solium eius in aeternum et dixit illi:
> Semen fratrum tuorum tuo semini serviet in aeternum.
> He baptised him, and established his throne forever, and said to him:
> The seed of thy brother[s] shall serve thy seed for ever.[34]

Of course Patrick's blessing is contingent on Conall's descendants continuing to support the Patrician church and ensuring its rights were not encroached upon. Tírechán is extremely valuable for the present research in having Patrick travel the midlands and the saint's encounters tell us much about the political situation in the region during the seventh century.

We might now consider how the respective brothers are treated by Tírechán. At the time of writing Cenél Lóegairi was in decline, a perhaps once extensive midland kingdom reduced to a rump territory around Trim.[35] Their much reduced status could be traced to the failure of the dynasty's eponymous founder to accept the faith, at least according to Tírechán. Likewise Coirpre and Fíachu, while encountered at significant sites in the Irish midlands perhaps in recognition of their onetime importance, were both at the head of dynasties being rapidly overshadowed as Tírechán wrote— overshadowed of course by the descendants of Conall mac Néill to whom

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31 Ludwig Bieler, *The Patrician texts in the book of Armagh* 132-133.
32 Ludwig Bieler, *The Patrician texts in the book of Armagh* 136-137.
33 Whitley Stokes (ed), *The Tripartite Life of Patrick with other documents relating to that Saint* i (2 vols. London 1887) 80-1.
34 Ludwig Bieler, *The Patrician texts in the book of Armagh* 132-133.
35 Byrne, *Certain Southern Uí Néill kingdoms* 156-83.

Patrick's favour is bestowed.[36] Tírechán surely had the Síl nÁedo Sláine in mind as he wrote, a dynasty which was having considerable success in the seventh century. Tellingly, the meeting between Patrick and Conall took place at the latter's house:

> quam fundavit in loco in quo est hodie Aeclessia Patricii Magna.
> which he had built in the place where there is now the Great Church of Patrick[37]

Conall then measured out a church on the site for Patrick. The church in question appears to be Domnach Mór Pátraic (Donaghpatrick, Barony of upper Kells, Co. Meath), adjacent to the royal site of Ráith Airther and not far from Tailtiu.[38] In Tírechán's day, Ráith Airther was a seat of Síl nÁedo Sláine kingship.[39] Indeed Swift has convincingly argued that the text is best viewed in the context of the reigns of the brothers Díarmait and Blathmac (both d.665) and the latter's son Sechnusach (d.671), all members of Síl nÁedo Sláine. These descendants of Conall were involved in clashes with the Cenél Coirpri and were also perhaps concerned to extend their power over the Connachta.[40]

Adomnán

While we should not overstate the point, Adomnán's *Life of Columba* is of somewhat greater historical value for the period it describes than the works of Tírechán or Muirchú are for the fifth century having been composed much closer to the subject's lifetime. Adomnán (d.704) wrote the Life about a century after Columba's death and had both written and oral sources available to him at Iona.[41] That said, Adomnán was motivated by a variety of factors in compiling the Life and we must approach his testimony with caution.[42] In a well-known passage Columba warns Áed Sláne that kin-slaying would imperil the political power he had inherited from his father Diarmait:

> Alio in tempore, cum vir beatus in Scotia per aliquot demoraretur dies ad supradictum Aidum ad se venientem sic prophetice locutus ait, 'Praecavere debes fili ne tibi a deo totius Everniae regni praerogativam monarchiae praedistinatam parricidali faciente peccato amittas. Nam si quandoque illud commiseris, non toto patris regno sed ejus aliqua parte in gente tua brevi frueris tempore.' Quae verba sancti sic sunt expleta secundum ejus vaticinationem. Nam post Suibneum filium Columbani dolo ab eo interfectum, non plus ut

36 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 453.
37 Ludwig Bieler, *The Patrician texts in the book of Armagh* 132-133.
38 While some scholars have argued that Ráith Airther was in the modern townland of Oristown, a large fort immediately to the east of the modern church of Donaghpatrick has also been suggested. See Catherine Swift, 'Óenach Tailten, the Blackwater Valley and the Uí Néill kings of Tara', Alfred P. Smyth (ed), *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin 2000) 110 n.8.
39 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 17.
40 Swift, 'Tírechán's motives', 79.
41 See: Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford 1988) 134-42; *VSC* lxv-lxviii; Charles Doherty, 'The Irish hagiographer: resources, aims, results', Tom Dunne (ed), *The writer as witness: literature as historical evidence* (Cork 1987) 12.
42 Jean-Michel Picard, 'Bede, Adomnán, and the writing of history', *Peritia* 3 (1984) 50-70.

> fertur quam iiii. annis et tribus mensibus regni concessa potitus est parte.
>
> At another time, when the blessed man was staying for some days in Ireland, and Aid (mentioned above) came to him, he spoke to him prophetically thus, saying: 'My son, you must take heed lest by reason of the sin of parricide you lose the prerogative of monarchy over the kingdom of all Ireland, predestined for you by God. For if ever you commit that sin, you will enjoy not the whole kingdom of your father, but only some part of it, in your own tribe, and for but a short time.' These words of the saint were fulfilled exactly according to his prediction. For after Aid had treacherously killed Suibne, Colman's son, he had dominion over the part of the kingdom that had been yielded to him for no more, as it is told, than four years and three months.[43]

Áed Sláine killed his cousin Suibne in 600 only to be killed by Suibne's son Conall in 604.[44] Adomnán's words of warning are for Áed Sláine and by extension Síl nÁedo Sláine but it is quite clear here, and elsewhere in the Life, that Adomnán is primarily concerned with Áed's father Díarmait. This comes through very clearly when Adomnán later discusses Díarmait's death at the hands of Áed Dubh who is vilified in several memorable passages.

> Qui et Diormitium filium Cerbulis totius Scotiae regnatorem deo auctore ordinatum interficerat.
> he had also killed Diormit, Cerball's son, who had been ordained, by God's will, as the ruler of all Ireland.[45]

Later Columba comments on Áed Dubh's ordination:

> Ordinatus vero indebete Aidus sicuti canis ad vomitum revertetur suum. Et ipse rursum sanguilentus trucidator existet, et ad ultimum lancea jugul[a]tus de ligno in aquam cadens submersus morietur. Talem multo prius terminum promeruit vitae, qui totius regem trucidavit Scotiae.
>
> And Aid, unworthily ordained, will return like a dog to his vomit, and he will again be a bloody killer, and at last, pierced with a spear, will fall from wood into water, and die by drowning. He has deserved such an end much sooner, who has slaughtered the king of all Ireland.[46]

Overall it seems as though Adomnán is far more concerned with Díarmait than with any of his descendants. Yet what he tells us about Díarmait cannot be taken at face value. His portrayal

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43 *VSC* [I 14] 236-37.
44 *AU* 600.2; *AU* 604.2.
45 *VSC* [I 36] 280-81.
46 *VSC* [I 36] 280-83; Picard cites this example in his discussion of the survival and incorporation of the Celtic theme of the 'threefold death' in hagiographical legend. See: Jean-Michel Picard, 'The Strange Death of Guaire Mac Áedáin', Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach and Kim McCone (ed), *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney* (Maynooth 1989) 372-73.

reflects Adomnán's late seventh-century concerns rather than sixth-century reality. Despite the fact that we know very little about the actual Díarmait, he was evidently considered to be a figure of huge significance by the Southern Uí Néill. This, coupled with the fact that he was a very close cousin of Columba, explains Adomnán's interest in him. He is set up as God's ordained ruler of all Ireland, something which we can hardly take seriously for the sixth century.[47] In having Columba warn Áed Sláne, Adomnán, influenced by the Old Testament, is perhaps more concerned to illustrate the consequences of kin-slaying as an unchristian and sinful practice. He uses a notable example where the perceived consequence of killing the Lord's anointed could be demonstrated. The series of killings which Áed Sláne sparked off are fairly well documented in the annals and are the first in the long-running and bloody feud between Síl nÁedo Sláne and Clann Cholmán.[48] Adomnán describes one single feuding dynasty rather than the two rivals that would later emerge. Of course such feuding seems to have hastened this segmentation. By contrasting a mythologised Díarmait with the declining contemporary power of his descendants, Adomnán produced a potent example of the risks in losing God's favour.

Later Lives

There remains some disagreement on the date of the *Tripartite Life of Patrick*.[49] One editor, Mulchrone, believes that a late ninth-century form of the text is retrievable from the fifteenth-century MS Egerton 93, on which she largely bases her edition.[50] Whitley Stokes, an earlier editor, argued for a date not earlier than the mid-tenth century.[51] More recently scholars are inclined to argue for a ninth-century date. Dumville, for example, argues that the text 'may be seen in a continual condition of alteration in language, detailed content, and perhaps structure from at least the ninth century.'[52] The difficulty appears to be that as the text stands today, we find both Old Irish and later forms side by side. Byrne, who argues that much of the linguistic evidence cited by previous scholars is at best ambiguous, suggests that the historical evidence is clear.

> The Tripartite Life is replete with political messages, all internally consistent, which point to a date not later than *c*.830.[53]

Of course the *Tripartite Life* contains much material taken from the earlier and dateable Patrician

47 See: Richard Sharpe, *Adomnán's Life of Columba* 60-63, n.157 at 296-297.
48 Sharpe, *Adomnán's Life of Columba* n.95 at 276; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* fig. 12.2 at 508.
49 For a brief synopsis of the positions adopted by some scholars, see: K. Jackson, 'The date of the Tripartite Life', *ZCP* xli (1986) 5-45: 6-8.
50 Kathleen Mulchrone, *Bethu Phátraic: The Tripartite Life of Patrick* i (Dublin 1939) v.
51 See Whitley Stokes, *The Tripartite Life of Patrick with other documents relating to that Saint* i (2 vols London 1887 repr Wiesbaden 1965) xiv, xlv, lvii, lxi (for his dating of the MSS) and lxiii-lxxxix (for evidence to support his dating of the text).
52 David Dumville, 'The dating of the Tripartite Life of Patrick', in idem (ed), *St Patrick 493-1993* 255-258.
53 F.J. Byrne and Pádraig Francis, 'Two Lives of Saint Patrick "Vita Secunda" and "Vita Quarta"', *JRSAI* 124 (1994) 5-117: 7.

works and for our purposes it contains very little relevant material not found in Tírechán's *Collectanea.*[54]

For all of the difficulties faced by scholars in dating the language of the *Tripartite Life* at least it is, for the most part, written in Irish. The great majority of Saints' Lives are in Latin but lack the type of markers (named and identifiable authors for example) which allow us to date the early Lives of Brigit, Patrick and Columba discussed above. These anonymously composed Lives survive in three later medieval collections the contents of which, superficially at least, appear quite uniform. We are however dealing with highly stratified material and individual Lives which vary greatly in date despite the virtually unchanging Latin used. Unfortunately the material drawn upon by the later medieval collectors has not survived independently of the collections themselves. The challenge therefore, is to identify and isolate earlier material from later strata within these collections. Some progress has been made, most notably by Richard Sharpe.[55] He has argued that nine or perhaps ten Lives which appear consecutively in all three later medieval collections, and which he labels the 'O'Donohue Group', derive from an exemplar dating to *c.*800. The name is taken from a memorandum in one of the three collections, the *Codex Salmenticensis* (S), which acknowledges a loan of material 'a fratre Dermicio Ó Dunchade.'[56] The Lives in the 'O'Donohue group' are those of SS Ailbe, Lugidus or Molua, Fintán of Clonenagh, Fínán, Ruadán, Áed mac Bricc, Cainnech, Fintán of Taghman alias Munnu, Colmán Élo and perhaps Columba of Terryglass. This last Life is not in the *Codex Kilkenniensis* (D) so Sharpe concedes it may not have been in his proposed early exemplar. That said, linguistic evidence and certain correspondences with other Lives in the Group suggest the possibility that it was the tenth Life.[57] The definition of these Lives as a distinct group rests firstly on the physical evidence of S. The first Life, that of Ailbe, is contained in the final six leaves of the fifth quire. The above mentioned memorandum recording the O'Donohue loan occurs 'on the first recto of the first new gathering in the group'.[58] The half column remaining at the end of the final Life in that Group, that of Columba of Terryglass, is left blank and the eighth quire then ends. The physical evidence alone is hardly convincing in justifying Sharpe's decision to consider these Lives together. However he goes on to discuss various textual and linguistic pieces of evidence to further support his argument. Having firstly examined the Lives as they appear across

54 There is also an interesting and surely much later section linking Díarmait mac Cerbaill to the foundation of Clonmacnoise. See: Whitley Stokes, *The Tripartite Life* 70-71, 89.

55 Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* ch. 10.

56 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* 297. For differing opinions on how and where S was compiled, see: W.W. Heist, 'Dermot O'Donohue and the Codex Salmanticensis', *Celtica* v (1960) 52-63; Pádraig Ó Riain, 'Codex Salmanticensis: a provenance *inter Anglos* or *inter Hibernos*?', Toby Bernard, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín and Katharine Simms (ed), *A miracle of learning: Studies in manuscripts and Irish learning: Essays in honour of William O' Sullivan* (Aldershot 1998) 91-100.

57 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* 298.

58 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* 297.

the three collections he concludes that S is 'the original on which the other recensions depend', and that the differences in form of these Lives are due to this recensional relationship.[59] The evidence presented is extensive but for example the redactor of the *Codex Insulensis* (O) displays a knowledge of and interest in Patrician legend and also often inserts biblical parallels towards the end of a given episode. The redactor of D on the other hand exhibits an interest in local topography and interpolates often seemingly irrelevant details while omitting or revising other material. Perhaps the most convincing evidence, both for the nature of the relationship between the extant collections, and the early exemplar as proposed by Sharpe, is lexical. While we noted the difficulty of dating Latin at the outset, Sharpe provides various examples where obscure or obsolete vocabulary in S is replaced in the other collections. One such example is the word *laicus* which appears in the Vita Prima S. Brigitae and Adomnán's Vita S. Columbae meaning a 'brigand bound by an evil vow.'[60] The word also appears in several Lives of the O'Donohue Group but because it did not retain this early meaning it was substituted with *latro* or *miles* in D and O, the redactors 'knowing that *laicus* would not be generally understood in this [earlier] sense.'[61] The difference between the standard, later meaning of *laicus,* i.e. a layman, and the earlier meaning of a warrior or brigand in the Hiberno-Latin Lives, as well as the fact that the earlier meaning appears to be associated with a custom of some antiquity, perhaps suggests an early origin for the O'Donohue Lives. That said, the fact that the D and O redactors recognised and understood *laicus* before providing a more modern substitute as well as the fact that an ancient word might be reused long after it had become obsolete 'diminishes the utility of such linguistic tests for dating texts.' As Sharpe himself stresses, the evidence presented thus far, the vocabulary, circumstantial form of the Lives and 'primitive' aspects of the content, 'give the impression of antiquity without actually permitting the dating of the texts.'[62] Some further evidence is however provided by the early forms of Irish personal and place names which are found concentrated in the O'Donohue Lives.[63] While difficult and dangerous material to extrapolate from, Sharpe believes that the Irish names in the O'Donohue exemplar were in Old Irish. Following a comparison, he concludes that the treatment of names in these Lives is not so archaic as that found in Adomnáin or the Book of Armagh 'but features are preserved which became obsolete in the eighth century.'[64]

The immense difficulties involved in analysing the later medieval collections of Saints'

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59 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* 310.
60 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* 319; Richard Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *laicus,* Irish *láech,* and the Devil's Men', *Ériu,* 30 (1979) 75-92.
61 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* 319.
62 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* 319.
63 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* 320-333 for detailed discussion.
64 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* 329.

Lives have, perhaps not surprisingly, meant that Sharpe's conclusions have not received universal acceptance.[65] There does not appear to be any truly clinching piece of evidence but Sharpe gradually builds up a dossier which, when considered in its totality, tends to support his thesis that the O'Donohue Lives were written *c.* 750-850.[66]

Geography would tend to support the view that these Lives should be regarded as a distinct group. With the exception of Taghmon belonging to St Munnu, all of the primary churches of the O'Donohue Saints are within twenty-five miles of the top of Slieve Bloom. Below we shall see examples where these saints are brought into friendly contact as they make guest appearances in one another's Lives. We shall also note the striking similarity of various episodes contained in several of these Lives. Therefore it seems possible that in this group of texts we can identify a desire to strengthen links and build solidarity between various local churches. In what follows the relevant episodes from these Lives for this study will be sketched out before an attempt to consider and interpret their contents.

Vita Sancti Ruadani[67]

The Life of St Ruadán contains a well known encounter between the Saint and Díarmait mac Cerbaill at Tara. The two come into conflict after Ruadán provides sanctuary to Áed Guaire of the Uí Maine who feared for his life having killed one of Díarmait's household. Ruadán hides Áed at his monastery but, at length, Díarmait manages to remove Áed to Tara. Ruadán follows with a group of other holy men keen to assist Áed and secure his release. Before Tara, Ruadán sings psalms and begins a fast against Díarmait. On the first night twelve noblemen within Tara's ramparts die. The next day, following the entreaties of their loved ones, Ruadán restores these twelve to life. In a short section found only in the edition published by Plummer, based on the *Codex Kilkenniensis*[68], Díarmait is described as retaliating by beginning his own fast and he is described quite sympathetically. This version also has Ruadán defeat Díarmait by a trick. He pretends to break his fast but does not actually eat. Díarmait, fooled, breaks his own fast and falls asleep. As he dreams, the Plummer edition essentially reconverges with that published by Heist, based on the *Codex Salmanticensis*. In this dream Díarmait sees a great tree, its shadow cast over Ireland.[69] He sees twelve elders with one hundred and fifty of their disciples cutting down the tree.

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65 See John Carey, 'Review of Richard Sharpe's *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives', Speculum* 68 (1) (1993) 260-262; Alfred P. Smyth, 'Review of Richard Sharpe's *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives', English Historical Review* 107 (1992) 676-678.

66 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* 329.

67 See: Heist *Vitae,* §12 at 163-165; Plummer *Vitae*, §§ xv-xviii at 245-249.

68 Plummer *Vitae,* lxxxvi. Plummer dates these MSS to the fifteenth century. ibid xii

69 Cíaran of Clonmacnoise has a similar dream in his Life. He sees an enormous tree by the Shannon, its shadow protecting Ireland. Similar to the episode here, the tree surely represents Cíaran, the growth of his influence throughout and his protection over Ireland. See: Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae,* i, § xxi 208

The sound of it falling wakes Díarmait from sleep. From his dream Díarmait understands that the fall of the tree anticipates the end of his life and that of his kingdom. He then approaches Ruadán and they trade increasingly bitter curses. The king begins by casting himself as the defender of the peace and Christ's law before predicting the decline of Ruadán's paruchia. Ruadán responds as follows:

> Regnum tuum primum deficiet, et de tuo genere nullus regnabit in eternum.[70]
> Your kingdom will decline first and none of your offspring will ever reign.

Díarmait then curses Ruadán's monasteries foretelling their destruction by swine before Ruadán famously curses Tara, predicting its abandonment:

> Civitas Temoria multis centenis annis prius vacua erit et sine habitatore in eternum.[71]
> The City of Tara will be empty many hundreds of years before and forever without inhabitants.

Having traded some particularly nasty personal insults with the saint, Díarmait then curses Ruadán's resting place describing a wild boar digging into his tomb.[72] However Ruadán has the last word by countering that Díarmait would not be buried wholly or properly but that sheep dung would be thrown over his thigh, which he had not raised in reverence to the saint, and which would not be buried with the rest of his body.[73] Now Díarmait backs down, recognising that he has been bested in this battle of malediction and releases the prisoner Áed. As compensation of sorts, thirty magical horses emerge from the sea and are given by Ruadán to Díarmait.

In placing the Vita Sancti Ruadani in the early 'O'Donohue Group' Sharpe cites an example of 'primitive' Latin vocabulary previously noted by Byrne to support his argument.[74] The episode outlined above, recording the encounter between Ruadán and Díarmait at Tara, is found in a much more elaborate form in later Irish.[75] We must be conscious of the possibility that the episode in the Latin Life as we have it includes later elaboration. Sharpe points out various anomalous forms in the Latin Life which might suggest that this section was translated into Latin from Irish and then inserted into the existing early Latin Life.[76] It seems possible that the encounter could have been present in the original Latin Life in a simpler form before being elaborated upon with the interpolation of the newly translated material. Though this is pure speculation.

But what does the encounter tell us anyway? Overall the hagiographer seems to be making a

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70 Heist *Vitae,* § 12 at 165.
71 *Ibid.*
72 *Ibid.*
73 *Ibid.*
74 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* 305; F.J. Byrne, 'Derrynavlan: The Historical Context', *JRSAI* 110 (1980) 118.
75 Standish H. O'Grady (ed), *Silva Gadelica* (2 vols London 1892) i at 66-72, ii at 70-76.
76 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* 331-332.

quite general comment on the subservience of secular power to the saint. As Díarmait was a figure of some fame and as his descendants were dominant in Southern Uí Néill territory as the hagiographer wrote, perhaps his inclusion in the Life is unsurprising. It might suggest that the church was under some pressure from Díarmait's descendants at the time of the Life's composition however, as noted, it is quite possible that the dramatic section where Tara is cursed by the saint was a later insertion. Ruadán's ultimate victory appears all the more glorious as it is won against such a powerful adversary as Díarmait. Also, a stroll over the abandoned ramparts of Tara, as they were in the eighth and later centuries, would of course seem to confirm Ruadán's power to anyone familiar with the Life.

Vita Sancti Aedi

Áed mac Bricc is involved in several interesting episodes with the Uí Néill. On one occasion he acts as an intermediary between the king of Munster and the Uí Néill. The former had gathered an army to lead against the Uí Néill. On hearing of this development the king of the Uí Néill, who is unnamed, grows frightened and asks for Áed's assistance. Following a display of his power the initially reluctant Munster king relents and comes to peace. Two horses are killed as part of this incident and while the Saint revives one, the other is buried and a lake formed at the place named Loch Gabre.[77]

Elsewhere Díarmait mac Cerbaill's wife comes to Áed in search of a blessing because she is unable to conceive. The saint duly obliges and predicts that she will give birth to a son who will be a glorious king of Tara. Subsequently she gives birth to Áed Sláne though only after first producing a lamb and a silver fish, a legend which would be elaborated upon subsequently.[78]

There is also an episode involving the king of Tethbae who assembles an army to attack a certain people in Mide. Áed is called upon to secure peace but the men of Tethbae decide to act before he can reach them. However, their horses become bogged down when crossing a river dividing both territories. Áed then arrives and orders them back to their own territory.[79]

Elsewhere Áed is approached by two parents in need of help in securing the release of their son who had been taken prisoner by a midland king. In S the prisoner is led 'ad regem Neill' while

77 Heist *Vitae,* §§ 8-9 at 169-170; Plummer *Vitae,* §v at 36-37. The description of the encounter seems to place it in Munster or on the border between Munster and Uí Néill lands. This would seem to rule out Lagore, the excavated crannóg of the kings of Southern Brega, which first springs to mind when we read 'Loch Gabre'. See: H. Hencken, 'Lagore Crannóg: An Irish Royal Residence of the 7th to 10th Centuries A.D.', *Proc Roy Ir Acad (C)*53 (1950) 1-248; *Onom.,* 499.

78 Heist *Vitae,* § 18 at 173; Plummer *Vitae,* § xiv at 39. See: Standish H. O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica* i at 82-84, ii at 88-91.

79 Heist *Vitae,* § 29 at 176; Plummer *Vitae,* §§ xxi at 40-41. Interestingly while the ruler of Tethbae is described as *rex* in S (used by Heist) he has been downgraded to *dux* in D. Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* 307. As already noted, Sharpe argues that S best preserves the archetype (Φ) which he dates to *c.*800. *Ibid,* 310-11.

the king is described as 'rex Midhi' in D.[80] Áed finds the king at an island, perhaps a crannóg, which is described as 'insula stagni Lemdin' and 'insulam stagni Lebayn' in Heist and Plummer respectively. As the king had ordered that Áed be refused access, the saint walks dry-footed across to the island. The king, suitably impressed, releases the prisoner. As we shall see below, this episode is very closely related to one found in the *Vita Sancti Cainnici,* in which Áed plays a supporting role.

Vita Sancti Cainnici

One episode of Cainnech's Life opens with Áed mac Bricc travelling to meet the king of the Uí Néill, Colmán Bec son of Díarmait.[81] He finds the king residing on an island, again perhaps a description of a crannóg, located 'in stagni insula Ros' and 'in stagno Rosso' in Heist and Plummer respectively. Áed was pleading for the release of a nun held by the king. Hearing of this Cainnech travels to help Áed. However king Colmán is unwilling to receive the men and has the rafts necessary to reach the island hidden to prevent access. However God reveals their whereabouts and Cainnech travels across and duly chastises Colmán. But the king remains recalcitrant. A traumatic vision follows as a man holding a glistening sword and riding in a fiery chariot approaches and attacks the king. He drops down dead but is revived by Cainnech and gives thanks, promises to return the nun to Áed and gives a site to Cainnech.

In another episode Cainnech comes upon a roadside cross and is told it marks the resting place of Colmán Bec who fell there against his enemies. Cainnech prays for the soul of the king whom he saves from hell. Colmán is described as 'rex istarum gentium' and 'rex istius regionis' in the Heist and Plummer editions respectively.[82]

We can draw some conclusions from the evidence of Vita Sancti Aedi and Vita Sancti Cainnici. Firstly, it seems possible that Áed's blessing of Díarmait's wife, Áed Sláine's mother, might narrow down the date of composition. While possible that a hagiographer would remain interested in Áed if writing in the later eighth century, it is more likely that he would be concerned to 'forsee' and 'predict' his greatness if the Síl nÁedo Sláine remained a powerful force at the time he was writing. That would only be the case if he was working before 743, i.e. before the battle of Serethmag which announced the arrival of the Clann Cholmáin as the preeminent Uí Néill power in the midlands.[83] Perhaps most interesting are the more localised details which reflect the hagiographer's concerns. Áed is portrayed as an intermediary between rival territories and works to

80 Heist *Vitae,* § 31 at 176; Plummer *Vitae,* §§ xxiii at 41.
81 Heist *Vitae,* § 32 at 190; Plummer *Vitae,* § xxvii at 162-163.
82 Heist *Vitae,* § 38 at 192; Plummer *Vitae,* § xxxi at 163-164.
83 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* n.12 at 445.

prevent conflict between Munster and the Uí Néill and between Tethbae and Mide. The site of the crannóg mentioned in Áed's Life must surely be Loch Lene near Fore in Co. Westmeath.[84] This was Coílle Fallomuin territory. Likewise, the location of the crannóg in Cainnech's Life can probably be located in Coílle Fallomuin territory.[85] The church of Killare, belonging to the community of Áed mac Bricc, is located about forty kilometers south west of Fore.[86] While the main church of Cainnech, Aghaboe, is located much farther south, there is a possibility that the community of St Cainnech had a church in Coílle Fallomuin territory also.[87] Hence it seems both these Lives are making a quite pointed and specific statement. The hagiographer(s) may well be asserting the rights of these churches in the area and perhaps suggests that this was in response to pressure from the secular rulers, the Coílle Fallomuin. The Lives of Áed and Cainnech are quite obviously related, both containing a virtually identical encounter with the king of Mide on his crannóg. Indeed Áed also has a minor supporting role in the latter's Life as they approach the king together.[88]

Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin[89]

This Saint's Life is considerably later than those discussed thus far. It survives in a single manuscript copy (MS 598, Bibliothèque Municipale de Rennes) which probably dates to the fifteenth century though the text itself seems to date from the twelfth.[90] As well as the general character of the language, the author's misidentification of several prominent eleventh century individuals means it is unlikely he was writing before 1100.[91] The Life's modern editor, Kuno Meyer, plausibly suggests that the rediscovery of a shrine containing the saint's relics may have

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84 *Onom.*, 501.

85 For the 14th September the Félire Óengusso has one 'Coeman Brecc'. In the notes we find the elaboration 'i. Caeman Brecc o Rus ech i Caille Follamin im-Mide.' See: Whitley Stokes (ed), *Felire Oengusso Celi De: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* (London 1905) 194, 206-09. It is possible therefore that the location mentioned in Cainnech's *Life* might be in the area later associated with the Coílle Fallomuin. See: Paul Walsh, 'Ancient Meath according to the Book of Rights', *Leaves of History* (Drogheda 1930) 49; Paul Byrne, *Certain* 145 and *AFM* i 238 n. 'z'. The probability that it is Coílle Fallomuin territory being described is increased because the episode is so obviously related to the encounter in the Vita Sancti Aedi where the location is specified.

86 See: *NHI* ix map 23.

87 'The ruins of Cainneach's little oratory are still pointed out in the townland of Kilkenny [...] Near the ruins of Cainneach's chapel still springs a well called *Tobar Chainnigh*.' See: John O'Donovan, 'The Ordinance Survey Letters', Paul Walsh, *The Placenames of Westmeath* (Dublin 1957) 10-11.

88 In his Life Ruadán comes, along with Columb Cille, to the assistance of Áed mac Bricc in one particular episode. Heist *Vitae*, § 23 at 167.

89 Kuno Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin. Life of Colmán son of Lúachan* (Dublin 1911). More recently this edition was reissued with some extra notes but without the Irish text, see Leo Daly (ed), Kuno Meyer (trans), *Life of Colmán of Lynn. Beatha Colmáin Lainne* (Dublin 1999).

90 Paul Walsh, 'St Colmán mac Luacháin of Lynn (2)', Nollaig Ó Muraíle (ed), *Irish Leaders and Learning through the Ages* (Dublin 2003) 413.

91 Paul Walsh, 'The topography of Betha Colmáin', Nollaig Ó Muraíle (ed), *Irish Leaders and Learning through the Ages* (Dublin 2003) 263. We should note the possibility that the hagiographer had access to older sources perhaps suggested by the occasional appearance of Old Irish forms. Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* viii.

prompted the composition of the Life.[92]

AU 1122.2 Scrin Cholmain m Luachain d'fhoghbhail i n-ailaidh Lainne ferchubat i talmhain dia Cetain in Braith.
The shrine of Colmán son of Luachán was found in the burial place of Lann [Ela], a man's cubit in earth, on Spy Wednesday [22 March].[93]

A note attached to the Life itself informs us that the saint's relics had been in their shrine among Colmán's community from the time of Domnall mac Murchada (d.763) until the arrival of Turgesius and the Norse when they were hidden. The shrine, we are told, was rediscovered during the reign of Toirrdelbach Mór Ua Conchobair as 'high-king' (1121-56) and that of Murchad Ua Maelsechlainn as king of Mide (1106-53), which would therefore agree with the date provided by the *AU* entry.[94]

The Life is of value for our study for a number of reasons. Firstly, the author was familiar with the area around Lough Ennell where the monastery of Lynn was located, indeed he was probably a member of the community. This area was also Clann Cholmáin heartland. Therefore the text provides us with detailed information about the local area, its topography and about several specific sites. Beyond this, it is also clear that the hagiographer was familiar with Clann Cholmáin history as he refers to several of their kings and to specific episodes in the dynasty's history from the seventh to eleventh centuries. A considerable amount of genealogical material also survives in the Life. As we shall see, the Life seems to reflect a strained relationship between Colmán's community and the Ua Maelechlainns. At times the Life portrays considerable conflict, tension and indeed outright hostility between Colmán and various Clann Cholmáin dynasts. The author uses earlier Clann Cholmáin history throughout the Life and both the dynasty's successes and failures are attributed to Colmán's favour, whether granted or withheld. Typically, the author goes into some detail in outlining the various possessions granted to the community and warning of the penalties if they are infringed upon. In short, the Life is a forceful statement by Colmán's community of their rights while the central preoccupation with Clann Cholmáin reflects the specific local context. As a result the text provides us with an interesting twelfth-century view of Clann Cholmáin history, infused of course with the contemporary concerns of the hagiographer, but also containing valuable local knowledge about the topography and important sites, both secular and ecclesiastical, of the Lough Ennell area.

92 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* vii.
93 Walsh suggests we should interpret this as meaning the shrine had been found 'buried to the depth of the height of a man.' Walsh, 'St Colmán mac Luacháin of Lynn (2)' 414.
94 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* vi. The shrine was destroyed in the late fourteenth century. See Walsh, 'St Colmán mac Luacháin of Lynn (2)' 414.

The Saint

The central concern with Clann Cholmáin is not at all surprising since the saint was himself said to have been related to this branch of the Southern Uí Néill and is described as 'of the race of Conall Cremthainne.'[95] That said there is some confusion in the Life regarding Colmán's ancestry. His genealogy is first recorded as:

> Colmān di*diu* m. Lūachāin m. Ledæ m. Maine m. Fergusæ m. Conaill Crem*thainn*i m. Nēill Nóigīallaig.

but is followed immediately by:

> Sic genealogia vera, id est, Colmān m. Lūachāin m. Leda m. Maine m. D[ī]armata Deirg m. Colmāin Mōir Mide .i. na rīg ⁊ mac sin Dīarmata m. Cerbaill m. Conaill C*hremthainne* m. Nē[i]ll Nóigiallaig[96]

The first of these genealogies is to be preferred. A Maine son of Cerball is recorded in the annals while no such individual is recorded anywhere as a son of Colmán Már.[97] In the genealogies of the saints these two rival traditions also appear. Colmán is described as 'ar slicht Diarmada m. Cerbaill' but by far the more elaborate genealogical ladders trace him back through Maine son of Fergus son of Conall Cremthainne.[98] The attachment of the saint to the line of Colmán Már is quite unconvincing but nevertheless interesting if it suggests an attempt to bring him into closer relationship with the main line of Clann Cholmáin. That which directly follows this genealogical section in the Life suggests as much:

> he is the only patron saint who has hitherto sprung from the race of Colman [...] And he is entitled to a scruple every seventh year from every adult of the descendants of Colman, and to a horse from every king.[99]

Throughout the Life, as we shall see, there are recurrent demands for the recognition of rights and privileges by Colmán's community from various secular powers, but most notably, from Clann Cholmáin. Attaching the saint to the main line of the dynasty was surely designed to give these claims added weight. The following examples will serve to highlight the author's familiarity with Clann Cholmáin history. He engages with it and reworks specific episodes to demonstrate Colmán's power and influence.

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95 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 47.

96 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 4. The first genealogical strand continues back to Conn of the Hundred battles.

97 *AU* 538.2; This is after firstly following Walsh's suggestion to omit 'D[ī]armata Deirg' as a scribal insertion for 'Dīarmata' on the next line. Walsh, 'St Colmán mac Luacháin of Lynn (2)' 412. Even if we do not follow this suggestion, Colmán Már is not credited in the genealogies with a son called Diarmait either.

98 *CGSH,* §§12, 41 and 535 at 5,8 and 71 respectively.

99 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 5-7.

Colmán encounters Onchú, king of Fartullagh[100]

In this episode the saint comes to Dún na Cairrge and discovers that the king of Fartullagh, Onchú, had died a week earlier on Inis na Cairrge.[101] Colmán revives Onchú to fulfill a promise to administer the Eucharist to the king before his death. A long conversation ensues which quickly turns to worldly matters with the listing of possessions granted by the king of Fartullagh to Colmán and his successors.[102] The conversation also stresses the close relationship between the saint and Clann Cholmáin,

> O(nchú): "Son of Luachan, of brilliant disposition, of the race of Conall Cremthainne, this is why I have been allowed to return to my house: in honour of thee and of Airmedach." C(olmán): "Airmedach, Suibne likewise, the sons of Colman son of Diarmait, the Lord—fair fame—has put them under the lake, O Onchu! What will thou give me in obedience to me, pure-shaped, generous Onchu? Shall it be gentle fair service? Shall it be bog or land?[103]

Conflict with Conall (Guthbind)

This early seventh-century king foolishly crosses Colmán in what is a quite extensive passage. The king's steward demands provisions from the saint and threatens him when it becomes clear that Colmán does not have the requisite amount. While the saint has the steward swallowed up by the ground for his impudence, Colmán then miraculously produces the required quantity of food and brings it to Conall at his fortress of Dún Brí. But the king was seized with fear having heard of Colmán's great power and attempted to flee the fort.

> Then the point of the sword cleaves to the quilt, and the quilt cleaves to the floor, and his limbs become distorted, and the fortress falls.....as the sloping Fort of Tara fell when Patrick met with disobedience in it. For it is in the time of Loegaire son of Niall that the fort fell, and in the time of Patrick, and it was not the judgment of the woad that destroyed it.[104]

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100 Meyer took an editorial decision to omit length marks in his English translation of the text. Hence 'Onchú' is rendered as 'Onchu' and, in a much more common example, 'Colmán' as 'Colman'. On his facing transcription of the Irish text the length marks are present. The 'u' must have been long as it appears to be based on analogy with the simplex 'cú'. For a compound like *ono-kû we would expect regular apocapation to *onuch. *DIL* suggests the name meant 'waterhound' but it is variously translated as 'otter', 'leopard' or 'wolf.' My thanks to Jürgen Uhlich for providing me with examples of the name he has gathered and explaining the various issues involved.

101 It has been suggested that these sites can be identified as the ringfort and enhanced natural island (Cherryisland) located about the southeastern shore of Lough Ennell. See Catherine E. Karkov & John Ruffing, 'The Southern Uí Néill and the political landscape of Lough Ennell', *Peritia* 11 (1997) 339-40.

102 For a note on the otherwise unattested word *tiucme* in this section on the dues owed by the king of Fir Thulach to Colmán, see Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'AD *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin,* 50.5', *Peritia* 10 (1996) 350.

103 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 49. Suibne son of Colmán son of Diarmait was killed in 600 by Áed Sláne. *AU* 600.2. While he did not, according to the genealogies, have a brother Airmedach, he is credited with a grandson ofthat name.

104 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 63.

Chastened, Conall prostrates himself before Colmán and hands over his fort and various other places before asking the saint to bless a site for a replacement fort.

> Together they go to Ruba Conaill to spite Arnan and Ultan, so that their church might be a passage for the hounds and attendants of the fortress for ever.[105]

Leaving aside what this might tell us about tensions between various midland churches, it is obviously significant in naming a Clann Cholmáin royal residence. Later we are given further information about the chief residences of Clann Cholmáin as Colmán stresses that neither Uí Gusáin nor Uí Thigernáin, local dynasties,

> are obliged to provision the king of Meath in Cró-inis, but only in Ruba Conaill; nor yet should troops be billeted upon them in Cró-inis, except what...out from Ruba Conaill.[106]

Interestingly, this encounter, where initial conflict eventually gives way to reconciliation, mentions three individual Clann Cholmáin residences.

Further, more serious, conflict with Conall

From a relatively innocuous beginning, the following episode steadily escalates into a serious conflict between Colmán and Conall. The latter places the steward of Uí Airmedaig, Maelodran, in fetters angry that he regularly prostrates himself before the saint with alms of food and dress.[107] On hearing this Colmán goes to the steward's aid accompanied by thirteen other men.

> And when he had come to Port na hInse, Conall said that no boat should be brought out to him. And Colman said: "The Lord is equally powerful upon water and land, and if He wills we be drowned, His will is our will." And Colman blessed the lake and struck it before him with his staff. And it seemed to them that it was shining mist, and they went across with dry feet as Moses the son of Abraham went through the Red Sea with his people behind him.[108]

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105 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 63.

106 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 65; Walsh suggests instead of 'what...', we read 'he should be driven'. Paul Walsh, 'St Colmán mac Luacháin of Lynn (1)', Nollaig Ó Muraíle (ed), *Irish Leaders and Learning through the Ages* (Dublin 2003) 412. The Uí Thigernáin, who gave their name to the barony of Magheradernan, were regarded by some as descended from Áed Sláne. Walsh notes that, having named Áed's seven sons, *BB* goes on: 'dicunt alii octauum filium habuisse .i. Tigernan a quo hUi Tigernan a nIarthur Midhe ut alii putant sed tamen hoc dubitatur'. Paul Walsh, *The Placenames of Westmeath* (Dublin 1957) 202; Paul Walsh, 'Note on Magheradernan', Nollaig Ó Muraíle (ed), *Irish Leaders and Learning through the Ages* (Dublin 2003) 262. This tradition also survives in the Laud genealogies. See: Kuno Meyer, 'The Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories', *ZCP* 8 (1912) 302. It can also be found in the mid-fourteenth century TCD MS H.2.7 (1298) f 13.

107 Walsh identifies the Uí Airmedaig as descendants of Airmedach son of Conall Guthbind and hence belonging to Clann Cholmáin. As he notes, their involvement with the 'father of their eponymous ancestor' is a 'chronological impossibility'. Though as we have seen, chronological accuracy is of no concern for this hagiographer. Walsh, 'The topography of Betha Colmáin' 270.

108 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 67.

Having performed this feat, Colmán demands the release of Maelodran but Conall remains defiant. But as Colmán leaves he says, 'wherever I shall be at nocturns to-night, there Maelodran will be.'[109] The prisoner escapes and finds sanctuary with Colmán at Lynn. Conall follows.

> "Give me my prisoner, Colman!" "Thou shalt have instead of him the kingship of Ireland for thyself and for thy offspring till Doom," said Colman. "That is not sensible", said Conall. "Who else shall hold the kingship of Ireland but my offspring?" "Thou shalt have heaven for thyself", said Colman, and heaven to thy successors till Doom." "No," said Conall, "I am looking forward to heaven as it is." "Grant heaven to me and to each representative of my descendants," said the prisoner, "and I submit to being killed."[110]

The prisoner was therefore killed, by Conall presumably, and became the first person to be buried at Lynn. Colmán was however outraged by these events and responded:

> "If the son of the Maiden were to allow it, yonder island out of which thou hast come to outrage me has leave to sink down into the lake till Doom. Its horses, however, and its victorious chariots- the earth has leave to swallow them up wherever they are." And thus it happened forthwith.[111]

This pattern of reprisal continued the following day as Conall set out to slay the saint 'in revenge for his people.' Aware of this intention,

> Colman blessed the air; and thereupon a mist came from heaven, and the king went wandering astray from Loch Ennell to Tech Nadfráich in Bregia. It seemed to him that he had come to Lann, and it further seemed to them that Loch Ennell was the Boyne in Bregia.[112]

Brega was a dangerous place for any Clann Cholmáin dynast and as a result of Colmán's power we watch as Conall slowly stumbles towards his own death. Two sons of Áed Sláne, Blathmac and Diarmait

> stormed the house in which he was and wrought a slaughter of his people in the house. He himself escapes to the shore of the Boyne. He was put into a vat, and the mouth of another vat was put on the top of it, and thereupon they were dragged out so that Maelumae son of Forannan, son of Aed Find, son of Maine, a tenant of Colman's son of Luachan (*sic*) and the son of his grandfather's brother found him and killed him at Liss Dochuinn in

109 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 69.
110 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 69.
111 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 71.
112 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 71-3; Walsh suggests that for 'Loch Ennell was the Boyne in Bregia' we instead read 'the Boyne in Bregia was Lough Ennell' which hardly alters the sense. Walsh, 'St Colmán mac Luacháin of Lynn (1)' 412.

revenge for the outrage upon Colman regarding the prisoner Maelodran.[113]

With his final words Conall implores his descendants to avenge him, 'may every king who holds Tara after me avenge me upon thee.'[114] But instead Colmán foresees the involvement of the Uí Forannáin in the inauguration ceremony of the future kings of Tara in what is a well known and slightly bizarre passage.

The above episode again underlines the author's familiarity with the Lough Ennell area. Another royal residence, Port na hInse is mentioned the description of which would seem to confirm the importance of crannógs in the area. The well known hostility between Clann Cholmáin and Síl nÁedo Sláine is used as the author incorporates and elaborates upon the details of Conall's death.

Murchad son of [Diarmait son of] Airmedach

Despite Conall's confidence that his descendants would hold the kingship of Tara, as we know this did not become a reality for over a century after his death. Indeed in what follows the hagiographer attributes this to 'the curse of Colman son of Luachan' dating back to Conall's hostility toward the saint, a curse only lifted when one of his descendants seeks forgiveness. Yet again we can clearly see the writer's preoccupation with Clann Cholmáin and willingness to dip in and out of their history to propel his narrative.

> On a certain occasion Murchad son of Airmedach, son of Conall Guthbinn, asked his soulfriend Cassan the priest of Domnach Mór: "What is it that deprives offspring of Colman the Great, son of Diarmait of the kingship of Tara and of Ireland, O cleric?" saith he. "How is it, O son," said the same priest, "that *thou* dost not know it?" "However, I do not know it", said Murchad. "So long as the curse of Colman son of Luachan clings to the race of Conall Guthbinn, they shall not be in the kingship of Tara." "Is there a help in

113 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 73. Conall's death in a vat near the shore of the Boyne is strikingly reminiscent of Muirchertach mac Erca's death in 534 where he drowned in a vat of wine above the Boyne. *AU* 534.1. This incident spawned a twelfth-century saga. See Lil Nic Dhonnchadha (ed), *Aided Muirchertaig Meic Erca* (Dublin 1964); Máire Herbert, 'The Death of Muirchertach Mac Erca: A Twelfth-Century Tale', Folke Josephson (ed), *Celts and Vikings: proceedings of the Fourth Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica* (Göteborg 1997) 27-40; For further comment on the context in which the tale may have been produced, see Katharine Simms, 'The Donegal poems in the Book of Fenagh', *Ériu* lviii (2008) 45. Conall's killer Maelumae was therefore of the Uí Foranáin who were, according to the genealogy put forward by the Life, another branch of Clann Cholmáin. See: Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* x. However like Colmán himself, their supposed descent from Colmán Már is less than convincing. In the context of the Life, they may be labelled as a branch of Clann Cholmáin, which Walsh duly does, but beyond that we must remain sceptical. Walsh, 'The topography of Betha Colmáin' 270-71.

114 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 73.

> store for us out of this, O cleric?" said Murchad. "There is indeed," said Cassan the priest, "if thou make peace with Colman son of Luachan." "What would that peace be?" said Murchad. "To do Colman's will," said the priest. So Murchad came to Colman and prostrates himself before him, and at his behest fasts three days and three nights. And Colman blesses him and his son, even Domnall son of Murchad, son of Diarmait, son of Airmedach, son of Conall Guthbinn, son of Suibhne, son of Colman the Great, son of Diarmait the Red, son of Fergus Wry-mouth, son of Crimthann, son of Niall of the Nine Hostages. And through that blessing of Colman's Domnall obtained the kingship of Tara.[115]

Typically, this is followed by an extensive list of possessions then granted by Murchad to Colmán in exchange for his blessing. Later Murchad's son Domnall also comes into contact with the saint and likewise grants him a site.[116]

Conall Guthbinn and Áed Rón

Later the Life returns to the much maligned figure of Conall Guthbind (d.635) and another well-known episode in Clann Cholmáin history.

> Then upon a raid into Meath Aed Róin came as far as Carn Fiachach. Early on the morrow, however, Conall Guthbinn, the king of Meath, came to Colman and told him that news. And Conall had but a small host and Aed Roin had a multitude. Then Colman said to Conall: "Do thou march against them and carry my staff with thee in front as a battle-standard, and I shall make it appear as if thou hast three battalions; and either a mist shall come over their eyes or their hands shall be held for thee," said Colman. [...] Thus, then, it was done; and at Faitche Mecnan Aed Dub was slain and his people slaughtered.[117]

Further Prohibitions

As we approach the end of the Life the author yet again stresses restrictions on Clann Cholmáin exactions in the local area.

> The king of Meath is not entitled to demand a troop from Fartullagh to accompany him on his round, except a lad for his horses, when he is in Cró-inis for the purpose of (collecting) the troop to accompany him; and they are not obliged to join a battalion on a day of battle, except with the king, and strangers and mercenaries.[118]

115 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 77.

116 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 83.

117 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 93-5. The incident is recorded in the annals, see Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* 604.3. In what appears to be a distinct episode in the *Life* which directly following this one Conall comes in obedience to Colmán and: 'offered him the great tribute of the people of Bretach henceforward (for it is they who were in his company as his protecting *fian* in every battle of the Bretach till doom)'. Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 95. The Brétach seem to have been a grouping based around Clonard, see Walsh 'The topography of Betha Colmáin' 264.

118 Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 103. The reference to the king with strangers and mercenaries (*deoraid 7*

Clearly the hagiographer's familiarity with the local area means we have access to valuable, detailed information including reference to specific royal sites.

Ruba Conaill

Ruba Conaill was blessed by Colmán maic Lúacháin as the site for king Conall's new fort.[119] The name of this site is preserved in the parish of Rathconnell, about 2km northeast of Mullingar. As well as its description as a Clann Cholmáin royal site in the Life, the annals, under the year 1159, records the following:

ATig 1159 a hosting by Murchertach, grandson of Lochlann, to Ruba Conaill, and he banished Diarmait Húa MaelSechlainn.

However it was almost certainly an important Clann Cholmáin site for some time previous to the twelfth century. A battle between two sons of Donnchad son of Domnall at the site in the early ninth century would certainly suggest as much.[120] It is also noticeable that Ruba Conaill was located near the crucial land corridor between Lough Owel and Lough Ennell and therefore of some strategic significance. In the law tracts *rubae* is listed among the military services owed by a base client to his lord. According to later glossators, it involved 'patrolling the borders of the territory and strategic points such as promontories and mountain-passes.'[121] In this case it seems this term was applied to a specific, strategically important place in the midlands controlled by Clann Cholmáin.

Port na hInse

This features in the episode where Conall retreats from Colmán who then walks across the water to reach him. However it seems that the hagiographer was projecting contemporary reality onto the seventh century in this case. The site was along the eastern shore of Lough Ennell and associated with the Fartullagh kings. Elsewhere in the Life we are told that this area was encroached upon by Clann Cholmáin in the eleventh century during the reign of Conchubar ua Maelechlainn

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amais) could reflect the implication that in the twelfth century foreign mercenaries formed a bodyguard about the king's immediate person. For example, compare the line 'Let the mercenaries (*amsaig*) of Aileach protect you keenly, let your foreign mercenaries (*Gaill*) be at your back' from the poem 'Cert cech ríg co réil'. See: Tadhg O'Donoghue, 'Cert cech ríg co réil', Osborn Bergin & Carl Marstrander (ed), *Miscellany presented to Kuno Meyer by some of his friends and pupils on the occasion of his appointment to the chair of Celtic philology in the University of Berlin* (Halle 1912) 258-77: §37 268-69; *LL* iii 617 l.18948. Cf. D.A. Binchy (ed), *Críth Gablach* (Dublin 1941) ll. 577-85.

119 The old fort, Dún Brí, granted by Conall to Colmán, is located between Lough Owel and Ennell by the hagiographer, near Mullingar. Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 61-63; Walsh 'The topography of Betha Colmáin' 269.

120 *AU* 803.5; Paul Walsh, *The Placenames of Westmeath* (Dublin 1957) 231-33.

121 Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin 1988) 31; See also Katharine Simms, 'Gaelic military history and the later brehon law commentaries', *Unity in Diversity: Studies in Irish and Scottish Gaelic Language, Literature and History* Cathal Ó Háinle & Donald E. Meek (ed), (Dublin 2004) 51-67, esp 62-63.

(1030-73)

> This Carrick was ever the residence of the kings of Fartullagh until the time of the daughter of the son of Conchubar viz. the wife of Conchubar Ua Maelseachlainn, when the king (of Meath) and his queen wrested it from Cúchaille, son of Dublaide, king of Fartullagh, and it was outraged by depriving it of its king and giving it to the queen of Meath. She was the first of the queens of Meath that took it and every one after her has since held it, and it is their own special property, free from the king of Fartullagh.[122]

Faithche Mecnan

This is the location of Conall's victory over Áed Rón/Dub according to the Life. The *AU* record of the event includes a gloss which informs us that the site was 'on the brink of Loch Semdid', i.e. Lough Sewdy[123]

Throughout the Life we have seen the quite typical hagiographical concern to stress the saint's sanctity and power and to produce an extensive portfolio of his community's possessions. Re-enforcement is provided by reference to events in the past which are used to legitimise and 'explain' these claims. While Colmán interacts with various secular powers, the Clann Cholmáin are uppermost in the hagiographer's mind. The saint is claimed as a close relative of Colmán Már, though a little unconvincingly, and reference, often quite detailed, is made to various important figures from the dynasty's history including Conall Guthbinn (d. 635), Murchad (d.715) and the first Clann Cholmáin overking, Domnall (d. 763).[124] Individual successes and failures for these particular kings are attributed to the favour of the saint, granted or withheld, and indeed the overall trajectory of the dynasty's history is interpreted in the light of the saint's interventions. Conall Guthbind was probably singled out for harsh treatment simply because he was regarded as one of Colmán's contemporaries. That said, the fact that he led an abortive attempt by Clann Cholmáin to overshadow Síl nÁedo Sláine and that this was followed by a prolonged period of decline was surely useful for the hagiographer who could quite easily attribute this to his various clashes with the saint.

Conclusion

This survey has shown that we are quite well served by the hagiographical material available

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122 Walsh, 'The topography of Betha Colmáin' 263 and see also 265. Walsh provides a more natural translation than Meyer. Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 53. This woman, Mór, appears as a guarantor to the freedom of Cill Delga in the fourth charter entered in the Book of Kells. See John O'Donovan (ed), 'The Irish Charters in the Book of Kells', *The Miscellany of the Irish Archaeological Society* 1 (1846) 127-58: 136-40.

123 *AU* 604.3; Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* 604.3 and n.4; Walsh 'The topography of Betha Colmáin' 267.

124 There is also a reference to 'Maelsechlainn', 'the King of Meath'. Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 41. While described making a donation to Colmán, the context seems to suggest this meant to his community or successors. We probably cannot accuse the hagiographer of stretching the saint's floruit still further.

to us. While the emphasis is on founding figures such as Conall mac Néill, Díarmait mac Cerbaill and Colmán Bec, all of whom lived long before the composition of the Lives in question, these texts do provide us with an insight into how their descendants were perceived by later hagiographers. In a general sense these texts familiarise us with the medieval midland landscape, both physical and political, and if successfully deciphered provide us with particular and specific information about the region and its rulers in the seventh and eighth centuries. While certainly more difficult to handle, the evidence from these saints' lives will, it is hoped, provide a valuable supplement to that which can be gleaned from such staples as annals and genealogies.

Cáin Adomnáin

Cáin Adomnáin is one of a series of special ordinances we know were issued in Ireland between the late seventh and late ninth centuries.[1] It was named after the man behind its promulgation, Adomnán (624/627-704), ninth abbot of Iona.[2] Fortunately the text itself has survived in two late copies, the language of which does not contradict the chronology suggested by a notice found in the *Annals of Ulster*:

AU 697.3 Adomnanus ad Hiberniam pergit ⁊ dedit Legem Innocentium po*pu*lis.
Adamnán proceeded to Ireland and gave the *Lex Innocentium* to the people.

This special ordinance, as its Latin title suggests, was primarily designed to protect non-combatants, i.e. clerics, women and children, in times of war.[3] However for our purposes we are not primarily concerned with the text of the *Cáin* itself but rather with the list of ninety-one guarantors attached to it.[4] This list begins with the abbot of Armagh who is followed by a further thirty-nine senior ecclesiastics.[5] There then follows a list of fifty-one senior secular guarantors beginning with the over-king of the Uí Néill, Loingsech mac Óengusso. Ní Dhonnchadha's analysis of the obits of the individual guarantors confirms that the list can be regarded as contemporaneous with the text itself.[6] The authority of these, the most important men in Ireland, obviously gave substantial weight to Adomnán's *Cáin* and highlights his ambition for this piece of law. The guarantor list is also important in providing us with a source, independent of the annals, listing the leading political figures in Ireland towards the end of the seventh century.[7] It is also valuable in capturing a moment

1 Kuno Meyer, *Cáin Adamnáin : an Old-Irish treatise on the Law of Adamnan* (Oxford 1905); Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Law of Adomnán: A Translation', Thomas O'Loughlin (ed), *Adomnán at Birr, AD 697* (Dublin 2001) 53-68; Gilbert Márkus, *Adomnán's 'Law of the Innocents'* (Kilmartin 2008).

2 Máire Herbert, 'The world of Adomnán', Thomas O'Loughlin (ed), *Adomnán at Birr, AD 697* (Dublin 2001) 33-40; Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Adomnán: A man of many parts', Thomas O'Loughlin (ed), *Adomnán at Birr, AD 697* (Dublin 2001) 41-52.

3 See: John Ryan, 'The Cáin Adomnáin', R. Thurneysen et.al (ed), *Studies in Early Irish Law* (Dublin 1936) 269-76; J.R. Kenney, *Sources for the early history of Ireland: Ecclesiastical* (New York 1929) 245-46; Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The *Lex Innocentium*: Adomnán's Law for Women, Clerics and Youths, 697 A.D', Mary O'Dowd & Sabine Wichert (ed), *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's status in church, state and society* (Antrim 1995) 58-69; Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Birr and the Law of the Innocents', Thomas O'Loughlin (ed), *Adomnán at Birr, AD 697* (Dublin 2001) 13-32; Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, 'Cáin Adamnáin', idem (ed), *Léachtaí Cholm Cille* 12 (1982) 93-111; Liam Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin 2005) 202-04. For a discussion of the Middle Irish prologue later attached to the Cáin, see Angela B.Gleason, 'Adamnán in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: A Literary Revival', (unpublished MPhil dissertation TCD 1997) ch. 6 at 49-68.

4 Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin,* 697', *Peritia* 1 (1982) 178-215; The edition of the list provided in this article (at 180-81) will be referred to throughout and Ní Dhonnchadha's numbering of the guarantors will also be included.

5 Fland Febla is described as *sui-epscop* or 'sage-bishop' in the text but 'he exercised abbatial jurisdiction and is styled abbot in the annalistic records of his death in 715.' Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List' 185.

6 Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List' 214-15.

7 Indeed the list also includes kings from those parts of Scotland under Irish influence as the law was designed to be

of transition and change amongst the various Uí Néill branches.

Cáin Adomnáin was promulgated just two years after the death of the previous Uí Néill over-king, Fínnachta Fledach of Síl nÁedo Sláine and the guarantor list clearly reflects a new dispensation. The new Uí Néill over-king, Loingsech of Cenél Conaill (41), is followed immediately by his kinsman, Congalach mac Fergusa, also of Cenél Conaill (42).[8] Next comes Fland Find of the Cenél nÉogain (43) followed by Conchobar mac Maile-Dúin of the Cenél Coirpri (44). In other words the main Northern Uí Néill dynasties and their allies were clearly in the ascendancy at the time of the list's compilation. The list then moves to non-Uí Néill kings from, for example, Munster, Osraige and the Ulaid reflecting the ambition of the law and its framer.[9] Indeed the decision to promulgate *Cáin Adomnáin* at Birr is surely significant in this respect too. While not a Columban foundation, its location at the intersection of Munster, Leinster, Connacht and the lands of the Southern Uí Néill perhaps symbolised Adomnáin's ambition that his *Cáin* should be established across Ireland and not limited by the contemporary political balance.

The recently superseded Síl nÁedo Sláine are included in the list, albeit some way down. Neill mac Cernaig (55), of what would become the Uí Chernaig based in southern Brega, is the fifteenth secular guarantor placed some way ahead of several other Síl nÁedo Sláine dynasts. Firstly his son Maine (70), Áed mac Dlúthaig (75) of Fir Chúl, a second son Fogartach (82), a third Conall Grant (86) and Írgalach mac Conaing (90) of the Uí Chonaing of Northern Brega. While the obits of individuals named in the guarantor list do not contradict a promulgation date of 697, many of the accompanying official titles cannot date from that period. Firstly it should be noted that while the majority of secular guarantors are described as 'king of x', several appear without any title. Of those with titles, inconsistencies emerge on comparison with independent sources. For example, Concabur mac Máili-dúin (44), fourth of the secular guarantors, is described as 'ri Ceneoil Coirpri'. While he did attain that office, his brother was king until 698, meaning Concabur's title is incorrect, for 697 at least.[10] Likewise Fiachrai Cossalach (53) is described as 'rí Cruithne' though he only achieved that position in 709.[11] While these and the other examples provided by Ní Dhonnchadha do not tell against the dating of the actual guarantor list, they do suggest that titles were subsequently attached to some, though not all of the guarantors.[12] Having noted these general features of the list, we might now note the inclusion of several Clann Cholmáin and midland

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effective 'for feraib Herenn ⁊ Alban'. Meyer, *Cáin Adamnáin* 14.

8 Congalach is described as 'rí Ceneoil Conaild' but the political titles in the list are problematic. We shall return to this below.

9 See Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Birr and the Law of the Innocents' 14.

10 Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor list' 180, 198.

11 Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor list' 180, 201.

12 This is further confirmed by the language. While archaisms occur in the names themselves, no such archaisms appear amongst the accompanying titles. Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor list' n.3 179.

dynasts. The twenty-sixth secular guarantor is 'Murchad Midi' (66). Still farther down the list we find 'Garban Mide ri'(83) and 'Bodb*hch*at*h* rí Luig*h*ne' (89).[13]

While no political title is attached to Murchad as such he does appear, like ten other guarantors, with a geographical agnomen. It seems at least possible that this had attached itself to Murchad during his lifetime and was therefore in the original text.[14] Murchad was victorious in a battle in 714 where two of his brothers, Áed and Colgu, fell. Neither brother features in the guarantor list. Murchad was himself killed the following year.[15]

'Garban Mide ri' (83) would seem to have died in 702 but we know nothing else about him.[16] The drowning of his son in Lough Ree is recorded in the Clonmacnoise annals under the year 747.[17] In his edition Meyer emended the entry, against both MSS, to 'Garbān rī Mide' to produce 'king of Meath.'[18] Meyer's emendation seems questionable and it could be possible that 'ri' was simply tacked on to the end of the entry. As already noted, it is probable that the original guarantor list did not include political titles. As Murchad takes precedence in the list, and indeed features in other sources, it seems he rather than Garbán was the most important Clann Cholmáin dynast at the time.

'Bodb*hch*at*h* rí Luig*h*ne' (89) is described as 'Bodbcath Midhe m. Dermato' in his obit in the annals at 704. He was thus another of Murchad's brothers.[19] Bodbcath's title does not seem as clumsy as Garbán's. While probably a later addition, it may be similar to those of Concabur and Fiachrai cited above. In short, Bodbcath may have attained this position after the fact or there may have been a later tradition that he had held it.

'Fallo*m*uin rí Ua Tuirt*r*i' (80) is quite possibly Follamon son of Cú Chongalt of Cáille Follamain, the first recorded king of Mide according to the annals. Ní Dhonnchadha suggests the title is incorrectly placed and should belong to the next guarantor, 'Fergus Focraidh' (81) of the Uí Macc Uais of Airgialla.[20] Follamon did not die until 766 making him 'by far the latest of the guarantors to die.' However the death of his son in 797 'is attestation to his longevity.'[21] It must be admitted that we are straining credibility in following this theory. Follamon would have been a very old man when he died in 766 if he was a guarantor in 697. A possible alternative is that the re-

13 Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor list' 180-81.
14 Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor list' 184.
15 Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* 188-89.
16 *AU* 702.4.
17 ATig 746 [747]; It is also possible that the saga *Cath Almaine,* which lists one 'Mac Garbáin' among the slain has preserved a genuine tradition. Pádraig Ó Riain (ed), *Cath Almaine* (Dublin 1978) 15, 55 .
18 Meyer, *Cáin Adamnáin* 20, 42; Márkus takes the same approach as Meyer. Márkus, *Adomnán's 'Law of the Innocents'* 18 while Ní Dhonnchadha follows the MSS in her translation to produce 'Garbán of Mide king'. Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Law of Adomnán: A Translation' 59. The first reliable record of the kingship of Mide in the annals is from 766 where we find the obit of Follamon son of Cú Chongalt, described as 'regis Midi'. *AU* 766.
19 *AU* 704.4. See Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* 180 n.2.
20 Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor list' 211.
21 Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor list' 211.

enactment of *Cáin Adomnáin* in 727 saw the insertion of extra guarantors who had not actually been involved the first time around.[22] This may also apply to the titles more generally.

The guarantor list is a fascinating snapshot of, among other things, the relative strengths of the various Uí Néill branches. The midland dynasts discussed above were not of the first importance at the time, and this is reflected by their position in the list. However the sheer extent of the list, designed to give the *Cáin* added weight, allows us consider the political picture in Mide. While the political titles are an added complication, this source remains vital for our consideration of the emergence of Clann Cholmáin in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, something which must be considered in the context of the broader shifts taking place amongst the Uí Néill and reflected in the guarantor list.

22 *AU* 727.5.

Poetry

Rechtgal úa Síadail.

The second Clann Cholmáin dynast to secure the Uí Néill overkingship, Donnchad mac Domnaill (d.797), is almost certainly the subject of a stanza in the first of the metrical tracts published by Thurneysen as *Mittelirische Verslehren.*[1] MV I is 'a homogeneous treatise on *bairdne* (bardic craft)' which 'consists of ninth century matter with some alteration by a tenth-century redactor.'[2] The tract can be regarded as a textbook on bardic metre and though extended subsequently, it seems to have originally been comprised of forty-four stanzas.[3] MV I divides the bards into seven grades and the stanzas presented 'constitute the prerogative of that grade- and there is a generic name for the metres of each grade.'[4] The tract begins with the highest grade before proceeding in descending order through the lesser grades. The first stanza of the tract, dealing with the *rígbard* or 'supreme bard' and the metres proper to him, mentions Donnchad[5]:

Donnchad dia-n-fich domun daigthech,	Donnchad through whom a fiery world seethes,
dom-[fh]oir gíallach glonnchar;	may he who takes hostages and loves brave deeds
comairdirc fri hÉrinn n-ollguirm	protect me; the name of the son of Domnall, Donnchad,
ainm maic Domnaill, Donnchad.	is as renowned as great-blue Ireland.[6]

It appears this was extracted from a no longer extant Old Irish poem concerning Donnchad, perhaps a eulogy, and used by the compiler of MV I as an example of the metre *dechnad mór.*[7] Both this stanza and that directly following it, used as an example of *dechnad mór trebraid*[8], are attributed to the poet Rechtgal úa Síadail. While there is no record of him in the annals, his *floruit* can be placed about the turn of the ninth century.[9] Rechtgal was clearly a poet of some significance in his own day

1 R. Thurneysen, 'Mittelirische Verslehren', W.H. Stokes & E. Windisch (ed), *Irische Texte dritte Serie 1* (Leipzig 1891) 1-182. Following the convention, the first of these tracts will henceforth be referred to as 'MV I'.

2 Gerard Murphy, *Early Irish Metrics* (Oxford 1961) v ; see also R. Thurneysen, *Zu irischen Handschriften und Litteraturdenkmälern* (Berlin 1912) 79-82.

3 Donncha Ó hAodha, 'The first Middle Irish metrical tract', Hildegard L.C. Tristram (ed), *Metrik und Medienwechsel, Metrics and Media* (Tübingen 1991) 207.

4 *Ibid* 217. This seven fold division was probably based on the grades of the *filid,* which was in turn based on the church grades. See Liam Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar: The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law* (Dublin 1987) 85-7.

5 In one passage of *Bretha Nemed* the grade of *rígbard* has a different meaning and refers to bards who were themselves kings. Ó hAodha, 'The first Middle Irish metrical tract', 221; Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar* 50-1. Examples of such bard-kings are then provided but where identifiable appear to have lived some time later than the date of the tract as suggested by its language. This leads Breatnach to conclude that this information was added by a later glossator. Liam Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin 2005) 185 n.6.

6 Donncha Ó hAodha, 'Rechtgal úa Síadail: a famous poet of the Old Irish period', Alfred P. Smyth (ed), *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin 2000) 192. See also Thurneysen, 'Mittelirische Verslehren', 7.

7 Murphy, *Early Irish Metrics* 30, 50.

8 *Ibid* 29.

9 Donnchad, subject of the first stanza, died in 797 while the second appears to concern Muirgius mac Tommaltaig, king of Connacht, who died in 815. Ó hAodha, 'Rechtgal úa Síadail', 194. Muirgius's reign witnessed a growth in Connacht power and he was sufficiently confident to involve himself in Uí Néill power struggles. In 808 he led a force as far as 'Tír ind Aenaig', probably Tailtiu, to support the Clann Cholmáin king Conchobur, a son of Donnchad, against Áed Oirdnide, Uí Néill overking. See: F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* 251-53.

who composed in praise of the most powerful kings. The subsequent use of his work to provide metrical examples also highlights the high regard in which his work was held. Rechtgal's stanza about Donnchad was also used to illustrate poetic closure. The Middle Irish poem *Do dhligheghaibh dunta na nduan* assumes the student's familiarity with Rechtgal's stanza which is held up as an example of a suitable *dúnad* (close).[10]

While his work was considered exemplary in the above instances, Rechtgal was also subject to some criticism. The Middle Irish tract *Trefhocul can chlóen*, which has tentatively been dated to the mid-tenth century[11], is concerned with metrical and stylistic faults and cites one of Rechtgal's poems as illustrating the fault of *forbrig* (exaggeration). The relevant section appears as follows in the *Book of Leinster* copy of the tract:

Can forbrig. Rechtgal h*ua* Siadail i ndúain Oengusa m*eic* Domnaill c*ecinit*.	Without exaggeration. Rechtgal uá Siadail Chanted in the poem of Óengus son of Domnall
Badbrí chuicid Her*end* uile ard bara. Brass bile dobádi sís ni síd chena cach ríg acht Ríg nime.[12]	The warlike king of the entire province of Ireland, great hero, he annihilates completely- there is no peace otherwise- every king except the king of heaven.[13]

Ó hÁodha argues that the first line suggests 'the subject was or claimed to be king of Ulaid.'[14] However no Óengus son of Domnall can be identified as king of the Ulaid. Thurneysen suggests Óengus was a brother of Donnchad mac Domnaill.[15] Donnchad did have brothers and we can identify several from the annals and kinglists, but none named Óengus. That said unnamed brothers are recorded fighting along with Donnchad against a Munster force so we cannot entirely rule out the possibility that he had a brother Óengus.[16] While plausible, Thurneysen's suggestion remains speculative.[17] If we were to accept Óengus as a Clann Cholmáin dynast and brother of Donnchad mac Domnaill, then the exaggeration demonstrated by this stanza 'resided not only in the phraseology of the second half of the quatrain, but also perhaps in the implicit claim in the first half that he was king of Ulaid.'[18] The above stanza also appears in the later *Book of Uí Maine* copy of the *Trefhocul* tract but is there preceded by another also attributed to Rechtgal.

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10 P.L. Henry, 'A Celtic-English Prosodic Feature', *ZCP* 29 (1962-64) 92-3; Ó hAodha, 'Rechtgal úa Síadail', 193.
11 Kaarina Hollo, 'Metrical Irregularity in Old and Middle Irish Syllabic Verse', Anders Ahlqvist et.al (ed), *Celtica Helsingiensia* (Helsinki 1996) 47-8.
12 *LL* i 166.
13 Ó hAodha, 'Rechtgal úa Síadail', 195.
14 *Ibid.*
15 Thurneysen, *Zu irischen Handschriften und Litteraturdenkmälern* 80.
16 *AU* 776.11.
17 Meyer had listed Rechtgal as a seventh-century poet and Thurneysen was searching for an Óengus son of Domnall who had flourished at the end of the following century. Kuno Meyer, *A Primer of Irish Metrics* (Dublin 1909) 51.
18 Ó hAodha, 'Rechtgal úa Síadail', 195.

Cen forbrigh dano, *ut dixit* Rechtgal hua Siadail:

Without exaggeration then, as Rechtgal úa Síadail said:

Gemtís ganna fir betha
Otha Liphi gu Letha,
Nasfurfead ol niptais ga[i]nn
Digi do de*r*naind Domnaill[19]

Although the inhabitants of the world, from the Liffey as far as Latium, might be in need, satisfaction from the hand of Domnall would suffice them, and they were not few in number[20]

It is unlikely on linguistic and metrical grounds that this second stanza was actually composed by Rechtgal but Ó hAodha suggests that the mention of a Domnall 'may have been the reason why the quatrain was intruded at this point in the Book of Uí Maine copy and attributed to Rechtgal.'[21] Perhaps the compiler of the Uí Maine *Trefhocul,* aware of Rechtgal's work on Donnchad and arguably his brother Óengus, considered a quatrain about their father Domnall appropriate for inclusion here.

MV I gives us then access to a fragment of Rechtgal úa Síadáil's Old Irish poem about Donnchad mac Domnaill, an important contemporary king. The fragment survived becoming part of the 'curriculum' as an example of both a particular metre and an appropriate *dúnad.* Rechtgal's poetry was also cited in the Middle Irish period to illustrate the stylistic fault of exaggeration. If we were to accept Thurneysen's identification of Óengus this might further confirm Rechtgal's close involvement with and patronisation by Clann Cholmáin towards the close of the eighth century. Ó hAodha's suggestion that the *Trefhocul* stanza from the *Book of Uí Maine* concerning Domnall was included because of Rechtgal's association with Donnchad, while also plausible, is still more speculative.

Óengus mac Óengusa (d.932)

Among the forty-four illustrative stanzas of MV I, there are several others which also refer to Clann Cholmáin kings. Flann Sinna (d.916) possibly features in four of them. Three of these illustrate, like that cited above, metres proper to the highest grade of bard.

Immon cathbarr, imma cléithe
co rrían réilsheng,
immon ríg réil,
immon ngréin ar inchaib Éirenn,

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

immon daig nde(a)rb ndergóir mbuidi

around the fire-firm, red-golden, yellow,

19 George Calder (ed), *Auraicept na n-Éces: The Scholar's Primer* (Edinburgh 1917) 261.
20 Ó hAodha, 'Rechtgal úa Síadail' 196.
21 *Ibid.*

bátar ili,
immon mbarr fo-n-talla uili;
im Fhlann Midi.

there are multitudes,
around the leader under whom all found room,
around Flann of Meath.[22]

We are told that these lines formed part of a eulogy for Flann. The author is identified as Óengus son of Óengus (d.932), described as *prímhfhili Érenn* in his annalistic obit.[23]

Unfortunately named authors are not provided in the following examples nor is the king identified clearly or associated with a specific region, as above.

A Fhlainn, at lúam in gaiscid grinn,
co Maistin maill;
at glan, at gáeth, is garg do rinn,
at láech, a Fhlainn.

Flann, you are a pilot of strong arms
as far as stately Maistiu;
you are pure, you are wise, your spear is fierce,
you are a hero, Flann.[24]

Though less certain than the previous example, it seems reasonable to suggest that these lines also refer to Flann Sinna (d.916) of Mide and Clann Cholmáin. The reference to the important royal site of Maistiu in Leinster was surely intended to flatter and stress Flann's position of strength relative to the Laigin. The first and third lines of the above quatrain are also cited again to illustrate the metre of *dechnad débrechta,* as well as a second accompanying example, perhaps also referring to Flann.

Lúaidi do gabair ngraifnig ngrip
for faithchib andre trogain tricc.

You guide your fast racing steed
on the greens of the war-goddess swiftly.[25]

In the final example perhaps referring to Flann Sinna the metre illustrated (*Dúan chenélach*) is regarded as proper to a bard belonging to the fourth of the seven grades.

Imchomarc Flainn, flaith nom-dlig,
báes fom-ríg na ricim sair,
co ríg n-Assail, ap druing dein,
fo geil cassail:fó Cuinn cain.

A greeting to Flann, a lord who has a claim on me,
it is folly that detains me so that I do not come eastwards,
to the king of Assal, "abbot" of a strong host,
who wears a bright "chasuble": excellent is the fair [descendant] of Conn.[26]

The reference to the famous figure of Conn, ancestor of Uí Néill (and Connachta) is significant here. As is the reference to Assal, an important district in Mide.

Finally, two quatrains of *deibide,* regarded as appropriate to the seventh grade of bard, the *bóbard,* refer to Flann Sinna's son Donnchad Donn (d.944), and were perhaps taken from an inauguration ode.

22 Ó hAodha, 'The first Middle Irish metrical tract', 226.
23 *AI* 932; *AFM* 930 [932].
24 Ó hAodha, 'The first Middle Irish metrical tract', 227.
25 Ó hAodha, 'The first Middle Irish metrical tract', 227.
26 Ó hAodha, 'The first Middle Irish metrical tract', 230.

Érig súas, a Donnchaid Duinn,	Rise up, Donnchad Donn,
for Fotla forchair fhoruill;	upon Fotla of (i.e. suffering from) very great violation;
bíd do chert ós corpblae Chuinn,	let your right be over Conn's own field,
a uí choím chorcrai Chonuill.	o fair, royal descendant of Conall.
Rúaidrí rodba, rí(g) dá raind,	Strong aggressive king, king of the two parts,
dian forba Temair telchaind;	whose patrimony is Tara-the summit;
mo rann maissi móir mac Flaind,	the son of Flann is my portion of great beauty,
corand chóir claisi Cremthuind.	Fitting diadem of the trench of Cremthann (i.e. fitting diadem of Tara).[27]

Máel Mura Othna (d.887)

The as yet unedited poem beginning *Flann for Éirinn i tig thogaid Tuathail Techtmair* was composed by Máel Mura Othna (d.887)[28], 'righfiled Erenn', for Flann Sinna of Clann Cholmáin. The poet's epithet, 'of Fahan', suggests he was initially associated with the monastery of that name in Co. Donegal and located a few miles from Ailech, an important royal site of Cenél nEógain. Since that dynasty was Clann Cholmáin's principal Uí Néill rival at this time, providing both Flann's predecessor and successor to the overkingship, it seems likely Máel Mura had relocated to the midlands when he composed the poem for Flann. Indeed the preposterous impression created in the poem that the kingship of Tara had been monopolised by Clann Cholmáin since the sixth century, without reference to Cenél nEógain claims, while flattering to Flann certainly suggests the poet was no longer working at Fahan.[29] The date of composition must have been between 879, when Flann took the Uí Néill overkingship, and 887, when Máel Mura died. John Carey suggests a likely context for the composition as the opening years (880-82) of Flann's reign as overking which saw him active and taking hostages in Leinster, Munster and the north.[30] There is however internal evidence suggesting the poem was composed for the sixth *óenach* of his reign, perhaps slightly later.[31] There are several notices bemoaning the occasional failure to hold the *óenach Tailten* from about this time and some of these occur later in Flann's reign.[32] But he is recorded holding it too.[33] If we assume that he did hold the *óenach Tailten* every year at the beginning of his reign, or at least that Máel Mura thought he did or that it was normal practice to do so, then this would suggest 885

27 Ó hAodha, 'The first Middle Irish metrical tract', 238-39.
28 *AU* 887.5; *CS* 887.
29 See Alex Woolf, 'View from the west: An Irish perspective on West Saxon dynastic practice', N.J. Higham & D.H. Hill (ed), *Edward the Elder 899-924* (London 2001) 89-101: 94.
30 John Carey, 'Máel Mura Othna', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. http://www.oxforddnb.com
31 There are two copies of the poem in the Book of Lecan (ff.8v b20-9v b7 and ff.296v a1-297r b8). Reference to the sixth *óenach* at f.9v a38 and f.297r a46.
32 *AU* 873.6; *AU* 878.7; *AU* 888.10; *AU* 889.4.
33 *CS* 891.

as the date of composition.[34]

The poem itself traces Flann's ancestry back to Tuathal Techtmar, supposed founder of Mide, and as noted, makes claims for longstanding Clann Cholmáin dominance. This, of course, was material well suited for Flann Sinna, styled 'king of Ireland' on the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise.[35]

34 Flann succeeded Áed Findliath in late 879, the latter died on the 20th November. *AU* 879.1. Flann's first *óenach Tailten* was then probably the following August, 880.

35 R.A.S. Macalister, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum* ii (Dublin 1949) 70-71, Plate XXVII; Domhnall Ó Murchadha, 'Rubbings Taken of the Inscriptions on the Cross of the Scriptures, Clonmacnois', *JRSAI* 110 (1980) 47-51.

Topography and Archaeology

After briefly describing the important topographical features of the Irish midlands we will go on to consider the archaeological evidence from several specific sites crucial to our study. The overall aim is to provide ourselves with a sound understanding of the local landscape in which Clann Cholmáin was based, something which will hopefully complement and enrich our reading of such documentary sources as the annals and genealogies.

The Irish midlands were, for Early Christian communities, a patchwork landscape consisting of islands of fertile and hospitable land amidst extensive bog and moorland while a series of rivers, lakes and roads further defined the area. Both settlement within and travel through the region was obviously influenced by these features.[1]

Roads

An tSlighe Mhór (The Great Road)

This important route-way followed the Eiscir Riada and therefore ran, roughly, from Dublin to Galway. This line was traditionally regarded as dividing Ireland between Leth Chuinn and Leth Moga. The road probably branched along several lesser paths periodically though it certainly ran to the south of Lough Ennell.[2]

Slighe Assail (The Road of Assal) and Rót na gCarpat (The road of the chariots)

Slighe Assail moved in the same broadly east-west direction but was farther north beyond Lough Derravaragh and Lough Lene. It seems to have linked Brega with the west moving from Tailtiu across to Kells, Fore, Castlepollard, Edgeworthstown, Longford and beyond towards Connacht.[3] Rót na gCarpat is used as a synonym for Slighe Assail but in some sources, the *Táin* for example, follows a somewhat different route linking Tara and Tlachtga to Uisnech and therefore passing between Lough Owel and Lough Ennell. This was an important corridor and we will return to consider the placement of a Clann Cholmáin ringfort, Ruba Conaill, between these lakes and along this route below.

Waterways

The region is defined to the north by the river Inny which links Lough Derravaragh to

1 See maps in Appendix 1.
2 See Colm O Lochlainn, 'Roadways in Ancient Ireland', John Ryan (ed), *Féil-Sgríbhinn Éoin Mhic Néill* (1940 repr. Dublin 1995) 471.
3 O Lochlainn, 'Roadways in Ancient Ireland', 472.

Lough Ree. An arm of the river Brosna links Lough Owel and Lough Ennell from where it continues in a generally south-westerly direction to eventually meet the Shannon above Lough Derg. The Inny and Brosna drainage provided important links between the Westmeath Lakelands and the Shannon. To the north-east of these lakes is the river Blackwater which skirts the north of Kells before meeting the Boyne at Navan. The latter river, rising in north County Kildare, travels through Trim to Navan and then turns east through Slane to the sea beyond Drogheda.

Bog-lands

The third of the accompanying maps (Appendix 1), is taken from the Historical Atlas section of Alfred Smyth's *Celtic Leinster* and shows soil type and bog coverage in the Irish midlands. This map clearly highlights the complex and challenging nature of the local terrain. Generally speaking we might note that the sprawling bog of Allen provided a formidable barrier between Mide and the territories of the Laigin. Physical definition between Mide and Tethbae to the northwest is also noticeable though to a lesser extent while the approach towards the Shannon and Munster was defined by extensive tracts of bog. Importantly, Smyth has drawn attention to a 'Midland Corridor' through this area linking Mide to the Munster border.[4] This narrow fertile strip of land, about twenty miles long and two to four miles wide, can be traced by following the line of the modern N52 from Tyrrellspass, just south of Lough Ennell, south-westerly to Tullamore and beyond as far as Birr.

In general terms we might note that amidst the network of rivers and lakes and the extensive bog-lands were pockets and indeed extensive tracts of fertile land. This patchwork landscape was laced with a network of important roads linking the west and south with Mide and ultimately, Brega. As well as Smyth's 'Midland Corridor' linking Mide to Munster, we can identify two other significant land corridors, at Mullingar between Lough Owel and Lough Ennell and at Tyrrellspass, about six kilometers to the south of the latter lake, which were crucial junctions for travel through the area.[5] We know from the documentary sources that the area around Lough Ennell became the Clann Cholmáin heartland but before discussing this in greater detail we will turn firstly to Uisnech, located some ten kilometers to the north-west of Lough Ennell, the lake clearly visible from its summit.[6] There is a general assumption that Clann Cholmáin moved its centre of power from Uisnech to Lough Ennell during the course of the eighth or ninth centuries.[7] In order to consider this

4 Alfred P. Smyth, *Celtic Leinster: towards an historical geography of early Irish civilization A.D. 500–1600* (Dublin 1982) 86-7.

5 Roseanne Schot, 'Uisneach, Co. Westmeath: archaeology, history and legend (Prehistory- *c.* AD 1100)', i (2vols unpublished PhD thesis UCG 2008) 258.

6 Roseanne Schot, 'Uisneach Midi a medón Érenn: a prehistoric 'cult' centre and 'royal site' in Co. Westmeath', *The Journal of Irish Archaeology* xv (2006) 39, 65.

7 Catherine E. Karkov & John Ruffing, 'The Southern Uí Néill and the political landscape of Lough Ennell', *Peritia* 11 (1997) 337.

we will begin by firstly surveying the archaeological work which has been carried out at Uisnech to date.

Uisnech

Uisnech encompasses an area of roughly 2.5km^2 and is in fact comprised of two summits of similar height. A large number of monuments ranging in date from the Neolithic to Medieval periods are on and around the Hill including barrows, enclosures and a possible megalithic tomb, all of which emphasise the ancient and enduring significance of the place for midland communities. MacAlister and Praeger, working in the 1920s, carried out a series of digs focused on a small number of these monuments but the reports, in part owing to the practices of the time, are less than satisfactory.[8] However Roseanne Schot has recently completed a Ph.D thesis which includes both a critical reassessment of those excavations and a modern survey of the area using non-intrusive technologies.[9]

There are over a dozen ringforts on and around the Hill of Uisnech but the most prominent of these is Rathnew, located on the eastern summit and the main focus of MacAlister and Praeger's excavation. The archaeological evidence suggests the site was in use over a long period and went through a number of distinct phases. The original excavators identified four periods of occupation from the Bronze age to the third century AD. They were very much influenced by the then prevailing academic orthodoxy concerning early Irish history and cited traditions more recent scholarship would label 'pseudo-historical'.

> The most important event for our present study is the occupation of Uisneach in or about the year 150 A.D. By Tuathal Teachtmhar, the first king of Connacht to make an irruption across the Shannon, and thus the first to strike a blow at the primitive division of the country into five independent kingdoms. From the time of Tuathal to that of Cormac mac Airt, who, about a hundred years later, transferred the seat of monarchy to Tara, the Connacht dynasty occupied Uisneach. We should expect the remains at a place thus occupied to be assignable to a late stage in the La Tène period; and this is actually the case here.[10]

MacAlister and Praeger were not open to the idea that the site was occupied during the medieval period and hence dismissed any possible link with Clann Cholmáin.

> Nor do the results countenance the identification of the Enclosure with the palace of the kings of Cland Cholmáin, "kings of Uisneach," who alternated with the kings of Aileach

8 R.A.S. MacAlister and R. Lloyd Praeger, 'Report on the excavation of Uisneach', *PRIA (C)* 38 (1928-29) 69-127; R.A.S. MacAlister and R. Lloyd Praeger, 'The excavation of an ancient structure on the townland of Togherstown, Co. Westmeath', *PRIA (C)* 39 (1930-31) 54-83; Schot, 'Uisneach Midi a medón Érenn', 47.

9 Schot, 'Uisneach, Co.Westmeath: archaeology, history and legend'.

10 MacAlister and Praeger, 'Report on the excavation of Uisneach', 125.

> from 734 to 1002 A.D. in the High Kingship, according to the historical analysis of Prof. MacNeill. Either these simply took their name from Uisneach, and actually reigned from Tara; or else their seat was one of the other earthen enclosures on the hill, not yet excavated.[11]

However Schot takes issue with this interpretation. Having reexamined the site and the original report she concludes that a penannular enclosure, possibly with a ceremonial function, was constructed first, perhaps between the third and fifth centuries AD.[12] This was then subsequently incorporated into a large conjoined ringfort, possibly constructed during the late seventh or eighth century with occupation through to the eleventh century.[13] The 'figure-of-eight' form of Rathnew is strikingly similar to that of the Forrad/Tech Cormaic at Tara and like there, we can see the enduring significance of prehistoric earthworks through their incorporation into and transformation by later monuments. Indeed Schot suggests the possibility that the 'figure-of eight form was closely (though not exclusively) associated with royalty.'[14] She also reassesses the earlier excavation of a large bivallate enclosure, labeled 'Togherstown 1', located on the northern flank of the Hill about 800m downslope from the summit. While unable to provide a date of construction any more precise than 'during the later first millennium AD' the artefactual evidence would suggest activity 'between the 8th and 11th centuries AD.'[15]

Having reassessed Rathnew, Schot suggests that it may have been a Clann Cholmáin royal site. This seems at least possible as her dating corresponds with a period of emerging dominance for the dynasty in the area. If this was the case, Rathnew was at least partially contemporary with the known Clann Cholmáin complex at Lough Ennell and Schot was justified in questioning the assumption that the dynasty transferred its centre of power from Uisnech to Lough Ennell. Most significantly for this particular point, Schot stresses the very different nature of the two sites. The assumption has been made that 'both of these centres were invested with equivalent, and thus readily interchangeable, roles.'[16] But this is quite unlikely. Uisnech was obviously a site of great significance from a very early period. Its prominence on the landscape and position at the 'centre' of Ireland made it an obvious focus for human activity and ritual from earliest times and the sheer quantity of monuments surviving there confirm its longstanding significance for midland communities. Hence Rathnew was built among and in fact incorporated one of the ancient monuments already on the Hill of Uisnech in a manner similar to activity at, for example, Tara.

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11 MacAlister and Praeger, 'Report on the excavation of Uisneach', 125.
12 Schot, 'Uisneach Midi a medón Érenn', 54.
13 Schot, 'Uisneach Midi a medón Érenn', 47-63.
14 Schot, 'Uisneach Midi a medón Érenn', 65.
15 Schot, 'Uisneach, Co.Westmeath: archaeology, history and legend', 229.
16 Schot, 'Uisneach Midi a medón Érenn', 66.

Rathnew is not therefore comparable to Dún na Sciath, the Clann Cholmáin ringfort on the banks of Lough Ennell. As we shall see below, that fort was sited with strategic and defensive considerations in mind rather than what were surely the more symbolic motivations behind the siting of Rathnew. Therefore Schot's suggestion that Rathnew and Dún na Sciath might better be regarded as fulfilling distinct but complementary roles seems justified. In short, it does seem reasonable to suggest that an impressive conjoined ringfort built in the late seventh or eight century and sited prominently at Uisnech *may* be the work of Clann Cholmáin.

Schot also refers to the documentary evidence to further support her theory. We might begin with the 'Ríg Uisnig' kinglist in the *Book of Leinster*. This is essentially a Clann Cholmáin kinglist beginning with Conall Cremthainne and carried down to the twelfth century though it does admit Fíachu mac Néill in its earliest section. Paul Byrne has noted a level of detail for the reign of Donnchad mac Domnaill (d.797) far in excess of anything found for the preceding or succeeding kings. He therefore concludes that the list may originally have been drawn up about this time and subsequently updated.[17] This is certainly possible and we might further argue that Fíachu may have been granted admission because of his association with Uisnech in Tírechán's *Collectanea*, to be discussed below. But it seems striking that there is no mention whatsoever of the kingship of Uisnech in any other source, a title which would surely warrant mention in the annals for example. It seems unlikely that the *Book of Leinster* preserves a genuine record of a real kingship and at least possible that the 'Ríg Uisnig' title was attached to a fairly standard Clann Cholmáin kinglist at a later date. Indeed F.J. Byrne makes the suggestion that the title simply reflects the bias of the scribe.

> when Áed Mac Crimthainn compiled his regnal lists in the Book of Leinster, he pointedly entitled them [i.e. the Ua Maeleachlainn] 'kings of Uisneach' after the mythological umbilical centre of Ireland that was the focus of ancient Mide. This title is never found in the contemporary annals; by using it, Áed wished to deny Ua Maíl Sechnaill whatever prestige still clung to the kingship of Tara.[18]

The manner of Uisnech's appearance in Tírechán's Patrician dossier does arguably support its identification as a seat of kingship. The following passage begins with reference to a church founded by Patrick:

> alteram in Capite Carmelli in campo Teloch, in qua sancta Brigita pallium cepit sub manibus filii Caille. In Huisniuch Midi mansit iuxta Petram Coithrigi, sed occissi sunt circa se alii perigrini a filio Fechach filii Né[i]ll; cui maledixit dicens: 'Non erit de stirpe tua rex

17 Paul Byrne, *Certain Southern Uí Néill kingdoms* (unpublished PhD thesis UCD 2000) 77. The problem with this list is similar to that with the 'Midland' list in MS Laud 610 which while also perhaps quite early, records holders of a kingship not known to have existed so early and which may simply be an adapted Clann Cholmáin genealogy. See the Kinglists discussion in Part 1 for further detail.

18 F.J. Byrne, 'Ireland before the battle of Clontarf', Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (ed), *NHI* i 861; The 'Rig Uisnig' list is last in a series of provincial lists and it seems possible that the ordering of the material reflects the compiler's Leinster bias and underlying agenda.

sed seruies semini fratrum tuorum.'[19]

> another [church] on Carmell's Head in Mag Teloch, where holy Brigit received the veil from the hands of Mac Caille. In Uisnech in Meath he stayed at Coithrige's Stone, but some of his foreign companions were killed by the son of Fíachu son of Níall; (Patrick) cursed him, saying: 'There shall be no king from thy progeny, but thou shalt serve the seed of thy brothers.'

As we know Patrick encounters the various descendants of Níall at important 'royal' sites, across Mide and Brega. He meets Lóegaire at Tara, Coirpre at Tailtiu, Conall at Ráith Airthir and Fíachu's son at Uisnech. While Tírechán is obviously hostile to the Cenél Fíachach, the setting for Patrick's meeting is surely significant. Despite Patrick's hostility and his 'prediction' of subservience for the Cenél Fíachach, the fact that they are included acknowledges their continued significance in the area. There were after all people who claimed descent from Fíachu living near Uisnech right down until the Early Modern period. This is not the only possible interpretation however. As we know Tírechán has Patrick encounter Coirpre mac Neill at Tailtiu, an area far to the east of their heartland by the later seventh century. In this instance perhaps Tírechán was aware of the tradition that Cenél Coirpri had once provided kings of Tara, which we find preserved in the *Baile Chuinn,* and that they had led the conquest of Brega from the Leinstermen, recoverable from the annals. If the case of Fíachu's son is comparable with that of Coirpre, then Tírechán may not in fact be suggesting Cenél Fiachach actually held Uisnech but rather acknowledging their onetime importance in the area. The annals clearly record the important role Cenél Fiachach had in the initial conquest of the area from the Laigin. Following defeat against Failge Berraide in 510 at Fremu (Frewin Hill, on the western shore of Lough Owel), Fíachu took his revenge in 516 at the battle of Druim Derg when 'the plain of Mide was taken away from the Laigin.'[20] Indeed, Patrick's hostility to certain secular powers would carry added weight if Tírechán's readers knew that Cenél Coirpri no longer held Tailtiu nor Cenél Fíachach Uisnech, as such 'demonstrating' Patrick's power and correctness. That said, the two cases are not exactly comparable because while Cenél Coirpre had no presence in Brega in the late seventh century, Cenél Fíachach continued to be based in the neighbourhood of Uisnech for centuries.

In conclusion, we can say with some certainty that Tírechán's work suggests Uisnech was an area of importance and sensitivity for the secular powers in the region with, probably, royal associations. There are a large number of impressive ringforts on and about the Hill of Uisnech,

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19 Whitley Stokes (ed), *The Tripartite Life of Patrick: with other documents relating to that saint* ii (2 vols London 1887) 310. Bieler mispunctuated (as if Uisnech was in Mag Teloch). Stokes' edition has been followed. See Ludwig Bieler (ed), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979 repr 2004) 136-37.

20 Ailbhe Séamus Mac Shamhráin, *Church and Polity in Pre-Norman Ireland: The Case of Glendalough* (Maynooth 1996) 60. See also Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge 2000) 449-51; Byrne, *Certain Southern Uí Néill kingdoms* 248.

most of which remain unexcavated, but Schot's work has now shown that work on some of them was taking place during the period of Clann Cholmáin's emergence and ascendancy. The important battle of Carn Fiachach was fought at Uisnech in 765 between two Clann Cholmáin dynasts, Donnchad and Murchad, both sons of Domnall (d.763), and settled the issue of succession in Donnchad's favour.[21] This clash also supports the idea that the area was sensitive and associated with secular power in the area. While Schot's assertion that Clann Cholmáin dynasts were 'styled *rig Uisnig* or 'kings of Uisneach' in early medieval king-lists'[22]is accurate, she may place too much emphasis on this particular piece of evidence in linking the dynasty with Uisnech. But there do appear to be enough other hints to allow us to broadly agree with the main thrust of her argument.

Lough Ennell

We can speak with much greater certainty when we turn to Lough Ennell and its hinterland which lay at the very heart of Clann Cholmáin territory. Perhaps the best known reference establishing the link between this area and Clann Cholmáin is the annal account of the death of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (d.1022).

> Maolseclainn mac Domnaill, mic Donnchadha, aird Rí Erenn uile, tuile ordain iartair domain, do héc i gCro Inis Locha Ainninne, in .xliii°. Anno regni sui, in .iiii^{a}. Nonas Septembris, die videlicet Dominico, luna .ii^{a}. ; millesimo, vero, ac .xxii°. post Incarnationem Dominicam anno, praesentibus ac sibi astantibus venerabilium Sanctorum, Patricii, scilicet, et Columbae ac Ciaraini heredibus penitens in pace pausavit.
> Maelsechlainn, son of Domhnall, son of Donnchadh, chief King of all Erinn, flood of dignity of the west of the world, died in Cro-Inis of Loch Ainninn, in the 43rd year of his reign, the 4th of the nones of September, viz, on Sunday, the 2nd of the moon's age, and in the thousand and twenty-second year after the lord's Incarnation; the successors of the venerable saints, that is to say, of Patrick, Columba, and Ciaran, being present and standing beside him pœnitens in pace pausavit.[23]

Cró Inis is a crannóg situated about eighty metres from the southwestern shore of Lough Ennell. It is overlooked by the large raised ringfort of Dún na Sciath.[24] But this royal complex cannot be viewed in isolation from the surrounding landscape and we are fortunate that the Lough Ennell area has been the focus of detailed, modern archaeological survey. In what follows we shall attempt to provide ourselves with a sound understanding of the Lough Ennell landscape in its totality as well as focusing on the archaeological evidence from several specific sites.

The Crannóg Archaeology Project (CAP)

This project, sponsored jointly by the National Museum of Ireland and Cornell University

21 *AU* 765.5; *ATig* [765].
22 Schot, 'Uisneach Midi a medón Érenn', 39.
23 *CS* 1020 [1022] Hennessy's edition at 260-61. See also http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/T100016/index.html which has access to MacNiocaill's unpublished edition of *CS*.
24 Máel Sechnaill's obit in the admittedly late *Annals of Clonmacnoise* adds that Cró Inis was 'neer his house of Doone Sgiath.' *AClon* 1022.

began work in the 1980s with the eventual aim of surveying all the crannógs of the Irish midlands.[25] Following some preliminary work in 1983, it was decided to firstly concentrate on Lough Ennell, though serious work did not begin until the later 1980s. The CAP team's approach was innovative as they sought to work both on land and in the water.[26] Several 'crannóg systems' were identified, i.e. groups of related sites and features both on and off-shore.

- Cró Inis

Cró Inis has a surface area of *c*.49 x 40m[27] on which stand the possible remains of a later medieval tower house.[28] The dating of oak planks found near the water's edge, several artefacts and indeed the surface area of the crannóg suggest that the site dates, other than the tower house material, to the twelfth century.[29] Importantly, the CAP team also discovered an offshore underwater timber palisade constructed of some 350 timbers and surrounding the crannóg on three sides in a horseshoe shape.[30] These timbers form a double and in parts triple palisade around the crannóg, are 'located at distances which vary from seven to ten meters from the current shore of the crannóg' and 'lie at a depth of one to two meters.'[31] While there are now some irregularities and intermittent gaps in the palisade, there are no timbers whatsoever off the landward side of the crannóg and the water at this point is very shallow. As we shall see below, these underwater palisades appear to be a feature of other crannógs on Lough Ennell. It has been suggested that they were designed to force boats to approach the crannóg from the landward side in shallow water and with reduced manoeuvrability. Crucially however, analysis of several of these timbers brought back dates of 1325±B.P. While Farrell considers it likely Cró Inis was constructed during the ninth century,[32]if the palisade reflects fortification or enhancement of a preexisting site, it seems at least possible that the original construction took place earlier.[33] Either way, the surface area of the crannóg was

25 Robert Farrell, 'The Crannóg Archaeology Project (CAP): Archaeological Field Research in the Lakes of the West Midlands in Ireland', Catherine Karkov and Robert Farrell (ed), *Studies in Insular Art and Archaeology* (Ohio 1991) 99-110; Catherine Karkov and John Ruffing, 'The crannógs of Lough Ennell: A computer survey', *Ríocht na Midhe* viii 3 (1990/1991) 105-13.

26 Traditionally work had been carried out on sites where drainage or land reclamation had isolated the site from its original watery context. For example the excavations at Lagore, seat of the kings of Southern Brega. See H. Hencken, 'Lagore Crannóg: An Irish Royal Residence of the 7th to 10th Centuries A.D.', *PRIA (C)*53 (1950) 1-248.

27 Karkov and Ruffing, 'The Southern Uí Néill and the Political Landscape of Lough Ennell', 339.

28 This interpretation has replaced that of MacAlister who considered the ruins those of a pyramid, an eighteenth-century folly. R.A.S. MacAlister, 'On an excavation conducted on Cro-Inis, Loch Ennell', *PRIA (C)*44 (1938) 248-52: 249. It has been suggested that the ruins may be those of the building where the poet Domhnaill O'Coffey and his two sons were murdered in 1446 'by the grandsons of Art o'Melaghlin, and the grandsons of Fiacha Mageoghean.' *AFM* 1446. Eamonn P. Kelly, 'Some recent observations on Irish Medieval Lake Dwellings', Catherine Karkov and Robert Farrell (ed), *Studies in Insular Art and Archaeology* (Ohio 1991) 90.

29 Farrell, 'The Crannóg Archaeology Project (CAP)', 103

30 Farrell gives a figure of 150 offshore timbers. Farrell, 'The Crannóg Archaeology Project (CAP)', 103. However 350 is the figure given elsewhere. Karkov and Ruffing, 'The Southern Uí Néill and the Political Landscape of Lough Ennell', 339; Karkov and Ruffing, 'The crannógs of Lough Ennell: A computer survey', 107.

31 Farrell, 'The Crannóg Archaeology Project (CAP)', 103.

32 Farrell, 'The Crannóg Archaeology Project (CAP)', 103.

33 An earlier date for the original construction would not be unusual. Crannóg timbers subjected to

subsequently further built up and the site may well have been refortified in the twelfth century.[34] As noted, the impressive raised ringfort of Dún na Scíath lies directly opposite the crannóg on the western shore of Lough Ennell but this has not yet been excavated.[35]

- Cherry Island

Almost directly opposite these sites on the eastern shore of Lough Ennell is an enhanced natural island, Cherry Island, upon which stands a stone cashel of *c.*30 meters in diameter.[36] Mirroring Cró Inis, Cherry Island is also overlooked by a large ringfort from the shore. It has been suggested that Cherry Island and the nearby ringfort might be identified as the seat of the Fir Thulach kings.[37]

- Goose Island

Goose island is also on the eastern shore of Lough Ennell but farther north and is similar to Cró Inis in a number of respects. While a slightly smaller crannóg, it too may have housed a later medieval stone structure though the remains are now much disturbed. It is also surrounded on three sides by an offshore, underwater palisade which is open on the landward side. Analysis of several of these timbers brought back dates ranging from the late ninth to mid-tenth centuries. There is also a nearby ringfort, Belvedere, overlooking the crannóg. Unfortunately neither Goose Island nor Belvedere ringfort have yet been linked to sites mentioned in the documentary sources.[38]

- The Northern Shore

The construction of the Royal Canal in the nineteenth century has considerably changed the waterways about the north of Lough Ennell. However it seems that at the point where the river Brosna originally entered the lake, it was met by two flanking crannógs, Schoolboy and Rushy Islands, the latter now part of the shoreline. The CAP survey did not find evidence of offshore timbers but work was severely hampered by a significant amount of silt and debris.[39] A dug-out canoe has been found near Rushy island[40] while two Early Christian hand bells have been recovered

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dendrochronological dating, while the sample is admittedly small and largely limited to Ulster, return remarkably similar felling dates 'clustering during the second half of the sixth and early seventh centuries AD.' Nancy Edwards, *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland* (London 1990) 36.

34 Farrell, 'The Crannóg Archaeology Project (CAP)', 103.

35 While at Cró Inis, MacAlister examined Dún na Sciath but could not justify the effort or expense of a full excavation and considered it an Anglo-Norman motte. MacAlister, 'On an excavation conducted on Cro-Inis, Loch Ennell', 252.

36 Karkov and Ruffing, 'The Southern Uí Néill and the Political Landscape of Lough Ennell', 339

37 Karkov and Ruffing, 'The Southern Uí Néill and the Political Landscape of Lough Ennell', 340. The twelfth-century *Betha Colman maic Luachain* contains a great amount of detail about the area in general but specifically includes an episode where the saint visits Onchú king of Fir Thulach whose residences are named as Dún na Cairrge and Inis na Cairrge.

38 Karkov and Ruffing, 'The crannógs of Lough Ennell: A computer survey', 107; Karkov and Ruffing, 'The Southern Uí Néill and the Political Landscape of Lough Ennell', 339; Farrell, 'The Crannóg Archaeology Project (CAP)', 104.

39 Karkov and Ruffing, 'The crannógs of Lough Ennell: A computer survey', 110-11; Karkov and Ruffing, 'The Southern Uí Néill and the Political Landscape of Lough Ennell', 342-43.

40 Catherine Karkov and John Ruffing, 'The settlement systems of Lough Ennell: the 1992 Survey', *Ríocht na Midhe*

from near Schoolboy island.[41] The latter find is not surprising considering the presence of several important ecclesiastical settlements in the area, Lynn to the northeast and Dísert to the west. The suggestion that these two crannógs were deliberately positioned to defend or control this strategic position, where the Brosna entered the lake, seems plausible.

- Lynn

The monastery of Lynn, founded by Colmán mac Luacháin, was located on the northern shore of the lake. While little of the site remains today, the graveyard may preserve the shape of the original enclosure.[42]

- Dysart

Dysart parish on the western shore of Lough Ennell, takes its name from *Dísert Máile Tuile*, a probably late-eighth century Céli Dé foundation. The ruins of a church, the base of a high-cross and a circular enclosure survive at the site which is just north of Dún na Scíath.[43] Several islands and crannógs north of Cró Inis also bear the name of the parish and several significant archaeological finds have been recovered from the area, something we shall return to below.

It is clear that the Lough Ennell area was a significant area of Early Christian settlement both secular and ecclesiastical. The local landscape is very much defined by several major rivers and lakes and these, as well as extensive surrounding bog, frame the area's fertile land. The CAP survey has added greatly to our knowledge and highlighted a possible settlement pattern consisting of complementary crannógs and ringforts at Lough Ennell which may have been designed to signify their dominance over both the land and waterways of the region. Reference to our earlier discussion of the region's general topography suggests that Clann Cholmáin settlement at Lough Ennell was due to the strategic significance of the area.

The dynasty certainly positioned itself within easy reach of the main communication routes traversing the Irish midlands and indeed, if we return to consider the positioning of Ruba Conaill, mentioned briefly earlier, it becomes clear that Clann Cholmáin put a great deal of thought into their control of this area. The name of this site is preserved in the parish of Rathconnell, about 2km northeast of Mullingar and located therefore along the corridor between Lough Owel and Lough Ennell. Indeed the name of the site is itself significant. *Fuba* and *Ruba* are two terms which often appear together in the law-tracts when dealing with military service and which can be translated as

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viii 4 (1992/1993) 57.

41 Karkov and Ruffing, 'The Southern Uí Néill and the Political Landscape of Lough Ennell', 343.

42 Karkov and Ruffing, 'The Southern Uí Néill and the Political Landscape of Lough Ennell', 342.

43 Edel Bhreathnach, "'A Midhe is maith da bhámar": thoughts on medieval Mide', Tom Condit and Christiaan Corlett (ed), *Above and beyond: Essays in memory of Leo Swan* (Bray 2005) 376; http://monasticon.celt.dias.ie/showrecord.php?id=3124 .

'attack' and 'ward'. The first involved military service for such tasks as hunting down wolves or thieves while the second involved sentry duty or patrol 'on ridges or peninsulas, passes through mountain or forest and the frontiers generally.'[44] While Ruba Conaill may simply suggest a headland, it is ideally located for such duties. There is also clear documentary evidence linking Clann Cholmáin to this strategically important site. A battle took place there in 803 between two sons of Donnchad (d.797) of Clann Cholmáin.[45] Over three hundred and fifty years later Muirchertach mac Lochlainn came south to Ruba Conaill to defeat a later Clann Cholmáin king.[46] The site also features in the twelfth-century Life of Colmán maic Lúacháin where we are told that the saint supposedly gave the site to the seventh-century Clann Cholmáin king, Conall Guthbinn.[47]

We can see that access into, around and out of the Clann Cholmáin heartland about Uisnech and Lough Ennell was very much restricted to a few important routes and, not surprisingly, Clann Cholmáin settlement reflected that fact. Important archaeological finds from the Lough Ennell area also serve to confirm its significance. We shall now briefly survey the most important of these.

Silver Finds at Lough Ennell

A significant number of silver and coin hoards have been recovered from Lough Ennell and the surrounding area.[48] Five of these finds were made on the western shore of the lake while the sixth was from the eastern shore. Analysis revealed that they all belong to the same context.[49] The hoard on the eastern shore, from the townland of **Carrick**, comprised sixty silver ingots with an average weight of 530.38g giving a total hoard weight of 31.192kg.[50] The **Dysart 1** hoard, recovered from Dysart island, a natural island just north of Cró Inis, comprised five complete ingots with an average weight of 525.0g giving a total hoard weight of 2.625kg. The Dysart I and Carrick ingots are unusual as Viking Age ingots rarely exceed 100g in weight. Indeed prior to this find the heaviest Viking Age ingot recorded from Ireland weighed 88.08g.[51] The **Dysart 2** hoard contained two ingots found at the centre of a crannóg, now submerged, just north of Dysart Island. These two ingots, virtually identical in shape and weight are still more massive both weighing over

44 Katharine Simms, 'Gaelic military history and the later brehon law commentaries', Cathal Ó Háinle & Donald E. Meek (ed), *Unity in Diversity: Studies in Irish and Scottish Gaelic Language, Literature and History* (Dublin 2004) 63. See also Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin 1988) 31.

45 *AU* 803.5; Paul Walsh, *The Placenames of Westmeath* (Dublin 1957) 231-33.

46 *ATig* 1159.

47 See Saints' Lives discussion (Part 1) for further details.

48 Michael Ryan, Raghnall Ó Floinn, Nicholas Lowick, Michael Kenny and Peter Cazalet, 'Six silver finds of the Viking period from the vicinity of Lough Ennell, Co Westmeath', *Peritia* 3 (1984) 334-81. See the fourth of the accompanying maps in Appendix 1, taken from Aidan O'Sullivan, 'Exploring past people's interactions with wetland environments in Ireland', *PRIA (C)* 107 (2007) 147-203: 167.

49 Ryan et.al, 'Six silver finds', 334.

50 Ryan et.al, 'Six silver finds', 336.

51 Ryan et.al, 'Six silver finds', 336.

3 kgs, i.e. together weighing about one fifth of the entire Carrick hoard of sixty ingots, themselves unusually large.[52] The **Dysart 3** find also contained two ingots though of much more modest proportions, weighing 66.52 and 49.65 grams respectively. The **Nure** find, from slightly farther south along the shore, is also small comprising just two ingot fragments weighing 23.5 and 11.5 grams respectively. The Dysart 3 and Nure ingots would be typical in their shape and size of Viking Age silver finds conforming to multiples or fractions of the Viking *öre* unit of currency of 22 to 26 grams. The **Dysart 4** hoard, also from Dysart Island, contained eighty-five ingots. Importantly however, it also includes twenty-nine pieces of cut ornament and forty-five coins.[53] Of the ingots, only five are complete, the remainder are fragments having been cut from longer ingots to the required size or weight. The majority weigh 5g or less. The ornament fragments are largely from brooches, bracelets or armlets and wire.[54] These objects, it has been argued, can probably be dated to the early-tenth century. The total weight of the coins is just over 31g, i.e. less than the weight of some individual silver ingots and less than 4% of the total hoard weight.[55] However they are of course extremely significant in the dating evidence they provide. The coin hoard can be broken down as follows:

-Nineteen silver Kufic Dirham fragments. The latest legible fragment dates to 902/3. It was minted in Central Asia or Eastern Iran but may have reached Ireland within just a few years.[56]

-Twenty-six Anglo-Saxon/Viking coins. These include St. Eadmund memorial coins minted *c.*890-910, a fragment of a coin issued late in the reign of Alfred the Great (d.899) and several coins from Viking York described as the 'Cunnetti issue' minted *c.* 895-900. Considering both these and the Kufic Dirhams, a deposition date of *c.*905-10 has been proposed for the Dysart 4 hoard.[57]

Taken together, the various hoards of silver found around Lough Ennell are very significant. We should firstly note that silver, valued by weight, was a normal means of exchange and valuation in pre-Viking Ireland's complex currency system.[58] But the Lough Ennell silver constitutes something new and reflects interaction with the Vikings. We should also note that the Lough Ennell finds are not isolated but rather fit into a wider pattern of hoard finds in Southern Uí Néill, but more specifically, Clann Cholmáin territory.[59] Kenny has noticed that, when plotted on a map, the coin hoard evidence shows a distinct regional bias. There is a concentration of finds from Mide, Brega and northern Leinster but no noticeable concentration toward the coast. While there is a predictable

52 Ryan et.al, 'Six silver finds', 337.
53 Ryan et.al, 'Six silver finds', 339.
54 Ryan et.al, 'Six silver finds', 340-41 for full description.
55 Michael Kenny, 'The geographical distribution of Irish Viking-Age coin hoards', *PRIA (C)* 87 (1987) 518.
56 Ryan et.al, 'Six silver finds', 346.
57 Ryan et.al, 'Six silver finds', 352.
58 Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* 112ff.
59 See Kenny, 'The geographical distribution of Irish Viking-Age coin hoards', 508-11.

cluster of hoards in the vicinity of Dublin, 'the majority of finds are from areas which were under Irish control for all or much of the Viking period and which were in many cases quite removed from the immediate hinterland of the Viking settlements.'[60] Indeed much of the material is concentrated in areas of Clann Cholmáin control. We can firstly say with some confidence that these hoards were not deposited by Vikings but rather by native hands. The presence of the hoards does however point to some form of economic activity and relationship between the Vikings and the midland dynasty. It would seem plausible that at least some of this material was acquired as the result of raiding or attacks on the Vikings. But there are problems in viewing all the hoards in this way. As noted above, a deposition date of *c.*905-10 has been proposed for some of the Lough Ennell material, a period following, according to the documentary sources, the abandonment of Dublin by the Vikings following a heavy defeat against the combined forces of Brega and Leinster. It is of course quite possible that the entire community at Dublin was not forced to leave Dublin in 902. Some of the other midland coin hoards have suggested deposition dates from the 950s and early 960s, a period when Dublin was not attacked by the Irish though it was a period of intense conflict between conflicting Uí Néill branches. Perhaps we had better view the deposition of these hoards in that context. Taken together, a simple 'war booty' explanation is unsatisfactory.[61] Kenny does not go so far as to argue for wide-scale coin usage among the Irish. But he convincingly argues that it is difficult to believe 'that the Irish of Meath, Leinster and Brega could have lived beside, fought, traded and intermarried with coin-using Vikings for over two hundred years without developing a greater awareness of coins and coin usage than the Irish of Connacht.'[62] It seems quite possible therefore that at least some of the Lough Ennell silver, both coins and ingots, while probably not used by the Irish amongst themselves, reflects economic links with Dublin, whether through trade or tribute. It is also surely significant that no major hoard has come from the sub kingdom of Teathba. Instead the material is concentrated in Clann Cholmáin heartland, indeed in the immediate neighbourhood of the royal complex at Dún na Sciath and Cró Inis.[63] This surely reflects the dynasty's decision to keep tight control over the material necessary for interaction with the Vikings. While the sheer quantity of silver finds from the Lough Ennell area further confirms its significance they also provide us with 'a new perspective upon the relationship between Meath [...] and Dublin, the country's most vibrant trading center.'[64]

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60 Kenny, 'The geographical distribution of Irish Viking-Age coin hoards', 512.
61 Michael Kenny, 'Coins and Coinage in the Irish Midlands during the Viking Age', Catherine Karkov and Robert Farrell (ed), *Studies in Insular Art and Archaeology* (Ohio 1991) 114-15.
62 Kenny, 'The geographical distribution of Irish Viking-Age coin hoards', 517; Kenny, 'Coins and Coinage in the Irish Midlands', 115.
63 Kenny, 'The geographical distribution of Irish Viking-Age coin hoards', 513.
64 Kenny, 'Coins and Coinage in the Irish Midlands', 111.

The *Banshenchas*

The *Banshenchas,* or 'Lore of Women', is a catalogue of famous and almost exclusively aristocratic women. Following a brief 'international beginning'[1] including figures from sources such as the Bible and, indirectly, the *Iliad,* the focus quickly turns to Irish women. From this point the text can be divided into two parts, a pre-Christian part concerned with Irish women from myth and saga and a Christian part concerned with women associated with Irish kings, generally their mothers and wives. The *Banshenchas* survives in both metrical and prose forms and we might begin by considering the relationship between these two formats before examining the contents more closely and discussing the value of *Banshenchas* evidence for our study.

Margaret Dobbs published editions of both the metrical and prose *Banshenchas* in the early 1930s.[2] In the closing lines if the metrical version in the Book of Leinster (LL*)* the poet, Gilla Mo Dutu Ua Casaide, identifies himself and informs us that he completed his task in 1147 on Devenish island, Lough Erne, Co. Fermanagh.[3] While this MS is virtually contemporary with that date, the text itself concludes with individuals who had died by 1030 at the latest. This leads Dobbs to suggest that Gilla Mo Dutu 'found a prose version ended a century earlier and set himself the task of versifying it but without bringing it up to date.'[4] The metrical *Banshenchas* also survives in three later MSS, the Book of Uí Maine (D), NLI MS G3 (G) and the Book of Lecan (Lec).[5] In these copies the poem is carried down into the twelfth century and concludes with Tigernán Ua Ruairc's wife, the famous Derborgaill, and Mór wife of Murchad Ua Maelechlainn, i.e. figures who were alive in 1147. However Dobbs views these longer metrical versions as later expansions on Gilla Mo-Dutu's original poem.[6] Working from this position she provides a transcription and translation of the LL text collated with that in Lec for emendations and superior readings. But the later eleventh and twelfth century coverage provided by the latter MS is not printed. Dobbs noted the presence of prose versions of the *Banshenchas* in six MSS but restricted herself to printing the texts found in Lec and D which she regarded as the best. She notes that while the D text resembles Lec in length, it 'varies greatly in the matter and in the order of it.'[7]

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1 Anne Connon, 'The *Banshenchas* and the Uí Néill queens of Tara', Alfred P. Smyth (ed), *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin 2000) 98.

2 Margaret Dobbs, 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* 47 (1930) 283-339 (metrical) *Revue Celtique* 48 (1931) 163-234 (prose) *Revue Celtique* 49 (1932) 437-489 (indices).

3 *LL* iii 562 ll.17385ff.

4 Dobbs, 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* 47 (1930) 283.

5 Dobbs was unaware of the existence of the G copy. See Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, 'An Bansenchas Filíochta' (unpublished MA dissertation UCG 1977) 46.

6 Dobbs, 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* 47 (1930) 283.

7 Dobbs, 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* 47 (1930) 284.

Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin completed as yet unpublished editions of both the metrical and prose *Banshenchas* for the degrees of MA and PhD respectively and drew upon all available MSS.[8] In contrast to Dobbs, Ní Bhrolcháin regards the metrical *Banshenchas* in LL as having been shortened despite the MS's virtual contemporaneity with the composition of the poem. She regards the eleventh and twelfth century coverage provided by the later MSS copies as part of Gilla Mo-Dutu's original composition and not a later addition. The material cut from the LL copy would, according to Ní Bhrolcháin, have been considered extraneous by a biased Leinster scribe who did not share Gilla Mo-Dutu's interest in, for example, the Ua Ruairc's and Ua Maelechlainn's of Mide.[9] It is argued that the most obvious excision is from the end of the poem covering the period *c.*1030-*c.*1147. This section includes information on the so-called high-kings 'with opposition' and concludes with kings reigning in 1147. It is paralleled by the closing section of another of Gilla Mo-Dutu's poems, *Ériu óg inis na naem,* composed in 1143.[10] Indeed Ní Bhrolcháin has suggested that this poem and the metrical *Banshenchas* might be regarded as companion pieces composed in honour of the famous couple, Tigernán Ua Ruairc and Derborgaill.[11] Following Ní Bhrolcháin's theory for the moment, there were other stanzas removed from the LL copy of the poem aside from the obvious shortening mentioned above. In the body of the poem, as the transition is made between the pre-Christian and Christian parts, several stanzas are omitted from the LL copy when compared with the later MSS. These refer to placenames encountered in the preceding pre-Christian section and the poet's thoughts on composition. Again it is argued that this material was 'considered extraneous and irrelevant' by the LL scribe and simply removed.[12] Ní Bhrolcháin also argues that two linked stanzas, best preserved in D, act to introduce and close the Christian era of the poem. She goes on to say that these must have been part of the original poem and that 'these were not added to the composition at a later date.'[13] But since neither stanza is in LL, this point does not seem to strengthen the case that LL was shortened but rather works from that assumption.

Ní Bhrolcháin also argues that the metrical *Banshenchas* in Lec is an expanded version of Gilla Mo-Dutu's original composition. This expansion includes the re-arrangement and elaboration of material already present, the insertion of material about the early queens of Tethbae and the provision of information about women 'whom Gilla Mo-Dutu freely admits he did not know.'[14] She

8 Ní Bhrolcháin, 'An Bansenchas Filíochta' ; *eadem*, 'The Prose Banshenchas', (unpublished PhD thesis UCG 1980).

9 Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The manuscript tradition of the Banshenchas', *Ériu* 33 (1982) 114. Gilla Mo-Dutu informs us that he is from Ardbraccan towards the end of the poem. Ní Bhrolcháin, 'An Bansenchas Filíochta', §276.

10 R.A.S. Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn (*ITS vol.44 part V) 562 ff ; B. MacCarthy (ed), *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus* (Dublin 1892) 408-37.

11 Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The manuscript tradition of the Banshenchas', *Ériu* 33 (1982) 110.

12 Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Manuscript tradition of the Banshenchas', *Ériu* 33 (1982) 114.

13 Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Manuscript tradition of the Banshenchas', *Ériu* 33 (1982) 112.

14 Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Manuscript tradition of the Banshenchas', *Ériu* 33 (1982) 117. While unable to establish for certain who was responsible for this expansion, it is suggested that the focus on Tethbae might reflect Giolla Íosu

concludes that the metrical texts in D and G show 'neither signs of being shortened like LL, nor of being expanded like Lec. It is therefore reasonable to assume that this is the most conservative copy of the text and the most likely to represent the composition of Gilla Mo-Dutu himself.'[15]

Turning to the prose *Banshenchas,* Ní Bhrolcháin goes to some length comparing the various copies. Firstly we should note that the prose provides considerably more coverage than the metrical version as it is carried down to the immediate post Anglo-Norman period. Ní Bhrolcháin essentially identifies two main versions. One (D) is characterised by considerable interest in and unique information about the province and dynasties of Leinster. This interest stretches from extra information about the wives of Énna Ceinnselach, ancestor of the Uí Cheinnselaig, to more detailed entries about the Uí Dhúnlainge and Uí Cheinnselaig dynasties in the seventh century and finally a specific interest in the Leinster families associated with Diarmait Mac Murchada (d.1172).[16] Lec and MS 2542 Brussels (Br) constitute a separate version which contains some quite detailed information about the Ua Maelechlainn family of Mide in the later eleventh and twelfth centuries.[17] This Lec/Br version also supplies the names of women who are unknown in the D version. Ní Bhrolcháin concludes that the D version of the prose 'bears the greatest resemblance to that of the original poem.'[18]

More recently Anne Connon has pointed out that having divided his work into pre-Christian and Christian parts, Gilla Mo-Dutu then proceeds to include two pre-Christian women in the Christian section. As a result she believes 'the splitting of the *Banshenchas* into pre-Christian and Christian halves was not an original division but one imposed by Gilla Mo-Dutu upon an existing list of names.'[19] Was he reworking a preexisting prose piece? As Ní Bhrolcháin herself admits, the *Dindshenchas* of Carmun lists a *Banshenchas* among the items to be recited at the Fair and Gwynn suggests this poem dates to *c.*1079.[20] It does seem possible that the *Banshenchas* genre existed in some form before 1147 perhaps allowing for a more complex textual history than Ní Bhrolcháin suggests.

Turning to the contents themselves, as noted briefly at the outset the *Banshenchas* moves quite rapidly from a pre-Christian section, including 'international' women, to a Christian section

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Mac Fhir Bhisigh's own special interests. Eadem, 'An Bansenchas Filíochta' 70.

15 Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Manuscript tradition of the Banshenchas', *Ériu* 33 (1982) 118.

16 Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Manuscript tradition of the Banshenchas', *Ériu* 33 (1982) 123-4

17 Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Manuscript tradition of the Banshenchas', *Ériu* 33 (1982) 119 See also: eadem, 'The *Banshenchas* Revisted' Mary O'Dowd & Sabine Wichert (ed.), *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's status in church, state and society* (Antrim 1995) 71.

18 Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Manuscript tradition of the Banshenchas', *Ériu* 33 (1982) 134.

19 Connon, 'The *Banshenchas* and the Uí Néill queens of Tara', *Seanchas* 102.

20 Ní Bhrolcháin, "The Prose Banshenchas' 3; Edward Gwynn (ed), *The Metrical Dindshenchas* iii (Dublin 1903-35 repr. Dublin 1991) 20 (l.251), 471. The verse in question is one of a number found only in LL, all other MSS containing an abridged version of this poem.

focused squarely on Irish women. It has been suggested that this latter section is structured around the Middle Irish Tara king-list and that the *Banshenchas* is concerned to provide us with information about the women associated with the kings of Tara.[21] This concern is central to both the metrical and prose versions. Connon has convincingly argued that the framework for this part of the *Banshenchas* was provided by a mother-list of the kings of Tara. While this source may have been supplemented with other data, a mother-list makes a better fit with the Tara king-list than a list of queens.[22] The fact that certain women recorded as queens of Tara in the annals are not included in the *Banshenchas* strengthens that case.[23] The metrical *Banshenchas* is only concerned with provincial or minor royalty insofar as they were connected via marriage to a given king of Tara. However the prose *Banshenchas* does move beyond this central concern to consider lesser localised kingships and dynasties. As noted briefly above, it has been argued that the prose survives in two main versions best represented by D and Lec which show definite interest in the dynasties of Leinster and the Ua Maelechlainns of Mide respectively.[24] The information provided is quite detailed and when it is possible to check it against other sources, usually proves very reliable.

The *Banshenchas* and Clann Cholmáin.

The testimony of the *Banshenchas* must be approached with caution, particularly in its earlier sections while its underlying structure also imposes certain limitations. Like many of our other sources, the line between myth and history is blurred and it does not follow that the earliest section of the Christian part of the *Banshenchas* is of inherently greater or indeed any historical value compared to the pre-Christian part. As we know, many kings from the early historical period must be approached with caution because though their inclusion in contemporary or near contemporary annal records might support their historicity, much of the detailed information we have about them is often much later. In this context we know that among the many sources drawn upon by the *Banshenchas* were various Middle Irish sagas including many from the 'Cycle of the kings' as well as such sources as the *Lebor Gabála* and the *Dinnshenchas*.[25] Hence we must be conscious that the information about the mothers and wives of these early kings might well come from these sources. For example, while one Muirenn Mael is named as a wife of Díarmait mac

21 Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Manuscript tradition of the Banshenchas', *Ériu* 33 (1982) 110; Connon, 'The *Banshenchas* and the Uí Néill queens of Tara', *Seanchas* 98.
22 Connon, 'The *Banshenchas* and the Uí Néill queens of Tara', *Seanchas* 104-5.
23 Connon, 'The *Banshenchas* and the Uí Néill queens of Tara', 101 ff.
24 Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Manuscript tradition of the Banshenchas', *Ériu* 33 (1982) 110; eadem, 'The *Banshenchas* Revisited', Mary O'Dowd & Sabine Wichert (ed), *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's status in church, state and society* (Antrim 1995) 70-71.
25 Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose Banshenchas' 125-8.

Cerbhaill in the *Banshenchas*, her only other appearance is in the tale *Genemain Aeda Sláne.*[26] The survival within the *Banshenchas* of confused or contradictory information about some of these early historical women also warns us of the unreliability of the sources for this early period. For example, one Mugain is given as the wife of Díarmait son of Áed Sláine while elsewhere she is also given as the wife of his grandfather, Díarmait mac Cearbhaill.[27]

The importance of establishing the relative value and reliability of *Banshenchas* material for this study can perhaps be illustrated by considering the many mothers of Colmán Már. Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin has argued that Colmán Már (d.558) and Colmán Bec (d.593) actually represent an eighth-century genealogical contrivance and that there was originally but a single Colmán. To support this argument he notes the 'coincidence that Banshenchus tradition assigns both siblings mothers from the dynasty of the Conmaicne' and, it is argued, this 'strengthens the argument in favour of genealogical contrivance.'[28] However the Banshenchas evidence is much more confused than Mac Shamhráin's statement implies. Three or perhaps four different women are in fact given as Colmán Már's mother at various points across the *Banshenchas.*[29] While one of these is described as being from the Conmaicne dynasty, the others are not. Perhaps we should hesitate to view this *Banshenchas* material as further evidence of genealogical contrivance, but rather consider the possibility of simple confusion in the source for this very early period.

There is an almost complete void in *Banshenchas* coverage of Clann Cholmáin between the mothers of Colmán Már and Bec mentioned above and the mother of Domnall Midi (d.763).[30] This is not surprising if a central organising principle behind the *Banshenchas* was to provide information about the women associated with the kings of Tara as Domnall was the first Clann Cholmáin dynast to secure that kingship. Having secured that kingship the *Banshenchas* does contain good detail on the Clann Cholmáin and is an invaluable source for the dynasty's later history. For example, Lec evidently had access to specific, local knowledge about the Ua Maelechlainns from which it is possible to construct a quite detailed family tree and, through analysis of their marriages and alliances, provide a much fuller account of the dynasty in the

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26 Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose Banshehchas' 106.

27 Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose Banshehchas' 107.

28 Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, '*Nebulae discutiuntur?* The Emergence of Clann Cholmáin, sixth-eighth centuries', Alfred P. Smyth (ed), *Seanchas* 90.

29 For Mugain and Erc mentioned in the metrical version, see: M. Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 305, 330; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* (unpublished M.A. dissertation UCG 1977) §§154-59, at 118-19, 188-89. For Eithne and Lasair in the prose, see: M. Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234:180-81; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis UCG 1980) §§ 290-95, at 242-44, 361-63.

30 Land mother of Fáelchú son of Airmedach is mentioned. See: M. Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234: 182; Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Banshehchas* §330 at 252, 371. Fáelchú son of Airmedach is named as 'king of Mide' in the *CS* account of the battle of Mag Roth. *CS* 636 [637]. While Airmedach does not appear in his own right in the annals, he is reckoned as a son of Conall Guthbind (d.635) in the genealogies.

eleventh and twelfth centuries. The *Banshenchas* is however of decreasing significance once we move back beyond the eleventh century and of little value for the pre-eighth century period. The void in coverage between Domnall Midi's mother and the very earliest dynasts is an unbridgeable gap as we move from reasonably accurate information to what are surely unhistorical traditions about Díarmait mac Cearbhaill and his sons.

1. The Two Colmáns

The eponymous founder of Clann Cholmáin, Colmán Már, is generally given as one of three sons of Díarmait mac Cerbaill (d.565). The other two being Áed Sláine and Colmán Bec. Colmán Már and Áed were progenitors of Clann Cholmáin and Síl nÁedo Sláine, based in Mide and Brega respectively.[1] From Colmán Bec was descended the less powerful dynasty known ultimately as Coílle Fallomuin, based around Fore, Co. Westmeath.[2] See the accompanying Family Tree, (Appendix 4). Though they will be used here for convenience sake, designations such as 'Clann Cholmáin' are anachronistic in discussing the earliest period. The ultimately distinct branches descended from Díarmait mac Cerbaill had not yet taken shape and we are dealing with individuals who were still closely related. Indeed even at a later period the designation 'Clann Cholmáin' is more a useful label for us to use than a commonly occurring designation in the sources. For example, in those texts derived from the *Chronicle of Ireland,* it occurs but once.[3]

Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin and Paul Byrne have both suggested that this tripartite division of the dynasty represents an eighth-century genealogical contrivance as the line of Domnall Midi (d.763), the first Clann Cholmáin king to secure the Uí Néill overkingship, sought to distance themselves from their less successful kinsmen. This, it is argued, involved the division of a single and original Colmán into greater and lesser individuals. Domnall Midi was traced back to the greater of these, Colmán Már, while the less successful branch found themselves linked to Colmán Bec.[4] In what follows we will argue against this theory and instead propose that in the eighth century Clann Cholmáin and Coílle Fallomuin were believed to have descended from distinct Colmáns. This argument will be presented in the context of a fresh attempt to consider and trace the earliest history of these midland Uí Néill dynasties.

While there are many uncertainties concerning the Uí Néill pedigree at this early period, it seems clear that there were very close personal relationships between northern and midland

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1 For example, see: *CGH* 140b18, 318b62 where we are told that Clann Cholmáin and Síl nÁedo Sláine meet at Diarmait.

2 Colmán Bec is also given as Díarmait's son in the fourteenth-century TCD MS H.2.7. (1298) 29a31. He does not feature in any earlier MSS. A fourth son, MaelDúin, appears only in the Book of Ballymote and it is from him, we are told, that Muinter Maeldúin of Clonmacnoise descended. See: RIA MS P 12 f49r10. This text mistakenly locates the descendants of Áed Sláine in Mide, so we must be suspicious of any other information provided.

3 *ATig* [763].

4 Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, '*Nebulae discutiuntur?* The Emergence of Clann Cholmáin, sixth-eighth centuries', Alfred P. Smyth (ed), *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin 2000) 97. See also: Paul Byrne, *Certain Southern Uí Néill Kingdoms* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis UCD 2000) 148-50. Hence, not surprisingly, this suggestion is also found in: Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin and Paul Byrne, 'Prosopography I: Kings named in *Baile Chuinn Chetchathaig* and *The Airgialla Charter Poem*', Edel Bhreathnach (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005) 159-224: 215-17. See also the additional notes and corrigenda in Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* xvii where this idea is accepted, presumably derived from one or both of the above scholars.

members of the dynasty. It is quite possible that the name we shall be so concerned with, 'Colmán', was adopted by one midland branch in reference to their famous cousin, St Columba (d. 595); however, reconstructing how the form of this name developed is problematic. 'Colmán' appears to be a fusion of the Latin *columba,* ('dove'), with a typical Irish diminutive suffix, *-án.*[5] But because the Irish cluster /mb/ was not reduced to /m/ until the eighth or ninth centuries (the Old Irish period), the form 'Colmán' appears suspiciously late and out of place in the sixth century. One would normally expect further syncopation to produce *Colmbán and then *Colbán rather than our 'Colmán'.This led Ó Máille, in his study of the language of the *Annals of Ulster*, to argue that 'the spelling *Colmán* during the sixth and early seventh century is presumably due to late compiler [sic].'[6] Obviously it would have important implications for our study if 'Colmán' were a later formation and not contemporary with the time both Colmán Már and Bec are said to have flourished. But among the Ogam inscriptions, which long pre-date the Old Irish period, we do find the form COLOMAGNI (gen.). This form is itself problematic since linguists would expect to find *COLOMBAGNI.[7] Thurneysen's solution was to suggest that 'Colmán' contains British *mb* > *m*, an earlier sound change, though full assimilation was a rather long process.[8] Hence, if we can posit a form 'Colum' in British (deriving from Latin *columba*) which Irish borrowed from, we will solve both the problem of COLOMAGNI and 'Colmán'.[9] In short the form 'Colmán' need not be a later formation but could indeed be contemporary with the sixth-century floruits of our subjects.

There is also a tradition claiming that St. Columba was originally named Crimthann, a 'fox' or 'wolf'.[10] This was evidently of some embarrassment to later hagiographers as this 'name of ill-meaning' was considered 'unfitting save for evil folk'[11]. We can speculate that the saint abandoned his Irish name as he embarked on his religious career but crucially his floruit sits comfortably with the suggestion that his new religious name was subsequently adopted by midland royalty. The likelihood of this is strengthened by the possibility that Columba and Díarmait mac Cerbaill were close cousins.[12] We might now set out the annalistic evidence for the two Colmáns.

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5 Damian McManus, *A Guide to Ogam* (Maynooth 1991) 107. My thanks to Professor McManus for explaining the problems involved here. Needless to say any inaccuracies are entirely my responsibility.

6 Tomás Ó Máille, *The Language of the Annals of Ulster* (Manchester 1910) 92 n.4.

7 See Damian McManus, *A Guide to Ogam* 107, 113 and 179 n.37

8 See Rudolf Thurneysen, 'Colman Mac Leneni Und Senchan Torpeist', *ZCP* xix (1933) 209 and Kenneth Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh 1953 repr. Dublin 2004) 90-94.

9 The Old Irish name 'Columb', more commonly 'Colum', would then be a separate borrowing from *columba* directly or simply a spelling influenced by Latin *columba.*

10 See *CGSH,* §§ 661, 703.1 and 703.22 at 61, 79, 131 and 132 respectively. See also: *LL* vi l.1595.

11 A. O'Kelleher and G. Schoepperle (ed), *Betha Colaim Chille: Life of Columcille* (Urbana 1918 repr. Dublin 1994) §53 40-41.

12 This rests on the theory that Conall Cremthainne and Conall Gulban are duplicates. See Mac Shamhráin and Byrne, 'Prosopography I', 214-15. In Tírechán, Patrick encounters 'Conallum filium Neill'. Ludwig Bieler (ed), *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979) §10 (1) 132. That he is not identified any more specifically

The annalistic evidence[13] Key: Ulster Inisfallen Tigernach Roscrea

Colmán Már:

558 Iugulatio Colmain Moir mc. Diarmata in curru suo quem Dub Sloit hua Trena, do Cruithneachaib, iugulauit.
The slaying of Colmán Mór son of Diarmait in his chariot; Dub Sloit ua Trena of the Cruithnig slew him.

Colmán Már's sons:

594 Iugulacio Senchain maic Colmain moir
The killing of Senchán son of Colmán Mór

600 Iugulatio Suibne m. Colmaen Moer la hAedh Slane i mBri Dam for Suaniu, .i. riuulus
The killing of Suibne son of Colmán Mór by Áed Sláne on Brí Dam by the Suaine, that is a stream.

618 [...] iugulatio Fergusa filii Colmain Magni
The killing of Fergus son of Colmán Mór

621 Iugulatio Aengusa mc. Colmain Maghni, .i. regis nepotum Neill
The killing of Óengus son of Colmán Mór, namely the king of the Uí Néill.

Colmán Bec:

568 Fecht i nIardoman ..i. Hi Soil ⁊ in Ili, la Colman mBec m. nDiarmato ⁊ Conall mc. Comgaill rí Ulad
Colmán Bec son of Diarmait and Conall mac Comgaill, king of the Ulaid, made an

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allows for the idea that there was but one Conall originally. Though it should be said that two brothers with the same first name was not at all unknown in Early Christian Ireland. See Thomas Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i (2 vols Liverpool 2006) 75 n.2.

13 The translation is based on that provided by Thomas Charles-Edwards in his *Chronicle of Ireland*. There he has attempted to reconstruct the common source underlying all of our surviving annal texts. This *Chronicle* was begun and kept at the monastic community of Iona and contains contemporary records from perhaps as early as the mid sixth-century. See discussion of the Annals in Part 1 for further detail. We have several examples here showing how the *Chronicle* was subsequently subject to retrospective interpolation and elaboration. Sections from the *Annals of Inisfallen*, not included in Charles-Edwards's *Chronicle*, are taken from Seán Mac Airt's 1944 edition.

expedition into Iardoman, that is, into Soil and into Íle.

573 Bellum Feimhin ria Cairpre mac Cridain, rí Muman, in quo uictus est Colman Modicus filius Diarmado, a Muminensibus interfectus est . 7 ipse euasit. Inde est Cennach ⁊ Loch Cend hi Maig Femin de capitibus eorum qui in bello occissi sunt. Corpre mc. Fedlimthe m. Oengussa ro bris in cath. Loch Sílend ainm ind locha sein ar thús. Inde dixit Patricius:

Loch Sílend,
is mairg nod n-ib ara biad!
Ro llín Corpre di chennaib
conid crú co rice a grian.

The battle of Femen, won by Coirpre son of Crimthann, king of Munster, in which Colmán Becc son of Diarmait was defeated, slain by the Munstermen, but he himself escaped. Hence are Cennach and Loch Cenn in Mag Feimin, from the heads of those who were killed in the strife. Cairpre, son of Feidlimid son of Aengus, won the battle. Loch Sílenn was the name of that lake at first. Hence Patrick said:

Loch Sílenn,
Alas for him who drinks it with his food!
Cairpre has filled it with heads
So that it is gore to its bottom.

586 Occisio Baetain m. Ninnedho filii Duach filii Conaill Gulban, regis Temro. Cummaene m. Colmain 7 Cummaene m. Libraen filii Illannon m. Cerbaill occiderunt eum consilio Colmain parvi, .i. oc Leim ind Eich.
The killing of Báetán son of Ninnid son of Daui son of Conall Gulban, king of Tara. Cumméne son of Colmán and Cumméne son of Librén son of Illand son of Cerball killed him according to Colmán Becc's plan at Léim ind Eich

587 Bellum Bhealaig Doæthe in quo cecidit Colman Bec mc. Diarmato. Aedh m. Ainmirech uictor erat. Daigh m. Cairill obiit; 7 in quo cecidit Libraen m. Illanndon.
The battle of Belach Daithe, in which Colmán Becc son of Diarmait fell; Áed son of Ainmire was the victor; Daig son of Cairell died; and in this battle Librén son of Illand fell.

593 Uel hoc anno: cath Bheal*aig* Dhaite in quo cecidit Colman Beag mc. Diarmoda, a quo Clann Cholman, .i. H*ui* Maeil Eachlainn ⁊ ceteri. Aedh mc. Ainmiręch victor erat.

Or this year, the battle of Belach Daithe, in which fell Colmán Bec son of Diarmait, from whom are descended Clann Cholmáin i.e. the Uí Mhaeil Shechlainn, etc. Áed son of Ainmire was victor. [This entry is in a secondary hand in *AU*].

Colmán Bec's son (?):

628 Iugulatio Cummeni filii Colmain
The killing of Cuiméne son of Colmán

As we can see the annals simply record Colmán Már's death, the date of which is crucial to this debate.[14] He apparently predeceased his father by some margin and this early date is central to the theory of later genealogical contrivance mentioned at the outset.[15] If Colmán Már died in the 550s, his sons, particularly Fergus and Óengus, should have been at least in their sixties when they died in 618 and 621 respectively, whilst evidently 'still striving to establish themselves politically'.[16] In short, it has been suggested that they might better be regarded as sons of a single Colmán, to whom was later attached the epithet 'Bec', and who died, as we can see, in 587. This would have put them in their thirties or forties when they died. Mac Shamhráin views Colmán Már's obit with suspicion and considers it a later insertion and the man himself a 'hollow figure' and 'artificial creation'[17]. If we were to accept this idea of later contrivance then one might wonder why Clann Cholmáin traced themselves back to this hollow figure rather than to the actual Colmán. In short, why was the epithet 'Már' attached to the invented Colmán and not to the real one? One might

14 Colmán Már's death is in fact recorded two further times at *AU* 555.2 and *AU* 563.3. The first entry would appear to be a doublet of the second (reproduced above) while the third is not in the main hand of *AU*.

15 Ó Cróinín suggests that Colmán Már fell against the Cruithin while 'doubtless attempting to avenge his father's death'. This is contradicted by the chronology of events found in the annals where Colmán Már predeceases his father. Also, while Díarmait fell against Áed Dub of the Cruithni, described as 'king of the Ulstermen' in *AT*, Colmán fell against Dub Sloit of the Cruithnig, a term which usually refers to the Picts. See *AU* 565.1; *AT* 564 [565]; Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Ireland, 400-800' in *NHI*, i p. 214. Díarmait's killer, Áed Dubh mac Suibhne, features memorably in Adomnan's *Life of Columba* where Columba dismisses his supposed repentance and ordination as a farce and predicts that he would 'return like a dog to his vomit, and he will again be a bloody killer, and at last, pierced with a spear, will fall from wood into water, and die by drowning.' See Alan Orr Anderson & Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (ed), *Adomnan's Life of Columba* (London 1961) 280-83. For a consideration of Áed's portrayal, see Jean-Michel Picard, 'The strange death of Guaire mac Áedáin', Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach and Kim McCone (ed), *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in honour of Professor James Carney* (Maynooth 1989) 372-73.

16 Mac Shamhráin, '*Nebulae discutiuntur?*' 89.

17 *Ibid* 90.

suggest that the issue of seniority played a part, i.e. that Colmán Már had to be seen as the eldest brother and hence his was the invented and earlier obit.[18]

Before considering this further, we might firstly turn to those annal entries referring to Colmán Bec. An initial problem with the 568 entry is the additional information found in the *Annals of Roscrea.* The Conall mentioned with Colmán Bec was not in fact king of the Ulaid but was rather king of Dál Ríata.[19] Also, Íle was an important part of Dál Ríata raising questions about the nature of their expedition if this was actually the destination.[20] While 'Iardoman' is generally taken to represent the Southern Inner Hebrides, it should be pointed out that it was susceptible to corruption. In the corresponding *Annals of Inisfallen* entry we find:

AI 568 Cath i nArd Tómmáin la Colmán Bec mc. Ailella m. Comgaill.

Rather than seeing this as providing us with extra, more specific information about the expedition as suggested by Mac Shamhráin, it seems preferable to follow the editors of *AI* and regard the entry as thoroughly corrupt.[21] A further complication stems from the fact that the *AU* entry is entirely in the vernacular, something very unusual at this early period.[22] Though speculative, considering the early date of the entry one possibility is that it actually records an expedition by Conall and Colmán Bec to the western part of the territory of the Damnonii, later the British kingdom of Strathclyde centred on Dumbarton (Ail Chluaithe/Alclud). This destination would make more sense from the context.

Our second entry for Colmán Bec, recording the battle of Feimhin in 573, is equally problematic. While the most basic entry simply records Colmán Bec's defeat and escape, in some of the other collections his opponent is identified as the king of Munster, Cairpre mac Cridain. *AI* is alone in claiming that Colmán Bec was killed in this battle.[23] More generally, the account of the

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18 Colmán Már is certainly regarded as the eldest of the three brothers in later literary material where the chronology is, perhaps not surprisingly, utterly implausible. See *Aided Diarmata* in Standish H. O'Grady (ed), *Silva Gadelica* (2 vols. London 1892) i 74-75, ii 78-79.

19 He was the person who had, according to some sources at least, granted the island of Iona to Columba. See *AU* 574.2 and Anderson & Anderson, *Adomnan's Life of Columba* pp 30-1. Although Bede credited the Picts with the donation. See B. Colgrave & R.A.B. Mynors (eds), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford 1969) 220-3.

20 See Mac Shamhráin and Byrne, 'Prosopography I', p. 216 where the islands are taken to be Seil and Islay. For further references see W. J. Watson, *The history of the Celtic place-names of Scotland* (Edinburgh 1926) 41.

21 'Colman and Conall fought a battle at Ard Tommain, apparently on Islay'. Mac Shamhráin, '*Nebulae discutiuntur?*', 90.

22 While there might well be Irish elements in early entries, to record names for example, entries appearing entirely in the vernacular account for less than four percent in the *Annals of Ulster* for the first two hundred and seventy years or so. See David Dumville, 'Latin and Irish in the *Annals of Ulster,* A.D. 431-1050' in D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick and D. Dumville (eds), *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in memory of Kathleen Hughes* (Cambridge 1982) 323.

23 Further confirmation that Colman Bec's death did not originally occur under this year can be found at *AI* 589. 'Quies

battle in *AI* seems suspiciously elaborate, particularly as this text is well known for its extreme laconicism. It would appear to include *Dindshenchas* material, claiming that Loch Cenn in Mag Femen received its name from the number of heads thrown into it following the battle.

Loch Sílend,	Loch Sílenn,
is mairg nod n-ib ara biad!	Alas for him who drinks it with his food!
Ro llín Corpre di chennaib	Cairpre has filled it with heads
conid crú co rice a grian.	So that it is gore to its bottom[24]

In the *Dindshenchas* collection proper, lines quite similar to these appear although part of a far more elaborate piece.

Loch Cenn, cid na cinn diatá?	Loch Cenn—what are the heads whence
Adfíatar a iarmata,	its name comes? let its traditions be
ó docher la Cairpri trá	recounted, since Colman mór son of
Colmán mór mac Diarmata.	Diarmait fell by the hand of Cairpre.
Colmán mac Diarmata gnó	Colman son of comely Diarmait, who
rogab Érinn cen íargnó:	ruled Erin without annoyance,
dorat a lecht, líth nad gó,	put his grave (no cheating treasure) in
i Maig Femin dia tig-ló	Mag Femin, at his dying day.
[...]	[...]
Noí cét cenn, ní comdáil gann,	Nine hundred heads- no meagre share-
im chenn Colmáin na corr-lann,	with the head of Colman, wielder of pointed
Cairpre Caisil, coimnert cing,	blades, did Cairpre of Cashel, stalwart
dobert for linn Locha Cenn.	prince, cast upon the waters of Loch Cenn.
[...]	[...]
Loch Cend,	Loch Cenn,
Mairg doimir for a bruach;	woe to him that rows along its shore
dolin Cairpri do Chinnu e	Cairpre filled it with heads, till it is,
condad cru e sis isuas	all blood beneath and above.[25]

Significantly, it is Colmán Már who falls at the battle of Femen according to the *Dindshenchas*. This entire process of elaboration might all be traceable to something as simple as a place-name. While the most famous Mag Femen lay near Cashel, there was a lesser known Femen in Brega.[26] It seems probable that the shorter annal entry is the more accurate, recording a battle in Brega where Colmán Bec suffered defeat against an unknown opponent and escaped.[27] But due to

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Dega m. Cairill m. Colmáin Bic m. Diarmata.' The editors suggest that this was originally Colman's obit but that the scribe has abbreviated '*7 mors*' to '*m*'. Whether this was simple error or a deliberate decision is unclear. Cf: *AU* 587.

24 *AI* 573.

25 See Edward Gwynn (ed), *The Metrical Dindshenchas* iv (Dublin 1924) 258-59. There is also a shorter item in: Whitley Stokes (ed), 'The prose tales in the Rennes *Dindsenchas,* published with translation and Notes', *Revue Celtique* xvi (1894) 31-83, 135-167, 269-312: 164-65.

26 *Onom.*, 408-09.

27 It has been claimed that Colmán Bec was in conflict with Báetán son of Ninnid at Femen, someone he would clash with later. MacShamhrain and Byrne, 'Prosopography I', 216. I can find no evidence to support this.

the more famous Femen in Munster, later annalists added and developed a quite elaborate account. The Munster based *Annals of Inisfallen* not surprisingly gave the king of the province credit for defeating Colmán Bec.[28] Perhaps we can see this tradition reach its culmination in the *Dindshenchas* proper as the king of Munster is pitted not against the lesser Colmán, but rather his more illustrious brother, Colmán Már.[29]

Our third Colmán Bec entry, at 586, records the death of Báetán of the Cenél Conaill who was killed in an attack instigated by Colmán Bec. Báetán's father had defeated Colmán's father in 561 so this was the continuation of a long running feud.[30] It is possible, but not certain, that the obit of 'Cummeni filii Colmain' at 628 is that of the 'Cummaene' who carried out his father's bidding in 586. There is no other record of this individual in the annals. Two short strands of genealogy in TCD MS H.2.7. record a 'Cummaeni' and 'Cummaene' respectively, but he is described as a son of Colmán Már, another example of the confusion surrounding these individuals in the genealogies.[31] Incidentally, the spirit of co-operation between the descendants of Díarmait mac Cerbaill and those of Illand mac Cerball did not last long as they are recorded clashing violently by the early seventh century.[32] As we can see, Colmán Bec was killed the following year by another Cenél Conaill dynast, Áed son of Ainmire.[33] The second notice of his death, at 593, is in a secondary hand in *AU* but clearly shows the longstanding confusion about this early section of the family tree as the Ua Maelechlainn's are traced back to Colmán Bec. The above material is the sum total of annal entries directly involving Colmán Már and Colmán Bec and is, quite obviously, meager in the extreme. While some may be of genuine antiquity, there are question marks over several of the entries. To

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28 See: Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Topographical Notes-II: Mag Femin, Femen, and some early annals', *Ériu,* xxii (1971) 97-99. Also, see the discussion of the Life of St Cainnech of Achad Bó below. In the Life, the Saint comes upon a cross marking the grave of Colmán Bec which was 'in regionibus Neill', again telling against the tradition that he fell in Munster against a southern king.

29 Recently the battle of Feimhin has been described as 'an early indication of Uí Néill ambitions in the south'. Ó Cróinín, 'Ireland, 400-800', 223. It probably does not warrant such emphasis.

30 Various identifications of 'leim ind Eich' have been suggested but there are numerous places, widely dispersed, with this name. See *Onom.,* 482.

31 See: H29a14. This material will be discussed in greater detail below.

32 *AU* 622.1.

33 Áed's father had also faced Colmán's father at Cúl Dreimne. There is a great deal of confusion surrounding Báetán and Áed. The evidence from the annals is scanty in the extreme and it is difficult to establish which of them was the more powerful in the 570s and 580s. Part of this problem relates to the convention of Druim Ceatt. See *AU* 575.1. It is Áed who is said to have attended the famous meeting and Báetán is 'conspicuously absent.' Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* 110. This suggests that Áed was the paramount Cenél Conaill dynast at the time of the convention. But it has been suggested that the convention itself has been misplaced in the annals and took place somewhat later, *c.*590, i.e. after Báetán's death in 586 (obit reproduced above). See Richard Sharpe, *Life of St Columba* 312-14 n.204; Anderson & Anderson, *Adomnan's Life of Columba* 32-35, 88-9, 102-105; https://www.cs.tcd.ie/Dan.McCarthy/chronology/synchronisms/Edition_4/K_trad/Synch_tables/s0566-0595.htm; Further confusion surrounding the death of Colmán Bec can be found in the largely ninth-century *Baile in Scáil* where we find mention of 'Colmán Mór mac Díarmato' under the reign of Suibne Menn. A battle site mentioned, 'Cath Dathe', seems similar to the 'Bellum Doæthe' we find in the annals at 587. However the text's claims seem chronologically impossible as Suibne Menn lived in the seventh century. See Kevin Murray (ed), *Baile in Scáil:The Phantom's Frenzy* (Dublin 2004) 41, 59.

consider this issue further, we must now turn to consider evidence which was certainly compiled at a later date.

Firstly we might consider *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* (*BCC*). This text belongs to a specific genre of Irish literature and purports to record a prophecy listing the successors of Conn Cétcathach, legendary king of Tara.[34] Though only surviving in late MSS, this is our earliest Tara king-list and is generally thought to date from the reign of Fínsnechta Fledach (675-95), though it possibly includes additions from the early eighth century.[35] Fínsnechta belonged to the Brega-based Síl nÁedo Sláine dynasty, close cousins but bitter rivals of Clann Cholmáin. While displaying various biases of its own, *BCC* is significant both because of its great age and because it contradicts the 'official' succession to the Tara kingship as found in later Middle Irish king-lists. Though neither Colmán Már nor Colmán Bec are admitted to *BCC,* the inclusion of one 'Óengus' is significant for our purposes. It seems probable that the individual referred to, who is regarded as a king of Tara, was a son of Colmán.[36]

In the annals, there are only two entries featuring Óengus- his obit, reproduced above, and the note of a battle between himself and a Síl nÁedo Sláine dynast.[37]

> *AU* 612 Bellum Odbae re nOengus m. Colmain in quo ceci*dit* Conall Laegh Bregh filius Aedho Slane
> The battle of Odbae won by Óengus son of Colmán, in which Conall Lóeg Breg son of Áed Sláne fell.

This victory over Conall of Brega can firstly be seen as yet another episode in the ongoing violence between Clann Cholmáin and Síl nÁedo Sláine. But the description of Óengus as 'king of the Uí Néill' on his death does not sit well with his inclusion in *BCC.* The title 'King of the Uí Néill' is found attached to midland kings in the eighth-century annals when the Uí Néill overkingship was held by the Northern Uí Néill.[38] In that context it represents a midland deputyship. Perhaps Óengus was an early holder of such a position. Or perhaps he had been able, albeit briefly, to challenge for

34 Knowledge of which, was an essential part of the *filid's* repertoire. See Proinsias MacCana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin 1980) 56.

35 See my discussion of Kinglists in Part 1 for further detail.

36 See Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray (ed), '*Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig:* Edition', eadem (ed), *The Kingship and landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005) 78, 84-85. In an earlier edition of the text Gerard Murphy took 'Óengus' as an epithet of the following Domnall, i.e. 'Domnall shall be a glorious Óengus', but both the more recent edition and scholarship prefer to see a simple list with 'Óengus' representing a separate individual. See G. Murphy, 'On the dates of two sources used in Thurneysen's Heldensage', *Ériu* xvi (1952) 148; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 492.

37 According to the king list 'Ríg Uisnig' in the *Book of Leinster*, Óengus reigned for seven years, 'Domnall m*ac* Mur*chada* ros marb.' *LL,* i 196. This is evidently a mistake as this Domnall, i.e. Domnall Midi, lived in the eighth century and died in 763. See *AU* 763.1; Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 131 n.3.

38 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 480-81. Most sources are agreed that Suibne Menn of the Cenél nEógain was king of Tara at this point.

the kingship of Tara itself, as suggested by his inclusion in *BCC*.

The context in which *BCC* was composed may be important in considering the inclusion of Óengus. Fínsnechta has been described as 'a highly influential outsider.'[39] He emerged having faced down the opposition of rivals within the Síl nÁedo Sláine and the commencement of his reign was marked by him slaying Cenn Faelad son of Blathmac in 675. Both Cenn Faelad and his brother Sechnusach are regarded as kings of Tara by the annals and later Middle Irish king-lists. But neither features in *BCC*, which while biased against the Cenél Conaill in general terms, also reflects this more localised political situation. While Óengus of the Clann Cholmáin had clashed with a son of Áed Sláne, this was more than sixty years, at least, before the text's compilation. Also, it was not one of Fínsnechta's direct ancestors who had fallen by Óengus. Perhaps then the compiler of *BCC*, looking for someone with whom to back-fill his list, chose Óengus as a well-known and powerful midland king who, crucially, would be a less controversial inclusion than Fínsnechta's immediate predecessors.[40]

Whatever about the actual position held by Óengus, establishing the identity of his father brings us back to the central problem of Clann Cholmáin's earliest history. As we have seen he is described in his annal obit as 'mc. Colmain Mag*hi*' but this is usually regarded as a mistake because he is given as a son of Colmán Bec in the Coílle Fallomuin genealogies.[41] In fact, the relevant genealogies are far from clear. In the earliest MSS, dating from the twelfth century, there is no coverage whatsoever for this early period of the Coílle Fallomuin pedigree.[42] In later MSS, from the fourteenth century, the Coílle Fallomuin genealogy does stretch back to the earliest period but there are significant inconsistencies and contradictions. A piece of evidence which has been used in support of the theory of later invention is the genealogy found in the mid-fourteenth century TCD MS H.2.7.[43]

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39 Edel Bhreathnach, '*Níell Cáich úa nasctar géill:* The Political Context of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*', eadem (ed), *The Kingship and landscape of Tara* 59.

40 Brian Lacey's radical suggestion that the designation 'Uí Néill' only applied to what we now term 'southern Uí Néill' before the eighth century, also has implications for the question of Óengus' status. But since a full discussion here would require a significant and not very profitable diversion, we will return to this idea in the next chapter.

41 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 492 n.100. Incidentally, his brothers Suibne and Fergus are also described as sons of Colmán Már in the Annals. See obits reproduced above. Suibne is recorded as a son of Colmán Már in the Clann Cholmáin genealogies which, because they are strictly linear, do not include Fergus anywhere.

42 See: Appendix 2; *CGH,* 144 c 47 (Rawl.B.502). There is no Cáille Follomain genealogy in *LL.*

43 The text presented below has been produced from the MS with the help of Donnchadh Ó Corráin's unpublished transcript.

MS H.2.7.(1298)

H 25a3:	H 29a31:
	CENEL COLMAIN bic.
	qui prius magnus fuit.
Maile Tule meic	Maili Tule meic
Faelcon Findmona meic	Faelcon meic
Maili Uamai m.	Mail Umai meic
Oengusa meic	Oengusa meic
Colmain Moir	Colman Bic meic
	Diarmata

The first strand (H 25a3) follows a full Clann Cholmáin genealogy very similar to that found in the *CGH* MSS. The second also follows directly on from material headed 'CLANND COLMAIN MOIR'. However, as we can see, this MS contains what are essentially two identical strands of genealogy but which include different Colmáns. The Latin line after the heading over the second strand is taken to mean 'who was previously (the) great.' This, it has been claimed, alerts us to the 'spurious nature' of the whole tradition.[44] If we were to take Óengus as a son of Colmán Már, then Colmán Bec would appear a little isolated, cut off in the genealogies at least, from his supposed descendants.[45] Before considering this any further, we shall firstly return to consider the other early evidence available to us, beginning with the saints' lives.

The earliest lives, those of Brigit and Patrick, contain nothing relevant for this particular investigation. Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, while written *c.*700, and whose subject was a contemporary of those under discussion here, is primarily concerned with Díarmait mac Cerball and rather less so with the succeeding generation. As with the lives of Brigit and Patrick, there is no mention of Colmán, Már or Bec, in Adomnán's Life.

But Colmán Bec does feature in the *Vita Sancti Cainnici,* tentatively dated to the eighth century.[46] According to Mac Shamhráin, his appearance and Colmán Már's complete absence from hagiographical works is still more evidence that Colmán Bec is a 'far more substantial figure.'[47] In the first of two relevant sections, Colmán Bec offends the saint Áed mac Bricc by refusing to release a nun he is holding captive. Cainnech decides to come to Áed's assistance and, on hearing

44 Byrne, *Certain* 148. Byrne omits the word 'prius' in his transcription of the phrase.

45 Colmán Bec's only son as recorded in the annals was Cummane, who as we saw was active in 586. As mentioned earlier, it is perhaps his obit we find at *AU* 628.5.

46 Plummer *Vitae,* 152-69, esp §§ xxvii, xxxi at 162-64; Heist *Vitae,* 182-98, esp §§ 32, 38 at 190-92. See Sharpe's discussion of the so-called 'O'Donohue Group'. Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives: An Introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Guilford, 1991) 297-339.

47 Mac Shamhráin, *'Nebulae discutiuntur?',* 90.

this, Colmán Bec retreats to an island to avoid censure. This island, or perhaps crannóg, is described as located 'in stagni insula Ros' and 'in stagno Rosso' in the respective editions of the text.[48] The crannóg appears to have been located in Coílle Fallomuin territory.[49] Colmán then hides the rafts necessary to reach the island from the saint. God intervenes by revealing their whereabouts to the saint who on reaching the island finds a still recalcitrant Colmán. However, Colmán then has a quite traumatic vision involving a fiery charioteer before dropping down dead. The saint revives him and, suitably impressed, Colmán submits and promises to make good for his offences. In the second relevant section of the *Vita Sancti Cainnici,* the saint comes upon a wayside cross marking Colmán Bec's resting place.[50] He prays for the dead king's soul and saves him from hell.

The first of these two episodes is strikingly similar to one found in another eighth-century Life, the *Vita Sancti Aedi.* As we saw, Áed mac Bricc makes a brief guest appearance in Cainnech's Life, the focus shifting to the latter saint once he turns up at the crannóg. In his own Life Áed is again found attempting to secure the release of a prisoner held captive by a midland king on a crannóg. Though the king is not named, the action seems to have taken place at Loch Lene near Fore in Co. Westmeath.[51] As in the life of Cainnech, the king attempts to prevent the saint reaching him on his crannóg but is again bested. This time Áed simply walks across the water to the island. The king, suitably impressed, releases the prisoner. The lives of Áed and Cainnech are quite obviously related, both containing a virtually identical encounter with the king on his crannóg. The action, in both cases, seems to be set in Coílle Fallomuin territory. The church of Killare, belonging to the community of Áed mac Bricc, is located about forty kilometers south-west of Fore. While the main church of Cainnech, Aghaboe, is located much farther south, there is a possibility that the community of St Cainnech had a church in Coílle Fallomuin territory also.[52] Hence it seems possible that both of these lives are making a quite pointed and specific statement. The hagiographer(s) may well be asserting the rights of these churches in the area perhaps in response to pressure from the secular rulers, the Coílle Fallomuin.

We should also note that the author of the *Vita Sancti Cainnici* had access to the earlier *Life*

48 Heist *Vitae,* § 32 at 190; Plummer *Vitae,* § xxvii at 162-163.

49 For the 14th September the Félire Óengusso has one 'Coeman Brecc'. In the notes we find the elaboration '.i. Caeman Brecc o Rus ech i Caille Follamin im-Mide.' See: Whitley Stokes (ed), *Felire Oengusso Celi De: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* (London 1905) 194, 206-09. It is possible therefore that the location mentioned in Cainnech's *Life* might be in the area later associated with the Caille Folloman. See Paul Walsh, *Leaves of History* 49; Paul Byrne, *Certain,* 145 and *AFM* i, 238 n. 'z' . The probability that it is Cáille Folloman territory being described is increased because the episode is so obviously related to the encounter in the *Vita Sancti Aedi* (see below) where the location is specified.

50 As noted above, located 'in regionibus Neill'.

51 We find 'insula stagni Lemdin' and 'insulam stagni Lebayn' in the respective editions. See Heist *Vitae,* § 31 at 176, i.e. Loch Lébind with *b/m* and *din* for *ind*; Plummer *Vitae,* § xxiii at 41. See also *Onom.,* 501.

52 'The ruins of Cainneach's little oratory are still pointed out in the townland of Kilkenny [...] Near the ruins of Cainneach's chapel still springs a well called *Tobar Chainnigh.*' See John O'Donovan, 'The Ordinance Survey Letters' in Paul Walsh, *The Placenames of Westmeath* (Dublin 1957) 10-11.

of Columba by Adomnán. While the saints were on very friendly terms in that earlier life,[53] Columba's sanctity is downplayed in the later Life and it is Cainnech who appears in the most favourable light, often occupying the high moral ground. It has been suggested that the shift reflects an increasingly strained relationship between the communities of Columba and Cainnech in the eighth century. Máire Herbert has suggested that the Life can be dated even more precisely and that the inclusion of Colmán Bec is a reaction to quite specific events recorded in the annals.[54] Following the death in 763 of Domnall, the first Clann Cholmáin king to secure the Uí Néill overkingship, the dynasty was thrown into some turmoil as two of his sons struggled for dominance. She suggests that this upheaval allowed 'for a brief interlude of prominence for Colmán Bec's family', specifically one individual, Folloman.

> *AU* 766.2 Iugul*atio* Follamhain m. Con Congalt regis Midi dolose.
> The treacherous killing of Follaman son of Cú Chongalt, king of Mide.

While his killer is not named, the wording of the entry states that Follomon's death involved treachery. As Herbert says, because 'Donnchad son of Domnall succeeded to the kingship thereafter, there is at least the suspicion of his involvement in the killing.'[55]According to this interpretation, the Life can be regarded as a reaction by the community of Cainnech to this treacherous killing. The Columban community, closely allied to the Clann Cholmáin, is the main focus of criticism. They stand accused of 'placing politics before principle' and of having lost their 'moral compass'.[56] The murder of Follomon, which 'must have been widely deplored' led directly to the 'representation of Follomon's ancestor Colmán Bec' in the Life.[57] This historical context leads Herbert to propose a date range for the compilation of the Life of 766-780.[58]

But there appear to be a number of problems with this interpretation.[59] The assumption has been made by Herbert that Follomon was the most powerful midland king on his death, however this was not necessarily the case. It is far from clear whether the family of Colmán Bec really came to prominence during this short time following Domnall's death. Folloman had certainly been around for quite a while but would appear to have held a position subordinate to Clann Cholmáin kings throughout his career. We will consider him further and the significance of his position in

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53 For example, *VSC,* 110-13.

54 Máire Herbert, 'The *Vitae Columbae* and Irish Hagiography: A study of *Vita Cainnechi*', John Carey, Máire Herbert and Pádraig Ó Riain (ed), *Studies in Irish Hagiography: Saints and Scholars* (Cornwall 2001) 39.

55 Herbert, 'The *Vitae Columbae* and Irish Hagiography', 38.

56 Herbert, 'The *Vitae Columbae* and Irish Hagiography', 38. The alliance between Clann Cholmáin and Columban community was often of a very worldly nature. For example in 776 the community of Durrow supported Donnchad militarily against the forces of Munster. *AU* 776.11.

57 Herbert, 'The *Vitae Columbae* and Irish Hagiography', 38.

58 Herbert, 'The *Vitae Columbae* and Irish Hagiography', 39.

59 See T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Saints' cults and their constituencies', *Ériu* 54 (2004) 99-100.

subsequent chapters focussed on the eighth century.[60] At this point we need only note that Herbert's suggestion that the inclusion of Colmán Bec in the Life stems from the slaying of Follomon and is part of a wider critique of the Clann Cholmáin, but more importantly their allies in the Columban church, is problematic. In addition, Colmán Bec's portrayal in the life would also tend to tell against such a suggestion. While it has been claimed that he is portrayed 'in a worldly but ultimately redeemable light', he does, we must remember, have to die before coming to his senses and being reconciled to Cainnech.[61] One wonders whether Colmán might not have been portrayed a little more sympathetically if the community of Cainnech were attempting to illustrate their solidarity with his family and with Follomon specifically. His portrayal might rather reflect the community's desire to reinforce their position in the territory of Coílle Fallomuin and stress Colman Bec's subservience to the saint. While we might therefore question the very specific date range suggested by Herbert for the life, the broad eighth-century date as proposed by Sharpe would not appear to be affected. As a result this *Vita Sancti Cainnici* remains a valuable source for this discussion. Whatever the reason behind Colmán Bec's inclusion, the crucial point is that he does feature in the probably eighth-century *Vita Sancti Cainnici* and may also be the unnamed midland king who features in the closely related *Vita Sancti Aedi*. This has implications for the proposed genealogical contrivance proposed by Byrne and Mac Shamhrain and outlined earlier.

Another eighth-century text with still greater implications for this discussion is the *Airgialla Charter Poem* (*ACP*). This text has been described as defining the 'relationship of the Airgialla to the Uí Néill'.[62] Though clearly subordinate, the Airgialla enjoyed a privileged position relative to the Uí Néill probably owing more to their importance as providers of military service rather than any genuine genealogical link. The *ACP* defines and discusses those services owed by the Airgialla but also strongly emphasises the limits to Uí Néill power and outlines the various conditions on which their service was dependent. The poem seems to present the Airgialla's perspective on the relationship and most importantly, in defining those Uí Néill branches entitled to service, they are limited to five kindreds.

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60 He may even feature in the Guarantor-list to *Cáin Adomnáin.* See: Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor list of *Cáin Adomnáin,* 697', *Peritia* 1 (1982) 181 §80. For discussion see *ibid,* 210-11.

61 Mac Shamhráin, '*Nebulae discutiuntur?',* 90.

62 Thomas Charles-Edwards, *'The Airgíalla Charter Poem:* The Legal Content', Edel Bhreathnach (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 100. Arguing from a historical perspective, the second quarter of the eighth century has been suggested as the period of the poem's composition, See Edel Bhreathnach, '*The Airgíalla Charter Poem:* The Political Context', eadem (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 99; Charles-Edwards, *'The Airgíalla Charter Poem',* 123. 'The linguistic evidence, however, cannot support a date much earlier than 800AD.' Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray (ed), '*The Airgíalla Charter Poem:* Edition', Edel Bhreathnach (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 126.

Áed Allán Áed mac Ainmerech at-n-amrammar
Áed Sláine síthe ata soírem samlammar.
Cland insin Conaill Chremthainne caín íarmarto
cland Cholmáin Bic clann Cholmáin Móir maic Díarmato.

Áed Allán, Áed mac Ainmerech let us marvel at him,
Áed Sláine of peace who are the noblest whom we compare.
Then the descendants of Conall Cremthainne, fair the prosperity,
the descendants of Colmán Bec, the descendants of Colmán Mór mac Diarmato.[63]

As we can see, both the descendants of Colmán Már and Colmán Bec are included in the *ACP.* Leaving aside the proposed genealogical contrivance for a moment, the inclusion of Colmán Bec appears baffling as the Coílle Fallomuin were a relatively minor political force. To be counted amongst the five kindreds requires evidence that they had enjoyed, at some stage at least, authority over branches of the Uí Néill other than their own and that they might therefore be in a position to claim the rights as outlined in the poem.[64] There are few people who fit the bill. One potential candidate would be Óengus, discussed above. His description as 'king of the Uí Néill' in the annals and his inclusion in *BCC,* while difficult to interpret, suggests he exercised significant power. The only other obvious candidate descended from Colmán Bec is Follomon (d.766). A recent analysis of the *ACP* suggests it was composed in the 730s to reflect an agreement between a northern Uí Néill king and the Airgíalla. However that agreement 'had to be made to endure even when the Southern Uí Néill were dominant.'[65] While the evidence suggests Follomon was never the most important midland Uí Néill king, despite his grand title 'king of Mide', there is a chance that at the time of the *ACP's* composition he was regarded as sufficiently powerful for his ancestor, Colmán Bec, to be counted among the 'Five Kindreds'.

Returning to the proposed genealogical contrivance, Mac Shamhráin argues that 'the line of Folloman, as kings of Meath, were important enough to be included in the schema as descendants of Díarmait son of Cerball-but not on the same terms as Domnall's line, which was now supplying kings of Tara.'[66] The contrivance theory does seem strongest when it is linked to the seemingly new title of 'king of Mide' and the hierarchical, tiered organisation of midland kingship implied by it. In short, the idea that an increasingly powerful Clann Cholmáin set-up their kinsmen as kings of Mide under their authority and that this was accompanied by a new genealogical rationalisation where Coílle Fallomuin were linked back to a lesser Colmán is quite appealing.

But a major stumbling block to this theory is presented by the rationale behind the *ACP*

63 Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray (ed), '*The Airgíalla Charter Poem:* Edition', 130-31.
64 Charles-Edwards, *'The Airgialla Charter Poem',* 107.
65 Charles-Edwards, *'The Airgialla Charter Poem',* 123.
66 Mac Shamhráin, '*Nebulae discutiuntur?',* 97.

itself.[67] If the purpose of the genealogical contrivance had been to present Colmán Bec as a foil for his more illustrious brother, then why grant his descendants admission to such a significant document as the *ACP* and so soon after that fabrication had taken place? In the genealogy Colmán Bec is lesser, according to the theory, to represent the eighth-century reality. He is not however a lesser figure in *ACP,* arguably a more potent textual vehicle than any genealogy. In short, in the *ACP* he *is* included on the same terms as Domnall's line. If, rather than Folloman, the compiler of the poem had Óengus in mind as an example of a king warranting his descendant's inclusion, then he was, of course, regarded as a son of Colmán Bec in the eighth century. Composed from an Airgíalla perspective, there seems to be little reason why a greater and lesser Colmán would be admitted unless they were recognised as distinct by the compiler. For the compiler to admit a grouping of recent creation into this document and in so doing grant them potential power over the Airgíalla seems quite unlikely.

The evidence from the *Banshenchus* has also been cited to support the theory of fabrication. For Mac Shamhráin, the 'coincidence that Banshenchus tradition assigns both siblings mothers from the dynasty of the Conmaicne further strengthens the argument in favour of genealogical contrivance.'[68] But this statement requires significant qualification due to the confusion evident in the source. While there are two women, Lasair and Brea, described as mothers of Colmán Már and Bec respectively, and who are both described as being of the Conmaicne, there are in fact several other women listed as their mothers across the collection. Rather than seeing the Conmaicne association as suspicious, more obvious is the utter confusion regarding these early figures. Far from being straightforward the *Banshenchus* evidence is as follows.

	Mother of Colmán Már	Mother of Colmán Bec
Metrical[69]:	Mugain or Erc	Brea
Prose[70]:	Eithne[71] (Earc in *UM*) or Lasair	Brea

The contrast between the consistency in the treatment of Colman Bec with the utter confusion surrounding Colmán Már is marked. Overall the *Banshenchas* does present Colmán Bec's parentage in a much more consistent, plausible way than that of Colmán Már.

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67 F.J. Byrne considered the inclusion of Colmán Bec in the *ACP* as 'particularly interesting' because 'no member of his dynasty ever attained the high-kingship', but he did not pursue the matter further. As noted earlier, in the revised reprint of *IKHK* he adopts the position that 'Colmán Bec was probably originally identical with Colmán Már' the distinction between the two 'a reflection of eighth-century politics.' Byrne, *Irish kings and High-kings* xvii.

68 Mac Shamhráin, *'Nebulae discutiuntur?',* 90.

69 M. Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 305, 330; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* (unpublished M.A. dissertation UCG 1977) §§154-59 at 118-19, 188-89.

70 M. Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234:180-81; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis UCG 1980) §§ 290-95, at 242-44, 361-63.

71 But this Eithne is also given as both Áed Sláine's wife and his son Blathmac's wife a little farther on in the text.

When all of the evidence is considered and the individual sources are weighted appropriately, there appear to be several serious arguments against the contrivance theory. Those arguing for a single original Colmán have not thus far adequately considered the two O'Donohue lives, that of Cainnech and Áed mac Bricc, or the *ACP,* texts dateable to the eighth century. While Mac Shamhráin mentions Colmán Bec's appearance in the *Vita Sancti Cainnici,* no consideration is given to the implications of the date of the *Vita* for the overarching theory.[72] Mac Shamhráin makes no mention whatsoever of the *ACP,* a text which poses the most serious obstacle to his theory. While Paul Byrne does so, it is only to comment that 'the earliest known reference to 'Colman Mar' and 'Colman Bec' is to be found in the poem on the Airgialla', without any further discussion of the implications.[73] The eighth-century evidence must be given its due, which has not been the case thus far. In contrast, perhaps too much emphasis has been placed on both the contradictory genealogical material and also the chronological issues thrown up by the annal entries. In terms of the former, Paul Byrne's reading of the note attached to the H.2.7 genealogy, while reasonable enough in itself, must be placed in context. The phrase 'qui prius magnus fuit' could be read as 'who was previously (the) great', but we cannot be confident that this alerts us to the 'spurious nature' of the tradition of distinct Colmáns.[74] Confusion and contradiction characterise the genealogical material in general, something which is clear from the following entry, which makes no mention of any contrivance, and which can be found on the folio directly preceding that which Byrne cites from:

> Tri meic Diarmata: Colman Mar 7 Colman Bec 7 Aed Slane.[75]

This statement cannot be regarded as a crucial piece of evidence in considering the late sixth century either, but it does highlight the confusion and contradiction which charaterises this source. In the opening paragraph of his article, Mac Shamhráin notes that the 'genealogical picture [...] is far from clear.'[76] This is followed by a perfectly reasonable comment that while late eighth-century levels may have survived in some of the genealogies, they become 'progressively less reliable as one moves back beyond the middle of the seventh century.' Beyond this there would 'be more scope for confusion' and 'greater opportunity for manipulation.'[77] It may not be necessary to emphasise the latter when the former explanation appears to deal satisfactorily with the evidence. Turning to the chronology of the annals, we might merely suggest that it may be unwise to place too much emphasis on the positioning of information under given years in the early annals, particularly for the sixth century. Also, as we have seen, there is reason to be sceptical about the antiquity of several

72 Mac Shamhráin, *'Nebulae discutiuntur?',* 90.
73 Byrne, *Certain* 148.
74 Byrne, *Certain* 148.
75 MS H.2.7 (1298) 28b.
76 Mac Shamhráin, *'Nebulae discutiuntur?',* 83.
77 Mac Shamhráin, *'Nebulae discutiuntur?',* 84.

of the entries. As a result the difference in annalistic coverage for the two Colmáns might not be as marked as has been suggested.[78]

While we might then seriously question the notion of an eighth-century genealogical contrivance, in reality we still know virtually nothing about the 'real' sixth-century individuals. In short, this period in Clann Cholmáin's history remains quite obscure, which comes as no great surprise. Rather, we are primarily dealing with later conceptions of that earliest history. In the eighth century two distinct, though evidently closely related midland groupings existed, Clann Cholmáin and Coílle Fallomuin and these were believed to be descended from distinct individuals, the brothers Colmán Már and Bec.

78 Mac Shamhráin, *'Nebulae discutiuntur?'*, 90.

2. Clann Cholmáin in the seventh century

We will begin this discussion by considering Conall son of Suibne (d.635) and his contemporaries with the hope that this will serve as a bridge between the eponymous ancestors of the great midland dynasties, discussed in the previous chapter, and the slightly firmer ground of the seventh-century records. But unfortunately for much of the mid and later seventh century the record is virtually silent as regards the fortunes of Clann Cholmain and we must attempt to make inferences from the broader political context.

The Clann Cholmáin genealogy gives Conall's father as Suibne and his grandfather as Colmán Már, eponymous founder of Clann Cholmáin.[1] The midland kinglists, based on a different logic to the genealogy, inform us that Conall did not directly succeed his father but rather two of his uncles, Fergus and Óengus.[2] His father Suibne was killed in 600 by Áed Sláine at Brí Dam in Mide, an area associated with the one-time occupants of the region, the Uí Fhailgi, and a location which suggests that Áed was the aggressor.[3] Áed Sláine's actions and their implications were famously referred to in Adomnán's *Life of Columba* where the Saint 'prophesies' the consequence of his kin-slaying. Of course Áed was killed by Conall son of Suibne in 604 to 'fulfill' the prophecy.[4] Though the annal entries for Conall's revenge attack of 604 are a little confused, the overall picture is clear.

AU does not provide a location for where Áed Sláine was killed but does inform us that Áed Rón, king of Uí Failgi, was also killed on the same day. A later hand added the further detail that this second killing was carried out by Conall's foster-brother Áed Gustan and one Baethgal Bile.[5] This second killing took place 'in Faithche Meic Meccnaen' which is likewise elaborated upon by the later hand with the addition of 'for bru Locha Seimhdidhe'[6]. This appears to refer to the shores of Lough Sewdy which lies to the west of Uisnech and thus in the heart of Mide. The corresponding entries in the

1 O'Brien, *CGH* 143bc39, 335d27. Later MSS copies of the Clann Cholmáin genealogy are in agreement about this point. See Appendix 2.

2 See Appendix 3.

3 *AU* 600.2; *ATig* [600]; *CS* 600; *AI* 604 [600]. Smyth gathers together evidence which convincingly suggests 'Brí Dam' was in the north eastern corner of present-day Co. Offaly. See Alfred P. Smyth, 'Húi Fáilgi relations with the Húi Néill in the century after the loss of the Plain of Mide', *Études Celtiques* xiv (ii) (1975) 506-08.

4 *VSC*, 236-37. *AU* 604.2; *ATig* [604]; *CS* 604; *AI* 607 [604].

5 *AU* 604.3. I cannot identify either Áed or Baethgal from any other source. The *AU* entry recording the slaying of Áed at Conall's hands ends with 'qui regnauerunt Temoriam ęquali potestate simul', *AU* 604.2. As Charles-Edwards notes, the king-lists record Colmán Rímid of Cenél nEógain as reigning together with Áed rather than the Clann Cholmáin dynast. Thomas Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i (2 vols Liverpool 2006) 123 n.3. Since the preceding item under this year (*AU* 604.1) records the death of Colmán Rímid, it is reasonable to assume that the above comment refers to these two obits and we need not argue that Conall had shared the kingship of Tara with Áed as proposed by Lacey. Brian Lacey, *Cenél Conaill and the Donegal kingdoms AD 500-800* (Dublin 2006) 210.

6 *AU* 604.3

Clonmacnoise group of annals tell a slightly different story. Here we are told of the 'Murder of Aed Sláine by Conall, son of Suibne, on the shore of Lough Sewdy. Aed Gusdan, Conall Guthbind's fosterbrother, and Baethgal Bile slew him.'[7] Perhaps this entry has confused and conflated the two separate incidents found in *AU*. The Clonmacnoise annals go on to record Áed Rón's death at the same location mentioned in *AU*, i.e. Faitche Meic Meccnaen, but no assailants are mentioned. The possibility remains of course that both Áed Sláine and Áed Rón died on the brink of Lough Sewdy.[8] The account in the Clonmacnoise group also records the murder 'of Aed the Yellow, king of Húi Mani and Teffia, that is, of the descendants of Mane, son of Niall, in the Hostel of Da Choca, by the same Conall in eodem die quo iugulatus est Aeda Slane.'[9]

Though a little confusing, it is clear that Conall son of Suibne removed, directly or by proxy, two and possibly three prominent rivals. It seems possible that Conall was responding to the development of a hostile alliance between the Uí Fhailgi and Áed Sláine. One might even speculate that the sequence of events suggests that the Uí Fhailgi had been complicit in the killing of his father in 600.[10] As the primary losers in the movement of the Uí Neill into the midlands, the Uí Fhailgi surely entertained thoughts of recovery. Perhaps they had sought exploit the conflict between the descendants of Díarmait mac Cerbaill in order to strengthen their own position. For Conall, powerful enemies to the south and east would certainly have constituted a threat and we can regard his response as strategically motivated. An obit from 643 adds further valuable context.

ATig [643] Bass Uasle ingi*n*e Suibne m*a*ic Colmai*n* .i. rigan Faelai*n* rí*g* L*a*igen.
Death of Uasle, daughter of Suibne, son of Colmán, that is, the queen of Faelán, king of Leinster.[11]

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7 *ATig* [604]; see also *CS* 604.

8 It has also been suggested that the scribe of *AU* may have misplaced his marginal gloss 'for bru Locha Seimhdidhe' beside the wrong entry, i.e. that regarding Áed Rón rather than Áed Sláne. See Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 123 n.4. In that case the testimony of the Clonmacnoise annals is to be preferred here. There also appears to be a doublet of Áed Rón's obit entered several years later. See *AU* 611.4; *ATig* [611]. This episode was drawn upon by the author of the twelfth-century *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* where Conall's success is attributed to the intercession of the saint. Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 93-5. Indeed the author appears to have been very familiar with Conall as he features several times in elaborately expanded versions of events recorded in the annals.

9 *ATig* [604]; also *CS* 604. Characteristically, the *Annals of the Four Masters* fudges the issue, stitching together the disparate and confusing annal entries to produce a slick new whole. While Conall killed Áed Sláine, 'Aedh Gustan, the foster brother of Conall, and Baethghal Bile, wounded him.' *AFM* 600 [604]. Returning to an earlier problem, *AFM* confirms the confusion surrounding the origins of the dynasty describing Conall as 'son of Suibhne, son of Colman Mor, or Beg.' *AFM* 600 [604].

10 Áed had killed Conall's father at Brí Dam which, as noted above, was a place associated with the Alfred P. Smyth, 'Húi Fáilgi relations with the Húi Néill in the century after the loss of the Plain of Mide', *Études Celtiques* xiv (ii) (1975) 508; Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Ireland, 400-800', *NHI* i 193.

11 Also *CS* 643. 'Huaisle' is mistakenly given as a *son* of Suibne in the *Annals of Ulster. AU* 643.1. See Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 143. Huasle, gen. of Huasal. Ó Cróinín believes Uasal to have been 'daughter of Suibne mac Commáin of the Déisi' but provides no reason why this would be more likely. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Ireland, 400-800', 198.

This entry records the death of Conall's sister who was married to Faelán, an Uí Dúnlainge king.[12] Hence Conall appears to have coupled aggression toward the Uí Fhailgi with support for the emerging Uí Dunlainge dynasty with the view to the establishment, as Smyth puts it, of 'a dynasty in north Leinster which might safeguard the borders of Mide to the south.'[13] That said, on occasion Mide remained the battleground for various contending outside forces. For example, in 602 Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain clashed at Slemain, just west of Lough Owel.[14] This battle saw Colmán Rímid of Cenél nEógan defeat Conall Cú, a son of the recently deceased Uí Néill overking from Cenél Conaill, Áed mac Ainmerech.

Though thus far we have been focussing on Conall son of Suibne, it is almost certain that he was not the leading Clann Cholmáin dynast throughout the entire period from his removal of Áed Sláine in 604 until his own death in 635. His uncle Óengus, mentioned in the previous chapter, may have been a more prominent figure for much of that time. Óengus's descendants went on to constitute the Coílle Fallomuin dynasty and would ultimately be cast firmly in the shadows by Clann Cholmáin 'proper' which claimed descent through his brother Suibne. But aside from his inclusion in the later seventh-century *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* (*BCC*), Óengus also appears in the various 'midland' kinglists.[15] According to the annals Óengus killed a son of Áed Sláine in 612 and if he did put himself in contention for the kingship of Tara, then this is a possible context.[16]

Another apparently senior Clann Cholmáin dynast active in the early seventh century was Fergus.

AU 618.2 Iugul*atio* Colggen m. Suibni, ₇mors Fiachrach m. Conaill, ₇iugul*atio* Fergusa filii Colmai*n* Magni .i. o Anfartuch hu Mescain do muinnt*ir* Blatine.
The slaying of Colgu son of Suibne and the death of Fiachra son of Conall and the slaying of Fergus son of Colmán Mór i.e. by Anfartach descendant of Mescán, of the people of Blaitíne.[17]

For this Suibne in the genealogies see O'Brien, *CGH* 328c20.

12 At the risk of causing still further confusion, we might note that Faelán was the son of one Colmán Mór. Like his Southern Uí Néill namesake, virtually nothing is known of this Colmán Mór. See *ATig* [564].

13 Smyth, 'Húi Fáilgi relations with the Húi Néill in the century after the loss of the Plain of Mide', 508; See also F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (Dublin 1972) 154.

14 The old name is preserved in the townlands of 'Slanemore' and 'Slanebeg'. Paul Walsh, *The Placenames of Westmeath* 205-07.

15 See n.4 above. In the 'Rig Uisnig' list in *LL*, Óengus's killer is given as 'Domnall m*ac* Mur*chada*' which must be an error as Domnall was an eighth-century Clann Cholmáin king. *LL* i 196.

16 *AU* 612.2; *ATig* [612]; *CS* 612. Áed's son was Conall Laeg Breg and Óengus killed him at the battle of Odba. As Charles-Edwards notes, a reference in *Cáin Adomnáin* suggests Odbae was in Southern Brega. Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 127 n.4. The reference is contained in the Middle Irish prologue later attached to the Old Irish text.

17 Also *ATig* [618], *CS* 618 where Fergus is described, no doubt anachronistically, as 'king of Mide'.

Fergus was another of Conall's uncles, a brother of both Suibne and Óengus. Fergus also features in the 'midland' kinglists before his nephew Conall. The 'Ríg Uisnig' list in *LL* provides some extra detail recording his death 'i cath Blatteined' which might be identified as Platin in Co. Meath, a detail which is also present, in a secondary hand, in the above *AU* entry.[18] Following the death of Suibne in 600, and now his brother Fergus in 618, Óengus was surely the most senior Clann Cholmáin dynast from 618 until his own death in 621. Perhaps Conall had been given the opportunity to exact revenge on Áed Sláine for killing his father but was then subservient to his uncles until *c*.621?

Just a year after the death of Óengus, Conall defeated two sons of Librén grandson of Cerball at the battle of Cenn Deilgthen.[19] Librén had died in 587 while fighting with Colmán Bec against Áed mac Ainmerech of the Northern Uí Néill.[20] Conall was hence engaged against close cousins. Interestingly, Conall was supported in this encounter by Domnall Brec of Dál Riata, who would be a participant, on the losing side, in the famous battle of Mag Roth in 637 and in which there was probably at least some Clann Cholmáin involvement.[21] This friendly relationship probably found its roots in the sixth century where an expedition to the Western Isles is recorded involving Colmán Bec and Conall son of Comgall, king of Dál Riata.[22]

To the south, the situation amongst the Laigin is very confused during the 620s though the general policy pursued by Clann Cholmáin is discernable. Though Crundmáel of Uí Chennselaig is styled 'regis Lagenensium' on his death in 656, it does not seem as though he held this position unopposed or at all times.[23] In 628 Fáelán son of Colmán of the Uí Dúnlainge, himself described as 'rex Laegen', appears to have defeated Crundmaél.[24] If Crundmáel lived on until 656 he was overshadowed and perhaps his obit is merely a courtesy, recording that he had once been recognised as king of the Laigin. This confusion and internal strife can only have helped Domnall of Cenél Conaill who marked the commencement of his reign by devastating the area in 628.[25]

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18 Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 130 n.3; *LL*, i 196.

19 *AU* 622.1; *ATig* [622]; *CS* 622; *AI* 622. Hogan suggests this may be Kildalkey Co. Meath, west of Trim. *Onom.*, 225. Another 'battle of Cenn Deilgden' in the eighth century between Síl nÁedo Sláine rivals might support such a location. *AU* 724.3; *ATig* [724].

20 *AU* 587.

21 This 622 entry has important implications for considering the make-up of alliances at Mag Roth in 637. Bhreathnach mistakenly says that Conall mac Suibni fought at Cenn Deilgthen 'in alliance with Domnall mac Áedo of Cenél Conaill.' Edel Bhreathnach, 'The Political Context of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig', The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 55. Instead the Clonmacnoise texts name Domnall Brecc.

22 *AU* 568.1; Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Ireland, 400-800', 216; Conall died in 574 and is best known for granting the island of Iona to Colum Cille, according to the annals at least. *AU* 574.

23 *AU* 656.4; also *ATig* [656].

24 *AU* 628.1; *ATig* [628]; *CS* 628.

25 *AU* 628.6; also *ATig* [628]; *CS* 628.

The 'battle of Áth Goan in western Life' in 633 at least brings Clann Cholmáin's strategy regarding Leinster back into focus. There are however a number of issues we must bear in mind when considering the annalistic evidence, which is reproduced below.

AU 633.2 B*ellum* Atho Goan i nIartar Lifi in quo ceci*dit* Cremtann m. Aedho f*ilius* Senaich, ri Lagenorum.

CS [633] Cat*h* At*h*a Goan in Iartur Liffe in quo cecidit Cremtann mac Aod*h*a, mic Senaig*h*, Rí Laig*h*en. Faelan mac Colmain, et Conall mac Suibne, Rí Mid*h*e, ocus Failbe Flann, Rí Muman, uictores erant.

ATig [633] C*ath* Atha Goan i n-iarthar Lifi, in q*uo* ceci*dit* Cremth*ann* Cualan*n*, m*ac* Aedha, m*aic* Senaigh, r*ex* L*ageni*orum. Faelan m*ac* Colmai*n* m*aic* *Con*aill m*aic* Suibne, r*í* Mi*de* 7 Failbe Flan*n* r*í* M*uman* uictores erant.[26]

Firstly we should note that the 633 entry in *AU* is, according to Dumville's classification, 'hybrid'. The use of Irish found here is outside the category of 'early compromises' in language usage found generally in the text. These compromises include the use of 'Irish names, inflections, prepositions and the word *macc*.' [27] But in this 633 entry we have an example of 'Irish common noun with dependent Irish name in latinized form', namely 'rí Lagenorum'.[28] This is one of a very small number of examples of the use of the vernacular 'rí' in *AU* during the mid-seventh century, a usage which does not reappear until the middle third of the eighth century. From then it occurs more frequently 'but *rex* continues to be normal usage.'[29] If we want to deny the presence of 'rí' in the original *AU* 633 entry, we could fall back on the argument of scribal substitution of the vernacular term for an original 'rex'.

But it is the Clonmacnoise texts which provide the crucial extra detail about Conall of Clann Cholmáin. However due to the absence of this section from *AU* we cannot be certain it was in the *Chronicle of Ireland*. While Conall is probably anachronistically described as 'rí Mide' here, the incident itself may throw some light on Clann Cholmáin policy at this stage. It does seem as though external forces from Munster and Mide here intervened in an internal Leinster dispute, supporting one claimant, Fáelán son of Colmán of the Uí Dúnlainge, against his Uí Máil opponent.[30] As already noted above, Conall's support stretched to a marriage alliance as his sister Uasal was married to Fáelán. The Clann Cholmáin policy of pacifying the Laigin through alliance and targeted intervention which would become so characteristic in subsequent centuries, was already evident at this early stage.

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26 *ATig* is corrupt having run the first two victors together to produce 'Faelan mac Colmain maic Conaill maic Suibne, rí Mide.'

27 David Dumville, 'Latin and Irish in the *Annals of Ulster*, A.D. 431-1050', Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamund McKitterick and David Dumville (ed), *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe: Studies in memory of Kathleen Hughes* (Cambridge 1982) 328.

28 Dumville, 'Latin and Irish in the *Annals of Ulster*, A.D. 431-1050', 335.

29 Dumville, 'Latin and Irish in the *Annals of Ulster*, A.D. 431-1050', 325.

30 See Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 498.

Likewise, we can see where Clann Cholmáin energies would be expended following the pacification of the southern frontier. The year after the battle of Áth Goan, Conall killed two of Áed Sláine's sons, 'i.e. Congal king of Brega, and Ailill the Harper, ancestor of Síl Dlúthaig'.[31] Both Mac Niocaill and Mac Shamhráin regard this as Conall following up his recent activity against the Laigin by striking against his eastern rivals.[32] But the location of the encounter at 'Loch Treitni opposite Fremainn', probably west of Lough Owel, suggests that the Síl nÁedo Sláine dynasts were the aggressors on this occasion.[33] The intense, intergenerational nature of the feud is clear and must have served to crystallise the respective dynasties and clearly demarcate them from one another. But ultimately Conall's efforts were in vain. The following year another of Áed Sláine's sons, Díarmait, killed him 'in the house of Nad-Fraích's son', with the assistance of one Mael Umai according to the Clonmacnoise texts.[34] Díarmait followed up by killing two of Conall's first cousins, another Mael Umai and Colga, both sons of Óengus.[35] From Mael Umai would descend the Coílle Fallomuin. Yet again, at this early stage the Síl nÁedo Sláine, itself hardly firmly formed, did not distinguish between different midland dynasties. Instead they directed their aggression at what were still very closely related proto-dynasties which seem to have been equally important in seventh-century Mide.

The period of Conall son of Suibne's *floruit* contains early evidence of those broad political policies which would be pursued by Clann Cholmáin subsequently. The support of a friendly regime, the Uí Dúnlainge, to the south and ongoing clashes with Síl nÁedo Sláine to the east. However, as we shall see, this period constituted something of a false start for Clann Cholmáin as a series of strong Síl nÁedo Sláine kings dominated the midlands throughout the remainder of the seventh century. Indeed the history of Clann Cholmáin from the death of Conall in 635 to that of his grandson Díarmait in 689 can only be guessed at.

For what it is worth, the Clann Cholmáin genealogy informs us that Conall's son was one

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31 *AU* 634.1; also *ATig* [634], *CS* 634.

32 Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings* (Dublin 1972) 97; Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, '*Nebulae discutiuntur?*', 88.

33 *AU* 634.1; also *ATig* [634], *CS* 634. Walsh suggests this is probably the parish of Portloman, bar. of Corkaree in Co. Westmeath. Paul Walsh, *The Placenames of Westmeath* (Dublin 1957) 240-1. The identification of Loch Treitni with Lough Drin (Hogan, *Onomasticon* s.v. Loch Treithin) can be defended if *ar* means 'to the east of' here. Cf. D.A. Binchy (ed), *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin* (Dublin 1963) n. on l.413. Perhaps Áed's sons were enjoying hospitality on a *cúairt* in Mide when Conall came upon them.

34 *AU* 635.1. Also *ATig* [635], *CS* 634. Mac Niocaill argues that Máel Umai was from the Airgialla but I have as yet been unable to find any evidence to support this. Mac Niocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings* 97. This is the only occurrence of the name 'Nad Fraich' in the *Chronicle of Ireland* though it does appear several times in the genealogies. I do not know who Nadfraích's son was. See *CGH* 709-10. In *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin*, Conall's death occurs after he wanders disorientated from Lough Ennell into Brega through the power of the saint whom he had intended to kill. See Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 73.

35 *AU* 635.2, *ATig* [635] and *AI* 637. Two entries are probably run together in *AI*.

Airmedach. In the annals, Airmedach appears only as the father of one Díarmait in the latter's obit (689) but nowhere in his own right. Airmedach's name appears with the sobriquet 'Cáech' in some versions of the obit and he is also described as such in some versions of the Clann Cholmáin genealogy.[36] The 'Ríg Uisnig' kinglist found in the *Book of Leinster* records Airmedach's death, 'i cath Roth' though the text does not claim he held the kingship or give him a reign length.[37] But some extra information is provided. We are told he was killed by 'Lommainech rí Mugdorn' the foster-father of Díarmait son of Áed Sláine.[38] This would confirm that the bloody feud between Clann Cholmáin and Síl nÁedo Sláine was ongoing, here transferred to the famous northern battlefield of Mag Roth. Díarmait, as we have seen, had removed several prominent Clann Cholmáin dynasts himself including Airmedach's father Conall in 635. But between Conall and Airmedach, 'Ríg Uisnig' also claims that one Mael Doid, a brother of Conall, reigned for fifteen years.[39] Other than his obit, recorded under the year 653 in the Clonmacnoise group of annal texts, nothing is known of this figure.[40] The evidence available from the annals, including reference to the problematic figure of Fáelchú, and the 'Ríg Uisnig' kinglist, is set out below:

1. Conall mac Suibni (d.635) *AU/ATig.* Killed by Díarmait (Ruanaid) son of Áed Sláine.
2. Máel Dóid mac Suibni (d.653) *CS/ATig.* Reigned 15 yrs according to 'Ríg Uisnig'.
3. Airmedach (d.637?) No annalistic obit. Killed at Mag Roth by Díarmait Ruanaid's foster-father, Lommainech, according to 'Ríg Uisnig'.
4. Fáelchú (d.637) *CS/ATig.* Fell at Mag Roth according to the annals.[41] Not mentioned in 'Ríg Uisnig.'
5. Díarmait mac Airmedach (d.689) *AU/ATig/CS/AI.* Reigned 33 yrs according to 'Ríg Uisnig'.

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36 *AU* 689.3. In the *Annals of Inisfallen* Diarmait is described as "son of 'In Caech'." *AI* 688. The sobriquet is attached to Airmedach's name in the Clann Cholmáin genealogy as found in TCD MS H.2.7 (1298), *BB*, *UM*, *LMG*, *O'C* and the *Leabhar Donn* though not in the two twelfth-century MSS found at O'Brien, *CGH* 143bc49, 335d41. In the twelfth-century *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* the Uí Airmedaig feature as a branch of Clann Cholmáin apparently descended from this Airmedach. They feature alongside the father of their eponymous ancestor, Conall, one of many examples where the Life's author shows his lack of interest in chronology. Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* 67.

37 *LL* i 197. Fáelchú son of Airmedach is not mentioned in this *LL* entry as is suggested in Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 495.

38 That is Díarmait Ruanaid (d.665). See *CGH* 160 (144b9) and Francis John Byrne, 'Genealogical Tables', *idem* et.al., *Historical Knowth and its Hinterland* (Dublin 2008) 62, 68.

39 See *LL* i 196-7.

40 *ATig* [653], *CS* 650 [653].

41 'Faelchu son of Airmedach, king of Midhe' *CS* 636 [637]. The corresponding entry in *ATig* does not name Fáelchú's father or any connection with Mide. *ATig* [637].

Perhaps not surprisingly, the reign lengths as given in 'Ríg Uisnig' do not tally exactly with the chronological anchors provided by the annalistic obits. If Máel Dóid succeeded Conall about 635 as the leading Clann Cholmáin dynast and we add fifteen we reach *c.*650. If we then add the thirty-three year reign of Díarmait mac Airmedach we reach about 683, some way short of his actual obit in 689. Irrespective of whether the arithmetic worked out or not, it would probably be unwise to read too much into this.

Perhaps some clarity may emerge if we turn to consider the broader political context. The battle of Mag Roth, while largely a complicated Northern affair, may well also have had a midland dimension.

AU 637.1 Bel*lum* Roth ₇ bel*lum* Sailtire in una die facta sunt. Conall Coel m. Maele Cobo, socius Domnaill, uictor erat, de genere Euagain in Bello Saeltire; ₇ mors Faelbhe Flainn Feimin, regis Muman.

The battle of [Mag] Roth and the battle of Sailtír were fought on the same day. Conall Cael son of Mael Cobo of the Cenél nEógain, and adherent of Domnall, was victor in the battle of Sailtír; and the death of Failbe Flann of Feimen, king of Mumu.

CS 636 [637] Cat*h* Maig*h*e Rat*h* ria nDom*h*noll mac Aed*h*a ocus ria maccoib*h* Aed*h*a Sláine, (sed Domnall mac Aed*h*a regnauit Temoriam in illo tempore), in quo cecidit Congal Caec*h* Rí Ulad*h*, ocus Faelc*h*u mac Airmeadhaig*h* Ri Mid*h*e, i ffrit*h*g*h*uin, cum multis nobilibus. Cat*h* Saeltire ria *Con*all Cáel mac Maelcoba, f*or* Cinel nEogain in eodem die.

The battle of Mag Roth *gained* by Domhnall, son of Aedh, and the sons of Aedh Slaine, (but Domhnall, son of Aedh ruled Temhair at that time); in which Congal Caech, King of Uladh, and Faelchu son of Airmedach, king of Midhe, were slain in the heat of battle, together with many chieftains. The battle of Saeltire *was gained* by Conall Cael, son of Maelcobho, over the Cinel Eoghain, on the same day.

But we must remember that the more discursive annalistic accounts of the battle may well owe some or all of their extra detail to the later saga cycle which grew up about the encounter.[42] Indeed Mac Eoin argues that the original annal entry may have simply read 'Bellum Roth'.[43] In *Fled Dúin na nGéd*, a text which probably dates to the early twelfth century, Domnall mac Áedo laments the fallen Fáelchú and it could be argued that the latter's appearance in *CS* derives from the saga.[44] But Domnall laments a

42 See John O'Donovan (ed), *The Banquet of Dun na n-Gedh and the Battle of Magh Rath* (Dublin 1842 LLanerch repr. 1995); J.G. O'Keeffe (ed), *Buile Suibhne* (Dublin 1952); or for a summary with discussion see Myles Dillon, *The Cycles of the Kings* (Dublin 1994) 56-74.

43 Gearóid Mac Eoin, 'Orality and literacy in some Middle-Irish King-Tales', Stephen N. Tranter & Hildegard L.C. Tristram (ed), *Early Irish literature-Media and Communication* (Tubingen 1989) 167-68.

44 Máire Herbert, '*Fled Dúin na nGéd:* A Reappraisal', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 18 (1989) 75-88.

Fáelchú 'son of Congal' and no connection is made to Mide.[45] In *CS* on the other hand, as we can see above, Fáelchú is explicitly named as 'king of Mide'. Though listed among the slain directly after Congal Cáech, the side that Fáelchú fought on is not clear and we will return to this below.[46] While the details in *Fled Dúin na nGéd* may have provided some material for an annalist to draw upon, it seems equally possible that *AU* is more laconic than the Clonmacnoise texts by simply 'skipping from one reference to Mag Roth- at the beginning of the account of the battle- to another mention of Mag Roth in the statement that it, and the battle of Sailtír were fought on the same day.'[47] If this is the case, then the Clonmacnoise annals' account of the battle could be textually superior.[48]

A consideration of the broader context would also seem to argue for at least some Clann Cholmáin participation at Mag Roth. Firstly, we should remember that the crucial relationships were longstanding. In 568, Colmán Bec participated in 'an expedition into Iardoman' with 'Conall son of Comgall'.[49] Conall was king of Dál Riata and had granted Iona to Columba. Almost seventy years later the political alignments of the north had shifted considerably. Dál Riata and the Cruithni had joined forces in an attempt to counter the Northern Uí Néill led by the Cenél Conaill. Hence at Mag Roth Domnall mac Áedo was opposed by Domnall Brecc and Congal Clóen/Cáech. The seventh-century law tract *Bechbretha* suggests Congal was a non-Uí Néill king of Tara, though it appears he had lost this position before Mag Roth where he was defeated and killed.[50] Importantly for our study, it may be that Congal exploited the internal feuding between the various branches of the Uí Néill to put himself in a position to challenge the Uí Néill for the kingship of Tara.[51] If we allow ourselves examine the wording of the Clonmacnoise annals, they might suggest that Congal was supported by Clann Cholmáin. The notice of Congal's death is followed immediately by 'et Faelchu cum multis nobilibus' in *ATig* and 'ocus Faelchú mac Airmedhaig rí Midhe' in *CS* while the sons of Áed Sláine are named directly after

45 John O'Donovan (ed), *The Banquet of Dun na n-Gedh and the Battle of Magh Rath* 305.

46 O'Keeffe notes the distinction. See O'Keeffe, *Buile Suibhne* 87-8. Fáelchú's mother, Land, does appear in the *Banshenchas.* (Metrical) See: Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 332; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* §177 at 124, 193; (Prose) See: Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234: 182; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* §330 at 252, 371.

47 Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* 140 n.3.

48 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 495 n.108. Though the sentence 'but Domhnall, son of Aedh ruled Temhair at that time' does read like a later interpolation.

49 *AU* 568.

50 See Thomas Charles-Edwards and Fergus Kelly (ed), *Bechbretha* (Dublin 1983) 68-69; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 495.

51 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 499. The suggestion has been made that Domnall mac Áeda was supported by both Síl nÁedo Sláine and Clann Cholmáin dynasts against Congal at Mag Roth. Charles-Edwards and Kelly, *Bechbretha* 127 §32 . Charles-Edwards has since revised his position now arguing that they took opposing sides at the battle. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 495.

Domnall.[52] As noted above, 'Ríg Uisnig' tells us that Airmedach was killed by Díarmait son of Áed Sláine's foster-father, 'Lommainech rí Mugdorn' during the battle.[53] In the context of the antagonism between Clann Cholmáin and Síl nÁedo Sláine at the time and the historic links between Clann Cholmáin and Dál Riata, it seems plausible to suggest that Domnall was supported by one of the great Southern Uí Néill dynasties and opposed by the other.[54] Though Domnall had been in a position to attack Leinster in 628[55], Clann Cholmáin participation against him at Mag Roth might suggest that he was 'far from being in control of the midlands.'[56] But crucially *CS* uses the phrase 'i frithguin' immediately after recording the death of Fáelchú in 637 at Mag Roth. This phrase is translated simply as 'in the heat of battle' by Hennessy. But it is generally used in the Annals 'when after enumerating losses on one side in a battle, those on the other are given'.[57] It seems possible that the *CS* entry could be interpreted as suggesting that Fáelchú fought with rather than against Domnall but had the misfortune of being killed despite being on the winning side. Also, the Prose *Banshenchas* claims that Domnall and Fáelchú were both sons of Land, the daughter of Áed Guaire of Airgialla, which might strengthen the case that they were on the same side.[58] Overall the corresponding entry in *ATig* is very similar to that in *CS* but Fáelchú is not identified in the same way and this crucial phrase, allowing for this interpretation, does not appear. Indeed the *ATig* entry suggests Fáelchú fell with Congal and against Domnall.[59] Hence while there is some confusion about the nature and extent of Clann Cholmáin involvement at Mag Roth, it seems reasonably clear that the dynasty was involved in this very important battle in some capacity. This suggests it maintained a position of some importance in the years immediately following the death of Conall son of Suibne (d.635). But after the battle of Mag Roth Clann Cholmáin drops off the political radar entirely and the dominance of Síl nÁedo Sláine in the midlands seems to have been confirmed.

Indeed the situation improved still further for Síl nÁedo Sláine with the death of Domnall mac Áedo in 642.[60] The *Annals of Ulster* record the confusion around the succession:

> Hic dubitatur quis regnauit post Domhnall. Dicunt alii historiagraphi regnasse .iiii.

52 *ATig* 636 [637]; *CS* 636 [637].
53 *LL* i 197.
54 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 495.
55 *AU* 628.6.
56 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 498.
57 *DIL* s.v. frithguin.
58 See Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234: 182; Ní Bhrolcháin (ed), 'The Prose BanShenchas', (unpublished PhD thesis UCG 1980) § 330 at 252, 371.
59 '[…] in quo cecidit Congal Caech rí Ulad et Faelchu cum multis nobilibus, in quo cecidit Suibne mac Colmain Cuair.' *ATig* [637].
60 *AU* 642.1, *ATig* [642], *CS* 640 [642], *AI* 643 [642].

> reges, .i. Cellach 7 Conall C[a]el 7 duo filii Aedho Slane mc. Diarmada mc. Fergusa Cerrbheoil mc. Conaill Cremthainde mc. Neill *Naoi*ghiall*aig*, .i. Diarmait 7 Blathm*ac*, per commixta regna.
>
> Here it is uncertain who reigned after Domnall. Some historigraphers state that four kings, i.e. Cellach, Conall Cael, and two sons of Aed Sláine son of Diarmait son of Fergus Cerrbél son of Conall of Cremthann son of Niall Naígiallach, namely Diarmait and Blathmac, reigned in mingled rule.[61]

In 649 Ragallach king of Connacht was slain and a Connacht regnal poem implicates Díarmait son of Áed Sláine who may have had close personal ties with the Connacht king.[62] According to the *Banshenchus* Díarmait was married to Muirenn daughter of Máele Dúin of Cenél Coirpri 'who was also (previously?) married to Rogallach.'[63] Díarmait followed up this action with success in the legend inspiring battle of Cairn Conaill where he defeated Guaire Aidne, a future overking of Connacht.[64] Notable at this stage is Díarmait's ability to project Síl nÁedo Sláine power westward which included military action in Connacht and alliance with Cenél Coirpri.[65] We can perhaps see evidence of a midland axis of sorts, surely aimed in part at the continued subjugation of Clann Cholmáin. It is easy to see why Tírecháin, writing in the last third of the seventh century, found it necessary to include Coirpre. Though his Patrick blessed Conall and cursed Coirpre, the latter's descendants had been prominent in the quite recent past and had to be accommodated in some form.

The year 651 saw the slaying of 'two sons of Blathmac son of Aed Sláine, i.e. Dúnchad and Conall.'[66] An accompanying quatrain in *AU* refers to Maelodrán's mill and the Clonmacnoise annals tells us they were killed 'by Mael Odráin of Leinster, in the mill of Mael Odráin.'[67] O'Donovan gives

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61 *AU* 643.7. This notice is placed at the beginning of the annal in *CS* but at the end of the previous annal in *ATig*. This might suggest it began life as a marginal note. Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* 144 n.2.

62 *AU* 649.1; BB 57b13-14. See Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* 145 n.6.

63 Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin and Paul Byrne, 'Prosopography I', Edel Bhreathnach (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005) 200. See also Anne Connon, 'Prosopography II', Edel Bhreathnach (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape* 289-90.

64 *AU* 649.2. *AI* 649 records the deaths of two of Blathmac's sons who obviously fell assisting their uncle. For the legend, see Whitley Stokes (ed), 'The Battle of Carn Conall', *ZCP* iii (1901) 203-19; See also Gearóid Mac Eoin, 'Orality and literacy in some Middle-Irish King-Tales', Stephen N. Tranter & Hildegard L.C. Tristram (ed), *Early Irish literature-Media and Communication* (Tubingen 1989) 168-174 for discussion and references to the many other tales in this cycle. Mac Eoin argues that the 'ATig entry is clearly derived in large part from the saga of *Cath Cairn Chonaill*.' 169.

65 The death of Aengus Bronbachall, 'regis Ceniuil Coirpri' is recorded at this time, *AU* 649.3. He also features in Adomnán's *Life of Columba* having been expelled from Ireland. His expulsion might even suggest a failed attempt to rekindle Cenél Coirpri fortunes. See *VSC*, 235; Byrne, *Certain* 220.

66 *AU* 651.1; also *ATig* [651], *CS* 648 [651]. *AI* seems to have mistakenly run several entries together and hence places their deaths at the battle of Carn Conaill several years before, *AI* 649.3. For discussion of a tale where those killed at the mill are given as sons of Díarmait mac Cerbaill, see: Gearóid Mac Eoin, 'The Death of the Boys in the Mill', *Celtica* 15 (1983) 60-64; *idem*, 'Orality and literacy in some Middle-Irish King-Tales' 174-5.

67 *ATig* [651]; also *CS* 648 [651].

this location as Mullenoran situated near Lough Owel[68]and the plausible suggestion has been made that a death in the Westmeath lakelands would indicate that they 'died in pursuit of [...] expansionist claims.'[69]Such a drive was certainly taking place in what we consider to be Clann Cholmáin heartland, just north of Uisnech and Lough Ennel. Shortly after this incident, we come across one of the very few pieces of annalistic information concerning the Clann Cholmáin during this period which records the death of Mael Doid who, as mentioned earlier, is included in 'Ríg Uisnig'.[70] His death coincided with an even greater strengthening of the Síl nÁedo Sláine position. As noted, the annalists were unsure as to who exactly succeeded Domnall mac Áedo as overking of the Uí Néill in 642. An entry in the *Annals of Tigernach* for the year 654 reading 'Diarmait and Blathmac, two sons of Aed Sláine, two kings of Tara'[71] may announce the succession of Díarmait and Blathmac as the obit of Conall son of Máel Coba, one of the other kings listed as possibly succeeding Domnall, occurs at this time.[72] The other northern contender, Cellach, died several years later and the added detail in the Clonmacnois annals that this occurred 'in the Brugh' perhaps suggests his captivity in Brega.[73]

From this position of power, Síl nÁedo Sláine suffered a succession of high-profile fatalities in the 660s. Dúnchad son of Áed Sláine died in 659, Echaid son of Blathmac in 660 as well as Ailill, son of the aforesaid Dúnchad the same year.[74]In 662 at the battle of Ogoman 'Blathmac son of Aed, Díarmait's adherent, was defeated'.[75] The Clonmacnoise annals provide the extra detail that Blathmac 'was vanquished by the friends of Diarmaid, son of Aedh Slaine' which would certainly suggest upheaval and power struggle within Síl nÁedo Sláine.[76] One of those recorded as fighting with Díarmait against Blathmac is Onchú son of Sárán whose only other appearance, to my knowledge, is in the twelfth-century *Life* of Colmán mac Luacháin.[77] There he features as king of Fir Thulach and encounters the saint at his royal residence on the southeastern shore of Lough Ennell. We are also told that another to perish in the battle of Ogoman was 'Faelchu, son of Maeluma, perished' in the battle of

68 'Muilleann-Odhrain, *anglicè* Mullenoran'. *AFM* i 262 n.'d'.
69 Mac Shamhráin and Paul Byrne, 'Prosopography I', 199.
70 *ATig* 653, *CS* 650 [653]. Though far from certain, the notice of a skirmish in 697 where fell 'Feradach son of Mael Doith', may refer to a son. *AU* 697.
71 *ATig* [654].
72 *AU* 654.1. A secondary hand adds the detail that it was Diarmait who killed Conall. Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* 149 n.3. Though it should be noted that Conall's death is not recorded in the Clonmacnoise annals. *AI* would seem to confirm that whatever about the preceding period, by the mid 650s these two Síl nÁedo Sláine dynasts had come to the fore in their own right. *AI* 656 Diarmait ⁊ Blaithmacc, da mc. Aeda Sláne, regnum tenuerunt.
73 *AU* 658.1; *ATig* 658; CS 654 [658]. Gearóid MacNiocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings* 98.
74 *AU* 659; *ATig* [656]; *CS* 655; *AU* 660; *ATig* [660]; *CS* 656 [660].
75 *AU* 662.2. While *socius* often does mean 'adherent', in this context it may refer to their joint kingship.
76 *CS* 658 [662]; *ATig* 661 [662]. The Clonmacnoise annals are far more elaborate than *AU* for this year. See Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 153.
77 Kuno Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin. Life of Colmán son of Lúachan* (Dublin 1911) 47ff.

Ogoman.[78] It has been suggested that Fáelchú was a son of the Máel Umai son of Forranán who supported Díarmait in killing Conall son of Suibne back 635.[79] However another possibility is that Fáelchú was a son of Máel Umai son of Óengus, a member of the Coílle Fallomuin dynasty. This different Máel Umai also appears in the annals under the year 635 thus providing plenty of scope for confusion. The wording of the 662 annal entry also suggests Fáelchú fought with Blathmac and against Díarmait. While Máel Umai son of Forindán had supported Díarmait, Mael Umai son of Óengus fell against Díarmait in 635. This might also support the latter identification.

Of course, this period of upheaval culminated in the arrival and effects of the *Buide Chonaill* in the mid 660s, which resulted in innumerable deaths and claimed both Díarmait and Blathmac.[80] It was Blathmac's son, Sechnusach, who went on to become king of Tara but his reign was short, killed in 671 by Dub Dúin 'king of Cenél Cairpri.'[81] Dub Dúin was a direct descendant of the last Cenél Coirpri king of Tara, Tuathal Máelgarb which, as Paul Byrne suggests, might 'have given him a claim of sorts to the title.'[82] Importantly it was Cenél Coirpri rather then Clann Cholmáin who were trying to revive their fortunes at a time of weakness for Síl nÁedo Sláine. Sechnusach was succeeded as king of Tara by his brother 'Cenn Faelad son of Blamac' in 672 but his reign was also short.[83] He fell in battle in 675 against Fínnachta son of Dúnchad, described by Mac Niocaill as 'a coming man'.[84] Fínnachta immediately signaled his intent and demonstrated the enduring power of Síl nÁedo Sláine with the famous 'destruction of Ailech Frigrenn.'[85] This might well refer to the Gríanán on the Inishowen peninsula and would suggest a powerful and symbolic strike against the northern Uí Néill.[86] The Laigin attempted to confront Fínnachta in his own territory in 677 but were defeated near Loch Gabair.[87] This was a site of some significance in Brega, the crannóg there would serve as the seat of the southern Brega (Uí Chernaig) dynasty.[88] In 679, Fínnachta was again active, this time in battle against the Dál Fiatach king Béc Bairche. We are told, in *ATig* at least, that the encounter took place at Tailtiu, which

78 *CS* 658 [662]; *ATig* 661 [662].
79 Byrne, *Certain* 40.
80 Both died in 665. *AU* 665.1; *ATig* [665]; *CS* 661 [665]; *AI* 666. Cernach Sotail, son of Díarmait had also died the previous year. *AU* 664.4; *ATig* [664]; *CS* 660 [664].
81 *AU* 671.3; *ATig* [671]; *CS* 667 [671].
82 Byrne, *Certain* 220.
83 *AU* 672.5; *ATig* [672]; *CS* 668 [672].
84 *AU* 675.1, 675.6; *ATig* [675]; *CS* 671 [675]; *AI* 674 [675]. Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings* 107
85 *AU* 676.4; *ATig* [676]; *CS* 672 [676].
86 See Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 161 n.4; Mac Shamhráin and Byrne, 'Prosopography I', 202.
87 *AU* 677.3; *ATig* [677]; *CS* 673 [677].
88 H. Hencken, 'Lagore Crannóg: An Irish Royal Residence of the 7th to 10th Centuries A.D.', *PRIA (C)* 53 (1950) 1-248.

would suggest another provocative attempt to undermine Fínnachta's authority at a royal site.[89] The following year the Uí Máil king of Leinster, Fiannamail, was killed by one of his kinsmen at the instigation of Fínnachta.[90] This must in part have been motivated by a desire to retaliate against the Leinstermen for their daring incursion as far as Loch Gabar three years previously.[91]

At 681 we find the following:

> Iugul*atio* Sechnasaigh m. Airmedaigh ₇ Conaing m. Congaile.
> The killing of Sechnasach son of Airmedach, and of Conaing son of Congal.[92]

Bhreathnach suggests Sechnasach belonged to Clann Cholmáin and that both he and Conaing were killed at the instigation of Fínnachta, something not without precedent.[93] If this were so, he would have been a brother of Diarmait Midi who died in 689. In the genealogical table in Bhreathnach's volume Sechnasach is labelled 'King of Uisneach according to the Middle Irish regnal lists' but I have not found him in any of these sources.[94] That said, it is chronologically possible that he was a son of Airmedach of Clann Cholmáin who died at Mag Roth (637) according to 'Rig Uisnig'.

In 688 Fínnachta 'assumed clerical life' and the important battle of Imlech Pich took place.[95] This battle was a Brega affair which hinted at what was to come in terms of the division of Brega into northern and southern parts. On this occasion Niall son of Cernach of what would become the Uí Chernaig of Southern Brega defeated a coalition of Congalach son of Conaing and the kings of Ard Cíannachta and Conailli.[96] As Byrne put it, 'Congalach's family, the northern branch of the dynasty, seem to have consoled themselves for their defeat by taking over most of the territory of their allies the Ciannachta [...] Thus they took over the tribal name of their newly acquired lands.'[97] Bhreathnach also

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89 *AU* 679.3; *ATig* [679]; *CS* 675 [679]. Tailtiu is not mentioned in the other two annal texts.
90 *ATig* 679 [680]; *CS* 676 [680]. Without notice of Fínnachta's involvement see *AU* 680.2.
91 This very challenging period for Fínnachta of course also saw the famous Saxon raid on Brega. *AU* 685.2; *ATig* [685]; *CS* 681 [685]. See Herman Moisl, 'The Bernician Royal Dynasty and the Irish in the Seventh Century', *Peritia* 2 (1983) 103–26. The period also appears to have seen a further series of 'natural disasters'. See *AU* 680.9 for the *bolgach* and *AU* 683.4, 684.1 for the 'mortality of children'. For some discussion, see: William P. MacArthur, 'The Identification of some Pestilences recorded in the Irish Annals', *Irish Historical Studies* 6 (23) (March 1949) 169-88: 179-81.
92 *AU* 681.4; *ATig* [681]; *CS* 677 [681].
93 Edel Bhreathnach, '*Níell cáich úa Néill nasctar géill:* The Political Context of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*', Edel Bhreathnach (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 61. Conaing became the eponymous ancestor of the Uí Chonaing dynasty of northern Brega.
94 See: 'Table 3: Clann Cholmáin', *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 344. The key to the symbols can be found at 339.
95 *AU* 688; *ATig* [688]; *CS* 684 [688]. Perhaps Emlagh just north of Kells, See *AFM* i 292 n.t.
96 Mac Niocaill's suggestion that the battle may have 'marked the first stage of an attempt to seize the kingship of Uisnech, which in turn might be a stepping-stone to the kingship of Tara' seems unlikely. MacNiocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings* 109.
97 F.J. Byrne, 'Historical note on Cnogba (Knowth)', *PRIA* 66 (C) (1968) 397.

suggests that Fínnachta's retreat into clerical life at this time may have been influenced in part by these events in Bregan politics.[98]

In the same year as Fínnachta's return to the kingship we learn of the killing of 'Diarmato Midi.'[99] According to the Clonmacnoise annals he was killed 'la hAedh mac nDluthaigh, ríg Fer Cúl' while 'Ríg Uisnig' in *LL* informs us that 'Fínachta Fledach ros marb.'[100] It seems fitting that following Clann Cholmáin's almost complete absence from the sources throughout the mid and later seventh century, the dynasty's reappearance occurs in the context of yet another episode in the long-running feud with Síl nÁedo Sláine. According to 'Ríg Uisnig', Diarmait had led his dynasty for thirty three years. While possible, in the absence of any information about Diarmait other than his obit, it is impossible to say.[101] But Diarmait does signal a new phase. His sobriquet 'Midi' would suggest that there was a growing aspiration to equate the Clann Cholmáin with the geographical region of Mide. Indeed, several of Diarmait's immediate descendants would also bear the sobriquet as the Clann Cholmáin grew in power throughout the eighth century. As we shall see, this process was accompanied by, not coincidentally, a weakening in the position of the long-dominant Síl nÁedo Sláine. The remainder of Fínnachta's reign seems relatively uneventful but bearing in mind what had gone before it is not surprising that when he was killed, it was at the hands of Síl nÁedo Sláine rivals. Congalach son of Conaing, based in northern Brega and another cousin Áed son of Dlúthach, killed both him and his son Bresal.[102] Whether Congalach would have been in a position to seize the kingship of Tara is impossible to say as he died the following year to be succeeded by Loingsech of Cenél Conaill.

Throughout our study thus far, we have used various sources which often paint conflicting pictures of the structure and organisation of midland kingship. At this point it may be valuable to pause and consider the evidence for Clann Cholmain kingship during this earliest period, up to the end of the seventh century.

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98 Edel Bhreathnach, *'Níell cáich úa Néill nasctar géill:* The Political Context of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig'*, eadem (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 61.

99 *AU* 689.3; *ATig* [689]; *CS* 685 [689].

100 *LL* i 197.

101 He does constitute one of the very few inconsistencies in Clann Cholmáin's genealogy. While included in 'Genelach Clainne Colmáin', found in *MS Rawlinson B.502*, he does not feature in 'Genelach Ríg Mide' in the *Book of Leinster,* versions which are otherwise virtually identical. *CGH* i 159, 425. Díarmait does feature in those versions of the Clann Cholmáin genealogy found in later MSS. See Appendix 2.

102 *AU* 695.1; *ATig* [695]; *CS* 691 [695]; *AI* 694 [695].

2.1 A kingship of Uisnech?

Though we have used the 'Rig Uisnig' kinglist from *LL* extensively, the evidence for an early kingship of Uisnech is hardly straightforward. Firstly we should point to evidence which certainly does confirm the early importance of Uisnech. The archaeological remains at the site are extensive and recent work suggests that the impressive ringfort of Rathnew on the summit probably dates to the late seventh or early eighth centuries with occupation through to the eleventh century.[103] Uisnech also appears in the early documentary record. In his Patrician dossier Tírechán uses it as the location for a meeting between the saint and a son of Fíachu mac Néill.[104] Uisnech was clearly regarded in Tírechán's day as an area of importance and sensitivity for the secular powers with, perhaps, royal associations. But owing to the nature of Tírechán's work, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions. Uisnech may have simply been regarded as a suitable location at which to set the meeting between saint and king and we should not necessarily assume that Uisnech was actually a seat of kingship in the late seventh century. But as we will see the important battle of Carn Fiachach, fought at Uisnech in 765, may help us to understand the significance of Uisnech. Here two Clann Cholmáin dynasts and brothers fought for the right to succeed their father Domnall (d.763). The battle can be compared with that fought at Ailenn in 728 between two sons of Murchad mac Brain for succession in Leinster.[105] It suggests that Uisnech was an important, symbolic royal site in Mide and that power successfully projected there was regarded as a claim to political authority in Mide.[106]

As for the 'Ríg Uisnig' kinglist, while it is possible that some of this text dates to as early as the late eighth century and on initial examination it would seem to support the idea of an early kingship of Uisnech, it is in fact the last in a whole series of provincial lists found in *LL* whose arrangement appears to reflect the compiler's Leinster bias. Even the title of the list may have been choosen to downplay the significance of the Ua Maelechlainn dynasty's early position and we should not place too much weight on that heading.[107] Beyond this point, the evidence 'Ríg Uisnig' contains, at least for the seventh century, also seems suspect on comparison with independent sources. The list is populated almost entirely with Clann Cholmáin dynasts though it begins with a more distant ancestor, Conall son of Niall.[108] It seems unlikely that it preserves a genuine record of a real kingship and the list, stretching

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103 See Part 1, 99.
104 Ludwig Bieler (ed), *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979) 41-2.
105 *AU* 728.2.
106 *AU* 765.5; *ATig* [765].
107 See Part 1, 40.
108 'Cremthaind' added above the line. *LL* i l.5905 at 196. Though the list does admit Fíachu mac Néill in its earliest section, was he perhaps granted admission in recognition of his association with Uisnech as found in Tírechán?

as it does back through Colmán, Díarmait and Conall, seems far too neat for this early period. It is probably rather a backward projection from a later time as the earlier section of the list was backfilled with prominent Clann Cholmáin ancestors drawn directly from the dynasty's genealogy.

A further and crucial point against the existence of an early kingship of Uisnech is its complete absence from the annals. If such an institution had existed it would seem remarkable if no trace of it were preserved in this source. In short, the existence of a kingship based at or named after the site appears unlikely. But there is clear evidence for the significance and sensitivity of Uisnech and it seems that it was a place where political authority in Mide could be claimed or challenged.

2.2 An early kingship of Mide?

In contrast, the kingship of Mide certainly did exist and was distinct from the kingship of Tara but identifying when it first appeared is far from straight-forward. Many of the earliest references to Mide give the impression that it was regarded primarily as a geographical unit. When Adomnán, writing about the close of the seventh century, mentions Columba's visit to Durrow, he describes the community as lying 'in mediterranea Eberniae', i.e. in 'the midland district of Ireland'.[109] This idea of Mide as a central and essentially geographical unit is also evident in the earliest references to it found in the *Chronicle of Ireland*, the ancestor text lying behind extant annalistic collections. At 516 we find mention of the important battle of Druim Derg where Fíachu mac Néill defeated Failge of the Laigin.

AU 516.1 Bellum Droma D*e*rge f*or* Failghi. Fiacha uictor erat. Deinde Campus Midhe a Lagenis sublatus est.
The battle of Druim Derg against Failge. Fiacha was victor. Thereafter the plain of Mide was taken away from the Laigin.[110]

Since Mide was contested by Uí Néill and Laigin at this early date it is perhaps not surprising that a sense of it as a political unit is lacking. While there are references in the annals to the kingship of Mide from as early as the seventh century, these are problematic.

AU 618.2 iugul*atio* Fergusa filii Colmai*n* Magni
CS 618 Iugulatio Fergusa mic Colmain Móir, Rí Mid*he*
ATig [618] Bass F*ergus*a m*aic* Colmai*n* Moir, r*íg* Mi*di*.

109 *VSC*, 214.

110 There is one possibly earlier reference. At 506 in the Clonmacnoise annals the battle 'of Fremainn in Meath' is recorded, this time Failge defeating Fiacha. *ATig* [506]; *CS* 505 [506]. This battle is also recorded in *AU* but under 510 and no mention is made of Mide. *AU* 510.

AU 633.2 B*ellum* Atho Goan i nIartar Lifi in quo ceci*dit* Cremtann m. Aedho f*ílius* Senaich, ri Lagenorum.

CS [633] Cat*h* At*h*a Goan in Iartur Liffe in quo cecidit Cremtann mac Aod*h*a, mic Senaig*h*, Rí Laig*h*en. Faelan mac Colmain, et Conall mac Suibne, Rí Mid*h*e, ocus Failbe Flann, Rí Muman, uictores erant.

ATig [633] C*ath* Atha Goan i n-iarthar Lifi, in q*u*o ceci*dit* Cremth*ann* Cualan*n*, m*a*c Aedha, m*a*ic Senaigh, r*ex* L*ageni*orum. Faelan m*a*c Colmai*n* m*a*ic *Con*aill m*a*ic Suibne, r*í* Mi*de* 7 Failbe Flan*n* r*í* M*uman* uictores erant.[111]

CS 650 [653] Maeldoid mac Suibne, Rí Mid*h*e, moritur.

ATig [653] Mael-dóid mac Suibne, rí Mi*di*.

AU 689.3 Iug*ulatio* Diarmato Midi filii Airmedaig ceci

ATig [689] Iugulatio Diarmuda m*aic* Airm*ed*haigh .i. r*í* Midhi, la hAedh m*ac* nDluthaigh, r*íg* Fer Cúl

While not exactly clear-cut, my impression is that the above evidence does not strongly support the existence of a kingship of Mide in the seventh century. The title does not appear in the *Annals of Ulster* during this period. In several instances it appears as though the simple familial identifications of *AU*, perhaps best preserving the underlying *Chronicle of Ireland* text, were supplemented in the Clonmacnoise texts with the addition of the kingly titles. Also, if an entry is not found in *AU* at all, we cannot be certain it was in the *Chronicle of Ireland* ancestor text and may have been retrospectively added to the Clonmacnoise branch.

Towards the end of the seventh century with the obit of Díarmait in 689, we perhaps see the first evidence of an important shift.[112] Díarmait and several of his eighth-century Clann Cholmáin descendants are further identified as *Midi* 'of Mide', perhaps suggesting that the geographical term had begun to acquire real political significance. It seems that from this period Clann Cholmáin sought to make their area of political influence coterminous with the geographical area.

2.3 Other options for the earliest period?

In the period before the eighth century the political structure of the midlands, and Clann Cholmáin's place in it, is unclear and open to interpretation. Tírechán, writing in the final third of the

111 *ATig* is corrupt having run together the names of Faelán and Conall.
112 *AU* 689.3; *ATig* [689]; *CS* 685 [689]; *AI* 688 [689].

seventh century, describes a single Uí Néill kingdom to which the various sons of Níall might aspire.[113] Of course they would only achieve power if Patrick's favour and blessing was forthcoming. We must be conscious of Tírechán's motives and view the political structure he portrays less as a reality on the ground than as an aspirational model designed as a secular counterpart to the *regnum* of Patrick he set forth. That said, when he mentions the sons or descendants of Níall he refers directly only to those branches we would label as 'southern Uí Néill'.[114] In detailing Patrick's supposed travels through the country he makes a clear distinction, which stretches to the structure of his writings, not between 'northern' and 'southern' Uí Néill but rather between 'Connachta' and 'Uí Néill'. As Patrick crosses the Shannon to leave the midlands we are informed:

> Finit liber primus in regionibus nepotum Neill paractus. Incipit secundus in regionibus Connacht peractus.
> This is the end of the first book, (deeds) performed in the territory of the Uí Néill. Here begins the second book, (deeds) performed in the regions of Connaught.[115]

What we term the 'northern Uí Néill' dynasties have, as Charles-Edwards puts it, 'no obvious place in his text.'[116] Cenél nEógain and Cenél nÉndai are nowhere mentioned. What brief mention there is of Cenél Conaill appears in the Connachta book though Tírechán largely restricts himself to describing the physical geography of the region and the churches founded by Patrick there.[117]

Turning to Adomnán, probably writing slightly later than Tírechán,[118]the crucial and oft-quoted passage concerning political structure is Columba's warning to Áed Sláine on the risks associated with kin-slaying.

> Praecavere debes filii ne tibi a deo totius Everniae regni prearogativam monarchiae praedistinatam parricidali faciente peccato amittas. Nam si quandoque illud commiseris, non toto patris regno sed ejus aliqua parte in gente tua brevi frueris tempore.

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113 Ludwig Bieler (ed), *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979) 41-2.

114 See Bieler, *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* 262-63 for references to these occurrences in the text.

115 Bieler, *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* 138-139. Admittedly there remains some debate on whether this division is actually Tírechán's or that of a later editor. See Catherine Swift, 'Tírechán's motives in compiling the *Collectanea:* an alternative interpretation', *Ériu* xlv (1994) 53. But the lines which immediately follow this division, and which do appear to be personal to Tírechán, also contrast 'uestris regionibus' 'your regions' (Uí Néill) with the lands on the other side of the Shannon with which Tírechán identifies.

116 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 37.

117 'Et perrexit *for* Bernas filiorum Conill in campo Itho et fundauit ibi aeclessiam magnam'. Bieler, *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* 160. Noticeably the northern Conall is not described as a son of Niall, unlike the midland Conall, and is mentioned simply in passing as part of this description of a physical feature.

118 See *VSC*, lxv-lxviii; Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford 1988) 134-42.

> My son, you must take heed lest by reason of the sin of parricide you lose the prerogative of monarchy over the kingdom of all Ireland, predestined for you by God. For if ever you commit that sin, you will enjoy not the whole kingdom of your father, but only some part of it, in your own tribe, and for but a short time.[119]

Charles-Edwards argues that the 'whole kingdom of your father' probably represents the overkingship of the entire Connachta and that Áed's father, Díarmait, may have been regarded as the first king of the Connachta to concentrate his energies on the newly won midland territories.[120] It is of course difficult to retrieve genuine information about contemporary political structure from Adomnán's comments which are certainly aspirational in part (i.e. 'kingdom of all Ireland') and reflect an attempt to influence powerful and closely related kinsmen. While we might seriously doubt the existence of an early kingship of Uisnech or of Mide, it does seem reasonable to suggest that throughout the earliest phases of Uí Néill expansion, in the sixth and seventh centuries, still closely related dynasts could aspire to a coherent if probably quite loose dynastic overkingship. Of course as we know the initial conquest of the midlands was led by Uí Néill branches subsequently superseded by the descendants of Díarmait mac Cerbaill. And of these Clann Cholmáin were, except for a brief period in the early seventh century, thoroughly overshadowed by Síl nÁedo Sláine until the eighth.

As mentioned in the introduction, Brian Lacey has recently put forward a radical reinterpretation of early Uí Néill history. His model, if adopted, would have some implications for how we view the earliest evidence for the midland Uí Néill and Clann Cholmáin more specifically. In short, Lacey argues that those groupings we label 'northern Uí Néill' were actually descended from the indigenous Ulaid and did not take on the 'Uí Néill' designation until the eighth century, perhaps during the reign of Áed Allán.[121] Unusually detailed annalistic accounts of the battles of Cúl Dreimne (561), Móin Daire Lothair (562/3) and Almu (722) which identify participants as 'Uí Néill' are regarded by Lacey as eighth-century productions prepared after the last of these victories in 'a centre of Cenél nÉogain propaganda.'[122] Prior to the eighth century he argues that the 'Uí Néill' were really only those groupings we now label as 'Southern Uí Néill'. We have already noted that the terminology used by Tírechán and even the division of his work leaves the northern Uí Néill with 'no obvious place.'[123] The terminology around and portrayal of the Uí Néill in other early sources is also problematic and might

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119 *VSC*, 236-37.
120 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 508.
121 Brain Lacey, *Cenél Conaill and the Donegal Kingdoms AD 500-800* (Dublin 2006) 149.
122 *Ibid* 184. His detailed argument for the influence of Cenél nEógan propaganda in the retrospective editing of several annal entries can be found at *ibid* 146ff.
123 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 47.

seem to justify Lacey's scepticism. Adomnán only uses the designation 'Uí Néill' once throughout the entire *Vita*. It comes as part of a discussion between Columba and Comgell, abbot of Bangor. Below is the Latin from the earlier Anderson & Anderson edition followed firstly by their translation and then that of Richard Sharpe.

> Nam mei cogitionales amici, et tui secundum carnem cognati, (hoc est Nellis nepotes, et Cruthini populi) in hac vicina munitione Cethirni belligerantes committent bellum. Unde in supra memorato fonte aliquis de mea cognitione trucidabitur homuncio; cujus cum ceterís interfecti sanguine ejusdem fonticuli locus replebitur.

> For my friends by kinship, and your kinsmen according to the flesh (that is to say the descendants of Néll, and the peoples of Cruthen), being at war will fight a battle in this near-by fortress of Cethern. And so one of my kindred will be slaughtered in the above-mentioned well, and with the blood of that poor fellow, killed among the rest, the place of that well will be filled.[124]

> For my near kindred and your kinsmen according to the flesh (that is the Uí Néill and the Cruithin) will make war on one another, fighting a battle at this fort of *Dún Cethirn* near here. One of my kindred will actually be killed in this spring, and his blood and that of others will fill the site of the spring.[125]

This is a crucial piece of evidence for Lacey's thesis. Adomnán does appear to be making some kind of distinction in the type of relationship which existed between Columba and the Uí Néill on the one hand and Comgell and the Cruithni on the other. While the latter were kinsmen 'according to the flesh', the implication seems to be that Columba's relationship with the Uí Néill was of a somewhat different nature. Lacey cites a suggestion by Edel Bhreathnach that Adomnán may have been attempting to render the Irish term *cairde* into Latin. While admitting the difficulty in interpreting this passage, Lacey suggests that 'Adomnán's use of the phrase *cognitionales amici* may have been hinting at Colum Cille's 'fictional consanguinity' with the Uí Néill.'[126] But if we put this passage in a wider context, weaknesses in Lacey's thesis emerge. Adomnán uses a variety of different terms for the Uí Néill throughout his work and, cumulatively, they make it quite clear that they were Columba's ordinary kindred.[127]

The earliest occurrence of the designation 'Uí Néill' in the *Chronicle of Ireland,* comes in recording the battle of Móin Daire Lothair.[128] As noted above, Lacey regards this annal entry as an eighth-century interpolation.[129] The next earliest occurrences of the 'Uí Néill' designation in the annals,

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124 *VSC*, 316-17.
125 Sharpe, *Life of St Columba* 151.
126 Brian Lacey, *Cenél Conaill and the Donegal Kingdoms AD 500-800* (Dublin 2006) 151.
127 Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh kinship*135-40.
128 For its occurrences, see Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* ii 179-80.
129 Lacey, *Cenél Conaill and the Donegal Kingdoms* 184.

reproduced below, are also problematic and appear neither telling for nor against Lacey's thesis.

AU 590.3 Bel*lum* Maighi Ochtair re mBrannubh m. Ech*ach* for Uu Neill
The battle of Mag Ochtair [won] by Brandub son of Eochu over the Uí Néill.[130]

AU 605.1 Bel*lum* Slæb*h*re in quo uictus est Brandubh mc. Eathach. Nepotes Neill uictores erant, .i. Aed Uaredac in quo tempore regnauit.
The battle of Slaebre took place, in which Brandub son of Eochu was vanquished. The Uí Néill were the victors, i.e. Aed Uairidnach, who reigned at that time.

Brandub was an Uí Chennselaig king of Leinster.[131] As his opponent(s) are left unnamed in the first case we have no way of knowing who constituted the 'Uí Néill' in the battle. In the second case the victory is only attributed to Áed by a secondary hand in the *Annals of Ulster*.[132] If the later hand of *AU* has incorrectly assumed the involvement of Áed Allán, it may be possible that these two battles at either end of Brandub's career were both fought against what we would now term 'southern Uí Néill' opponents. But when Brandub's opponents are explicitly named they are what we would now call 'northern Uí Néill' dynasts.[133] The evidence is inconclusive. The problematic nature of both this early evidence and the theory which Lacey has built upon it is particularly evident when we come to consider a midland king important for our study.

As already discussed, the early seventh century saw a brief period of Clann Cholmáin prominence in the midlands. The key information about Óengus (d.621), discussed in some detail in the first chapter, is firstly his obit:

AU 621.2 Iugul*atio* Aengusa mc. Colmain Mag*h*ni, .i. regis nepotum Neill.
The killing of Aengus son of Colmán Mór i.e. king of the Uí Néill.[134]

and secondly his inclusion, in all probability, in the kinglist *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* [*BCC*] where

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130 The *Annals of Tigernach* provides the extra detail that the battle took place:
os Cluai*n* Conaire Tomain andes
on the hill above Cluain Conairi Tomáin in the south. *ATig* [590].
This battle would appear to have taken place near Cloncurry in northern Co.Kildare. See *Onom.*, 528; Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 117 n.4; *AFM* i 586 n.'m'.

131 Brega suffered 'the blows of Brandubh' during this period. *CS* 601; *ATig* [601]. See *LL* i 236 for the short poem, 'Bemmend Branduib for Brega'. Brandub was killed by his own kindred the same year as the battle of Slaebre. *AU* 605.2; *ATig* [605]; *CS* 605; *AI* 608. See Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Ireland, 400-800', 199.

132 Nor do the Clonmacnoise annals elaborate on who exactly the Uí Néill were. *ATig* [605]; *CS* 605. Site unidentified.

133 Over the following few years Brandub continued to be quite active killing Cumascach son of Áed in 597 and his father Áed son of Ainmire, both from Cenél Conaill, the following year. *AU* 597.1, *ATig* [597], *CS* 597; *AU* 598.2, *ATig* [598], *CS* 598. In these cases where his opponents are named the term 'Uí Néill' is not used.

134 Also *ATig* [621], *CS* 621. There is a duplicate entry of Óengus's obit at *CS* 625.

he is described as 'Sóer Óengus', 'noble Óengus'.[135] *BCC* would seem to regard Óengus then as a king of Tara. But, as discussed previously, the title in his obit does not mean 'king of Tara'. Óengus is the first in a series of 'kings of Uí Néill', a title which in the eighth century appears to represent a midland deputyship.[136] If we were to apply Lacey's model to the midland evidence it could be argued that Óengus's inclusion in *BCC* and his description as 'king of the Uí Néill' are not incompatible. In short, that Óengus was king of the Uí Néill as that grouping was defined in the seventh century, i.e. excluding what we now label 'northern Uí Néill'. It could be argued that he did secure the kingship of Tara in that capacity, a kingship contested both by his grouping (the Uí Néill) and such non-Uí Néill groupings as, for example, Cenél Conaill.

But this approach is highly speculative and perhaps smacks of a desperate attempt to reconcile the above fragments of evidence. It depends on accepting Lacey's overarching thesis about the early history of the Uí Néill, much of which is, by his own admission, based upon 'informed speculation.'[137] While there are dubious elements to the now generally accepted theory on the origins and early movements of the Uí Néill, such is the paucity of evidence for this early period that this is hardly surprising. Lacey's new hypotheses and speculations do not seem to command any greater respect or to be supported by any greater weight of evidence than existing theories.[138] While previous scholars, such as Charles-Edwards, have highlighted the problems the source material pose for the now orthodox labels of 'northern' and 'southern' Uí Néill, in considering the implications Lacey appears to have gone to a particularly radical extreme. It does not seem appropriate, as things stand, to adopt his radical new interpretation of the whole of early Uí Néill history simply because it allows us conveniently deal with the problematic status of Óengus (d.621)

Another possibility in considering the early structure of Uí Néill kingship in the midlands is to adopt a model used by Thomas Charles-Edwards in discussing the eighth century but apply it to an earlier period. The appearance of various 'kings of the Uí Néill' in the eighth century is regarded by him

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135 See Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray (ed), '*Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig:* Edition', eadem (ed), *The Kingship and landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005) 78, 84-85. In an earlier edition of the text Gerard Murphy took 'Óengus' as an epithet of the following Domnall, i.e. 'Domnall shall be a glorious Óengus', but both the more recent edition and scholarship prefer to see a simple list with 'Óengus' representing a separate individual. See G. Murphy, 'On the dates of two sources used in Thurneysen's Heldensage', *Ériu* xvi (1952) 148; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 492.

136 For the various 'kings of Uí Néill' in the *Chronicle* see the index to Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* ii 180. The designation 'king of Tara', occurs much earlier and more frequently in the record. See the index to Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* ii 172.

137 Brian Lacey, *Cenél Conaill and the Donegal Kingdoms AD 500-800* (Dublin 2006) 30.

138 For a highly critical review of his book, see: Colmán Etchingham, 'Review of *Cenél Conaill and the Donegal Kingdoms AD 500-800* by Brian Lacey', *Irish Historical Studies* xxxvi (141) (May 2008) 100-102.

as evidence for the development of lesser, localised deputy kingships amongst the Uí Néill.[139] These individuals, all from Clann Cholmáin, are described as 'kings of the Uí Néill' at times when the kingship of Tara was held by a northern Uí Néill king. Conversely, when Clann Cholmáin dynasts later secured the overkingship themselves, we find northern Uí Néill kings described as 'king of the north' suggesting that the arrangment could work both ways.[140] But the inclusion of Óengus in *BCC* as something more than a midland deputy would seem to pose problems for such an interpretation. There seems to be little obvious reason why the text's author, a Síl nÁedo Sláine partisan, would include Óengus if he was not regarded as a king of Tara.[141] One possible solution is that the author of *BCC* regarded Óengus as an uncontroversial but powerful and well-known midland figure with whom to backfill the list. *BCC* is strongly biased against many of the reigning king of Tara's (Fínnachta Fledach) immediate predecessors, both from Cenél Conaill and from rival Síl nÁedo Sláine branches. Perhaps then Óengus, not actually a king of Tara but rather a midland deputy, was elevated to the former position by the author of *BCC*. But again this seems a less than satisfactory explanation.

In truth the position(s) held by Clann Cholmáin kings during the seventh century remains obscure. While this is partly due to the difficulty in understanding exactly how Uí Néill kingship more generally was organised at this early stage, the real difficulty is that, but for brief periods, Clann Cholmáin was thoroughly overshadowed in the midlands and unable to challenge its major political rivals. As we have seen, for much of the mid and later seventh century we are forced to draw inferences and speculate on the position of Clann Cholmáin from the wider political context. But the year 697 is an important milestone in our study as it saw the promulgation of Adomnán's *Lex Innocentium.*[142] The list of guarantors to the law has survived and throws much light on the relative strengths of the various Uí Néill branches at a crucial moment. Coming after such a long period of virtual silence as regards Clann Cholmáin, the list is an interesting reflection of the immediate post-Fínnachta political landscape and provides an obvious starting point for a history of the Clann Cholmáin in the eighth century.

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139 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 479-81.

140 This will be discussed in greater detail below. See Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743: the Rise and Fall of Dynasties', *Peritia* 16 (2002) 396-418, esp 406-07.

141 Though perhaps updated later, the text is generally dated to the reign of Fínsnechta Fledach of Síl nÁedo Sláine who reigned 675-95. Carey suggests a date of 688-9 for the text. John Carey, 'On the interrelationships of some *Cín Dromma Snechtai* texts', *Ériu* xlvi (1995) 89.

142 *AU* 697.3; *ATig* [697]; *CS* 693 [697]; *AI* 696 [697].

3. The eighth-century emergence

Following a period of almost impenetrable obscurity, we can begin to consider the history of Clann Cholmáin from the late seventh century with greater confidence. A crucial piece of evidence is the Guarantor-list attached to *Cáin Adomnáin* (697) which includes several Clann Cholmáin dynasts and illustrates their relative political significance at this particular moment in time.[1]

These dynasts are 'Murchad Midi' (66), followed some way down the list by 'Garban Mide ri'(83) and 'Bodb*hch*at*h* rí Luig*h*ne' (89). It is also possible that 'Fallo*m*ui*n* rí Ua Tuirt*r*i' (80) is Fallomon son of Cú Chongalt of the closely related Coílle Fallomuin dynasty.[2] In terms of their placement in the list overall, none of these midland kings were of the highest order. But judging by his position in the list relative to his kinsmen, Murchad appears to have been the most senior Clann Cholmáin dynast at this time. He does appear after his father Díarmait (d.689) in all the Midland Kinglists, but the annals, where Murchad is only mentioned twice, provide little detail. Like his father Díarmait and brother Garbán, Murchad bears the epithet 'Midi', stressing the link between Clann Cholmáin and the midland region.

His brother Garbán died in 702 but the annals provide no further information.[3] The 'ri' which follows his name in the Guarantor List looks like a rather clumsy later addition. Bodbhchath's title 'ri Luighne' might, as Charles-Edwards suggests, mean 'he had been placed as ruler of a client kingdom in Mide by his brother Murchad'.[4] While his title does not look as suspicious as Garbán's, it may still have been added later. That said, while perhaps incorrect for 697, it is possible the title is correct for a later date. We do know that Bodbcath fell in battle against Cellach of the Laigin at Claenath (Clane, Co.

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1 Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor list of *Cáin Adomnáin,* 697', *Peritia* 1 (1982) 178-215. See discussion in Part 1.

2 Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor list' 180-81. The numbering is that of the guarantors provided by Ní Dhonnchadha. There are ninety-one guarantors in all, the first forty of whom are ecclesiastical. The first secular guarantor is Loingsech (41), Uí Néill overking.

3 *AU* 702.4. The drowning of his son Fiachrai in Lough Ree is recorded under the year 747 in the Clonmacnoise annals. *ATig* [747]. The saga *Cath Almaine,* the B recension of which dates to the tenth century, records one 'M*a*c Ga*r*bhain' of '*Ui* Neill an Desg*ir*t' among the slain at this important battle. Pádraig Ó Riain (ed), *Cath Almaine* (Dublin 1978) 15, 55.

4 Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* 180 n.3. Mac Shamhráin argues that the title 'would seem to be an error' noting that the preceding name in the list is Toicthech son of Cennfáelad, king of Luigne. This is accurate but Toicthech was of the Luigne Connacht. As Ní Dhonnchadha notes, Bodbhchath's title 'may well refer to the branch of Luigne in Meath'. Mac Shamhráin, "*Nebulae discutiuntur?* The emergence of Clann Cholmáin, sixth-eighth centuries', 85; Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor list', 213.

Kildare) while his ally at this encounter, Fogartach grandson of Cernach, fled the field.[5]

There are other sources of information for this general period, including the 'Ríg Uisnig' kinglist from the *Book of Leinster,* which occasionally elaborates beyond what are usually quite laconic entries. For example:

> Dermait 7 Airmedach i cath Bili Tened ro marb*tha.*
> Aed 7 Colgu .u. Dorochair in cethrursa. la Fland m*ac* Aeda m*eic* Dluthaig. 7 daroch*air* Fl*and* sin gliaid chetna .i. Fland m*ac* Dluth*aig* m*eic* Aile*l*la.[6]
>
> Diarmait and Airmedach were killed in the battle of Bile Tened.
> Áed and Colgu [reigned for] five years. These four fell by Flann son of Áed son of Dlúthach. And Flann fell in the same fight, namely Flann son of Dlúthach son of Ailill.

This is a reference to the battle of Bile Tened, recorded in the annals under the year 714, and which constitutes one of the two appearances of Murchad Midi in the annals.[7]

> *AU* 714.1 Bel*lum* ime-sech in Campo Singittę uc Biliu Thenedh i nAsal ubi Flann filius Aidho m. Dluthaigh ₇ Dub Duin nepos Becce ceciderunt in alt*er*a cong*res*sione belli, ₇ Colgu ₇ Aedh m. Dermato in prima cong*res*sione belli interfecti sunt.
>
> A battle of varying fortunes in Mag Singitae at Bile Teined in Asal, where Flann son of Aed son of Dlúthach and Dub Dúin grandson of Béc fell in the second encounter of the battle, and Colgu and Aed son of Diarmait were slain in the first.
>
> *ATig* [714] Cath i*m*mesech i*n* Campo Singite ic Bile tenidh i n-Asal ria Murch*ad* Midhi, ubi Fland m*a*c Aedha, m*ai*c Dluthaigh *et* Dub dui*u* h*úa* Beicce ceciderun*t* in ailte*r*a *congres*sio*n*e belli, *et* Colgu *et* Aedh Cluasach [mac] Diarmuta in p*r*ima congressione belli i*nter*fecti s*un*t.
>
> A .... battle in Mag Singite at Bile tened in Asal, gained by Murchad of Meath, ubi etc.[8]

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5 *AU* 704.4. His description as 'm. Dermato' would seem to fix him as a brother of Murchad. Also *ATig* 704; *CS* 700 [704]. If the next entry in *AU* is related then the king of Cenél Loegaire may also have fallen along with Bodbchad. *AU* 704.5.

6 *LL* i 197.

7 Bile Tened can be identified with the townland of Billistown, par. Delvin, Co. Westmeath. This lay within the wider area of Assal in eastern Co. Westmeath.

8 *Imsech* consists of the preposition *sech* to which has been prefixed the preposition imb/imm + an and functions here adverbally meaning '(each) in (his) turn'. See *DIL* col.124, l.84; Rudolf Thurneysen, *A Grammer of Old Irish* (Dublin 1946 repr Dublin 2003) §841d at 517. For a detailed note on this entry, also see: Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 188 n.1.

Though Murchad only features in the Clonmacnoise group of annals, the deaths of his brothers Áed and Colgu are recorded in both *AU* and the Clonmacnoise texts.[9] Returning to the kinglist item reproduced above, we could speculate that two otherwise unknown figures, Díarmait and Airmedach, completed the four Clann Cholmáin dynasts 'Rig Uisnig' tells us fell at the battle. But it is much more likely that a mistake has been made involving two of the immediately preceding figures in the list, Díarmait (d.689) and Airmedach (d.637?), which has resulted in them being placed at a battle involving their descendants in 714. This confusion is also present in the two other midland kinglists, that in *MS Laud 610* and Flann Mainistrech's regnal poem *Mide Maigen Clainne Cuind.* The Laud list is the most laconic of these three midland kinglists and after Murchad we find the unusual entry 'Diarmait Airmedach' and immediately below this, 'Aed ₇ Cholgu'.[10] O'Rahilly suggests that these names are corruptions of 'Diarmait m. Airmedaig, which would be merely a blundering repetition of the name of the king who was slain in 689.'[11] Alternatively, MacNeill suggests that the error may derive from a misconstrued interlineation, something like 'm. Diarmato m. Airmedaich', which referred to Áed and Colgu on the next line.[12] The list would remain faulty, on comparison with the annals at least, even if we were to adopt the above suggestions and assume Áed and Colgu were intended to come after Murchad. According to the annals Murchad did not fall until the year after the battle of Bile Tened.[13] Leaving aside how this error may have come about, we should note its presence in all three Midland kinglists.[14] We can clearly see that such is the confusion in the king-lists for this period that they provide little reliable supplementary information.

But Clann Cholmáin's fortunes appear to have changed radically during the period covered by these floruits. About the turn of the eighth century, as illustrated by the Guarantor List, the dynasty was hardly of the first order of importance. But when Murchad Midi died in 715, the second of his two appearance in the annals, he is accorded

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9 Though Garbán is not given a patronymic in the annals he may have been a brother of Murchad, Áed, Colgu and Bodbchad. *AU* 702.4.

10 The relevant folio can be consulted at: http://image.ox.ac.uk/images/bodleian/mslaudmisc610/115v.jpg

11 Thomas F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin 1946) 416.

12 John [Eoin] MacNeill, 'On the reconstruction and date of the Laud Synchronisms', *ZCP* x (1915) 94.

13 *AU* 715.2; *ATig* [715]; *CS* 711 [715].

14 *LL* i 197; Smith, '*Mide Maigen Clainne Cuind:* Medieval Poem on the Kings of Mide', §20 at 117, 130; Meyer, 'The Laud Synchronisms', 480.

the rather grand title 'king of the Uí Neill'.[15] Establishing what this title meant is crucial. In the terminology of the *Airgialla Charter Poem*, a text which may date to the 730s and reflect a newly established alliance between Áed Allán and the Airgialla, the title 'king of the Uí Néill' is used in referring to the overking of the entire Uí Néill grouping.[16] But this terminology was not shared by the annals and we can be quite sure Murchad Midi did not hold the overkingship in 715, a position held by Fergal mac Máele Dúin of Cenél nEógain. Yet the title suggests both that Murchad held a position of some broad authority and that Clann Cholmáin's standing had improved markedly about this time. Considering the dynasty's history during this period is difficult but some sense emerges by using the above mentioned sources coupled with inferences drawn from the wider political context.

Generally speaking the Uí Chernaig tended to be overshadowed by the Uí Chonaing of northern Brega from this period as the territorial divisions so characteristic of Brega's later history took shape. The year 704 appears to have seen an attack on the Laigin by Bodbchad of Clann Cholmáin in alliance with Fogartach of the Uí Chernaig. The location (Clane, Co.Kildare) would certainly suggest these two individuals were the aggressors but Cellach Cualann, Uí Máil king of Leinster, was victorious. Bodbchad fell while Fogartach fled.[17] A decade later at the battle of Bile Tened, Flann of the Síl nDlúthaig, based in northern Brega, struck deep into the midlands. The battle site has been located between Delvin and Mullingar.[18] While the attack was repulsed by Murchad Midi, this came at some cost as two of his brothers, Colgu and Áed, were slain. According to the *Banshenchas* Murchad's wife was Ailpín daughter of Comgall of the Delbna Mór or Assail, based around modern Delvin, an area then where the Clann Cholmáin king could count on strong support.[19] On the same day the 'men of Mide' also defeated Forbasach, king of Uí Fhailgi at Garbshalach in Mide.[20] This second battle has

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15 *AU* 715.2; *ATig* [715]; *CS* 711 [715].

16 Thomas Charles-Edwards, '*The Airgíalla Charter Poem:* The Legal Content', Edel Bhreathnach (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005) 122-23; *Idem*, 'The Uí Néill 695-743: the Rise and Fall of Dynasties', *Peritia* 16 (2002) 410-11. The annals of Inisfallen use the title in a similar fashion though perhaps here reflecting a Munster bias and desire to deprive the Uí Néill of the prestige associated with the name 'Tara'. For example, see *AI* 710; *AI* 763.

17 *AU* 704.4; *ATig* 704; *CS* 700 [704].

18 *AU* 714.1; *ATig* [714]; *CS* [714]. I cannot identify Flann's ally, Dub Dúin. See: Charles-Edwards *Chronicle of Ireland* 188 n.1; Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743', 401.

19 See (Metrical) Margaret Dobbs,(ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 309-10, 334; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* §206 at 131, 200. (Prose) Margaret Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234: 186; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* §379 at 263, 381.

20 *AU* 714.5; *ATig* [714].

been located between Lough Owel and Lough Derravaragh, deep in Mide, and about ten miles to the north-west of the first battle site.[21] Though the 'men of Mide' are unnamed, we can be reasonably sure that the defence was led by Clann Cholmáin. We have, it seems, evidence here of a co-ordinated attack by elements of Síl nÁeda Sláine and the Laigin directed against Clann Cholmáin which was beaten back with some loss.[22] Murchad Midi was killed the following year by Conall Grant of Uí Chernaig and granted, as previously noted, the title 'king of the Uí Néill' in his annalistic obit.

After Murchad Midi's death in 715, the next piece of annalistic information about Clann Cholmáin we have is the obit of Ailill son of Bodbchad who was killed in 726.[23] Domnall son of Murchad, the key figure in Clann Cholmáin's mid-eighth century history and the first of the dynasty's kings to secure the Uí Néill overkingship, first appears in the annalistic record shortly afterwards.[24]

AU 730.8 Commixtio dunaid *for* Domnall m. Murchadho i Culaibh, i*d* est, adaigh noidhe nephain ł Imlecho Senaich.
A camp mêlée against Domnall son of Murchad in Cúla i.e. adaigh noidhe nephain, or of Imlech Senaich.[25]

Contemporary sources make it clear that to disrupt a king's encampment was a serious affront. In the *Airgíalla Charter Poem* we find the following in a section concerned with the four crimes the king of the Uí Néill (i.e. the overking of the Uí Néill or king of Tara) may judge himself, i.e. without consulting the Airgialla.[26]

> Mesc n-óenaig fair mesc cuirmthige mesc a dúnaid
> díguin im fhér a fhaithche is damnae mbúraig.
>
> The disruption of an assembly upon him, the disruption of a drinking-hall, the

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21 See Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* 189 n.1.

22 This episode is reminiscent of another in the early seventh century when Conall son of Suibne successfully repulsed a co-ordinated attack by Síl nÁedo Sláine and Laigin. See *AU* 604.2; *ATig* [604]; *CS* 604; *AI* 607 [604].

23 *AU* 726.6; *ATig* [726]. We are not told by whom.

24 He appears in all copies of the Clann Cholmáin genealogy, the three midland kinglists and is the first Clann Cholmain king to appear in the Middle Irish high-king list. See Genealogy and Kinglist spreadsheets. In the margin of the 'Rig Uisnig' list we find the note 'cetrí her*end* a Midi'. *LL* i 197. His mother was Ailpin of the Delbna Mór mentioned above, see n.18.

25 The untranslated phrase in the middle of this annal remains to be deciphered. See Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 203.

26 Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray (ed), '*The Airgíalla Charter Poem:* Edition', eadem (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005) §32 at 134-35 .

disruption of his encampment, violation of the grass of his *faithche,* it is an occasion of offence.

But we must wonder what Domnall was doing encamped in northern Brega. The encampment was 'i Culaibh', generally translated as the 'recesses' and probably located to the north of Tailtiu and Kells.[27] This was surely hostile territory for a Clann Cholmáin king and the location may even suggest aggression on his part. Though it should be noted that Domnall's wife, according to the *Banshenchas*, was 'Albine ingen Aililla Arda Cianachta'.[28] Ailill was most likely the last native king of the Ciannachta in Brega before the Uí Chonaing took over the title for themselves in the mid-eighth century.[29] While certainly a challenging part of the country for Clann Cholmáin at this stage, the dynasty clearly recognised the importance of establishing alliances and some presence in the area. That this encampment was 'disturbed' can hardly have come as a surprise. An alternative interpretation may be that Domnall, like his father before him, was a 'king of the Uí Néill', exercising some form of broader authority in the region and we should consider his encampment in Brega, perhaps close to the important assembly site of Tailtiu, in this light.

The next episode involving Domnall also has implications for our understanding of the political structure of the midlands in the eighth century.

AU 733.7 Coscrath Cathail do Domnall a Tailtae 7 coscradh Fallomuin do Chathal a Tlactghu.
The overthrow of Cathal by Domnall in Tailtiu, and the overthrow of Fallomun by Cathal in Tlachtga.

Firstly, it seems reasonable to assume that despite, or perhaps because of the lack of a patronymic, the Domnall mentioned was the son of Murchad of Clann Cholmáin. There

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27 Edel Bhreathnach, 'The Medieval Kingdom of Brega', eadem (ed), *Kingship and landscape* 414; Thomas Charles-Edwards, '*The Airgíalla Charter Poem:* The Legal Content', Edel Bhreathnach (ed), *Kingship and Landscape* 120. 'Imlecho Senaich' is a further detail appearing in the annals but I cannot propose an identification. This is the only example of the place listed in *Onom.,* 455. Though occurring in the neighbourhood of Tailtiu, this incident appears to be different from the various 'disturbances' of the *óenach Tailten.* In those cases *óenach* or *agon* is used rather than *dúnad* here. A discussion of those 'disturbances', which is also of relevance for what follows directly here, can be found at Appendix 5.

28 See (Prose) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* (1931) 163-234: 186; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* §383 at 264, 382. Also (Metrical) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 310, 334; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* §208 at 132, 200.

29 His obit is at *AU* 702.4. See Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 178 n.4. Another possibility, though perhaps a little late, is that Albini's father was the Ailill who was killed in 'Bellum Airde Ciannachtae' and who is described as 'ri Ardda Oa Cinn Faeladh'. *AU* 749.5.

does not appear to be any other Domnall of sufficient prominence during this period to be identified in this way.[30] Of the other individuals involved, Fallomon gave his name to the Coílle Fallomuin dynasty based around Fore Co. Westmeath and was a descendant of Colmán Bec. Identifying Cathal, the aggressor, is somewhat more difficult. Cathal mac Finnguini has been suggested which if accurate would mark an ambitious Munster strike against important Uí Néill sites.[31] But the major argument against such an identification is the silence of the *Annals of Inisfallen* on this matter. This partisan text is well-known for focusing upon and exaggerating anything which shows a Munster king in a positive light and the fact that it makes nothing of this incident undermines this identification.[32] There appear to be two other possible candidates, Cathal mac Áeda of Síl nÁeda Sláine and Cathal mac Muiredaig of Connacht. The latter, as king of Connacht, would have been sufficiently important to be recorded without a patronymic. But this identification is dismissed by Charles-Edwards because 'it would be entirely out of character'.[33] While the only piece of information about Cathal in the annals is his obit, the above comment does seem reasonable if we bear in mind the peaceful relations which generally prevailed between the Connachta and Southern Uí Néill during this period.[34] Charles-Edwards therefore considers Cathal mac Áeda of Síl nÁeda Sláine as the most likely candidate.[35] But again, other than to record his death, the annals have nothing whatsoever to say about this Cathal. It appears impossible to propose any firm identification of the Cathal who attacked Domnall and Fallomon in 733.

Leaving aside the identity of the aggressor for the moment, let us consider the clashes themselves. Both locations were politically sensitive and Cathal was certainly

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30 See Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 477.

31 F.J. Byrne, *Irish kings and High-kings* 208; Bart Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession* 220; Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin and Paul Byrne, 'Kings named in *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* and *The Airgíalla Charter Poem*', Edel Bhreathnach (ed), *Kingship and Landscape* 211.

32 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 478. Contrast this with the account of Cathal's attack on Brega in 721 which is treated at great length. *AI* 721.

33 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 479.

34 *AU* 735.4. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 570.

35 Charles-Edwards identifies Cathal as a son of Áed of the Uí Chernaig branch though he may have been a member of the Síl nDlúthaig branch. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 479. See F.J. Byrne, 'Historical Note on Cnogba (Knowth)', Table I; and idem *Historical Knowth and its Hinterland* Table A1.1:S3 63. The father Áed was a Guarantor to *Cáin Adomnáin.* Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor list of *Cáin Adomnáin,* 697', 181.

making a bold statement.[36] But the incident raises a number of questions.[37] There is nothing to suggest that the *óenach* of Tailtiu was 'disturbed' during this event, a phenomenon discussed elsewhere, but the mere fact that the encounter took place at this sensitive site is significant enough. Tailtiu was a location intimately associated with Tara and we must wonder about Domnall's presence there. There is no evidence that Domnall had usurped, even temporarily, the reigning Uí Néill overking, Flaithbertach mac Loingsig of Cenél Conaill. Domnall was not to become overking himself until 743. But there is evidence that Flaithbertach was preoccupied at this time as he, unsuccessfully as it turned out, attempted to face down Áed Allán of Cenél nEógain. Áed had launched a major offensive against Flaithbertach over successive years which eventually forced the latter into clerical retirement where he died over thirty years later. Perhaps with the northern Uí Néill thus distracted, Domnall was in a position to exert greater authority in the midlands and occupy, even temporarily, a site associated with the overking of Uí Néill. If Cathal was from Munster, he may have perceived a moment of weakness before Domnall demonstrated that he, irrespective of northern Uí Néill weakness, was in a position to defend the sensitive midland sites. If Cathal was from Síl nÁedo Sláine, perhaps he was attempting to challenge the growing power of Clann Cholmáin in the midlands and remind Domnall that Síl nÁedo Sláine contested Domnall's claim to regional primacy. It seems unlikely that the order in which the battles are listed in the annal entry tells us anything significant and the close geographical proximity of the sites means we can infer little, irrespective of whether we argue the attack came from Munster or from Brega.

But of some interest is the position of Fallomon at Tlachtga. He may well feature in the 'Guarantor-list' attached to *Cáin Adomnáin* and did not die until 766 when he is styled 'king of Mide', the first reliable use of that title in the annals.[38] However there is no evidence, either from his positioning in the 'Guarantor-list' relative to other Clann

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36 As Charles-Edwards notes, 'To judge by the parallel between Tailtiu and Tlachtga in this entry, Tlachtga may have been, like Tailtiu, an assembly site, though of lesser status, with appropriate legends attached.' Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 477. Tailtiu was certainly a much more important site appearing on numerous occasions in the annals and other early texts, for example Adomnán's *Life of Columba* and in the opening line of the *Airgialla Charter Poem.* Other than this reference we do not have such a wealth of evidence for the early significance of Tlachtga though later legend grew up about the place. Bhreathnach and Murray (ed), '*The Airgíalla Charter Poem:* Edition', eadem (ed), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* 128-29 §1. *VSC,* 470-71 [III 3]. For the Dindshenchas of Tlachtga, see Edward Gwynn (ed), *The Metrical Dindshenchas* iv (Dublin 1924 repr. Dublin 1991) 186-91. Also see D.A. Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara', *Ériu* 18 (1958) 129-30.

37 See Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 477-80.

38 Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor list of *Cáin Adomnáin,* 697', 181; *AU* 766.2; *ATig* [766].

Cholmáin figures, or from the annal evidence, that Fallomon was at any stage the most powerful king in the midlands. The model proposed by Charles-Edwards to explain the 'apparent contrast between power and title' seems entirely reasonable.[39] In short, while Domnall was the most powerful king in Mide in 733, he was not king of Mide. Instead he allowed Fallomon to hold this title as a bauble thus demonstrating *febas,* political standing. By flattering Fallomon, Domnall solidified their relationship and secured loyalty. This interpretation would seem to be confirmed by reference to the sites involved. Cathal was met by Domnall at Tailtiu, by far the more important site, while he was met by Fallomon at the less prestigious Tlachtga. It may be that this relationship with Fallomon had a parallel in Domnall's relationship with the northern Uí Néill at this time. Earlier we noted the possibility that Domnall, like his father Murchad, was a 'king of the Uí Néill', holding some broad authority in the midlands. It may be that this position was one of deputyship. In short, just as Fallomon was deputy to Domnall in Mide, Domnall was himself a deputy to the northern overking in 'southern Uí Néill' territory. We do appear to have evidence here for a degree of complexity in the organisation of midland kingship which was characterised by hierarchy and deputyship.

Over the next few years we find evidence of Áed Allán's activity and success on many fronts. He defeated the Ulaid and probably established Cenél nEógain authority over the Muirtheimne region, he met with Cathal mac Finnguine at a *rígdál* and he enjoyed a 'tremendous victory' over the Laigin at the battle of Áth Senaig.[40] The next appearance of Domnall mac Murchada is probably at 739 where we find the following:

AU 739.4 Combustio muinnt*ir*i Domnaill i mBodbraith ubi ceci*dit* Ail*il*l Breg Leith in domo cenę.
The burning of Domnall's followers in Bodbráith, where Ailill of Brí Leth perished in the banquet-house.[41]

Like the cases mentioned earlier, the absence of a patronymic would tend to suggest a well-known person and we can be reasonably sure that this is a reference to Domnall of

39 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 480.

40 *AU* 735.2; *ATig* [735]; *AU* 737.9; *ATig* [737]; *AU* 738.4; *ATig* [738]. For a discussion focussed on the context of the 737 *rígdál*, see: Denis Casey, 'An Eighth-Century Royal Conversation: Cathal mac Finnguini and Áed Allán at Tír da Glás, AD 737', *Quaestio Insularis* 7 (2007) 57-71.

41 See also *ATig* [739]. In the translation we should perhaps read 'Brí Léith'. The *Dindshenchas* derives the name from someone called Líath. Edward Gwynn (ed), *The Metrical Dindshenchas* iv (5 vols Dublin 1903-35 repr. Dublin 1991) 228. See also Kathleen Mulchrone (ed), *Bethu Phátraic: The Tripartite Life of Patrick* (Dublin 1939) l.992 (Leth), l.993 (Leith).

Clann Cholmáin. Our reference is the only appearance of 'Bodbraith' in Hogan's *Onomasticon Goedelicum*.[42] Ailill, described as 'of Brí Léith', was presumably a member of Domnall's party. Brí Léith, near Ardagh in Co.Longford, was in Tethbae. While this incident may or may not have taken place in Tethbae, in the absence of an identification of the placename 'Bodbraith' we cannot be sure. While Ailill does not feature in the genealogies of those Uí Néill branches who controlled Tethbae, namely the Cenél Maini and Cenél Coirpri,[43] he is included (*Ailill Brig Leith*) in one of the poems listing those kings from the region who were buried at Clonmacnoise.[44] Returning to the annal entry itself, the detail that the incident happened 'in domo cenę', perhaps a 'banquet-house' or 'dinner-house' is intriguing. This phrase does not, to the best of my knowledge, appear anywhere else in the annals. Might it suggest that the setting was the refectory of a religious house? Or perhaps the annalist simply used a term he was familiar with to describe an attack on Domnall and his retinue as they were feasting. The entry may also suggest that Domnall exercised some form of control or overlorship over Tethbae, something entirely plausible.

The record of Domnall entering 'in clericatum' the following year and again in 744 is also intriguing.[45] In neither case are we told where Domnall went and there is no detail about the nature of the position he took up or the motivation behind his decision. Domnall may have 'opted out' of his kingship, even briefly, perhaps as a result of external pressure. Or perhaps he took up some ecclesiastical position which he held simultaneously with his kingship, a practice which was relatively common in Munster at the time. While we are in large part reduced to conjecture, some possibilities are more likely than others. Mac Niocaill speculates that Domnall may have taken up the abbacy of a major midland church, Clonard perhaps.[46] However if this were the case, there would seem to be little reason why the annals would mention it twice in quick succession. Indeed the wording of the second instance 'Domnall in clericatum iterum', would seem to tell against Mac Niocaill's interpretation. Edel Bhreatnach suggests Domnall's retreats

42 *Onom.*, 118. His suggestion that we consider 'Síd boidb', north of Clonmel, seems unlikely in this context.

43 See *CGH* 162, 166.

44 M. Stokes (ed), *Christian Inscriptions in the Irish language chiefly collected and drawn by George Petrie* i (2 vols Dublin 1872) 77. This poem, which begins *Hi ccathraig in toirnide, Ciaran crabad co ngrinde,* is mentioned in passing in: Dobbs, 'The Territory and People of Tethba', 253-54; James F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical* (New York 1966) 383. But thus far I have been unable to find any significant discussion of it.

45 *AU* 740.1; *ATig* [740]; *AU* 744.2; *ATig* [744].

46 Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings* 126.

into clerical life may have been occasioned by military defeat.[47] The first instance might fit this model. Domnall may have retreated temporarily into clerical life in 740 in the wake of the mysterious incident at Bodbraith in 739, discussed above. But the second retreat certainly does not fit this model and therefore raises questions about its overall validity. The 744 retreat directly followed Domnall's most important military victory, his defeat of Áed Allán in 743, to be discussed further below, which saw him become the first Clann Cholmáin king to seize the overkingship of Uí Néill. Hence the overall impression is that Domnall's retreats into religious life were brief, temporary affairs and were not accompanied by the abandonment of his political position. We certainly do not have a midland paralled to the contemporary retirement of Flaithbertach mac Loingsig, the Cenél Conaill overking, who was probably forced to make this decision as a result of Áed Allán's unrelenting aggression. Perhaps Domnall took a religious vow of some description and was motivated by genuine religious feeling.[48] As for the location, we might suggest that Domnall's later association with the *Familia Columbae* including the tradition that he was buried at Durrow, might be significant.[49]

As mentioned briefly above, between Domnall's two clerical retirements a battle was fought which appears to have been a crucial event in both his career and the fortunes of Clann Cholmáin more generally.

AU 743.4 Bellum Serethmaighe, la Domn*a*ll mc. Mu*r*chadha. .i. Ceanannas, in quo ceci*derunt* Aedh Olddain m. F*er*gaile, ⁊ Cumuscach m. Concobair ri na nAirther, ⁊ Moenach m. Conlaich rex nepotum Cremthain, [⁊] M*uir*edach m. F*er*gusa Forcraidh rex nepotum T*uir*tri.

The battle of Seredmag [won] by Domnall son of Murchad, i.e. in Cenannas, in which fell Aed Allán son of Fergal and Cumuscach son of Conchobor, king of Int Airthir, and Maenach son of Conlaech, king of Uí Chremthainn, [and] Muiredach son of Fergus Forcraidh, king of Uí Thuirtre.

ATig [743] Cath Seredhmuige i Cenan*nus* et*er* da Thefa, i*n* qu*o* ceci*derunt* Aedh Allan

47 Edel Bhreathnach, 'Abbesses, Minor Dynasties and Kings *in clericatu*: Perspectives of Ireland, 700-850', Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr (ed), *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon kingdom in Europe* 122-23.

48 Adomnán's *Life of Columba* records the visit of two brothers to Iona who wanted to be pilgrims there for a year. Columba accepted them on the condition that they take the monastic vow, which they did. *VSC,* 270-72 [i 32].

49 Bhreathnach goes still further suggesting the links were such that 'Durrow may have counted among his royal vills.' Bhreatnach, 'Abbesses, Minor Dynasties and Kings *in clericatu*' 123. For some further discussion of the problems in interpreting these particular entries as well as various broader issues, see: Clare Stancliffe, 'Kings who Opted Out', Patrick Wormald et al. (ed), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford 1983) 154-76, esp. 161-64. Also see: Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland A.D. 650 to 1000* (Maynooth 1999) 389.

> mac Fergaile, rí Erenn, 7 Cumascach mac Concobair, rí na n-Airrther, 7 Maenach mac Condalaigh, rí Húa Cremthainn. Muiredhach mac Fergusa Forcraidh rí Húa Turtri. Domnall mac Murchadha uictor erat.
>
> The battle of Seredmag in Kells between the two Teffias, wherein fell Aed Allan, son of Fergal, king of Ireland, and Cumuscach son of Conchobar, king of the Oriors, and Maenach, son of Condalach, king of Húi Cremthainn, and Muredach, son of Fergus Forcraid, king of Húi Turtri. Domnall, son of Murchad, was victor.

AI 743 Cath Seredmaige eter Hú Neill i torchair Aed Alláin.
The battle of Seredmag between the Uí Néill, in which Aed Alláin fell.

The details that the battle was won by Domnall and fought at 'Cenannas' were added inter-linearly to *AU* while *ATig* alone locates Cenannus 'between the two Tethbae'.

In much of the secondary literature the battle of Serethmag has been placed at Kells, Co. Meath.[50] This identification might receive some support by firstly noting Kells's royal associations. In the tale *Esnada Tige Buchet,* arguably dateable to the late Old Irish period, Kells is referred to as 'Cenannas na ríg'. Cormac hua Cuind rules from there while Medb Lethderg is in Tara.[51] In the opening lines of the eleventh-century tale edited by Hennessy as the 'Battle of Cnucha', Cathaír Mór is placed in the kingship of Tara while Conn Cétchathach was 'hi Cenandos hi ferand rigdomna', i.e. 'in Kells in the *rígdamna's* land.'[52] The same tradition occurs in the prehistoric section of the Laigin genealogy found in MS Rawlinson B.502.

> Comaimser dano do Chathaír ⁊ do Chunn Chunn Cētchathach,
> Cathaīr hi Temraig ⁊ Conn hi Cenannas.[53]
>
> Contemporaries Cathaír and Conn Cétchathach,
> Cathaír in Tara and Conn in Kells.

While certainly regarded as being an important place in the distant past, perhaps Kells was also a politically sensitive area in the eighth century. We might even speculate that

50 F.J. Byrne, *Irish kings and High kings* 118; Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry* 69; Mac Niocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings* 126.

51 David Greene, *Fingal Rónáin and other stories* (Dublin 1955) ll.507, 555-59. For Greene's dating of these texts see *ibid* v, 27. For further comment on this specific section of *Esnada Tige Buchet* and for a reconsideration of the text's date, which he argues may be as late as the eleventh century, see Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'The Manuscript Tradition of Two Middle Irish Leinster Tales', *Celtica* 18 (1986) 23-26, 29.

52 W.M. Hennessy, 'The Battle of Cnucha', *Revue Celtique* 2 (1873-75) 86-93: 86-87. The tale survives in a single copy in *Lebor na hUidre* (*c.*1100). For some further discussion, see Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession* 238-39. The eleventh-century date is Meyer's. Kuno Meyer, *Fianaigecht* (Dublin 1910 repr Dublin 1937) xxv.

53 *CGH* 124a25.

the links mentioned above suggest it was of particular interest to the kings of Tara (a royal demesne?). The 743 battle, which saw one holder of the Uí Néill overkingship replaced by his successor, evidently took place on a symbolically loaded battlefield. The first difficulty is in identifying a Serethmag in the vicinity of Kells. The examples of this name listed by Hogan all appear to refer to this 743 battle.[54] But the reference to Tethbae in the *ATig* account of the battle adds further confusion as both northern and southern Tethbae lay north of the river Inny, roughly modern Co. Longford, some way west of Kells Co. Meath.[55] Though Charles-Edwards argues that the battle took place 'apparently on the boundary between Northern Tethbae and Southern Tethbae (in Co. Longford),'[56] conversely there is no placename 'Cenannus' identifiable in Tethbae. The ninth-century text *Baile in Scáil* adds still further confusion as it seems to locate Seredmag, 'on the shore of Loch Sailchitain.'[57] O'Donovan contends that 'nothing is clearer than that this is the place in Meath now called Loughsallagh' near Dunboyne.[58]

Leaving aside the exact location, we can say a little about the battle itself. Áed Allán took to the field with considerable support from his Airgíalla allies. Three kings fell along with him in the encounter. These were Cumuscach of the Airthir, based about Armagh, Maenach of Uí Chremthainn, based west of Armagh and Muiredhach of Uí Thuirtri, based east of the Sperrin mountains.[59] The relationship between Áed, or Cenél nEógan, and these military clients may only recently have been formalised by Áed and given a suitable underpinning with newly fashioned genealogical links and origin legends.[60] Despite this support, Domnall defeated Áed and established his claim to the overkingship.[61] This was a crucial breakthrough for Clann Cholmáin.

Between 697 and 842 special laws, *cánai,* were promulgated on thirty-three occasions.[62] With a few notable exceptions, the texts of these special ordinances or indeed

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54 *Onom.,* 597.

55 Paul Walsh, 'Tethbae', *Ériu* 13 (1942) 88-94; Margaret E. Dobbs, 'The Territory and People of Tethba', *JRSAI* 8(2) (1938) 241-59.

56 Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743', 416.

57 Kevin Murray (ed), *Baile in Scáil: 'The Phantom's Frenzy',* (Dublin 2004) 43, 60-61 §43.

58 *AFM* i 339 n.i.

59 F.J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* 115.

60 Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743', 412-13.

61 A note in *AU,* in a secondary hand, marks the commencement of his reign as Uí Néill overking *AU* 743.12; also *ATig* [743].

62 Kathleen Hughes, 'The Church and the World in Early Christian Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies* 13 (50) (Sept. 1962) 102. The equivalent Latin term, 'Lex' often appears in the annals. Though the vernacular and Latin terms need not have been entirely synonymous, the use of the former at *AU* 783.9, 'Forus Cano Patricii hi Cruachnibh', suggests they refer broadly to the same phenomenon. Thomas

any detailed information about them, have not survived and we are left to infer and speculate from laconic notices in the annals. The period of Domnall Midi's reign saw the promulgation of several of these and he was himself directly involved with at least one of them. In their general character these special *cánai* appear to have been directed at specific problems. Hence for example *Cáin Adomnáin,* the text of which *has* survived, was designed to combat violent offences against clerics, women and children.[63] It seems probable that in at least some cases, the promulgation of these special laws was a direct legislative response to a specific threat. Many of the *cánai* appear to accompany notices of famine or the outbreak of serious disease and the laws may have been designed to counteract attendant and potentially disastrous social disorder.[64] Oftentimes, though not always, the laws were named after a saint, the long-dead founder of the church behind the promulgation of the law for example.[65] The *cánai* tended to claim to apply over a large geographical area, a province or occasionally the entire island.[66] As such this would necessitate widespread consultation with interested parties and the sponsorship, or at least tacit approval, of the secular powers. We can identify several instances where these laws were promulgated at special councils or synods and we have clear evidence of the involvement of kings in this process.[67] Turning to those *cánai* which may be associated with Domnall, we will take two together.

AU 743.7	*ATig* [743]
Lex nepotis Suanaigh.	Lex H*úi* Suanaigh.

AU 748.8	*ATig* [748]
Lex aui Suanaich f*or* Leith Cuinn.	Lex H*úi* Suanaigh, f*or* Leath Cuínd.

Charles-Edwards, *The Early Medieval Gaelic Lawyer* (Cambridge 1999) 43 n.100.

63 Kuno Meyer, *Cáin Adamnáin: an Old-Irish treatise on the Law of Adamnan* (Oxford 1905); Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Law of Adomnán: A Translation', Thomas O'Loughlin (ed), *Adomnán at Birr, AD 697* (Dublin 2001) 53-68; Gilbert Márkus, *Adomnán's 'Law of the Innocents'* (Kilmartin 2008).

64 Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Ireland *c.*800: aspects of society', Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (ed), *NHI* i (Oxford 2005) 583.

65 Charles-Edwards, *The Early Medieval Gaelic Lawyer* 44.

66 Charles-Edwards, *The Early Medieval Gaelic Lawyer* 47.

67 Again *Cáin Adomnáin* is perhaps the best example of this. As we have seen already, a lengthy list of both secular and ecclesiastical guarantors was attached to it. It has also been suggested that '*Cáin* law' was always promulgated at an assembly. See Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland A.D. 650 to 1000* (Maynooth 1999) 208-09; Charles-Edwards, *The Early Medieval Gaelic Lawyer* 52-54.

Firstly we should note that these are among the majority of *cánai* in that they are named only in the annals.[68] This law, perhaps re-promulgated a few years after its first appearance, may be associated with the monastery of Rathen (now Rahan, Co.Offaly) and named, not after a founding saint, but rather a contemporary churchman associated with the monastery. The wording of these entries, as Charles-Edwards points out, suggests that Fidmuine anchorite of Rathen (d.757), was the contemporary churchman in question.[69] These laws coincide with periods of distress and may have been promulgated in response. Hence the promulgation of 743 might be associated with an outbreak of leprosy and the so-called *Bolgach,* identified as smallpox by MacArthur.[70] Likewise the law's (re)promulgation in 748 coincided with heavy snow which resulted in the death of 'nearly all the cattle of the whole of Ireland'. This was followed by severe drought.[71] While we cannot be sure of Domnall's involvement in the first promulgation of the law, the second over 'Leth Cuinn' by a monastery within Mide surely involved the new Uí Néill overking, whether through direct sponsorship or at least tacit approval. We are on much firmer ground when we come to consider the Columban *cánai.*

AU 753.4	*ATig* [753]
Lex Coluim Cille la Domnall Mide.	Lex Colai*m* cilli la Do*m*nall Midhi.

AU 757.9	*ATig* [757]
Lex Columbe Cille la Sleibene.	Lex Colu[i]m cille la Slebi*n*e.

This is clear evidence of close co-operation between the Columban church and the Uí Néill overking. We can only really speculate on the nature of this special law because, like the *cáin* from Rathen discussed above, it too only features in the annals.[72] There is no

68 Liam Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin 2005) 193.

69 Charles-Edwards, *The Early Medieval Gaelic Lawyer* 45. Jaski makes reference to a subsept of Uí Echach Cobo, Uí Suanaig, members of which can be linked with the abbacy of Bangor. On this basis he argues that the law came from there. See Bart Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* 220; *idem*, 'Additional notes to the *Annals of Ulster*', *Ériu* 48 (1997) 116. However having noted the importance of royal sponsorship and the fact that the law was promulgated over *Leth Cuinn*, a midland monastery rather than one in the territory of the Ulaid seems much more likely. Charles-Edwards's identification is to be preferred particularly when the broader thrust of his analysis is taken into account. Absence of *Cáin* law from the territories of the Laigin and the Ulaid may be regarded as 'a corollary of the political order', in short reflecting Uí Néill political dominance and unwillingness to allow these groupings promulgate their own *cánai*. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 584.

70 *AU* 742.9; *AU* 743.11; *ATig* [743]. William P. MacArthur, 'The identification of some pestilences mentioned in the Irish annals', *Irish Historical Studies* 6 (23) (March 1949) 84.

71 *AU* 748.3; *ATig* [748].

72 Breatnach, *Companion* 193.

specific 'disaster' recorded in the annals which coincides with the promulgation of either of these Columban *cánai.* That said, bearing in mind the example of *Cáin Adomnáin* which first appeared a half century before, it may be that the Columban community and Uí Néill overking were hoping to 'alleviate the distress of the weak.'[73] But we should also stress the benefits that would accrue to both parties promulgating the law, be they revenues gained or influence extended. The links between the Columban church and Clann Cholmáin may have been strengthened in the years leading up to the 753 promulgation as Sléibéne's predecessor, Cilléne Droichtech, was himself a member of the southern Uí Néill descended from Conall Cremthainne.[74] Cilléne's abbacy also alerts us to a pattern which throws some further light on the 753 promulgation. He had become abbot of Iona in 726.[75] The following year the relics of Adomnán were brought to Ireland and the law of 697 'promulgated anew'.[76] In 753, the year after Cilléne's death[77], and with Sléibéne newly installed as abbot of Iona, the law of Columb Cille was promulgated. In other words the assumption of the abbacy by a new holder was probably accompanied by a certain amount of diplomatic activity as he sought to assert his authority. This may have involved a tour of the *familia's* monasteries, perhaps with relics, and the promulgation of a special *cáin.*[78] The sponsorship of the Uí Néill overking, here Domnall, would also have been desirable.

This period also saw the deaths of various obscure Clann Cholmáin dynasts. We can do little more than note their obits and insert them into the dynasty's family tree. Fiachrai drowned in Loch Ree in 747.[79] He was the son of Garbán who was named in the Guarantor-list attached to *Cáin Adomnáin.* Coirpre died in 749.[80] He was a son of Murchad Midi and hence a brother of Domnall Midi. The arrangement of the 'Ríg Uisnig' kinglist would also suggest that one of Domnall's sons, Fíachu, was killed during his reign. Fiachu's killers are name as Díarmait and Ailill 'dá ríg Fer Ross', a grouping within the Mugdorna branch of the Airgialla based in Louth and Monaghan.[81] Fiachu, Díarmait

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73 Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry* (Oxford 1988) 64.

74 *CGSH,* 55 §344.

75 *ATig* [726] records the death of his predecessor.

76 *AU* 727.5; *ATig* [727].

77 *AU* 752.8; *ATig* [752].

78 We do not know whether Sléibene came to Ireland in 753. He certainly came to Ireland the following year. *AU* 754.3; *ATig* [754].

79 *ATig* [747].

80 *AU* 749.6; *ATig* [749].

81 F.J. Byrne, *Irish kings and High-Kings* 117.

and Ailill are all absent from the annals and there is no genealogical coverage of the Fir Ross for this early period but we are told that Fíachu was killed 'i mBregaib for cuairt maccaem', 'in Brega, when he was on a circuit of *maccoím*.'[82] *Maccóem*, literally 'dear boy' seems to be a term used to describe a particular stage in a young noble's life before he takes up arms. In this case the entry in *LL* suggests that Fíachu was sent upon a royal circuit through his father's subject kingdoms where he met fatal opposition.

Turning once more to Domnall, there are several notable events in the latter part of his reign worthy of note. In 756 we are informed that he mobilised the Laigin against Niall, presumably the son of Fergal of Cenél nEógain, otherwise known as Niall Frassach.[83] Niall would succeed Domnall as Uí Néill overking on the latter's death in 763. But this encounter took place in Mag Muirtheimne. The location was probably no accident as Niall's younger brother, Áed Allán, had expended much energy in making the region a base of Cenél nEógain power on the east coast.[84] It seems therefore that Domnall planned and organised a significant hosting aimed at dislodging Cenél nEógain from their recently established foothold. Notable is Domnall's ability to mobilise the military resources of the Laigin. Unlike many of his Clann Cholmáin ancestors, Domnall appears to have maintained peaceful relations with the Laigin and there are no recorded attacks during his reign.[85] Indeed there is some evidence of marriage alliance. Cummascach, king of Uí Fhailgi who was killed in 757, was Domnall's nephew.[86] He was killed by the king of Munster who may 'have been challenging the current political settlement in the midlands'.[87]

In 760 we find the first reference to what would become, as we shall see, something of a trend in the years following Domnall's death, namely the participation of monastic communities in large-scale violence. On this occasion Clonmacnoise and Birr clashed.[88] Domnall died in 763 and, as mentioned, Niall Frassach succeeded to the

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82 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 114.

83 *AU* 756.3; *ATig* [756]. See *AU* 718.7; *ATig* [718] for the notice of Niall's birth.

84 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 573.

85 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 575.

86 *ATig* [757]. His mother Érennach was Domnall's sister. This information is found in the Uí Fhailgi genealogies. See *CGH* 59. In previous chapters we noted Clann Cholmáin strategy as regards the Laigin. For example the intervention of Conall with the king of Munster in 633 in support of an Uí Dúnlainge king, Fáelán, against his Uí Máil opponent. *AU* 633.2; *CS* [633]; *ATig* [633]. Conall's sister was also married to Fáelán. *ATig* [643]. At this earlier period the Uí Dúnlainge were supported and Uí Fhailgi, the ancient power in Mide, the enemy.

87 Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 227 n.3.

88 *AU* 760.8; *ATig* [760].

overkingship. The *Annals of the Four Masters* provide the added detail that Domnall was buried at Durrow, and considering his longstanding alliance with the Columban community, this seems plausible.[89]

Having set out the evidence available for the period from the late seventh century until Domnall's death we might now pause and again consider some general questions. This period does appear to throw light on the organisation and operation of kingship among Clann Cholmáin. But while it has implications for our understanding of this dynasty specifically, it would also seem to reflect broader patterns evident in Uí Néill kingship more generally. We have already seen the parallel where the Guarantor list is headed by the then overking Loingsech, who was then followed in the list by his first cousin and ally Congalach mac Fergusa, 'rí Ceneoil *Con*aild'.[90] For the early eighth century we have, as noted, in total very little information about Murchad Midi (d.715). But that which we have, when viewed in conjunction with the history of the various Síl nÁedo Sláine branches, is revealing. We might begin by considering the two attacks on Mide in 714 (Bile Tened and Garbsalach), the various kings involved, and what can be inferred about the political organisation of the midlands at this time. While Síl Dlúthaig were involved at Bile Tened in 714 there is no mention of Uí Chernaig involvement in either this incursion, or that at Garbsalach the same year. During the previous few years there was great hostility between these two branches of Síl nÁedo Sláine so if Uí Chernaig were involved, we would have to speculate that for a brief moment Síl nÁedo Sláine acted in a much more unified manner than either previously or subsequently. Fogartach ua Cernaig was expelled from his kingship in 714, only to return in 716. We are not told what kingship he had held and the *Annals of the Four Masters* is alone in attributing the expulsion to Fergal mac Maíle Dúin, which may well be simply guesswork.[91] It may be significant that the death of Murchad Midi, 'king of Ui Neill', in 715 at the hands of Conall Grant was followed swiftly by the return of Fogartach from exile. Conall Grant was also of Uí Chernaig and was quite active over the following years killing two rivals from the northern branches of Síl nÁedo Sláine in 718 before being

89 *AU* 763.1; On the 20th November according to *ATig* [763]. There also appears to be a duplicate of the obit at *ATig* [761]. Also see *AI* 763; *AFM* 758 [763]. *Baile in Scáil* informs us that Domnall died of a tumor at Imlech Fia (Emlagh), a monastic house in the neighborhood of Tailtiu. Kevin Murray (ed), *Baile in Scáil: 'The Phantom's Frenzy'*, (Dublin 2004) §44 at 43, 61.

90 Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor-list of Cáin Adomnáin', 180.

91 Expulsion: *AU* 714.4; *ATig* [714]; *CS* 710 [714]; *AFM* 712 [714]. Return: *AU* 716.3; *ATig* [716]; *CS* 712 [716]. See Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743', 403-06 for an extensive discussion.

killed by Fergal mac Maíle Dúin later that year.[92] Charles-Edwards highlights the system of territorial kingships amongst Síl nÁedo Sláine clearly evident in both the Guarantor-List to *Cáin Adomnán* and in the annals by the later eighth century. Such 'titular strategies' were probably designed to secure alliances and solidarity but saw a proliferation of titles. For example two Uí Chernaig dynasts named in the Guarantor-list, Niall mac Cernaig and Conall Grant, are described as 'king of Bregmag' and 'king of Deiscert mBreg' respectively. As Charles-Edwards has said, 'what seems to have happened is that, because Niall mac Cernaig was king of Brega, he could allow Conall Grant to be king of Southern Brega; this was a situation which facilitated an alliance between them and, indeed, could only endure while the two rulers remained allies.'[93] In this context, Ó Riain's view that Fogartach's expulsion was simply an example of rivalry between Conall Grant and Fogartach, i.e. an internal Síl nÁedo Sláine affair, does not now seem convincing.[94] In short, we might speculate that when one Uí Chernaig king, Conall, killed Murchad Midi of Clann Cholmáin, this paved the way for another, Fogartach, to return from exile. But it seems that this hierarchically graded system of kingships was in use among the Uí Néill more generally and this was Conall Grant's undoing. Hence when the overking Fergal killed Conall in 718, he was both reasserting his authority over the region and perhaps also retaliating for the removal of Murchad Midi who may well have been his midland deputy. As we have seen, it also seems reasonable to regard the Clann Cholmáin as operating a similar system themselves within Mide. In its earliest manifestation the kingship of Mide, held by Fallomon (d.766), was certainly not of the first order of importance. Fallomon was neither the most important midland king in 733 when he stood with Domnall Midi against Cathal, nor at his death in 766.[95] Though the main line of Clann Cholmáin soon took over the title themselves, it initially appears to have been reserved for their deputies in Mide. But when Domnall of Clann Cholmain defended Tailtiu against Cathal in 733 he was not himself the Uí Néill overking. That position was held by Flaithbertach mac Loingsig of Cenél Conaill. In a tiered and hierarchical system of kingship in operation in both the midlands but also among the wider Uí Néill grouping, he was himself a deputy king, a midland deputy for

92 *AU* 718.3; *ATig* [718]; *CS* 714 [718].

93 Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743', 405.

94 Pádraig Ó Riain (ed), *Cath Almaine* (Dublin 1978) xvi-xvii. Also compare the expulsion of Fogartach's son Coirpre in 769 by Donnchad of Clann Cholmáin which might also suggest that we are dealing here with the intervention of more powerful regional kings in local affairs. *AU* 769.5.

95 Which will be mentioned again at the beginning of the next chapter.

the northern based overking, much as his father Murchad Midi (d.715), 'king of the Ui Neill' had been. Only later did he go on to secure the overkingship.

During the period covered by this chapter we have seen the rise of Clann Cholmáin to the overkingship. While the opportunity presented by Síl nÁedo Sláine feuding remains a crucial factor, a broader view of the structures of power among the various Uí Néill branches, north and south, provides the most fruitful results. The active interest of the northern Uí Néill in the midlands which is perhaps evident in the 'king of the Uí Néill' deputyship was designed initially to counteract Síl nÁedo Sláine but ultimately provided Clann Cholmáin with a timely boost. But along with this we must also recognise the efforts of Clann Cholmáin to consolidate their position in the midlands. The adoption of the 'Midi' epithet and the installation of allies in the kingship of Mide are two obvious manifestations. But the mid-eighth century also sees the splintering of the Cenél Coirpre kingship, another important political event. Whereas previously kings of the entire branch are named, from this period on individuals appear who are described as kings of Coirpre Tethbae.[96] Earlier we noted the death of one of Domnall Midi's men, Ailill of Brí Léith. Perhaps this relationship also reflects an attempt to bring neighbouring rulers under closer control.[97] Of course Clann Cholmáin's relationship with the great churches of the midlands was also crucial. While what has gone before is a relatively impressionistic account based on source material of limited quantity and quality, we can nevertheless identify certain trends and developments which appear to have been crucial for the success of Clann Cholmáin. This success was increasingly not only limited to their own midland territories but farther afield. Fortunately we will be able to trace the history of the dynasty in greater detail when we come to deal with Domnall's descendants in the later eighth and ninth centuries.

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96 *AU* 752.9.

97 Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743', 412. We also noted the possibility that Bodbchad, named as a Guarantor, was installed as king of the Luigne by his brother Murchad.

4. Donnchad Midi

Donnchad dia-n-fich domun daigthech,
dom-[fh]oir gíallach glonnchar;
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; the name of the son of Domnall, Donnchad,
is as renowned as great-blue Ireland.[1]

Above is the sole remaining quatrain from an Old Irish poem composed by Rechtgal úa Síadail in praise of Donnchad mac Domnaill (d.797). While clearly designed to flatter, the equation of Donnchad's name with that of Ireland itself would have been appreciated by a dynasty which, by the latter half of the eighth century, had firmly established itself as one of the most powerful political forces on the island.

The Clann Cholmáin genealogy is consistent across all copies in including Donnchad.[2] Of course this strictly linear record reflects political success and we must look elsewhere for the detail with which to trace Donnchad's rise. In the immediate aftermath of his father Domnall's death (763) it appears that the late king's brother Bresal and another son, Diarmait Dub, were most active. In the previous chapter we noted a battle between Clonmacnoise and Birr in 760.[3] Four years later Clonmacnoise was again involved in violence, this time against Durrow. But on this occasion midland dynastic politics was certainly an added dimension.

AU 764.4 Bel*lum* Arggamain inter familiam Cluana Mo*cc*u Nois 7 Dermaighi ubi ceci*derunt* Diarmait Dub m. Domnaill 7 Dighlach m. Duib Liss 7 .cc. uiri de familia Dermaige. Bresal m. M*urchad*a uictor exstetit cum familia Cluana.

The battle of Argaman between the community of Cluain Moccu Nóis and the community of Dermag, in which fell Diarmait Dub son of Domnall, and Diglach son of Dub Lis, and two hundred men of the community of Dermag. Bresal, son of Murchad, emerged victor, with the community of Cluain.[4]

But Bresal was himself killed later the same year by an unnamed assailant, quite possibly another episode in this ongoing feuding.[5] The killing of Suibne son of Murchad, another of the late king Domnall's brothers shortly afterwards, confirms the extent of Clann Cholmáin feuding at this time.

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1 Donncha Ó hAodha, 'Rechtgal úa Síadail: a famous poet of the Old Irish period', Alfred P. Smyth (ed), *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Cornwall 2000) 192. See discussion of this poet in the Poetry section of Part 1.

2 See 'Genealogies' spreadsheet. His mother Albini, mentioned previously, was of the Ciannachta of Brega. See (Metrical) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 310, 334; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* §208 at 132, 200. (Prose) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* (1931) 163-234: 186; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* §383 at 264, 382.

3 *AU* 760.8; *ATig* [760].

4 Also at *ATig* [764]. The battlefield, Argamain, has not been identified any more precisely than as lying between Clonmacnoise and Durrow. See: Hogan, *Onomasticon* 49. The 'Dighlach m. Duib Liss' who fell along with Diarmait also remains unidentified.

5 *AU* 764.11

AU 765.4 Iugul*atio* Suibne m. M*ur*codha cum duobus filiis suis.
The killing of Suibne son of Murchad, with his two sons.[6]

Whether Donnchad had anything to do with the deaths of his two uncles, he does first appear in the record at this time and was clearly staking his claim for leadership of the dynasty.[7]

AU 764.12 Bel*lum* Duin Bile re Donnch*ad for* Firu Telach.
The battle of Dún Bile [won] by Donnchad over the Fir Tulach.[8]

Donnchad's aggression was directed against a small kingdom located along the eastern shore of Lough Ennell close to Clann Cholmáin's own seat. Of no great political significance, this small kingdom was probably subject to Clann Cholmáin overlordship at this stage, as it certainly was at a later date.[9] While little more than speculation, from the context it seems possible that Fir Tulach saw an opportunity to increase their autonomy while Clann Cholmáin's attention was distracted by internal feuding. But having defeated this local grouping, Donnchad then effectively settled the Clann Cholmáin feuding which had broken out following his father's death at the battle of Carn Fiachach.

AU 765.5 Bel*lum* Cairn Fiachach inter duos filios Domnaill, i*d* est Donnch*ad* 7 M*ur*ch*ad*. Fallomon la Donnch*ad*; Ailgal la M*ur*ch*ad*. In bel*lo* ceci*dit* M*ur*ch*ad*; Ailgal in fugam uersus est.
The battle of Carn Fiachach between two sons of Domnall, i.e. Donnchad and Murchad. Fallomon assisted Donnchad, [and] Ailgal Murchad. Murchad fell in the battle, [and] Ailgal was put to flight.[10]

Carn Fiachach was in the neighbourhood of Uisnech, an appropriate setting for an encounter where control of the midlands was contested.[11] Donnchad, supported by Fallomon, defeated his brother Murchad with whom fought Ailgal, described as king of Tethba in the *Annals of Tigernach*.[12] *Baile in Scáil* mentions Carn Fiachach in discussing Donnchad's reign in what is probably a specific allusion to this important battle:

> Is lais do-regat in slúaig, timchell Cairnd Fíachach antúaith.
> The hosts will accompany him from the north around Carn Fíachach.[13]

In 728 rivals for the kingship of Leinster, Dúnchad and Faelán sons of Murchad, fought a battle at

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6 Also *ATig* [765].
7 Leaving aside the clearly retrospective notice of his birth. *AU* 733.4; *ATig* [733].
8 *AU* 764.12; *ATig* [764].
9 See Walsh, *The Placenames of Westmeath* 161 ff. If the site of the encounter, Dún Bile, was not in the barony of Fartullagh, it may have been in nearby Farbill (from 'Fir Bili') located slightly farther to the east. *Ibid* 371; *Onom.*, 377.
10 Also *ATig* [765].
11 *Onom.*, 161.
12 *ATig* [765].
13 Kevin Murray (ed), *Baile in Scáil: 'The Phantom's Frenzy'*, (Dublin 2004) §46 at 43-44, 61-62.

Ailenn, 'a prehistoric site of contemporary importance.'[14] We shall discuss Ailenn in greater detail below but the 728 and 765 battles are surely comparable. In both cases a battle to decide control of a specific area was fought at a symbolic site associated with that area.

After his victory at Carn Fiachach, Máire Herbert suggests Donnchad removed another rival, Fallomon, the following year.

AU 766.2 Iugul*atio* Follamhain m. Con Congalt regis Midi dolose.
The treacherous killing of Follaman son of Cú Chongalt, king of Mide.

We have already mentioned Fallomon in previous chapters. In chapter three we considered his relationship to the Clann Cholmáin king Domnall (d.763) and in chapter one discussed whether his status is important in considering Colmán Bec, both the latter's position in the early genealogical tradition and his inclusion in the *ACP*. As previously noted, the treacherous circumstances surrounding Fallomon's death leads Herbert to suspect Donnchad's involvement. Ultimately she regards the *Vita Sancti Cainnici,* which includes Fallomon's ancestor Colmán Bec, as a product of this time and a specific and hostile comment by the community of Cainnech on this treacherous killing directed against Clann Cholmáin.[15] But if we instead regard Fallomon as a midland deputy, a suggestion made by Charles-Edwards and followed in chapter three, Donnchad's involvement in Fallomon's killing seems unlikely.[16] Fallomon had after all supported Donnchad against his brother Murchad at Carn Fiachach just a year before his own treacherous killing.

At this point we should note an alternative tradition about the Clann Cholmáin succession which survives in the 'Ríg Uisnig' kinglist found in *LL*. It tells us firstly that 'Niall m*ac* Diarmata' ruled for a short period.[17] Niall's father died in 689 and his brothers during the first two decades of the eighth-century so he would have been of an advanced age by the 760s. His obit is found only in the *Annals of the Four Masters,* though both *AT* and *CS* are lacunose at this point.

AFM 763 [768] Niall mac Diarmata, tig*h*erna Midhe décc.
Niall, son of Diarmaid, lord of Meath, died.[18]

If the common *AFM* practice of downgrading lesser kings to princes and lords has been followed here, it is possible that this entry was in the *Chronicle of Ireland*. After Niall was killed, the 'Ríg Uisnig' list then tells us the kingship passed to 'Muridach m*ac* Domnaill' who was then himself killed

[14] Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* 201 n.1.
[15] Máire Herbert, 'The *Vitae Columbae* and Irish Hagiography: A study of *Vita Cainnechi*', John Carey, Máire Herbert and Páraig Ó Riain (ed), *Studies in Irish Hagiography: Saints and Scholars* (Dublin 2001) 38ff.
[16] T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Saints' cults and their constituencies', *Ériu* 54 (2004) 99-100.
[17] *LL* i 197.
[18] This entry is found in both MSS covering this period. See UCD Franciscan MS A 13, f.299r at www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/UCD/UCD_MS_A_13/tables/32.html#0629 ; RIA MS C iii 3, f.286r at www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/RIA/RIA_MS_C_iii_3/tables/31.html#0605 .

and replaced by Donnchad.[19] Again the kinglist appears to be defective at this point. For 'Muridach' we should probably read 'Murchad', the brother killed by Donnchad at Carn Fíachach in 765. As we shall see Donnchad did have a brother Murideach, but he outlived Donnchad, dying in 802.[20] Overall it seems likely that the 765 battle secured Donnchad's position as the leading Clann Cholmáin dynast.

Predictably he then turned his attention farther afield.

AU 769.5 Longus Coirpri m. Foghertaigh re nDonnch*ad*.
Cairpre son of Fogartach driven into exile by Donnchad.

This was the Uí Chernaig king of Brega whose death is recorded two years later, perhaps while still in exile.[21] Interestingly, Coirpre was the son of an earlier Uí Chernaig king who had also been driven into exile only to return subsequently, Fogartach (d.724), discussed in the previous chapter.[22] *Baile in Scáil* comments on Donnchad's ability to 'subdue Brega in mighty battles'.[23] Next Donnchad led a major attack against the Laigin. His father's reign had been characterised by peaceful relations with the Laigin but the relationship was more complex under Donnchad.[24] While relations often appeared friendly they were certainly predicated on the military superiority of Clann Cholmáin over their southern neighbours. Donnchad's opponent was Cellach son of Dúnchad, the Uí Dúnlainge king of Leinster.[25]

AU 770.8
Cong*res*sio et*er* Donnch*ad* m. Domn*aill* 7 Cellach m. nDonnch*ad*a 7 exiit Donnch*ad* cum exercitu nepo*tum* Neill cu Laigniu 7 efugerunt eum Lagi*n* 7 exierunt i Sciaigh Necti*n* 7 manserunt Hui Neill .uii. diebus i Raith Alinne 7 accenderunt igni omnes terminos Laginentium.

An encounter between Donnchad son of Domnall and Cellach son of Donnchad, and Donnchad went with the army of the Uí Néill against the Laigin and the Laigin eluded him, and went to Scé Nechtain. The Uí Néill remained seven days in Ráith Ailinne, and burned all the confines of the Laigin with fire.[26]

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[19] *LL* i 197.
[20] *AU* 802.1.
[21] *AU* 771.4.
[22] Expulsion: *AU* 714.4; *ATig* [714]; *CS* 710 [714]; *AFM* 712 [714]. Return: *AU* 716.3; *ATig* [716]; *CS* 712 [716]. See Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743', 403-06.
[23] Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 61. A reference to victory won 'on the edge of Loch Luglochta', while difficult to link to any specific battle recorded in the annals, probably refers to victories won in Brega if the location, as has been suggested, was near Lusk, north county Dublin. Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 91 §46; *Onom.*, 507.
[24] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 570ff.
[25] Or he could also be described as an early member of the Uí Dúnchada branch of Uí Dúnlainge, a branch which sprang from his father.
[26] As a typical example of *AI's* laconicism cf: *AI* 770: 'Indred Laigen la Donnchad'. While it seems entirely appropriate to translate *congressio* as 'congress' at *AU* **780.12** and **804.7**, of the examples collected from the *Annals of Ulster* the overwhelming impression is that *congressio* does not normally refer to anything as formal as a congress, council or meeting but is rather best translated as 'clash' or, following the editors, 'encounter'. See: *AU* 677.5, 711.5, 714.1, 717.5, 719.5, 727.3, 733.3, 734.8, 736.2, 737.4, 770.8, 775.5, **780.12, 804.7,** 875.3. The entry at *AU* 714.1 is particularly convincing in illustrating the more common meaning of the word because *congressio* is qualified by *belli*, i.e. 'encounter of the battle'. Overall it seems that this 770 *congressio* is best translated, as with

It has been suggested that Scé Nechtain was near Castledermot in south county Kildare.[27] The Laigin had given Donnchad a free hand and his actions at Ailenn were hugely provocative. Though the site (now Knockaulin, south of Newbridge) does not appear to have been occupied during the Early Christian period, it was nevertheless regarded as symbolically important and identified with the kingship of Leinster.[28] For example an Old Irish poem, preserved in a single copy in *LL* and edited by Kuno Meyer as *Hail Brigit,* clearly makes this link. Having referred to various Leinster kings the poet continues:

> Ailend aurdairc, álaind fius, fail mór flaithi fo a crius
> Far-famed Alenn! Delightful knowledge! Many a prince is under its girth[29]

Having described at length the aristocratic activities which took place at Ailenn and the warriors who dwelt there the poet then notes the abandonment of the site:

> Adrad Lītha nī fiu clúas, solud nā sén sīabras bás, is bréc uile īarna thūr indid Alend is dún fás.
> Worship of auguries is not worth listening to, nor of spells and auspices that betoken death; all is vain when it is probed, since Alenn is a deserted doon.[30]

Of course the poet's primary objective is to contrast transient secular power, symbolised by the deserted site of Ailenn, with the enduring glory and power of Brigit:

> A Brigit 'sa tír atchīu, is cāch a úair immudrá, rogab do chlú for a chlú ind ríg, is tū fordatá.
> Oh Brigit whose land I behold, on which each one in turn has moved about, thy fame has outshone the fame of the king- thou art over them all.[31]

The essential point is that though a prehistoric and abandoned site, Ailenn, much like Tara, was symbolically significant and linked to a contemporary kingship in the Early Christian period. We find something similar in the early ninth century *Félire Óengusso.*[32]

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most instances of the word, as 'encounter'.

27 *Onom.,* 592-93.

28 Excavation has uncovered some Neolithic activity followed by successive phases of construction during the Iron-Age. The site has been interpreted as having had a religious or ceremonial function during the latter period. See: B. Wailes, 'Dún Ailinne: A Summary Excavation Report', *Emania: Bulletin of the Navan Research Group* 7 (1990) 10-21.

29 Kuno Meyer (ed), *Hail Brigit: An Old-Irish Poem on the Hill of Alenn* (Dublin 1912) 12-13. Meyer dates the text to the eighth or early ninth century. *Ibid* 11.

30 Meyer, *Hail Brigit* 14-15.

31 Meyer, *Hail Brigit* 18-19.

32 While more precise datings have been put forward for this text there remains some disagreement among scholars. See: Liam Breatnach, 'Poets and poetry', Kim McCone and Katharine Simms (ed), *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies* (Maynooth 1996) 74.

Borg Aillinne úallach	Aillenn's proud burgh
atbath lia slóg mbágach,	has perished with its warlike
is mór Brigit búadach,	host: great is victorious Brigit:
is caín a rrúam dálach.	fair is her multitudinous cemetery.[33]

This is but one of a series of stanzas where the abandoned pagan seats of power are contrasted with the thriving Christian centres.

Atbath borg tromm Temra	Tara's mighty burgh
la tairthim a flathe,	perished at the death of her princes:
col-lín corad sruithe	with a multitude of venerable champions
maraid Ard mór Machae.	The great Height of Machae (Armagh) abides.[34]

Taken together both *Hail Brigit* and the *Félire Óengusso* establish the link between Ailenn and the kingship of Leinster in (near) contemporary minds. Though the site does not feature regularly in the annals, the available evidence does support the link suggested by the above texts. As mentioned previously, in 728 rivals for the kingship of Leinster, Dúnchad and Faelán sons of Murchad, fought a battle at Ailenn.[35] It can have been no accident that the claimants to the Leinster kingship fought at this symbolically important site. Clearly then Donnchad's occupation of the site in 770, however briefly, was a serious slight on the Laigin and designed to humiliate. But Leinster power may not have been utterly destroyed if it was they who defeated the men of southern Brega the same year.

AU 770.9	Coscradh Builgg Boinne *for* firu deisceird Breg ubi ceci*derunt* Flaithb*er*tach m. Flainn filii Rogellnigh 7 Uarcridhe m. Baith 7 Sneidgus m. Ainf*r*itrigh 7 Cernach m. Flainn Foirbthe. The overthrow of the men of southern Brega at Bolg Bóinne, in which fell Flaithbertach son of Flann son of Ragallach, and Uarchride son of Baeth and Snédgus son of Ainfthech and Cernach son of Flann Foirthe.
AI 770	Cath Builg Bónne *for* Hú Neill re Laignib. The battle of Bolg Bóinne [gained] against the Uí Néill by the Laigin.

But considering the general context, it seems reasonable to question the testimony of *AI* on this point. Indeed Donnchad seems a much more likely figure to have been attacking Brega at this point than the Laigin. Either way Leinster subservience to Clann Cholmáin seems to have been established by the major 770 hosting. Donnchad, like his father before him, was able to call upon their military resources in launching attacks farther afield and also supported Leinster against Munster hostility.[36]

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[33] Whitley Stokes (ed), *Félire Óengusso Céli Dé: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* (London 1905) §189 at 25.
[34] Stokes, *Félire Óengusso Céli Dé* §165 at 24.
[35] Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* 201 n.1.
[36] *AU* 777.3; *AU* 756.3; *ATig* [756].

Indeed, as we shall see, Donnchad differed from his father in pursuing an aggressive policy against Munster and it seems our interpretation of conflict between Munster and Leinster must take account of the subservience of the Laigin to the Clann Cholmáin king.

In both 771 and 772 Donnchad was active to the north of Mide.[37] Firstly 'isin Fochla', 'into the North' and then to 'Cnocc mBane', perhaps near Clogher in Co. Tyrone.[38] This leads us to consider the relative strengths of Donnchad and Niall Frossach at this point. The latter died in 778 but it is quite unlikely he was still Uí Néill overking at this stage. A secondary hand in *AU* tells us he died at Iona, a detail also found in *Baile in Scáil*.[39] But establishing when exactly Donnchad assumed the overkingship is not straightforward. On the basis of the annalistic evidence, Niall's reign stands in stark contrast to that of his older brother Áed Allán who was far more aggressive. This was something later elaborated upon in the *Fragmentary Annals*.[40] Perhaps then *Baile in Scáil* is correct in telling us that Niall was expelled 'de regno suo' by Donnchad. While no opponent is mentioned, Donnchad's hostings in 771 and 772 were certainly into Cenél nEógain's sphere of influence and perhaps designed to force such a change.[41] But could Donnchad have been overking even earlier than this? Several of the kinglists give Niall a reign of seven years, which, if we begin with his accession to the overkingship at 763 as found in the annals, takes us to 770.[42] It is possible therefore that Donnchad's major assault on the Laigin that year was his *crech ríg*, a royal prey against an ancient enemy to mark the commencement of his reign, where through feats of arms, he proved his worthiness to rule.[43] Under this interpretation Donnchad's hostings north in subsequent years took place in his capacity as Uí Néill overking rather than as an aspiring candidate to that position. But this argument is weakened by the reliance on the reign-lengths found in the kinglists which are often at odds with the more reliable chronological anchors found in the annals. As Charles-Edwards points out, 770 saw 'civil war among the Leinstermen' and a 'general outbreak of warfare along the frontier between the Uí Néill and the Leinstermen'.[44] In occupying Ailenn, Donnchad may simply have been taking advantage of the political upheaval within Leinster to exert his own influence in the region. Niall Frossach's position may well have been weakening at the time and if so, the events of 770 certainly advanced Donnchad's 'claims to be the next king of Tara.'[45]

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37 *AU* 771.10; *AU* 772.3.

38 *Onom.*, 273-74.

39 *AU* 778.7; Murray, *Baile in Scáil* §45 at 43, 61. This detail is also found in the kinglists. See: *LL* i 97; Kuno Meyer (ed), 'The Laud Synchronisms', *ZCP* ix (1913) 480.

40 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 43, 61 §45; *FA* 61ff.

41 Again while difficult to link to a specific battle recorded in the annals, *Baile in Scáil's* reference to 'the great battle of eastern Fúat' waged by Donnchad also seems to point to his aggressive policy toward Cenél nEógain or their satellites. Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 43, 61 §46.

42 *AU* 763.11; *ATig* [763]. Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 43, 61 §45; *LL* i 97; Meyer, 'The Laud Synchronisms', 480.

43 See: Pádraig Ó Riain, 'The Crech Ríg or Regal Prey', *Eigse* xv (1973-74) 24-30.

44 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 576-77.

45 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 577. Charles-Edwards concludes that Niall Frossach abdicated at some point between 772 and 777.

Donnchad's marriage alliances certainly suggest a keen awareness of establishing political alliances in the north and must be viewed in the context of Clann Cholmáin's rivalry with Cenél nEógain. Donnchad was married to Bé Fáil (d.801) daughter of Cathal, described as king of the Ulaid in the *Banshenchas*.[46] This union produced his sons Máel Ruanaid and Óengus. The same source tells us another wife was Fuirseach, daughter of Congal of the Dál nAraide, mother of his son Conchobor, the future Uí Néill overking.

While Donnchad may not have been overking as early as 770, he was certainly the most powerful midland dynast. At 775 we find the notice of a 'skirmish' between himself and the community of Clonard.[47] We have already seen Clann Cholmáin's involvement with Clonmacnoise and Durrow and Donnchad would also sponsor the promulgation of *cáin* law to further strengthen his ties with the Columban church. While facing some opposition, it seems he also sought to bring Clonard, another great midland church, under closer control.

Several of the 'disturbances' at the *óenach Tailten*, a phenomenon examined in greater detail in Appendix 5, also involved Donnchad.

AU 774.7 Comixtio agonis la Donnchad.
Disturbance of the fair by Donnchad

AU 777.6 Cumuscc ind oenaigh la Donnch*ad for* Ciannacht. In coccadh it*er* Donnch*ad* 7 Congalach.
Disturbance of the assembly by Donnchad against the Ciannacht. Warfare between Donnchad and Congalach.

The 774 entry, though extremely laconic, would seem to suggest that Donnchad was the instigator of the violence. If Niall Frossach was still Uí Néill overking and in a position to convene the *óenach* then it may be that Donnchad was following up his recent hostings into the North with a further display of aggression as he pushed for supremacy. By the time of the 777 'disturbance' it seems possible that Donnchad was himself overking.[48] If we follow Paul Byrne's approach to these entries, with the preposition *la* interpreted as introducing the victor rather than the instigator of the

[46] *AU* 801.6 has: Be Fáil filia Cathail, regina Donnchada, moritur. See (Metrical) Margaret Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 310, 334; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* §210 at 132, 201. (Prose) Margaret Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234: 186; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* §§385-86 at 264, 382. While the Ulaid kinglist does not include Cathal, Charles-Edwards suggests he may have been 'Cathal son of Muiredach, after whom Leth Cathail, Lecale, was named'. Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* ii 37.

[47] *AU* 775.6.

[48] This came after a series of impressive victories over Munster forces for Donnchad. *AU* 775.5; *AU* 776.11. In the first instance Donnchad is named explicitly while in the latter the involvment of 'alii de filiis Domnaill' is recorded, quite possibly including Donnchad. The edition of *AU* is correct on this point, both MSS clearly reading 'Domnall' and we are not dealing with sons of Donnchad as suggested by translations found in Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 242; idem, *Early Christian Ireland* 595. See MS TCD 1282 (H.1.8) 33va5; MS Rawlinson B.489 16va30. The latter is available to view at: image.ox.ac.uk/images/bodleian/msrawlb489/f16v.jpg. The unnamed sons of Domnall involved may also have included Innrechtach who died in 797 or Muridach who died in 802. *AU* 797.1; *AU* 802.1. Another possibility is Fiachu who appears only in the 'Ríg Uisnig' kinglist. Though his positioning in that list suggests he died during his father's reign, i.e. before 763. *LL* i 197.

'disturbance', this provides some flexibility in interpreting these events. Adopting this approach it could be argued that in order to challenge him, Uí Chonaing had attempted to preside over the *óenach Tailten* before Donnchad disrupted their attempt. But, from the general political context of this period, Donnchad was clearly the most powerful king in the region and one would expect him to preside over the *óenach*. Is there then any possibility that though presiding, he disrupted the *óenach* himself? Perhaps if his authority was challenged in some way, here by Uí Chonaing, he might have responded with a show of force, recorded by the annalist as his 'disturbance' against the Cíannachta. But of course this is somewhat circular because in such a scenario he would be responding to an initial 'disturbance' by the Uí Chonaing directed against him. Either way, this 'disturbance' must be regarded as a further manifestation of ongoing conflict between Donnchad and the Uí Chonaing branch of Síl nÁedo Sláine and as such reflects the local political dimension to the *óenach Tailten* and any 'disturbances' there.[49]

In 778 Donnchad met Congalach in battle at Forchalad, which O'Donovan places in the parish of Ballyloughloe, barony of Clonlonan, Co. Westmeath.[50] But this part of southwestern Co. Westmeath seems an unlikely location for a clash between these two parties. Even if Congalach had been the aggressor striking into Mide, we would surely expect the battle to be fought in eastern or central Mide rather than at the western extremity.[51] Donnchad was victorious and Congalach fell along with his various unidentifiable allies and Donnchad had 'an abundance of [severed] heads on the morning in Forcalad.'[52] The year 778 also saw the death of Niall Frossach and while Donnchad was probably already the acting overking at this stage, he now set about consolidating his position. The law of Columba, was (re)promulgated the same year by Donnchad and Bresal, abbot of Iona.[53] The following year Donnchad again made a hosting north, this time taking hostages from Domnall son of Áed, a Cenél Conaill king described here as 'king of the North'.[54] This title may be the northern equivalent of the midland deputyship, represented by the title 'king of the Uí Néill' which had been held by various earlier Clann Cholmáin kings.[55] As argued earlier, the emergence of Clann Cholmáin as the most important southern branch of Uí Néill may have, in part at least, been due to the support of northern overkings who used the dynasty as midland deputies. Now that Donnchad of Clann Cholmáin was overking he may have been in a position to adopt this strategy himself and

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[49] See Appendix 5 for further details.

[50] *AU* 778.1; *AFM* i 378 n.'o'.

[51] Hogan suggests Brega but this is based purely on the authority of this battle. *Onom.*, 428.

[52] 'Prophesied' in *Baile in Scáil*. Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 61 §46. One of Congalach's allies, Dúchad son of Ailéne, is described as 'lord of Mughdhorna' *AFM* 773 [778] and 'Prince of Mogornn' *AClon* 771 [778]. 'Ríg Uisnig' is unusually detailed at this point, something which leads Paul Byrne to suggest that the list was originally drawn up at or soon after Domnall Midi's death and subsequently updated. Paul Byrne, *Certain* 77.

[53] *AU* 778.4. Bresal died in 801, 'in his 31st year as superior.' *AU* 801.4.

[54] *AU* 779.10. The further detail that 'Fearghal, son of Dunghal, son of Faelchu, lord of Fortuatha-Laighean, was slain by the king Donnchadh' is found only in *AFM* 774 [779].

[55] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 510.

support Cenél Conaill in the north as a counterbalance to Cenél nEógan.

At this stage violence broke out again between Clann Cholmáin and the Laigin. Donnchad's opposition was formidable representing a determined effort on the part of the Laigin to free themselves from his influence. He faced Ruaidrí son of Fáelán of Uí Dúnlainge and Coirpre son of Laidgnén of Uí Chennselaig. While the site of the battle, Óchtar Ocha, remains unidentified, the fact that the forces of southern Leinster had been assembled and joined with those of northern Leinster clearly suggests premeditated aggression. But Donnchad won a decisive victory and followed this up as he 'pursued them with his adherents, and laid waste and burned their territory and churches.'[56]

It seems probable that this serious outbreak of violence between Donnchad and the Laigin provides the backdrop to the following entry:

AU 780.12 Cong*res*sio senodorum nepotum Neill Laginentiumque in op[p]ido Temro ubi fuerunt ancoritę 7 scribe multi, quibus dux erat Dublitter.

A congress of the synods of Uí Néill and Laigin, in the town of Temair, at which were present many anchorites and scribes, led by Dubliter.[57]

Ó Corráin has raised the objection that 'an assembly of synods would be an unusual ecclesiastical event' and instead suggests that the crucial word is 'a Hiberno-Latin spelling of *senatores* in the well-attested sense of "nobles, optimates, leading men" '.[58] While certainly possible, we need not entirely dismiss the idea of a meeting of synods. As Charles-Edwards points out, there is some evidence that separate synods of Mide and 'the North' existed in the ninth century which may provide a parallel.[59] Leaving aside the nature of the gathering for the moment, the choice of Tara as the venue coupled with his recent victory, strongly suggests Donnchad was the convener. If we follow the *AU* editor's translation then Donnchad was in a position to summon the leading churchmen from both his own territories and those of the recently vanquished Laigin. Notable is the prominence given to Dublitter, the Céli Dé churchman associated with Finglas.[60] If we follow Ó Corráin's suggestion, the assembly would appear to have been mixed, including both leading churchmen and dynasts from Uí Néill and Leinster territory. The recent destruction of church property may well have been discussed and attempts made to pacify the warring parties. But if political matters were discussed we may doubt whether any real negotiation took place. The location of the meeting and recent events suggest if any settlement was arrived at, it was probably presented as a *fait accompli* to the Laigin.

A seemingly more straight-forward meeting, a *rígdál,* took place between Donnchad and Fiachna son of Áed Rón of the Ulaid in 784. But the exact location, given as 'Inis na Ríg' in eastern

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[56] *AU* 780.7.
[57] See note 26 above for the translation of *congressio.*
[58] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Congressio Senadorum', *Peritia* 10 (1996) 252.
[59] Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 245 n.4; *AU* 851.5.
[60] For his obit, see *AU* 796.1.

Brega, raises problems. The information provided would seem to suggest the meeting took place off the eastern coast, though the island, otherwise unidentified, bears a suspiciously appropriate name for such a meeting. The annal entry is accompanied, in the margin, by an Old-Irish verse:

Ossi brigh	And that this is the outcome
in dal occ Innsi na Righ.	of the meeting at Inis na Ríg
Donnchadh ni dichet for muir.	Donnchad cannot go on the sea
Fiachna ni tuidhecht hi tir.	And Fiachna cannot come ashore.[61]

F.J. Byrne rather imaginatively argues that the 'Ulster king arrived by sea, but would not step ashore onto Donnchad's territory, while for the high-king to go aboard Fiachnae's boat would have been tantamount to going into his house- a formal gesture of submission.'[62] Another interpretation is provided by Charles-Edwards who suggests an agreement had been reached that 'Donnchad would confine his military ambitions to Ireland, leaving Fiachnae son of Áed Rón, king of Ulster, the hope of mounting enterprises by sea, such as the old Ulster ambition of conquering the Isle of Man.'[63] There is very little evidence that Clann Cholmáin regularly took to the seas or had such interests so such a concession would have been easily made.[64]

The year 786 saw the battle of Liac Find, glossed '.i. Tuileain', between Donnchad and 'genus Aedha Slane.'[65] This battle is mentioned in the 'Ríg Uisnig' kinglist where the cause is given as follows:

> Is in fath. .i. fer de muintir ríg Breg ro boí ic marb*ad* Faebairdatha airchinnich Tuilén.[66]
> This is the cause. i.e. one of the king of Brega's household killed Febordaith, head of the church of Dulane.

This cleric's slaying is recorded in *AU* directly before the notice of the battle of Liac Find and also that he 'was avenged.'[67] The church site is located north of Kells, Co.Meath and therefore probably lay within the kingdom of the Fir Chúl. The events suggest Donnchad was attempting to exert control over this area and he had probably become involved in local ecclesiastical politics. Donnchad was certainly keen to involve himself in such matters as is clearly evident from the events of 789.

AU 789.17 Sarug*ad* Bachlu Is*u* 7 minn Patraic la Donnch*ad* m. nDomnaill oc Raith Airthir ar oenach.
Dishonouring of the staff of Jesus and relics of Patrick by Donnchad son of Domnall

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[61] *AU* 784.8. The first line is translated as 'what is the meaning' by the *AU* editors. But I follow the translations of Byrne and Charles-Edwards. It seems we have the conjunction *os* ('and') with the third singular feminine pronoun.
[62] Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* 124.
[63] Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 249 n.1.
[64] A very early but very doubtful example being Colmán Bec's expedition to the Hebrides with Conall of Dál Ríata. See: *AU* 568 and 'Two Colmáns' chapter for further detail.
[65] *AU* 786.6.
[66] *LL* i 197.
[67] *AU* 786.5.

at Ráith Airthir at an assembly.

On this occasion he dishonoured the staff of Jesus and relics of Patrick at Ráith Airthir on the occasion of an *óenach*, undoubtedly that of Tailtiu.[68] As noted previously, the Patrician church of Donaghpatrick was in the neighbourhood. While the abbot of Armagh may have been attempting to demonstrate his authority at this occasion, Donnchad's hostility should be seen in the context of his alliance with the Columban church and the fact that Armagh was generally allied to Cenél nEógain at this stage.[69] The latter dynasty, led by Áed Oirdnide, and supported by their Airgialla clients, struck at Donnchad's authority two years later.

AU 791.5 Cathc(*h*)oscradh re nDonnch*ad* a Tailti Ducairn m. Cairthin *for* Aedh nIngor in quo ceci*derunt* Cathal m. Ecdhach, rex nepotum Cremhthain, 7 Mael Fothartaich m. Artrach 7 Domnall m. Colggen.
A battle-overthrow was inflicted in Tailtiu Ducairn Meic Cairthinn (?) by Donnchad on Aed Ingor, in which Cathal son of Echaid, king of Uí Chremthainn, and Mael Fothartaig son of Artri, and Domnall son of Colgu fell.

That this battle took place at Tailtiu yet again highlights the site's significance as a setting for clashes between the most powerful political rivals. Donnchad defeated Áed, described with some hostility by the annalist as *Ingor,* 'unfilial' and drove him from the battlefield and down the Blackwater towards Slane.[70]

The final years of his life clearly demonstrate one of Donnchad's major concerns, his relationship with the Laigin. In 794 he led a hosting to aid them against Munster forces[71] while the following year his sister Eithne, wife of the king of Leinster, was killed.[72] She died along with her husband Bran of the Uí Muiredaig in the church of Cell Chúle Dumai, perhaps near Abbeyleix in Co Offaly.[73] They were both killed by Fínsnechtae of Uí Dunchada, the next king of Leinster. Clearly Donnchad had sought to further strengthen his ties with the rulers of Leinster by means of a marriage alliance. This was not of course a new strategy, though the individual Leinster dynasties allied to Clann Cholmáin had shifted. As noted previously, the early seventh century had seen support for the Uí Dúnlainge. Later, Donnchad's aunt Érennach was married to an Uí Fhailgi king.[74] Another family member, his son Conn, was killed the following year by Flann of Uí Chonaing.[75] Donnchad himself

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[68] *AU* 789.17. In 784 the relics of Mac Eirc had been brought 'ad ciuitatem Tailten'. *AU* 784.9.
[69] We have already mentioned that Adomnán says Columba was judged by a synod held at Tailtiu. *VSC*, 468-71.
[70] The problematic element in this entry is regarded as a placename, Carn Maic Caírthinn, by Charles Doherty. See Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* 255 n.1. Cf. the Mac Caírthinn of the early ogam inscription inscription mentioned above at p.7.
[71] *AU* 794.6.
[72] Byrne describes her as a daughter of Donnchad. See F.J. Byrne, 'Church and Politics, c.750-c.1100', Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (ed), *NHI* i 671. But this appears to be a slip as the annal entry reads 'Eithne ingi*n* Domnaill Midhe.' *AU* 795.1.
[73] *Onom.*, 186.
[74] See: *AU* 633.2; *CS* [633]; *ATig* [633]; *ATig* [643]; *ATig* [757]; *CGH* 59.
[75] *AU* 795.2. The site, Crích Ua nOlcán, has not been identified with any precision. *Onom.*, 306.

died in 797, peacefully it seems, along with an otherwise unmentioned brother, Innrechtach.[76] Áed Oirdnide of Cenél nEógan now finally secured the overkingship and immediately sought to subdue the territories of the late king through the 'devastation of Mide'.[77]

Donnchad's reign is important not only for the history of Clann Cholmáin but as evidence for the growing power and ambition of Uí Néill overkings. He was an unusually aggressive ruler who, having ruthlessly removed all internal opposition following his father's death, pursued policies which seriously destabilised the existing political balance.[78] While we have seen continuities- the typical series of hostings against political rivals, attempts to control traditional sites and important churches or the sponsorship of *cáin* law, Donnchad's reign also represents a departure when compared to that of his father. Donnchad's ambition, or perhaps his power and ability to make these ambitions real, saw key developments which would characterise the policies of subsequent Uí Néill overkings. Formal assemblies of leading ecclesiastical and secular figures, presided over by Donnchad, attest to his desire to spread his influence and power. In particular his strategy towards the Laigin reflects the increasingly wide-ranging ambitions of overkings who sought to bring neighbouring provincial kings under their direct and enduring authority. Prolonged campaigning complete with the symbolic and humiliating occupation of Leinster sites secured, for a time at least, a more formalised subservience to Clann Cholmáin. Donnchad was then in a position to add the military resources of the Laigin to his own when pursuing further claims. Hence Leinster also became a pawn in ongoing hostility between Donnchad and Munster. The relative peace which had previously existed between the Uí Néill and Munster and which was underpinned and explained by genealogy, was shattered by Donnchad.[79] Though it should be said that there is some evidence tension between Clann Cholmáin and Munster had been building for some time. For example, Máel Dúin king of Munster killed the king of Uí Fhailgi in 757. As noted previously, this Leinster king was married to a Clann Cholmáin queen, Donnchad's aunt, a broader context which must be remembered when considering the incident. But it is clear that the frontier zone between Mide and Munster, home to so many important churches and generally a peaceful area, now became a violent interface between rival territories. Indeed as we have seen the great churches of the area became involved in this violence themselves. While Donnchad's alliance with the Columban church, including their joint-sponsorship of *Cáin*-law and his prominence in presiding over major assemblies certainly attest to wideranging ambition, his political aggression had profound consequences for Clann Cholmáin when the dynasty was in less

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[76] *AU* 797.1; *AI* 797. *Baile in Scáil* says he died at Clonard. Kevin Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 44,62 §46. Admittedly the text *Do Fhlaithesaib Hérend Iar Creitim* in *LL* claims Donnchad fell at the battle of *Druim Ríg,* also in 797, against Áed Oirdnide. But overall it seems more likely that the context for that battle, discussed at the beginning of the next chapter, is Áed's attempts to subdue the midlands *after* Donnchad's death. See: *LL* i 97 (l.3102).

[77] *AU* 797.9.

[78] For the significance of Donnchad's reign in the political history of the period, see Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 594ff.

[79] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 593.

capable hands.

As we have seen, our understanding of the organisation and operation of midland kingship also becomes much clearer from this period. As noted, with the death of Fallomon in 766 we have the first *reliable* reference to the kingship of Mide, an institution which in this and other early appearances represented a local deputyship. We have also seen further evidence for the hierarchical, layered system of kingship in operation among the Uí Néill of the midlands and Clann Cholmáin specifically. It was a system complete with both deputyship and also sufficient flexibility to accommodate shifts in the balance of power. When Donnchad made a hosting north in 779 he took hostages from a Cenél Conaill king described as 'king of the North'.[80] This may well represent a northern equivalent to the 'king of Uí Néill' title encountered earlier which seems to have represented a midland Uí Néill deputy position. The appearance of a northern equivalent must then be seen in the broader context of Donnchad's power as Uí Néill overking and as another element in Clann Cholmáin's wider political strategy.[81]

[80] *AU* 779.10. The further detail that 'Fearghal, son of Dunghal, son of Faelchu, lord of Fortuatha-Laighean, was slain by the king Donnchadh' is found only in *AFM* 774 [779].

[81] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 510.

5. The early ninth century

Following the death of Donnchad in 797 Clann Cholmáin was immediately thrown into turmoil as the new overking, Áed Oirdnide of Cenél nEógain, sought to make his presence felt in the midlands. At the battle of *Druim Ríg*, (Drumree, par. Knockmark, bar. Deece Lower, Co. Meath) Áed won a major victory against a collection of midland dynasts.[1]

AU 797.3 Bel*lum* Droma Rigin quo ceciderunt .ii. filii Domnaill, i*d* est Finsnechta 7 Diarmait Hodur frater eius, 7 Finsnechta m. Follamhain 7 alii multi qui non numerati sunt. Aedh m. Neill filii Fergaile uictor fuit.

The battle of Druim Ríg in which fell two sons of Domnall, i.e. Fínnechta and his brother Diarmait Odar, and Fínnechta son of Follaman, and many others who are not listed. Aed son of Niall was victor.

Among the fallen were two sons of Domnall (d.763), Fínsnechta and Diarmait Odur, brothers of the late Donnchad.[2] The other Fínsnechta was most likely a son of Fallomon, the former king of Mide who died in 766.[3] But together this group of midland dynasts were defeated by the incoming Uí Néill overking. *Baile in Scáil,* in 'prophesying' Áed's reign provides quite detailed information about the battle.

Fo-dercfa bandæ fo dii, fris[a] tóethsat slúaig Midi .i. Findachta.

He will perform bloody exploits twice, against whom the hosts of Mide will fall, i.e. Fínnachta.

[...]

Is lais íbait fiäich fuil	for seichib ic Derclúachair (.i. Druim Ríg).
In slúag do-ficfe fri clé,	cúl a catha fri Tlachtge.
Áed find cumma chnes,	memais ríam síardes.
In tan sóifes clár fri clé	ara-mbeba Fínachtæ.

On account of him, ravens will drink blood
on skins at Derclúachair (i.e. Druimm Ríg).
The host that will come to the left,
The rear of their battalion to Tlachtga
Fair Áed hacking bodies, will rout before him south-westwards.
It is when he will turn the chariot breast to the left

1 *AU* 797.3; *Onom.*, 368.
2 *Odur* a dun or greyish-brown colour, perhaps refers to his complexion. *DIL* s.v. Odor.
3 *AU* 766.2.

that Fínnachta will die.[4]

The year 797 was clearly a challenging one for Clann Cholmáin and a clear statement of intent from Áed Oirdnide. The final entry for that year in the *Annals of Ulster* reads as follows:

AU 797.5 Uastatio Midi la Aedh m. Neill, 7 initium regni eius.
The devastation of Mide by Aed son of Niall, and the beginning of his reign.

Inevitably this external pressure had implications for the political stability of the midlands. The battle of Findubair in 799 appears to have been a major clash involving various kings from the region.

AU 799.2 Bel*lum* Finnubrach hi Tethbai ubi reges multi occissi sunt, i*d* est: Fergus m. Algaile, Coscarach m. Ceithernaich; reges generis Coirpri, .i. Dub Innrecht m. Artghaile 7 M*urchad* m. Condmaigh. M*urchad* m. Domnaill uictor fuit.

The battle of Finnabair in Tethba, where many kings were slain, i.e. Fergus son of Ailgal, Coscarach son of Ceithernach, [and] kings of Cenél Cairpri, i.e. Dub Innrecht son of Artgal and Murchad son of Connmach. Murchad son of Domnall was victor.

It seems possible that *AU* is mistaken in giving Murchad as the victor. A Murchad son of Domnall was killed by his brother Donnchad at Carn Fiachach as far back as 765 and while possible that we are here dealing with another and otherwise unattested Murchad son of Domnall, it seems more likely that the similarly named Muiredach son of Domnall, who did not die until 802, is meant.[5] The battle took place in Tethbae and several of those involved appear to have been from the region.[6] As well as the two kings of Cenél Coirpri, Dub Innrecht and Murchad, Fergus son of Ailgal can be identified as the figure who killed the king of Tethbae in 791.[7] The other participant, Coscarach son of Ceithernach, cannot be identified with any certainty though it is chronologically possible that it was his father who died in the battle of Foileng (unidentified) in 760.[8] The alliance drawn up against Clann Cholmáin would therefore seem to have been powerful but the location of the battle suggests that Murchad of Clann Cholmáin was the aggressor.

The year 799 also saw the killing of the abbot of Cluain Fota Bóetáin (Clonfad, par.

4 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 44-45, 62-63 §47.

5 The following reading provides some support: *AFM* 794 [799] Iomaireacc Finnabhrach i Tethbha ria Muiredhach, mac Domhnaill, ttorcratar maithe iomdha im Fergas, mac Ailgile, tighernae Cheneóil Coirpre, im Dhuibhindreacht, mac Artghaile, 7 im Muiredhach, mac Connmaigh, 7 im Cosccrach [mac] Ceithernaigh.
Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* ii 99.

6 Hogan's suggestion, derived from O'Donovan, that the specific site was Fennor, parish of Rathconnell, Co. Westmeath, does not sit well with the annal entry which specifically states the battle took place in Tethbae. Rathconnell would seem to be too far to the east. *Onom.*, 420. Another battle at the same location in 824, this time between the men of Tethbae themselves, would seem to confirm a site farther west. *AU* 824.3.

7 *AU* 791.4.

8 *AU* 760.2.

Killucan, bar. Farbill, Co. Westmeath)[9] by Máel Ruanaid and Fallomon, two of the late Donnchad's sons.[10] The church lay just south of Lough Ennell in the heart of Mide. The same year another of Donnchad's sons was killed treacherously 'a fratribus suis'.[11] Though far from clear it seems that, similar to the situation following the death of Domnall in 763, his son's death in 797 precipitated internal upheaval within Clann Cholmáin. Muiredach son of Domnall, whose obit at 802 describes him as 'ri Midhe', may well have briefly secured primacy during this turbulent period.[12] Interestingly in this example the title 'king of Mide' was held by a Clann Cholmáin dynast directly and not, as in 766, by one of their local supporters. But Áed seems to have seized upon the death of this king as another opportunity to exert his influence over the midlands. In a dramatic demonstration of his power and ambition he divided Mide between another two of Donnchad's sons.

AU 802.2 Sloghadh la *h*Aedh for Midhe *co*ro rann Midhe it*er* da mc. Donnch*ad*a, i*d* est Concobu*r* 7 Ailell.

A hosting by Aed against Mide, and he divided Mide between two sons of Donnchad, i.e. Conchobor and Ailill.

This is the earliest example of an approach to controlling Mide which was to become increasingly popular with powerful provincial kings, particularly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Áed also divided the kingship of Leinster on two separate occasions.[13] In a further attempt to establish his control over Mide it seems Áed also married Euginis, a daughter of his predecessor Donnchad, whose death is also recorded in 802.[14]

But his imposed division of political power in Mide did not last long and Conchobar killed his brother soon after.

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9 http://monasticon.celt.dias.ie/showrecord.php?id=2733

10 *AU* 799.3. According to the *Banshenchas* the mother of Máel Ruanaid and Óengus, another of Donnchad's sons, was Bé Fáil (d.801) daughter of Cathal, described as king of the Ulaid. The mother of Conchobor son of Donnchad on the other hand was Fuirseach, daughter of Congal of the Dál nAraide. See (Metrical) Margaret Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 310, 334; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* §210 at 132, 201. (Prose) Margaret Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234: 186; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* §§385-86 at 264, 382.

11 The victim was Domnall son of Donnchad. *AU* 799.5. We might also note the obit of the late Donnchad's wife Bé Fáil which appears around this time. *AU* 801.6.

12 *AU* 802.1; *AI* 802. From about the middle third of the eighth century *rí* is used quite frequently in *AU* though *rex* is more common. In short, we need not be as sceptical about this title as the seventh-century examples of the title 'rí Mide' found only in the Clonmacnoise group of texts for which there are parallel entries in *AU* without the title. See my discussion of the Annals in Part 1 for further details.

13 *AU* 805.7; *AU* 818.6.

14 *AU* 802.7. There appears to have been a pattern of incoming kings of Tara marrying the widows of their predecessors which was probably designed to establish some continuity and stability during a period of transition or perhaps to humiliate a rival. Perhaps this example, though involving a daughter of the late king, should be considered along with these. See: Bart Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* 69-71.

AU 803.5 Bel*lum* Rubhai Conaill inter .ii. filios Donnch*ad*a, ubi Ailill ceci*dit* 7 Concobu*r* uictor fuit.

The battle of Ruba Conaill between the two sons of Donnchad, in which Ailill fell and Conchobur was victor.

Ruba Conaill was a place definitely associated with Clann Cholmáin/Ua Maelechlainn in the twelfth century as it features in *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin.*[15] But on this evidence it was clearly one of the dynasty's seats from a much earlier period.

The fact that Áed was in a position to attack Leinster twice in one month during the year 804 would further suggest that he maintained a powerful and prolonged presence in the midlands at this time.[16] His position is confirmed by a record of another *congressio* the same year.

AU 804.7 Cong*res*sio senadorum nepotum Neill cui dux erat Condmach, ab*bas* Airdd Machae, i nDun Chuaer.

A meeting of the synods of the Uí Néill in Dún Cuair, presided over by Connmach, abbot of Ard Macha.

In this case, as in the 780 example, it seems entirely appropriate to translate *congressio* as 'congress' or 'meeting'. Whether a meeting of synods or of nobles, it was clearly an important gathering led by the abbot of Armagh, Condmach, a close ally of Áed Oirdnide.[17] The congress was held at Dún Cuair, possibly Rathcore in what was southern Brega. Charles-Edwards suggests this was a royal seat of a branch of the Uí Chernaig rulers of the district.[18] This location might be supported by the fact that when Áed Oirdnide twice divided the kingship of Leinster, briefly noted above, he did so at Dún Cuair, a site relatively close to the Leinster border.[19] This would all tend to suggest the involvement of the major secular powers, including Áed, irrespective of how we choose to translate

15 The site is granted to Conall son of Suibne by the saint. See Kuno Meyer, *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin, Life of Colmán son of Lúachan* (Dublin 1911) 61-63. It also features in the annals from this later period. See *ATig* 1159: 'a hosting by Murchertach, grandson of Lochlann, to Ruba Conaill, and he banished Diarmait Húa MaelSechlainn'. The name is preserved in the parish of Rathconnell, about 2km northeast of Mullingar. See my discussion of the Life for further details.

16 *AU* 804.5; *CS* 804.

17 He belonged to Clann Sínaich. This family, a division of the Uí Echdach branch of the Airthir whose territory encompassed Armagh, had attempted to secure the abbacy of Armagh on an hereditary basis with the support of Cenél nEógain who had usurped their former political position. See: Tomás Ó Fiaich, 'The Church of Armagh under Lay Control', *Seanchas Ard Mhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society,* v (1) (1969) 75-127: 82ff.

18 Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* ii 141; Hogan, *Onomasticon* 381.

19 The appearance in the annalistic record soon after this (*AU* 814.1) of a Patrician steward (*máer*) may also be significant here. The position was held by men associated with the monasteries of Kilmoon, Trevet, Dunleer, Monasterboice, Duleek, Louth and Lusk. The examples of this office holder found in the annals were collected by Ó Fiaich and printed as a supplementary note in: Aubrey Gwynn, 'Brian in Armagh (1005)', *Seanchas Ard Mhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society* (ix) 1 (1978) 35-50: 48-50. These office holders probably constituted a permanent Patrician presence in southern Uí Néill territory, establishing a foothold and defending the interests of the church of Armagh 'south of the mountain'. They may also have been entitled to collect revenue and must have received the support or at least tolerance of the secular rulers in Brega.

the annal entry and that the *congressio* should be regarded as further evidence of his efforts to extend his authority.[20]

As for Clann Cholmáin, having removed both his brother and Áed's imposed division of Mide, in 808 Conchobor directly challenged the authority of Áed with the assistance of Muirgius, the Uí Briúin Aí king of the Connachta.

AU 808.4 Slog*ad* Muirgussa m. Tomaltaigh co Connachtaibh la Conchob*ur* m. nDonnch*ad*a co rici Thir in Oenaigh, 7 fugerunt repente post tres noctes, 7 migrauit Aedh m. Neill in ob[u]iam eorum 7 combussit terminos Midi eorumque fuga capris 7 hinulis simulata est.
An expeditionary force by Muirgius son of Tomaltach, with the Connachtmen, [was led] by Conchobur son of Donnchad as far as Tír ind Aenaig, and they hastened away suddenly after three nights, and Aed son of Niall marched to oppose them, and burned the borders of Mide; and their flight was likened to that of goats and kids.

'Tír ind Aenaig' likely refers to Tailtiu, which suggests that Conchobar and Muirgius had provocatively challenged Áed's authority at the sensitive site. Arguably the editor's translation is overly generous to Conchobar as *fugerunt* might better be rendered 'they fled', suggesting a hastily executed climbdown in the face of an advancing and superior force.

Whether it has anything to do with a weakening in Clann Cholmáin's position in the midlands at this time or a specific interest by the annalist, this period also sees fleeting reference to lesser local midland kingships. For example in 812 we learn of 'a slaughter of the Corcu Roídi of Mide by the Uí Moccu Uais.'[21] A few years later we also find mention of Írgalach son of Mael Umai, described as 'rex Corco Sogain'.[22] While this is the only appearance of this kingship in the annals, one possibility is that it is Írgalach's son who is later described as king of 'Coille Follamhain' on his death in 851.[23] We may then have evidence here for a midland dynast, closely connected to Clann Cholmáin, operating under this title.[24]

In 817 the community of Columba came to Tara and excommunicated Áed Oirdnide, probably due to the killing of the *princeps* of Raphoe the same year.[25] The overking died two years later 'in Campo Conaille'.[26] The location of his death may suggest that like his Cenél nEógain predecessors, Áed Allán and Niall Frossach, he had an interest in the region of Mag Muirthemne as

20 Further evidence of this strategy, pursued with the church of Armagh, is found at *AU* 806.5: 'Lex Patricii la *h*Aedh m. Neill'.
21 *AU* 812.10. Preserved in the barony names 'Corkaree' and 'Moygoish' respectively.
22 *AU* 816.1.
23 *AU* 851.4.
24 Though this is only one possibility. We cannot be certain that Congalach (d.851) was the son of Írgalach (d.816) and indeed these names are, if anything, reminiscent of Síl nÁeda Sláine. The death of another Congalach son of Írgalach, *tánaise abbad* of Clonmacnoise, in 843 should also be noted. *CS* 843.
25 *AU* 817.8. See Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 276 n.3.
26 *AU* 819.2. Also *CS* 819; *AI* 819.

a southern base for Cenél nEógain.[27] Typically, Áed's death led to some struggle. Murchad son of Máel Dúin, grandson of Áed Allán, emerged and defeated the Cenél Conaill king Máel Bresail in 819.[28] Having established himself Murchad confronted Conchobar who, according to the various Middle Irish lists, succeeded Áed as Uí Néill overking.[29]

AU 820.2 Slog*ad* la Mur*chad* do Druim ind Eich co nOib Neill in Tuaisc*eirt* ; Concobu*r* co nOib neill in Deisc*eirt* andes 7 co Laignibh, donec Deus eos seperauit per suam magnam potentiam.

Murchad with the northern Uí Néill, made an expedition to Druim ind Eich; Conchobor with the southern Uí Néill and the Laigin moved northwards, till at length God by his great power separated them.

Drimnagh or Drumnigh, both in Dublin, have been suggested as possible locations for the encounter by Hogan. The former, south of the Liffey, seems unlikely. But the latter, near Portmarnock, is quite possible as Conchobor combined his forces with those of the Laigin. While Murchad may have marched south from Mag Muirthemne down along the east coast to meet this composite force.[30] Though this particular encounter did not end in violence, this uneasy peace did not last long as over the following few years both Conchobar and Murchad aggressively campaigned against one another.

AU 821.5 Slog*ad* la Conchobu*r* m. nDonnch*ad*a co hArdachadh Sleibe Fuait. Uastatio na nAirth*er co* rice Emhain Machae.

Conchobor son of Donnchad made an expedition to Ardachad of Sliab Fuait. Int Airthir was laid waste as far as Emain Macha.[31]

AU 822.3 Sloigedh la Mu*r*cadh m. Maile Duin co fe*r*aib ind Fochli *co* rici Aird mBrecan. Eludh iar*u*m do fe*r*aib Breg cuice, .i. Diarmait m. Neill co Sil Aedha Slane, *co*ru giallsat ic Druim Fe*r*gusso do Mu*r*chadh. Indred fe*r* mBregh la Concobu*r* m. nDonnchadha co ndessidh ecc Gualait. Indred deisc*eir*d Breg leis aitherrach in k*al*e*n*dis Nouembr*is co* torchair sluagh dimor leiss de fe*r*aib deisc*eir*t Bregh, 7 *co*ru giallsat Hui Ce*r*naig ar eicin.

Murchad son of Mael Dúin made an expedition with the men of the North to Ard

27 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 573. As already noted above, the appearance of various Patrician stewards about this time would also tend to confirm northern interest in this general part of the country. See note 19 above.

28 *AU* 819.3.

29 See my Kinglist Table (Appendix 3). Conchobar does not feature in the Clann Cholmáin genealogy because his descendants did not manage to retain control. All later kings traced descent from his brother, Máel Ruanaid. One late and hardly significant exception is found in Mac Fhir Bhisigh's genealogical collection where at one point Conchobar is incorrectly given as Máel Ruanaid's father.

30 *Onom.*, 365.

31 The translation should read 'Ind Airthir' (n. pl. of masc. *o*-stem). Ard Achad can be identified as Newtownhamilton, Co. Armagh. Hogan, *Onomasticon* 36.

> Brecáin. The men of Brega, i.e. Diarmait son of Niall and the descendants of Aed Sláine, then went over secretly to Murchad and submitted to him at Druim Fergusa. Conchobor son of Donnchad invaded Brega and camped at Gualu. He invaded southern Brega again on the Kalends [1st] of November, and a vast number of the men of southern Brega fell by him, and the Uí Chernaig submitted under compulsion.

Murchad's actions here were highly provocative. The submission made to him by the Uí Chernaig king, Diarmait son of Neill, may be a further evidence of a link previously established between Cenél nEógain and this branch of Síl nÁedo Sláine. Of course Uí Chernaig may also have favoured a more distant overlordship by submitting to the Cenél nEógain king and attempting to evade Conchobar's lordship.[32] The term used to describe their actions, *eludh,* has a specific legal sense meaning 'evasion of rightful claims, default, neglect to comply with legal customs or duties' etc.[33] According to the early eighth century legal tract *Críth Gablach,* such an evasion was one of three instances where a king could pledge a hosting on his *túatha.*

> slógad tar crích fri túa[i]th asidluí.[34]
> a hosting across the border against a *túath* which evades him.

With this information at our disposal we might suggest that Mac Niocaill's use of the word 'secretly' in his translation of this incident in *AU* is unnecessary and inaccurate. The 'men of Brega' openly abandoned their lord and offered submission to another in a defined and understood manner rather than secretly renouncing Conchobor. But Conchobar's response was decisive and certainly suggests Clann Cholmáin were ordinarily the dominant political force in the region.[35]

The varying meaning of the title 'king of Mide' is again evident about this time. We have seen how the holder of the title in 766 was not the most powerful midland king but seems rather to have been a deputy for Domnall Midi. But in 802 the Clann Cholmáin dynast Muiredach held the title. By 826 Niall son of Diarmait, *rex Midhe* according to his obit but otherwise unknown, must have been Conchobar's deputy.[36] It is also possible that the dynasty had taken direct control of some church offices at this stage. In 823 the death is recorded of Díarmait son of Donnchad, abbot of Ross Ech.[37] For the 14th September the Félire Óengusso names one 'Coeman Brecc'. In the notes we find the elaboration '.i. Caeman Brecc o Rus ech i Caille Follamin im-Mide' confirming the location of this church.[38] The possibility that Díarmait's father was Donnchad Midi (d.797) makes a

32 Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 280 n.5.
33 *DIL* s.v. élúd 118.
34 D.A. Binchy, *Críth Gablach* §37 at 20 [ll. 512-13].
35 *Baile in Scáil* describes Conchobar as the 'Fair flame of the land of Bregmag', though we should perhaps acknowledge this as a rhetorical flourish. Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45, 63 §48.
36 *AU* 826.2; *CS* 826. He may have been a son of Díarmait Dub who died in 764 or Díarmait Odur who died in 797. Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 284 n.1.
37 *AU* 823.1.
38 Whitley Stokes (ed), *Felire Oengusso Celi De: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* (London 1905) 194, 206-09.

chronological fit.

In 827 we find another example of a so-called 'disturbance' at Tailtiu.

AU 827.5 Coscradh oinaigh Taillten f*or* Gailengaibh la Concobu*r* m. nDonnch*ad*a in quo ceci*derunt* multi.
A disturbance of the Fair of Tailtiu [caused by an attack] on the Gailenga by Conchobor son of Donnchad, and many fell therein.

The Gailenga were a local and probably ancient political grouping.[39] As discussed in greater detail elsewhere, the wording of the 827 entry is ambiguous and can be interpreted in a number of different ways. It may be that this entry simply records the outcome of this 'disturbance', i.e. that Conchobar emerged victorious, rather than necessarily suggesting he instigated the violence. This raises the possibility that the Gailenga were challenging Conchobar's authority at Tailtiu.

The year 827 also saw Conchobar meet Fedilmid king of Cashel at a *rígdál* in Birr.[40] This was on the frontier between Uí Néill and Munster territory suggesting parity between the kings.[41] According to *CS,* the year 827 also saw the appointment of a Munsterman to the *secnapóte* i.e. 'office of second abbot' at Clonmacnoise, 'which was never before done'. There had been no Munster abbot of Clonmacnoise since 638.[42] This appointment may also be a reflection of the arrangement of political power in the area at this time. Indeed a few years previously Artrí 'episcopus Ard Macha' made a circuit of Munster with Fedilmid where the 'Lex Patricii' was proclaimed.[43] Though as we shall see below some remain sceptical, it has been suggested that Artrí was a son of Conchobor of Clann Cholmáin. But whatever arrangement was reached between Conchobor and Fedilmid at Birr, peace did not last long. Indeed it may be that the rout inflicted on the Connachta by 'the men of Mide' in 829 was part of the power struggle between Conchobar and Fedilmid to secure political submission.[44] The following year 'the smashing of the southern Uí Briúin by Fedlimid' is recorded.[45] But direct hostility between the two powers also broke out and in 830 Fallomon son of Donnchad was killed by the Munstermen.[46] Under the year 830 we find one Óengus son of Donnchad described as 'rex Telach Mide'.[47] Óengus may well have been a Clann Cholmáin king, a son of Donnchad Midi (d.797), his title here perhaps designed as a consolation

39 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 466-67.
40 *AU* 827.10.
41 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 279-80.
42 Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* 222.
43 *AU* 823.5.
44 *AU* 829.4; *CS* 829.
45 *AU* 830.6.
46 *AU* 830.5; *AI* 830. The latter source credits Fedilimid with defeating both the Connachta and Uí Néill, though this is possibly exaggeration to flatter Fedilimid and motivated by a Munster bias.
47 *AU* 830.1. This is the only appearance of this in the *Chronicle of Ireland.*

prize. Óengus was certainly not the leading Clann Cholmáin king in any case, that position being held by Conchobor (d.833).

In 831 the Fair was disturbed again.

AU 831.5 Oenach Tailten do cumusc oc Foradhaib im scrin M. Cuilind 7 im minda Patraicc condid·aptha ile de.

The fair of Tailtiu was disturbed at the platforms owing to [dissension over] the shrine of MacCuilinn and the halidoms of Patrick, and many died as a result.

It seems at least possible that the disruption around the relics of Patrick was an episode in the ongoing conflict surrounding the abbacy of Armagh, a conflict which involved Clann Cholmáin.[48] The very same year we find the following:

AU 831.9 Sarug*ad* Eugain Mainisdreach, ab*batis* Airdd Machae hi foigaillnaig la Conchobar m. nDonnch*ad*a co·arrgabtha a muinnt*er* 7 co ructha a graigi.

Eógan of Mainister abbot of Ard Macha was dishonoured over a legal decision (?) by Conchobor son of Donnchad, and his followers were taken prisoner, and his horses taken away.

Eogan was one claimant to the abbacy, the other the aforementioned Artrí. The latter was a 'son of Conchobor' and it has been suggested his father was the Clann Cholmáin king.[49] Both Artrí and 'our' Conchobar were certainly in conflict with Eogan. The above entry shows Conchobar's attitude to Eogan and a few years previously we find:

AU 827.2 Sarug*ad* Eugain i nArdd Machae la Cumuscach m. Catail 7 la Artrigh m. Concobu*ir*. The dishonouring of Eogan in Ard Macha by Cumuscach son of Cathal and by Artrí son of Conchobor.

The fact that Artrí's father was called Conchobor and that both he and Clann Cholmáin's Conchobor were in opposition to Eogan seems to be the only reason why Artrí has been identified as a son of the Clann Cholmáin king. While possible, some scholars remain sceptical.[50] Of course the dispute over the abbacy of Armagh was also a very local affair reflecting the struggle for political position in the region. In the important battle of Leth Cam, also in 827, Níall Caille of Cenél nEógain had decisively defeated a coalition which included several kings of the Airgialla who had opposed his favourite, Eogan.[51]

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48 Mac Cuilinn was patron saint of Lusk, a church in southern Brega. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 559; idem, *Chronicle of Ireland* ii 89.

49 H.J. Lawlor and R.I. Best, 'The Ancient List of the Coarbs of Patrick', *PRIA* 35 C (1919) 316-62: 349.

50 Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 290 n.5.

51 *AU* 827.4.

Conchobar's harrying of Life (the Liffey plain) in 831 may well have been in retaliation for Fedilmid's activities in the region that year. He had been in a position to strike into Brega with a force of Munster and Leinstermen and Conchobar was probably punishing the latter for their involvement.[52] The death of Conchobar is recorded soon after this along with that of his putative son Artrí.[53]

AU 833.1 Artri m. Concobair abb Airdd Machae, 7 Concobu*r* m. Donncodha rex Temhro, uno mense mortui sunt.
Artrí son of Conchobor, abbot of Ard Macha, and Conchobor son of Donnchad, king of Temair, died in the same month.[54]

According to the 'Ríg Uisnig' kinglist, Conchobar's death was violent.

> Conchob*or* m*ac* Don*dchada* .xii. a bádud i n-usci i Cl*uain* Iraird la ríg Gall.[55]
> Conchobor son of Donnchad [reigned for] twelve years. He was drowned in water at Clonard by the king of the Foreigners.

The association with Clonard is also found at §48 of *Baile in Scáil* though that text tells us Conchobar was buried there.[56] But the use of the past tense Latin phrase 'sepultus est' in *Baile in Scáil* to provide this information is suspicious. This phrase, or the vernacular equivalent 'ro-adnacht', occurs almost regularly in §§40-55 of *Baile in Scáil* and these phrases would seem to be later additions.[57]

The link between Conchobor and the Norse as suggested by the above 'Ríg Uisnig' notice might find some support elsewhere in *Baile in Scáil* which in characterising his reign includes the following:

> Túaruscbáil tíchtan geinti.
> Tidings of the coming of the Norse.[58]

But the above evidence for linking Conchobor with the Norse is seriously undermined by reference to the annals where there is no mention of any dealings between the two parties. While the frequency of Norse raiding certainly increased through the 820s and early 830s, there is nothing to suggest that the midlands had yet been subject to attack. While the author of *Baile in Scáil* simply

52 *AU* 831.11; *CS* 831.
53 The Laud MS 610 list breaks from its usual laconicism to inform us that four hundred years elapsed from the arrival of Patrick until the deaths of Conchobar and Artrí. Meyer, 'The Laud Synchronisms', 610.
54 Also *CS* 833. A further notice is also found, though not in the main hand, at *AU* 832.9.
55 *LL* 5950.
56 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45, 63 §48.
57 Ro-adnacht being the perfect of ad-anaig, 'to bury' or 'to entomb'. *DIL* s.v. ad-anaig.
58 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45, 63 §48.

placed the emergence of the Norse threat during Conchobar's reign, the notice in 'Ríg Uisnig' may well have been inserted under the wrong Conchobar. An annal entry concerning a great nephew and namesake of the Conchobor we have been discussing here bears striking similarities to the 'Ríg Uisnig' entry reproduced above.

AU 864.2 Concobu*r* m. Donncadha, leithri Mide, do marb*ad* i n-uisciu oc Cluain Irairdd la Amlaiph, ri Gall.
Conchobor son of Donnchad, one of two kings of Mide, was put to death in water at Cluain Iraird by Amlaíb, king of the foreigners.

Over the first third or so of the ninth century we have further evidence for the hierarchical, layered but adaptable system of kingship operated by Clann Cholmáin and their midland supporters. Deputyship continues to be an important element in the organisation of midland kingship. This is reflected firstly in the use of the title 'king of Mide' which was dependent on the position of the leading Clann Cholmáin dynast relative to that of Uí Néill rivals, both in the midlands and north. But we have also seen some evidence for the occupation of lesser midland kingships by lesser members of Clann Cholmáin. Alliance with and control of the major churches must also be considered in the context of the pursuit of power by Clann Cholmáin, and indeed by Cenél nEógain. We have also seen the continued emphasis by overkings, be they Clann Cholmáin or Cenél nEógain during this period, on the control of lesser provincial powers in the pursuit of ambitious, wide-ranging authority. Attempts to divide kingships and appoint rulers, strategies which would be followed with increasing regularity, can be clearly identified from this period. Whereas Clann Cholmáin was at times able to pursue such ambitious policies itself, we have also seen the dynasty on the receiving end of such treatment at moments of Cenél nEógain strength. As we have also seen, the relative peace and stability between the Connachta and Clann Cholmáin began to totter from this period too. It may be that this was in part a consequence of Clann Cholmáin and Munster vying for wider influence, but the resulting increase in raiding and hostility across the Shannon weakened Clann Cholmáin's position in the long run.[59]

59 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 596.

6. Máel Sechnaill

According to most copies of the Middle Irish high-king list, Conchobor of Clann Cholmáin was succeeded by Níall son of Áed of Cenél nEógain. One exception is the text *Do Fhlathiusaib Hérend* in the Book of Leinster. This omits Níall and moves directly to Máel Sechnaill of Clann Cholmáin though it also admits Fedilmid as a high-king with opposition.[1] The annal evidence suggests that following Conchobor's death (833), Clann Cholmáin was thoroughly overshadowed for several years and that Níall and Fedilmid were the most powerful Irish kings. Clann Cholmáin's genealogy for this period moves from Donnchad Midi (d.797) to Máel Ruanaid (d.843) and then Máel Sechnaill (d.862).[2] According to the midland regnal list 'Ríg Uisnig' in *LL*, Máel Ruanaid succeeded his brother Conchobor. He had certainly been around for quite a while by 833 as his involvement in the killing of the abbot of Clonfad in 799 demonstrates.[3] According to the *Banshenchas* he was married to one Aróc, who was Máel Sechnaill's mother. This woman was a daughter of Cathal, king of the Fir Chúl in northern Brega.[4] But aside from these few notices, there is in truth very little information about Máel Ruanaid and his virtual absence from the record must in part be due to the very challenging political context in which Clann Cholmáin found itself during this period.

In 835 Níall son of Áed of Cenél nEógain was active in both Mide and Leinster. In Leinster he appointed Bran of the Uí Dúnchada as the new king.[5] In considering Níall's appointment of a new king over Leinster we should bear in mind that when Fedilmid made a hosting into Brega in 831, he had Leinster support. This suggests that the previous king of Leinster, Cellach whose death is recorded in 834, was a supporter, willing or otherwise, of Níall's main rival.[6] Níall's policy here is reminiscent of his father's regular interventions into both Mide and Leinster to divide the territories and appoint rulers.[7] He also overran Mide:

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1 *LL* i 97.

2 As previously noted Conchobor (d.833) is not included in Clann Cholmáin's genealogy because his descendants did not retain power following his death.

3 *AU* 799.3.

4 See (Metrical) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 310, 335; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* §214 at 133, 202. (Prose) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234: 186; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* §390 at 265, 383. Cathal belonged to the Síl nDlúthaig branch of Síl nÁedo Sláine and is described in his annalistic obit as 'rex Ratho Airthir 7 Uirorum Cul'. *AU* 810.1.

5 *AU* 835.1. The verb used in this entry, *coro digestar*, is translated as 'ordained' by Hennessy and 'set up' by Mac Niocaill and Mac Airt. Ó Corráin has argued that a reading *co ro ordigestar* from the verb *ordaigidir*, 'to appoint', makes more sense in this context. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'King-making in Leinster in 835', *Peritia* 14 (2000) 431; William H. Hennessy, *Annals of Ulster* i (Dublin 1887) 334-35 s.a 834 [835].

6 *AU* 831.9; *AU* 834.3.

7 *AU* 802.2; *AU* 805.7; *AU* 818.6.

AU 835.3 Indredh Mide la Niall *co*ro loscadh *co* dici Tech Mael Chonoc.
Niall invaded Mide and burned the country as far as Tech Maíl Chonóc.

The *Four Masters* contains the added detail that this location was 'i mbodhammair' but O'Donovan was unable to propose any identification. Hogan identifies a similarly named location in the midlands, north-east of Athlone while both *AFM* and *AClon* describe Maíl Chonóc as the ruler of Dealbhna Bethra.[8] Fedilmid had repeatedly harried this area during the 820s and early 830s.[9] Perhaps Níall's attack in 835 suggests that Fedilmid had brought this area under his control. Importantly, this would suggest that Clann Cholmáin's traditional influence in the area had waned, something which is not at all surprising from the general context, and that it was Níall and Fedilmid who struggled for control. According to the *Banshenchas* Níall married Gormlaith (d.861), a daughter of the former Clann Cholmáin overking Donnchad (d.797). She was mother of another Cenél nEógain overking, Áed Findliath (d.879).[10] This marriage must certainly be considered in the context of Níall's attempts to extend his influence in the midlands. There is one other possible reference to a Clann Cholmáin figure of some importance during this period which may also suggest they retained some influence at Clonmacnoise:

CS 838 Ruaidri mac Donnchad*h*a, secundus Abbas Cliana Iraird, tanaisi Abb Cluana muc Nois, quieuit.
Ruaidhri, son of Donnchadh, vice-Abbot of Cluain-Iraird, and tanist Abbot of Cluain-muc-Nois, quievit.

Perhaps this was a son of Donnchad Midi (d.797). As Charles-Edwards points out, since both Clonmacnoise and Clonard were very important midland churches it might be argued that this Ruaidrí was a political appointment to these positions.[11] Among the many grave-slabs at Clonmacnoise is one bearing the inscription 'Ruadri' which Lionard suggests may refer to the Ruaidri of our annal entry.[12]

AU 838.6 Rigdhal mor i Cluain Conaire Tommain et*er* Feidhilmidh 7 Niall.
A great royal conference in Cluain Chonaire Tómáin, between Feidlimid and Niall.

AI 838 Mordal fer nErend i Cluain Ferta Brénaind, 7 Niall mc. Aeda, rí Temrach, do riarad Fédlimmid m. Crimthain | corbo lánrí Hérend Fédlimmid in lá sein, 7 co ndessid hi

8 *AFM* 834 [835]; *Onom.*, 118 s.v. Bodamair; *AClon* 832 [835].
9 *AU* 826.8; *CS* 832; *AU* 833.6.
10 See (Metrical) Margaret Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 310, 335; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* §215 at 133, 202. (Prose) Margaret Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234: 186; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* §391 at 265, 383.
11 Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 296 n.2.
12 R.A.S. Macalister, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum* ii (Dublin 1945 repr. Dublin 1996) 48, Plate XV; Pádraig Lionard, 'Early Irish Grave-Slabs', *PRIA* 61(C) (1961-62) 95-169: 160.

suide abbad Cluana Ferta.
A great assembly of the men of Ireland in Cluain Ferta Brénainn, and Niall son of Aed, king of Temuir, submitted to Feidlimid, son of Crimthann, so that Feidlimid became full king of Ireland that day, and he occupied the abbot's chair of Cluain Ferta.

The account of this *rígdál* found in *AI* must be regarded with some suspicion considering the Munster bias of the text. Aside from the extra detail, *AI* says that Clonfert in Co.Galway was the location whereas *AU* gives the more likely location of Cloncurry, on what was the border between Leinster and Brega. Such a border location might suggest 'that Fedlimid had gained a temporary authority over Leinster.'[13] This seems quite likely. A few years later he occupied Carman, the sensitive site of the *Óenach Carmain,* a Fair associated with the kingship of Leinster, which might also suggest Fedilmid's authority over, or at least claim to authority over Leinster.[14] Whatever arrangement was arrived at between Níall and Fedilmid during the 838 *rígdál,* it did not endure for long.

AU 840.4 Feidilmidh, ri Muman, do innriud Mide 7 Breg conid·deisigh i Temhraigh 7 in illa uice indred Cell 7 Beithri la Niall m. Aedha.
Feidlimid king of Mumu invaded Mide and Brega, and halted at Temair; and on that occasion Fir Chell and Bethra were invaded by Niall son of Aed.[15]

AI 840 Fedlimmid do indriud Lethe Cuind óthá Birra co Temraich, 7 a chostud i Temraich 7 Gormlaith ingen Murchada, ríg Laigen, do gabail cona banchure, 7 Indrechtach macc Mail Duin do marbad lais i Temrach.
Feidlimid harried Leth Cuinn from Birra to Temuir, and he was checked at Temuir, and he seized Gormlaith, daughter of Murchad, king of Laigin, together with her female train, and Indrechtach, son of Mael Dúin, was killed by him at Temuir.

While some of the extra detail in the *AI* account is of dubious reliability,[16] Fedilmid's appearance at Tara was clearly a challenge to Níall who responded by invading the territories of Fir Chell and Delbnae Bethra. This would again suggest that Fedilmid had brought these areas under his control.

As noted above, Máel Ruanaid, apparently the leading Clann Cholmáin dynast at this time, is largely absent from the annalistic record but 839 does see the first appearance of his son, Máel

13 Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 295-96 n.2.

14 *AU* 841.5. In considering the possible location of Carman, there is some discussion of its significance in: Diarmuid Ó Murchadha, 'Carman, site of Óenach Carmain: A Proposed Location', *Éigse* xxxiii (2002) 57-70. Also see my Appendix 5 on the 'disturbances' at Tailtiu with wider context for further detail.

15 Also CS 840.

16 Here Gormlaith has been confused with the better known tenth-century daughter of Murchad of Leinster who was married, most famously, to Brian Boru. According to the *Banshenchas* Donnchad Midi's daughter Gormlaith (obit at *AU* 861.2) was married to Niall Caille but considering the confusion surrounding the various different Gormlaiths and their development from historical figures into literary characters, the *AI* entry is 'best treated with caution.' Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tale of Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', *Ériu* 52 (2002) 1-24: 3; n.10 above.

Sechnaill, who killed the steward (*equonimus*) of Durrow that year.[17] Shortly afterwards we have evidence of feuding amongst Clann Cholmáin.

AU 841.1 Cumsundud f*or* Mael Ruanaidh m. nDonnch*ad*a la Diarmaid m. Concobhair 7 marb*ad* Diarmata iarum la Mael Sechnaill in eadem die, 7 Mael Ruanaigh in uita remansit.
Diarmait son of Conchobor subjected Mael Ruanaid son of Donnchad to compulsion (?)[18], and Diarmait was later killed by Mael Sechnaill on the same day, and Mael Ruanaid was left alive.

Here Máel Ruanaid was challenged by a nephew and supported by his son, Máel Sechnaill. That the challenge was met by Máel Sechnaill might even suggest that though Máel Ruanaid did not die until 843, his son was the real holder of power even earlier.[19] But it is certainly clear that in the decade following Conchobor's death (833) political forces to the north and south of Mide were in the ascendant.

Of course a crucial new dimension to consider from this period is the Viking presence. While their activity for the first few decades of the ninth century seems to have been largely restricted to coastal raiding, 841 saw the establishment of two semi-permanent *longphuirt* along the eastern coast.

AU 841.4 Longp*or*t oc Linn Duachaill asar orta tuatha 7 cealla Tethbai. Longp*or*t oc Duiblinn as·rorta Laig*in* 7 Oi Neill etir tuatha 7 cealla *co* rice Sliabh Bledhma.

There was a naval camp at Linn Duachaill from which the peoples and churches of Tethba were plundered. There was a naval camp at Duiblinn from which the Laigin and the Uí Néill were plundered, both states and churches, as far as Sliab Bladma.

From Lind Duachaill, near Annagassan in Co.Louth, the Vikings plundered the area roughly corresponding to modern Co. Longford.[20] We can interpret the attack on 'Uí Néill' as being focused

17 Crunnmáel son of Fiannamail (unidentified). See: *AU* 839.6.

18 The primary meaning of *cumsanad*, the verbal noun of *con-osna*, appears to be 'the act of resting, ceasing, reposing' etc. But there are several examples where it also has negative connotations, used in instances where dissension, disruption or an attack is being discussed. In the *AFM* version of this entry, the word has been replaced with *sraoineadh*, 'defeating, routing in battle'. *DIL* s.vv. cumsanad, con-oscaigi, sraíniud. Charles-Edwards translates as 'a coup'. Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 299.

19 There are examples, though somewhat later (eleventh century), where a king installs and associates a son with himself in the kingship. While the evidence is sparse, perhaps we have an early example of the 'rí ri láim a athar' 'king by the side of his father' here. See: Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Irish Regnal Succession: A Reappraisal', *Studia Hibernica* 11 (1971) 7-39: 36; Katharine Simms, *From Kings to Warlords* (Woodbridge 1987) 52.

20 Recent geophysical survey and very limited excavation has established the precise location of the *longphort* and the dateable evidence confirms the mid-ninth century date of establishment found in the annals. These findings were presented by Mark Clinton and Eamonn P. Kelly at the thirteenth annual Medieval Dublin Symposium held at Trinity College Dublin (21/05/2011). The paper will most likely appear in a future volume of the Medieval Dublin series. In the meantime, further details can be found at the Linn Duachaill Research Group's website, www.linnduachaill.ie.

on the southern Uí Néill territories of Brega and Mide reaching as far south as Slieve Bloom.[21] Extra detail provided by *CS* informs us that they plundered Clonard as well as Clonenagh (Co. Laois) and Killeigh (Co. Offaly).[22] The attack on Clonard in particular, one of the midland's most important churches, would certainly have hurt Clann Cholmáin interests. As noted above, the Ruaidhrí who died in 838 and held positions at both Clonard and Clonmacnoise may well have been a Clann Cholmáin dynast.

Máel Ruanaid died in 843, bringing a rather obscure reign to an end.[23] It is possible that two other Clann Cholmáin dynasts are also recorded that year:

AU 843.2 Mors Cathail m. Concobhair.
Death of Cathal son of Conchobor.

It is possible this was a son of the Clann Cholmáin overking who died in 833.

AU 843.3 Arttagan m. Domnaill iugul*atus* est dolose a Ruargg m. Broin.
Artacán son of Domnall was deceitfully killed by Ruarc son of Bran.

It is possible that Artacán was a son of the Domnall who died in 799 and who was in turn a son of Donnchad Midi.[24] Ruarc was an Uí Dúnchada king.

845 saw further major Viking activity, this time from the midlands.

AU 845.3 Dunadh di Gallaibh .i. la Tuirgeis f*or* Loch Ri *cor*[o] ortadu*r* Connachta 7 Midhe, 7 *co*ro loscaiset Cluain M. Nois cona dertaigibh, 7 Cluaen Ferta Bren*ainn* 7 Tir da Glass 7 Lothra 7 alaile cathracha.

There was an encampment of the foreigners i.e. under Tuirgéis on Loch Rí, and they plundered Connacht and Mide, and burned Cluain Moccu Nóis with its oratories, and Cluain Ferta Brénainn, and Tír dá Glas and Lothra and other monasteries.[25]

The presence of a Viking base on Lough Ree was a significant development but Máel Sechnaill responded decisively by capturing Turgéis and drowning him in Lough Owel.[26] Máel Sechnaill was to do something similar a few years later when he drowned Cináed, an Uí Chonaing king:

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21 The Viking's increasing involvement in the Irish political scene can be seen in 842 when they took one Máel Dúin prisoner. He was king of Calatruim, an Uí Chernaig kingship. He was apparently released at some point because he was killed in 846 by the Leinstermen. *AU* 842.5.

22 Orgain Cluana Ed*h*nec*h* et dilg*h*enn Cluana Iráird ocus Cille aichaid*h* o Gentib*h*.
Plundering of Cluain-edhnech, and demolition of Cluain-Iraird and Cill-achaidh, by Gentiles. *CS* 841.The *CS* entry is otherwise virtually identical to that found in *AU*. *Onom.*, 173, 262.

23 *AU* 843.1; *CS* 843; *AI* 843.

24 *AU* 799.5.

25 Also *CS* 845.

26 *AU* 845.8; *CS* 845.

AU 851.2 Cinaedh m. Conaing, rex Ciannachta, demersus est in lacu crudeli morte o Mael Sechnaill 7 o Tigernach di foesmaib degdoine nEr*enn* 7 comarbbai Patraicc specialit*er*.
Cinaed son of Conaing, king of Cianacht, was cruelly drowned in a pool by Mael Sechnaill and Tigernach, in spite of the guarantees of the nobles of Ireland and the successor of Patrick in particular.

CS 851 Cinaodh mac Conaíng, Rí Ciannacda, demersus est in lacu .i. in Angi, crudeli morte ó Maoilseclain et ó Tigernach, di foesmaib daigh daoinibh nEreann, et comarba Padraig specialiter.
Cinaedh, son of Conaing, King of Ciannachda, was drowned in a lake (*i.e.*in the Anghi)-a cruel death-by Maelsechlainn and Tigernach, to the satisfaction of all the good men of Erinn,[27] and of the comarb of Patrick especially.

Charles-Edwards argues that we should disregard the editor's translation ('was cruelly drowned in a pool') and instead regard the drowning as taking place 'in a cruel lake'.[28] Perhaps we have here evidence of a method of execution? The *AU* entry is also accompanied by a marginal Irish verse with the slightly different detail that Cinaed had been taken bound to a pit. According to Early Irish Law a condemned person could be left to die from starvation and/or exposure in a pit.[29] But the marginal verse is only in TCD MS H.1.8. and not in its sister manuscript, MS Rawlinson B.489, suggesting it 'is therefore extraneous material and a dubious source.'[30] Byrne argues that drowning as a method of execution was 'probably borrowed from the Norse'.[31] But an annal entry from 734 suggests this was a method practiced by the Picts.

AU 734.5 Talorgg m. Congusso a fratre suo uinctus est, tradit*ur* in manus Pictorum 7 cum illis in aqua demersus est.

Talorg son of Congus was held captive by his brother, handed over to the Picts, and drowned by them.

Whether or not Máel Sechnaill was imitating a method of execution brought to Ireland in drowning Turgéis in 845, the outcome was the removal of a threat to his position. The year 845 also saw him remove several close kinsmen and probable rivals.

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27 This phrase is mistranslated. The editors of *AU* have captured the sense. See F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* 263.

28 Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 307 n.3. Similar phrasing can be found at: *AU* 912.2; *CS* 911 [912]. Again the editors' translation should be disregarded there too.

29 Fergus Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law* 218-19.

30 Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'High-Kings, Vikings and Other Kings', *Irish Historical Studies* 22 (83) (1979) 283-323: 309.

31 F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* 263. A later example where Lorcán king of Mide was drowned by Amlaíb a Norse king at Clonard is recorded at *AU* 864.2; *CS* 864. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

AU 845.7 Orggain Donncadha m. Follomain 7 Flainn m. Mael Ruanaig la Mael Sechnaill m. Mael Ruanaidh.
Donnchad son of Follaman and Flann son of Mael Ruanaid were killed by Mael Sechnaill son of Mael Ruanaid.[32]

Donnchad was probably a son of Fallomon (d.830) and hence a first cousin of Máel Sechnaill. Flann was clearly Máel Sechnaill's brother. The following year Níall son of Áed of Cenél nEógain drowned in the River Callann.[33] His death was soon followed by that of Fedilmid, king of Cashel, in 847.[34] But though Máel Sechnaill's position would undoubtedly have been strengthened by the deaths of these two powerful kings, he still faced local competition. In 846 he and Ruarc, perhaps the Uí Dúnchada king, were routed by Tigernach the Uí Chernaig king of Loch Gabor 'in which many were slaughtered'.[35]

The year 847 saw Máel Sechnaill attack Inis Muinnremair (Lough Ramor, Co. Cavan).[36]

AU 847.3 Toghal Innsi Locha Muin*n*remair la Mael Sechnaill f*or* fianlach mar di m*acc*aibh bais Luigne 7 Galeng ro batar oc indriudh na tuath more gentilium.

Mael Sechnaill destroyed the Island of Loch Muinremor, overcoming there a large band of wicked men of Luigni and Gailenga, who had been plundering the territories in the manner of the heathens.[37]

Whatever about drowning as a method of execution, the practice described in this entry cannot, it seems, be blamed on the arrival of the Vikings to Ireland. Both Sharpe and McCone have discussed the evidence for groups of young men operating outside of the *túath* system in the pre-Viking period.[38] Having noted the pagan associations of these groups in some sources, Sharpe suggests that in the 847 entry 'the application of the word *Gentiles* to the vikings may well be seen as placing them in the context of pagan *díbergaig*.'[39] Both the Gailenga and Luigni were peoples based in northern Mide and certainly within Clann Cholmáin's orbit.[40]

The year 848 saw several large defeats for the Vikings in Ireland including one at the hands

32 *AI* 845 has run these two separate notices together to produce: Orguin Don*nchada* m. Flaind la Mael Sechnaill.
33 *AU* 846.3; *CS* 846; *AI* 846.
34 *AU* 847.1; *CS* 847; *AI* 847.
35 *AU* 846.7. If, as suggested above, the Artacán son of Domnall who was killed by Ruarc in 843 was a Clann Cholmáin dynast, then it would seem that Ruarc and the midland dynasty had quickly set their differences aside. This is entirely possible. As we shall see the Tigernach who routed Máel Sechnaill here in 846 was allied with him soon after.
36 *Onom.*, 468.
37 Also:*CS* 847.
38 Richard Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus,* Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', *Ériu* xxx (1979) 75-92; Kim McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga,* and *Fíanna:* Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 12 (Winter 1986) 1-22. Indeed McCone argues that we have here evidence for the survival of the *Männerbund*, an institution inherited from an Indo-European archetype and observable across a variety of cultures.
39 Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus,* Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men', 91.
40 *Onom.*, 434, 507.

of Máel Sechnaill, by now king of Tara. He met them in a battle which saw seven hundred fall and which was fought deep in Mide:

AU 848.4 Cath re Mael Sechnaill f*or* gennti i Fo*r*aig in quo ceci*derunt* .uii. cét.
Mael Sechnaill won a battle against the heathens at Forach, in which seven hundred fell.

CS 848 Cat*h* re Maolsec*h*lainn mac Maeilruanaid*h* [for Gentib*h*] i Foraig, in quo ceciderunt .uii. ced.
A battle *gained* by Maelsechlainn, son of Maelruanaidh, [over the Gentiles], at Forach, in which 700 fell.[41]

It is possible that this victory was noted outside of Ireland because under the year 848, during the reign of Charles the Bald, we find the following entry in the Annals of St. Bertin:

> Scotti super Nortmannos irruentes, auxilio domini nostri Jesu Christi victores, eos a suis finibus propellunt; unde et rex Scottorum ad Karolum pacis et amicitiæ gratia legatos cum muneribus mittit, viam sibi petendi Romam concedi deposcens.[42]
>
> The Irish attacked the Northmen, won a victory with the aid of our Lord Jesus Christ, and drove them out of their land. Consequently the king of the Irish sent envoys bearing gifts to Charles to make a friendship-treaty and alliance with him; the Irish king also sought permission to travel through Charles's kingdom on a pilgrimage to Rome.[43]

But because the entry does not further identify the Irish king, we cannot be certain that Máel Sechnaill is meant since the Irish annals record several victories by Irish kings against the Vikings in 848. Ólchobor, king of Munster and Lorcán, king of Leinster, defeated Jarl Tomrair who fell with twelve hundred.[44] Tigernach, the Uí Chernaig king of Loch Gabor routed another force, probably in Brega, in which another twelve hundred fell.[45] Finally we are told that the Eóganacht of Cashel routed a force, presumably in Munster, though no king is named.[46] Clearly then 848 saw setbacks for the Vikings across Ireland but it is tempting to regard Máel Sechnaill as the most likely figure to be called 'king of the Irish' by a continental annalist.

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41 O'Donovan, followed by Hennessy, put the battle in Co. Meath: *AFM,* n. z at 474; William H. Hennessy, *Annals of Ulster* i (Dublin 1887) [sa 847] n.8 at 355. But Hogan later argued the site was 'rather, Farrow tl. near Mullingar.' *Onom.,* s.v. *Forrach.* This more westerly location in the Westmeath lakelands finds some confirmation in the text *Do Fhlaithesaib Hérend Iar creitim* in the *Book of Leinster* which has the following to say about the 848 battle: 'Cath Farcha ria Mael Sehnaill for Gallaib ubi .dc. ceciderunt.' In the margin the location is elaborated upon: '.i. tilach i n-iarthur Mide.' *LL* i 97 (l.3114). See: Paul Walsh, *The Placenames of Westmeath* (Dublin 1957) 96-7, 131ff. The battle is also mentioned in Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45, 63 §50: Dianfichta fri hechtranda (.i. Gaullu), sluagdortad Forchai. [It will be] swiftly fought against foreigners (i.e. the Norsemen), destruction of hosts at Forach.

42 C. Dehaisnes (ed), *Les Annales de Saint-Bertin et de Saint-Vaast* (Paris 1871) 68.

43 Janet L.Nelson (ed), *The Annals of St-Bertin* (Manchester 1991) 66 s.a. 848; Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 305 n.1.

44 *AU* 848.5; *CS* 848.

45 *AU* 848.6; *CS* 848.

46 *AU* 848.7; *CS* 848.

Though we are not told where the Viking force Máel Sechnaill defeated had come from, it is tempting to think that it was from Dublin because the following year Mael Sechnaill attacked the settlement, perhaps in retaliation:

CS 849 Inrad*h* Duiblinne la Maolsec*h*lainn et la Tigernac*h*, Rí Locha Gapar.
The plundering of Dublinn by Maelsechlainn, and by Tigernach, King of Loch Gabhar.[47]

Though Máel Sechnaill and Tigernach had clashed as recently as 846, both had inflicted defeats on the Vikings in 848 and it would seem that they were now in alliance. This alliance between Uí Chernaig of southern Brega and Máel Sechnaill and their joint attack on Dublin provides the background to the following entry:

AU 850.3 Cinaedh m. Conaing, rex Ciannachtae, du frithtuidecht Mael Sechnaill a nneurt Gall *co*r indridh Ou Neill o Sinaind co *m*m[uir] etir cella 7 tuatha, 7 *co*r[o] ort innsi Locha Gabur dolose corbo comardd fria lar, 7 *co*ro loscad leis derthach Treoit 7 tri .xx.^{it} dec di doinibh ann.

Cinaed son of Conaing, king of Cianacht, rebelled against Mael Sechnaill with the support of the foreigners, and plundered the Uí Néill from the Sinann to the sea, both churches and states, and he deceitfully sacked the island of Loch Gabor, levelling it to the ground, and the oratory of Treóit, with seventy people in it, was burned by him

CS 850 Cinaod*h* mac Conaing, Rí Ciannacda, do ritt*h*aigect re Maelsec*h*lainn mac Maelruanaid*h* a nert gall, gur roinder o Sionainn co muir, eitir cealla ocus túat*h*a, et gur ort innsi Loc*h*a Gabor; ocus ra loiscced*h* leis durtec*h* Treoite cum .cc.lx. hominibus, et durtec*h* nuarrac*h* cum .lx. hominibus.

Cinaedh, son of Conaing, King of Ciannachda, rebelled against Maelsechlainn, son of Maelruanaidh, through the influence of the Foreigners, so that he devastated from the Sionann to the sea, both churches and territories; and he spoiled the islands of Loch Gabhar; and the oratory of Treoit was burnt by him, with 260 men *in it;* and the oratory of Nuarrach, with 60 men *in it.*[48]

As noted elsewhere, the kingship of Ciannachta had been occupied by the Uí Chonaing since the early eighth century. Cináed was therefore an important Síl nÁedo Sláine king from northern

47 *CS* 849. This attack is not recorded in *AU* but those annals do record a siege (*forbais*) by Máel Sechnaill 'hi Crupait'. *AU* 849.12. This however is a marginal addition. Hogan gives Crupait as a variant of Crufot, perhaps Croboy on the Meath-Westmeath border north of Kinnegad. *Onom.,* 311-12.

48 The number of casualties at Trevet given in the *AU* translation is a mistake. We should read 'thirteen times twenty', i.e. two hundred and sixty, the same figure found in *CS*. For this usage, see *DIL* s.v. deec, I b.

Brega.[49] Indeed his father who died the previous year is described as 'rex bregh' in his obit.[50] The new alliance between Clann Cholmáin and Uí Chernaig, bitter enemies of the Uí Chonaing, was clearly a worrying development when viewed from northern Brega. Now the Uí Chonaing fought in alliance with Dublin Vikings but importantly focused their aggression on the royal sites of the traditional enemy in Southern Brega, Loch nGabor (Lagore) and its associated church, Tréoit (Trevet). In recording Cináed's campaign, we should perhaps not read too much into the phrase 'from the Sinann to the sea' as it is a recurring formulaic expression found elsewhere in the annals.[51] For this serious attack Cináed was drowned the following year by Máel Sechnaill and Tigernach (reproduced above when we discussed drowning as a method of execution[52]) clearly showing that the Vikings he had allied with were not in a position to protect Cináed from the Uí Néill overking.[53]

851 also saw another *rígdál* at Armagh.

AU 851.5 Righdal i nArdd Machae et*ir* Mael Sechnaill co maithibh Leithi Cuinn 7 Matodhan co maithibh coicidh Conchobu*ir* 7 Dermait 7 Fethgna co samhadh Patraicc 7 Suarlech co cleirchibh Midhe.

A royal conference in Ard Macha, between Mael Sechnaill, accompanied by the nobles of Leth Cuinn, and Matudán with the nobles of Conchobor's Province, and Diarmait and Fethgna with the congregation of Patrick, and Suairlech with the clerics of Mide.[54]

Matudán was the king of the Ulaid. The religious men involved were Díarmait, abbot of Armagh,[55] Féthgna who would succeed to that office after him and Suairlech abbot of Clonard.[56] As Charles-Edwards notes, 'the secular and ecclesiastical divisions implied by this entry do not coincide.'[57] While *Leth Cuinn* excluded Ulster, the 'congregation of Patrick' would have included clergy from Ulster as well as Airgialla territory and probably Cenél nEógain. Likewise, it seems possible that 'the clerics of Mide', headed by Suairlech, may have included figures from across 'Southern Uí Néill' territory. To be in a position to bring such a gathering together 'was a notable assertion of authority

49 See Ó Corráin, 'High-Kings, Vikings and other Kings', *Irish Historical Studies* 21 (1979) 306; Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 214 n.3.

50 *AU* 849.1; Also *CS* 849. Cináed's brother Flann is described as 'rig Bregh n-uile' in his obit at *AU* 868.4. Also *CS* 868.

51 Cf: *AU* 837.4.

52 *CS* provides the added glossed detail that this happened in the river Nanny. *AU* 851.2; *CS* 851. *Onom.,* 31.

53 Perhaps due to their own divisions at this time as 851 also saw 'a great slaughter of the fair-haired foreigners' (*Finngallaib*) by the 'dark heathens' (*Dubgennti*) at 'Áth Cliath' *AU* 851.3. See: Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Irish warfare before 1100', Thomas Bartlett & Keith Jeffery (ed), *A military history of Ireland* (Cambridge 1997) 26-51: 47.

54 Also: *CS* 851.

55 Though this position was contested by Forannán at the time. Both died in 852. *AU* 852.1.

56 He is described as such at *AU* 859.3.

57 Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 308 n.1.

by Máel Sechnaill.'[58]

Generally it seems that if a *rígdál* was held in a border area this suggests parity between the kings involved whereas if held within a given territory, this meant the king of that territory was the more powerful at the time.[59] But this particular *rígdál* may not fit the general model. Armagh was certainly not Máel Sechnaill's home territory and indeed his relationship with the community of Patrick was often strained.[60] Ó Corráin argues that the *rígdál* met on 'neutral ground'[61] but Máel Sechnaill certainly was the most powerful king involved and it seems reasonably clear that the Ulaid were submitting to his authority. As Ó Corráin suggests, under serious pressure from the expanding Northern Uí Néill, they may have welcomed an opportunity to deal with the southern Uí Néill overking. 'The same Northern Uí Néill were Máel Sechnaill's most deadly enemies and it was in his interest and that of the Ulaid to come to an understanding.'[62]

Máel Sechnaill was clearly in a quite strong position at this stage and soon turned his attention to Munster. He marched into the province in 854[63] and again two years later when he went to Cashel itself and took Munster's hostages.[64] The year 856 also saw him involved in 'great warfare' with the Vikings.

AU 856.3 Cocadh mor et*er* gennti 7 Mael Sechl*ainn* co nGall-ghoidhel*aib* leis.
Great warfare between the heathens and Mael Sechnaill, supported by Norse-Irish.[65]

This is the first appearance of the *Gall-Goídil* in the Chronicle of Ireland. These were soldiers, perhaps mercenaries, of a mixed ethnic background.[66] Clearly Máel Sechnaill made use of whatever military resources best suited him. There is also a suggestion that he allied with one group of Vikings against another. His daughter Muirgel was married to the Viking Otir who appears to have

58 Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 308 n.1. It is worth noting that this entry might be important evidence about the 'congressio senadorum' problem discussed elsewhere in that it suggests there were separate northern and southern Uí Néill synods. A *congressio* of them might therefore be feasible. See: *AU* 780.12; *AU* 804.7. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 279.

59 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 280.

60 For example when he drowned Cináed son of Conaing in 851 it was in violation of protection guaranteed by an unnamed 'comarbbai Patraicc'. *AU* 851.2.

61 Ó Corráin, 'High-Kings, Vikings and Other Kings', 310.

62 Ó Corráin, 'High-Kings, Vikings and Other Kings', 310.

63 *AU* 854.2; *CS* 854; *FA* 854 §246. The location seems to have been Mag Femen, around Cashel. Hogan, *Onomasticon* 460. According to *FA,* Máel Sechnaill sent the king of Osraige, Cerball son of Dúnlang, into Munster to demand the hostages. While we should perhaps be wary of this detail, the emphasis found in *FA* on the recent death of the Munster king Áilgenán is quite perceptive. From other sources we know that he was but one of a series of shortlived and weak Munster kings who followed Fedilmid.

64 *AU* 856.2; *CS* 856.

65 Also: *CS* 856.

66 'It is likely that they originated in Viking Scotland, and were war bands aristocratically led by men of mixed Scottish and Viking descent, operating independently of the dynasty and adventuring on their own account in Ireland.' Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Vikings in Ireland and Scotland in the Ninth Century', *Peritia* 12 (1998) 296-339: 326.

belonged to the *Findgennti* group which struggled with the *Dubgennti* around this time. Otir's father Iercne was beheaded by them in 852 and we can perhaps see an attempt by Máel Sechnaill to counter the rise of this latter group.[67] But in 853 Amlaíb 'son of the king of Lochlann' arrived and received the submission of Ireland's 'Foreigners' and tribute from the Irish.[68] While Amlaíb may have been attempting to insert himself at the top of the existing Irish political system as a new overlord, and may well have secured tribute from some neighbouring Irish peoples, his arrival does not seem to have really affected Máel Sechnaill's position. Indeed in 858 the Clann Cholmáin king was again in Munster, the details about this hosting varying somewhat between *AU* and *CS*.

AU 858.4 Mael Sechnaill m. Mael Ruanaigh co feraib Er*enn* do tuidhecht hi tire Muman co ndeisidh .x. n-aithci oc Neim, 7 a n-innred co muir fadess iar madmaim f*or*a rriga oc Carn Lughdach, co fargbadh ann lethri na nDeise, Maelcron m. Mu*ir*edhaigh. Tuc Mael Sechl*ainn* iarum giallu Muman o Belut Gabrain co Insi Tarbnai iar nÉre, 7 o Dun Cermnai co hArainn nAirithir.

Mael Sechnaill son of Mael Ruanaid came with the men of Ireland to the lands of Mumu and halted for ten nights at Niam; and he plundered them to the south as far as the sea, after their kings had been defeated at Carn Lugdach, Maelchrón son of Muiredach, king of the Déisi, being left [dead] there. Mael Sechnaill then took the hostages of Mumu from Belat Gabráin to Inis Tarbnai off the Irish coast, and from Dún Cermna to Ára Airthir.

CS 858 Sluaccad*h* mor diar loiscced*h* Muma an aon ló la Maelseclain mac Maolruanaid*h*, co feroib*h* Erenn, co ttugsad maidm for feraib Muman oc Carn Lugdac*h*, gur faccbad*h* ann Maelcróin mac Muiredhaig*h*, Leit*h* Rí na nDése. Tucc Maelseclainn gialla Muman ó Comar trí nusce co Innsi Tarbna iar nEreann, ocus ó Dún Cermna co hArainn nairt*h*ir. [...] Maidm ria Cerbaill ocus ria nIomar accric*h* Arad*h* tire for [Cinel] Fiachach go Gall Gaoidhealib*h* Leit*h*e Cuinn .i. .cccc. ar se míle a linside.

A great host, by which Mumhan was burnt in one day, *was led* by Maelsechlain, son of Maelruanaidh, with the men of Erinn, so that they inflicted a defeat on the men of Mumhan at Carn Lughdach, where Maelcróin, son of Muiredhach, half-King of the Deisi, was lost.[69] Maelsechlainn brought off the hostages of Mumhan from Comar-tri-nuisce to Inis Tarbhna, in the west of Erinn, and from Dún Cearma to Arann-airther.
[...] A victory by Cerbhall and Imhar, in the district of Aradh-tire, over [the Cinel] Fiachach, with the Gall-Gaeidhel of Leth Chuinn, viz., their number was 6,400.[70]

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67 *AU* 852.3; *CS* 852.

68 *AU* 853.2. Which perhaps suggests that the Vikings in Ireland were treated as privileged clients by Amlaíb whereas the Irish kings were treated as so-called 'base clients' obliged to pay him tribute as their overlord. Charles-Edwards, 'Irish warfare before 1100', 48.

69 We should read 'left', (i.e. dead on the battlefield), as suggested by Hennessy at n.8.

70 Perhaps not surprisingly, the account at *AI* 858 is nowhere near as elaborate reading simply:
Sloged Maíl Sechnaill f*or* Mum*ain*. A hosting by Mael Sechnaill against Mumu.

Neim, where he rested for ten nights according to *AU,* is perhaps to be identified as the river Blackwater in Munster.[71] Carn Lugdach, the site of his victory, was apparently in Waterford, which would make sense if a Déisi king died there.[72] The places in Munster listed were at its geographical extremities so that by this formula the annalist stresses Máel Sechnaill's subjection of the whole of Munster.[73] But even allowing for some 'rhetorical exuberance', the entry does suggest that Máel Sechnaill received the submission not just of the provincial king, but of lesser Munster kings too, in what was a dramatic demonstration of his ambition and power.[74] Máire Herbert also suggests that the use of *Gall-Goídil* by Máel Sechnaill in 856 and his hosting *co feraib Erenn* in 858 hint at changes in both the operation of kingship and in political identity in ninth-century Ireland. Máel Sechnaill was projecting his power far beyond the boundaries of his own midland territories and using military forces of diverse origins to make his claim to island-wide political dominance. As we shall see below, his annalistic obit and several inscriptions on high crosses make similar claims. For Herbert, 'association with the island of Ireland bonded a heterogeneous royal following, and geography supplanted genealogy as a common identifier'.[75]

As we saw above, the *Gall-Goídil* of *Leth Cuinn* were also in action in 858 with the midland Uí Néill of Cenél Fiachach but were defeated by Cerball king of Osraige and the Viking Ímar.[76] Cerball, with the the Dublin Vikings Amlaíb and Ímar, also led a great army into Mide the following year.[77] This particular king of Osraige was hostile to Clann Cholmáin but from the evidence of his marriage alliances, Máel Sechnaill had clearly identified the strategic significance of the area some time before. According to the *Banshenchas* Máel Sechnaill was married to Land, a sister of this Cerball and daughter of the previous king of Osraige, Dúngal (d.842).[78] She was Flann Sinna's mother.[79] But despite this connection Máel Sechnaill had to face down a challenge from this quarter. His success can be gauged from the outcome of the famous *rígdál* at Ráith Aeda (Rahugh, Co.

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71 *Onom.,* 554.

72 *Onom.,* 162.

73 Bélat Gabráin (Gowran Pass) was between Leinster and Munster, the eastern border of Munster. *Onom.,* 433. The place found in *CS,* 'Comar trí nusce', is the confluence of the three rivers, the Barrow, Nore and Siur. Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 312 n.2. For Inis Tarbnai (Dursey Island) at the south western limit of Munster, Dún Cermai (Head of Kinsale) and Ára Airthir (Aran Islands), see *Onom.,* 470, 379 and 32 respectively.

74 Charles-Edwards, 'Irish warfare before 1100', 48.

75 Máire Herbert, *'Rí Éirenn, Rí Alban,* kingship and identity in the ninth and tenth centuries', Simon Taylor (ed), *Kings, clerics and chronicles in Scotland 500-1297* (Dublin 2000) 62-72: 64.

76 The battle, which took place in the Munster client kingdom of Araid Tíre, confirms the ongoing political struggle. Charles-Edwards, 'Irish warfare before 1100', 48-49.

77 *AU* 859.2. *AI* is again faulty here incorrectly making it appear as though a brother of the king of Munster was involved. *AI* 859; Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 313 n.1.

78 *AU* 842.13.

79 See (Metrical) Margaret Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 311, 335; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* §216 at 134, 202. (Prose) Margaret Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234: 186; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* §392 at 265-66, 383.

Westmeath) held in 859. We are told that it was held 'to make peace and amity between the men of Ireland'[80]. Máel Sechnaill is listed first among the attendees followed by Fethgna abbot of Armagh and Suairlech abbot of Clonard, these two clerics perhaps again representing the two Uí Néill ecclesiastical spheres of influence. Also in attendance was Cerball king of Osraige and Máel Guala king of Munster. The setting of Ráith Áeda was significant. In southern Mide close to the Leinster border it was still only about six miles south of Lough Ennell, the centre of Clann Cholmáin territory, and well serviced by the major roads running through the region. Aside from this, of as much or perhaps greater importance may have been the fact that the patron saint of Ráith Aeda, Áed mac Bricc, was legendary as an arbitrator between warring kings. The Life of the saint, which may date to the eighth century, includes an episode where Áed acts as an intermediary between the king of Munster and the Uí Néill.[81] He is portrayed as a formidable border saint whom powerful kings were compelled to obey.[82] While the setting may have been chosen with this in mind and to give some moral legitimacy to the decisions arrived at, the product of the *rígdál* was less a compromise agreement than a northern diktat. Osraige was brought under the domination of *Leth Cuinn* as the king Cerball 'gave his full dues to Patrick's congregation and his successor and the Osraige were alienated to Leth Cuinn, and Mael Guala, king of Mumu, warranted the alienation.'[83] This important event clearly demonstrates Máel Sechnaill's strength, the weakness of Munster and the end of Osraige's opposition to the Clann Cholmáin king.

From this position of strength Máel Sechnaill next turned his attention to the northern Uí Néill.

AU 860.1 Sloighedh Laig*en* 7 Muman 7 Connacht 7 Oa Neill in Deisc*eir*t isin Fochla la Mael Sechnaill rig Temro, co ndeisidh oc Maigh Dumai i comfocus Aird Machae. Do·*for*bairt Aedh m. Neill 7 Flann m. Conaing a ndunadh i n-aithchi *co*ro marbsat doine f*or* lar in dunaidh, 7 ro memhaidh f*or* Aedh n-iaramh, *co* farcaib ili stante exercitu Mael Sechnaill in statu suo.

Mael Sechnaill, king of Temair, led an army of the Laigin and Mumu and Connacht and the southern Uí Néill into the North, and he halted at Mag Dumai near Ard Macha. Aed son of Niall and Flann son of Conaing attacked their camp by night and killed some people in the middle of the camp; and Aed was subsequently overcome and left many dead behind him, Mael Sechnaill's army holding to its position.[84]

80 *AU* 859.3. Also see: *CS* 859.

81 Heist *Vitae,* §§ 8-9 at 169-170; Plummer *Vitae,* §v at 36-37. Also see the discussion of this text in Part 1.

82 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 445-446; Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, 'The landscape of Máel Sechnaill's rígdál at Ráith Áeda, AD 859', Tom Condit and Christiaan Corlett (ed), *Above and Beyond: Essays in memory of Leo Swan* (Wicklow 2005) 267-280: 278.

83 *AU* 859.3; Also *CS* 859.

84 Also: *CS* 860.

The forces mobilised suggest considerable strength and notable is the inclusion of Munster in the hosting. But noticeable too is the fact that Flann of Uí Chonaing had allied with the northern king against Máel Sechnaill. This alliance was to endure. Áed recovered to invade Mide the following year with a force of Vikings (*Gallaib*).[85] Though according to *CS* the year 861 also saw Máel Sechnaill defeat the Vikings of Dublin at Druim-da-mhaighe, if as suggested this was in Co. Offaly, it would mean they had struck deep into his home territory.[86] Áed returned to campaign in Mide in 862 with more Vikings as well as Flann of Uí Chonaing, who was we should remember a brother of the Cináed whom Máel Sechnaill had drowned in 851.[87] From a position of great strength, these final years saw Máel Sechnaill face considerable political opposition on many fronts. He died in 862.

AU 862.5 Mael Sechn*aill* m. Mael Ruanaigh mc. Donnchadha mc. Domn*a*ill mc. Murchadha Midhi mc. Diarmada Den m. Oirmędhaigh Chaeich mc. Conaill Guthbhinn mc. Shuibhne mc. Colmain Moir mc. Diarmada Derg mc. F*e*rgusa Cerrbeoil, ri Her*enn* uile, .ii. kł. Decimb*ris,* .iii. Feria, anno regni suo .xui°., defunctus est.

Mael Sechnaill son of Mael Ruanaid son of Donnchad son of Domnall son of Murchad of Mide son of Diarmait the Harsh son of Airmedach the One-eyed son of Conall of the Sweet Voice, son of Suibne son of Colmán the great son of Diarmait the red son of Fergus Wrymouth, king of all Ireland, died on the third feria, the second of the Kalends of December [30 Nov.], in the 16th year of his reign.[88]

Máel Sechnaill's successes in bringing Ulster, Munster and Osraige to submission were unprecedented. Further confirmation of his position is found on two high crosses in the midlands. The first, from the monastery of *Cenn Etig* (Kinnitty, Co. Offaly), carries the following inscription on the south face:

OR DO RIG MAELSECHNAILL M MAELRUANAID
OROIT AR RIG HERENN

A prayer for King Maelsechnaill son of Maelruanaid.
A prayer for the king of Ireland.

The inscription on the northern face reads:

OR DO COLMAN DORRO . . IN CROSSA AR RIG HERENN
OR DO RIG HERENN.
A prayer for Colman who made the cross for the king of Ireland.
A prayer for the king of Ireland.

85 *AU* 861.1; *CS* 861.
86 *Onom.*, 362. Gormlaith daughter of Donnchad's death is recorded at *AU* 861.2.
87 *AU* 862.2; *CS* 862.
88 Also *CS* 862; *AI* 862.

Colmán may have been the abbot of the monastery or the sculptor of the cross.[89] The Cenn Etig inscription is remarkable because the church seems to have been just to the south of the frontier between Munster and Mide which was probably the Camcor at this point.[90] That this area and this church was contested is confirmed by the fact that one Colmán, described as *princeps* of the church of Kinnitty, was killed in battle in 908 fighting alongside Cormac mac Cuilennán against Máel Sechnaill's son Flann Sinna.[91] According to *CS* Colmán was also 'rí Corca Duibne'. As Charles-Edwards points out, though the church of Cenn Etig lay over a hundred miles to the north-east of Corcaguiney, the patron saint Fínán Cam was from that territory. Hence the link was preserved by Colmán, *princeps* of the church and king of the territory.[92]

At Durrow, an important midland church closely linked with Clann Cholmáin, an inscription on the north panel of the West Cross reads:

O R D O [M] _ _
S E C H N A _ _ _
R I G H E R E _ _
O R _ O C _ O _ _
A _ D O R R O _ _
A _ C H R O _ S [93]

Though fragmentary, this would also seem to refer to Máel Sechnaill and describe him as 'king of Ireland'. Firstly, these dedications must have been made later in Máel Sechnaill's career when he had achieved widespread dominance. De Paor suggests that the period after the *rígdál* of Rathugh (859) when Osraige was alienated to *Leth Cuinn* as a likely context.[94] Furthermore, these inscriptions might suggest that Máel Sechnaill's description in his *AU* obit as 'ri Her*enn* uile' need not be dismissed as an anachronistic retrospective interpolation.[95] Whether we chose to acknowledge a reality behind the title, wide-ranging authority was certainly claimed by Máel Sechnaill and we have enough evidence to argue that at times during his reign he made his claims real enough. While emphasis has rightly been placed on Máel Sechnaill's achievements, his ambitions and policies were not without precedent. As we have seen in previous chapters, many of

89 See Liam de Paor. 'The High Crosses of Tech Theille (Tihilly), Kinnitty, and Related Sculpture', Etienne Rynne (ed), *Figures from the Past:Studies on Figurative Art in Christian Ireland in honour of Helen M. Roe* (Dublin 1987) 140.
90 *CGSH* no.665.3 at 109.
91 *AU* 908.3; *CS* 907 [908]; *AI* 908.
92 Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 347 n.1.
93 Domhnall Ó Murchadha and Giollamuire Ó Murchú, 'Fragmentary Inscriptions from the West Cross at Durrow, the South Cross at Clonmacnois, and the Cross of Kinnitty', *JRSAI* 118 (1998) 58.
94 de Paor. 'The High Crosses of Tech Theille (Tihilly), Kinnitty, and Related Sculpture', 155.
95 de Paor. 'The High Crosses of Tech Theille (Tihilly), Kinnitty, and Related Sculpture', 143.

the trends and developments of the mid-ninth century find parallels amongst his Clann Cholmáin ancestors, albeit less well articulated.

In the ninth century Fedilmid proved that a Munster king could take the fight to the midland Uí Néill with some success. The arrival of the Vikings at the close of the eighth century clearly added another dimension though, as we have seen, the impact on the midlands appears to have been quite minimal until well into the ninth century. The establishment of the *longphoirt* along the eastern coast from the 840s appeared, for a time at least, to seriously threaten southern Uí Néill territory. But in Máel Sechnaill Clann Cholmáin found one of their finest kings who had great success against the Vikings. Indeed, as we have seen both he and the Northern Uí Néill supplemented their own military resources by adding Vikings or mixed *Gall-Goídil* forces to their own as the 'Foreigners' found for themselves a more settled place within the Irish political system.

We also have further evidence for the hiererchical nature of midland kingship from this period and should continue to be conscious of the flexibility inherent in the system. For example, in the obit of Muiredach (d.802) of Clann Cholmáin, he is described as 'ri Midhe' and may well have briefly overcome the opposition of his kinsmen in the turbulent years following the death of Donnchad Midi (d.797).[96] But in 802, unlike in 766, this 'king of Mide' was a Clann Cholmáin dynast himself and not a local supporter. In 826 the title 'rex Mide' was again held by a Clann Cholmáin dynast, Níall son of Díarmait. But this individual, unknown other than his obit, was not the leading Clann Cholmáin figure, that being Conchobar. In 826 the 'king of Mide' was again then a local deputy.[97] Later in the ninth century, shortly after Máel Sechnaill's death, we find the following:

AU 863.4 Uamh Achaidh Alddai 7 Cnodhbai 7 uam Feirt Boadan os Dubadh 7 uam Mna Angobann ro scruidiset Gaill, quod antea non perfectum est, .i. a fecht ro slatsat .iii. righ Gall feronn Flaind m. Conaing, .i. Amhlaim 7 Ímhar 7 Auisle; 7 Lorcan m. Cathail leo occa, rí Mide.

The caves of Achad Aldai, and of Cnodba, and of Boadán's Mound above Dubad, and of Óengoba's wife, were searched by the foreigners—something which had never been done before. This was the occasion when three kings of the foreigners, i.e. Amlaíb and Ímar and Auisle, plundered the land of Flann son of Conaing; and Lorcán son of Cathal, king of Mide, was with them in this.

96 *AU* 802.1; *AI* 802. From about the middle third of the eighth century *rí* is used quite frequently in *AU* though *rex* is more common. In short, we need not be as sceptical about this title as the seventh-century examples of the title 'rí Mide' found only in the Clonmacnoise group of texts for which there are parallel entries in *AU* without the title. See my discussion of the annals for further details.

97 *AU* 826.2; *CS* 826. He may have been a son of Díarmait Dub who died in 764 or Díarmait Odur who died in 797. Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 284 n.1.

The 'caves' searched by the Vikings were the passage tombs of the Boyne valley located in northern Brega and in the territory of Uí Chonaing. The 'king of Mide' who took part in this episode, Lorcán son of Cathal, was of the Luigni of Mide and hence not even an Uí Néill dynast.[98] This identification is based on the appearance of Lorcán's son in *AU* under the year 901 where he is clearly regarded as belonging to the Luigne.[99] It seems reasonable to suggest then that the recently deceased Máel Sechnaill (d.862) had delegated this position and title to Lorcán, another example of the kingship of Mide being used by Clann Cholmáin as a prize to bestow on local supporters. Though we must also admit the possibility that Lorcán had simply taken advantage of the upheaval following Mael Sechnaill's death to seize the position for himself.[100] But the lesson may be that when a Clann Cholmáin king held the Uí Néill overkingship, or was at least in a powerful position across the midlands, the 'king of Mide' title could be delegated to an ally. In 766 this was Fallomon of Coílle Fallomuin, in 826 it was Níall of Clann Cholmáin and in 863 it was probably Lorcán of the Luigne. When the dynasty was not in such a powerful position, as in the years following Donnchad's death when Áed Oirdnide harried Mide repeatedly, the kingship of Mide may have been the primary kingship held by Clann Cholmáin itself.

Máel Sechnaill's power was certainly great and strong Clann Cholmáin kings could now pursue ever more ambitious political goals. But a weak or unfortunate king was subject to the main downside of increasingly powerful overkingship, being subject to it. In cases where Clann Cholmáin kings struggled to secure great power and pursue ambitious goals themselves the dynasty found itself in increasing danger of being exposed to aggression on multiple fronts. As Charles-Edwards has put it, 'Cland Cholmáin were both the principal exponents of Uí Néill expansionism in the late eighth and ninth centuries and, in the end, its principal victims.'[101]

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98 Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 316 n.3.

99 *AU* 901.1 Mael Ruanaidh m. Flaind filii Mael Sechnaill, rigomna nEr*enn,* o Luignibh occisus est, .i. o m*acc*aibh Cernachain filii Taidhcc 7 o m. Lorcain m. Cathail [...]
Mael Ruanaid son of Flann son of Mael Sechnaill, heir designate of Ireland, was killed by the Luigne, i.e. by the sons of Cernachán son of Tadc and by the son of Lorcán son of Cathal [...] Also: *CS* 901; *AI* 901. *CS* says he was killed 'o luignib*h* Connacht' but it seems much more likely that the midland Luigne were involved. His unnamed son is given the title 'Tighearna Midhe' in the *AFM* version of the event. See *AFM* 896 [901].

100There is a slight possibility that this Lorcán, 'king of Mide', was actually a member of Clann Cholmáin himself and not of the Luigne. This is the position taken by Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin in his contribution on Máel Sechnaill for the Dictionary of Irish Biography (http://dib.cambridge.org) where he describes Lorcán as Máel Sechnaill's 'first cousin once removed.' Jaski is of the same opinion and can give Lorcán a chronologically plausible place on the Clann Cholmáin family-tree as a son of Cathal (d.843), son of Conchobor (d.833). Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession* 308. But Lorcán's son is described as 'o Luignibh' in 901 in a battle where this opponent was himself a member of Clann Cholmáin, i.e. Máel Ruanaid son of Flann. It seems unlikely then that the annalist would word the entry in the way he does if Lorcán's son was also from Clann Cholmáin.

101 Charles-Edwards, 'Irish warfare before 1100', 51.

7. Flann Sinna

As we have seen previously, the death of a powerful Clann Cholmáin king was often followed by a period of some upheaval as rival contenders struggled to secure leadership of the dynasty. This was also often accompanied by opportunistic intervention in the midlands by, most notably, Cenél nEógain. All copies of the Clann Cholmáin genealogy are agreed in naming Flann Sinna after Máel Sechnaill (d.862) but it is equally clear that he did not come to prominence immediately after the death of his father. At the end of the previous chapter we noted the involvement of Lorcán, 'king of Mide', in a raid on the passage tombs of the Boyne Valley and that he likely held this position at the pleasure of the recently deceased Máel Sechnaill.[1] But whatever success Lorcán may have enjoyed was short-lived as he was blinded in 864 by the new Uí Néill overking, Áed Findliath of Cenél nEógain.[2] This is hardly surprising considering Áed's general hostility to Clann Cholmáin interests and the fact that Lorcán had plundered the land of Flann son of Conaing, one of Aed's own allies.[3]

The Viking Amlaíb, also involved in the 864 campaign against northern Brega, is recorded drowning Conchobor son of Donnchad 'leithri Mide' the same year. This took place at the important midland church of Clonard, which was closely linked to Clann Cholmáin.[4] Conchobor was probably a son of Donnchad (d.845) son of Fallomon (d.830). His title, literally 'half-king', suggests a division of political power in Mide at this time. Perhaps Conchobor shared the kingship of Mide for a time with the aforementioned and recently blinded Lorcán. In blinding Lorcán, perhaps Áed supported Conchobor as his man in the midlands. If this was the case then the killing of Conchobor by Amlaíb makes sense. Amlaíb had led a large army into Mide in 859 but was in alliance with Lorcán in raiding the passage tombs in 863.[5] Since his midland ally Lorcán had been blinded by Áed, perhaps Amlaíb's response to this was to kill Conchobor. While the exact sequence of events is a little confused, it seems reasonably clear that outside forces were competing for control and influence over the rulers of the midlands at this point and intervening to promote their own interests.

The annals are silent about Clann Cholmáin throughout the remainder of the 860s and much of the 870s, the first appearance of Flann Sinna coming in 877.

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1 *AU* 863.4

2 *AU* 864.1; *CS* 864.

3 Áed and Flann had together attacked Máel Sechnaill outside Armagh in 860 and both also plundered Mide in 862. *AU* 860.1; *AU* 862.2.

4 *AU* 864.2; also *CS* 864. A note in *Rig Uisnig* which records the drowning at Clonard and which is very close in wording to the annal entries for 864 was mistakenly attached to an earlier Conchobor (d.833). *LL* i 197.

5 *AU* 859.2.

AU 877.2 Donnch*ad* m. Aedhaccain m. Concobu*ir* o Flaunn m. Mael Sechnaill per dolum occisus est.
Donnchad son of Aedacán son of Conchobor, was deceitfully killed by Flann son of Mael Sechnaill.

This notice records an internal Clann Cholmáin dispute. Donnchad's grandfather was probably Conchobor (d.833), the former overking. According to *Ríg Uisnig* Donnchad held the kingship after Lorcán (blinded in 864) and the list goes on to confirm that Flann Sinna then killed Donnchad.[6] Flann's power increased still further shortly afterwards with the death of Áed Findliath in late 879 allowing him to seize the overkingship.[7]

According to *CS,* Flann was immediately challenged 'la fiora Muman' in 880 as they invaded Mide as far as Lough Ennell and Lough Sewdy, the very centre of Clann Cholmáin territory.[8] But the same text also tells us that Flann plundered Leinster that year and that their *aitiri,* or hostage sureties, were given to him.[9] Another entry, this time unique to the *Annals of the Four Masters*, tells us that Munster was plundered by Flann in 880.[10] While it is unfortunate that the *Annals of Ulster* has nothing to say on these matters, there can be little doubt that Flann's reign began with military activity.

In 882 Flann marched north with an army 'both of foreigners and Irish' and arrived at Armagh.[11] *Baile in Scáil* refers to this event and to Flann's hosting with 'Foreigners' (*co nechtrandaib*). An interlinear gloss above this provides the added detail that these were 'sons of Ímar'.[12] Ímar had died in 873 and his two recorded sons, Sichfrith and Sitriucc are obscure figures,

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6 *LL* i 198 l.5955. *AFM* is alone in providing some further detail for this year in recording the death of one Donnchad son of Máel Seachnaill, and hence Flann's brother, by the Éli, a north Munster people. *AFM* 874 [877].

7 The commencement of Flann's reign is found, in a secondary hand at *AU* 879.2. Also see *CS* 878 where the entry has been misplaced and appears before the notice of Áed's death at *CS* 879.

8 *CS* 880. This notice is also at *AFM* 876 [879].

9 *CS* 880. For the *aitire* see Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 330 n.5 and ii 1.

10 *AFM* 877 [879]. The plundering was 'from Boraimhe to Corcach', perhaps another example of a phrase used to mean 'widespread' and not to be taken literally since the places named were near the extremities of the province, i.e. near Killaloe on the Shannon and Cork. See *Onom.,* 119 s.v. Bóraime.

11 'co nGall*aib* 7 Goidel*aib*'. *AU* 882.1. The extra detail that he took the hostages of Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain on this occasion and also plundered Munster this year is found at *CS* 882.

12 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45-46, 63-64 §52. 'Tecait airdi ili 'na flaith .i. techt do nim (.i. ailithir o Roim) dia foicertar ar nGoidel ic Duiblind (.i. ind ailithir) [...] Firfid forbais for táilcentaig (.i. Ard Macha) co n-echtrandaib (.i. Gaill .i. maic Ímair).
Many signs [will] come in his reign, i.e. a messenger from heaven (i.e. a pilgrim from Rome) who will proclaim the slaughter of the Goidil at Dublin (i.e. of the pilgrim) [...] He will lay seige to a monastery (i.e. Armagh) with foreigners (i.e. Norsemen, i.e. the sons of Ímar).
See http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msrawlb512 [f.104vb]
Incidentally, while this text is very useful in the detail it provides, it should be noted that the tone is generally quite hostile towards Flann. For example Flann is initially referred to as the 'lying stammerer'. One notable exception, where Flann is described as a 'Peaceful wealthy ruler', jars with the general tone of the piece. See 'kinglists' section of Part 1 above for further details.

killed by other Vikings in 888 and 896 respectively.[13] So while they were alive at the time of Flann's raid north in 882, it is hard to know how much weight to give this evidence. Our task in considering this is made more difficult by the fact that it is not exactly clear what was going on in Dublin at this time. Flann may have welcomed any support on a hosting to Armagh early in his reign but as we will see, the usual antipathy between Clann Cholmáin and Dublin was restored soon after.

An entry from a few years later confirms that Clann Cholmáin was familiar with at least some of the 'Foreigners'.

AU 883.4 Mors m. Ausli o m. Iergni 7 o ingai*n* Mael Sechnaill.
Death of Auisle's son at the hands of Iergne's son and the daughter of Mael Sechnaill.

CS 883 Morss mic Ausile o Otir mac Eirgni, ocus ó Muirgil ingen Maoilec*h*lainn.
The son of Ausli was slain by Otir, son of Eirgni, and by Muirgel, daughter of Maelechlainn.

It seems that one of Flann Sinna's sisters, Muirgel, was married to the Viking Otir who appears to have belonged to a faction opposed to the Dublin Vikings. He was probably a son of the Iercne who was part of a force of *Findgennti* defeated by the *Dubgennti* at Snám Aignech and who 'fell beheaded' there in 852.[14] The victim's father on the other hand, Auisle, was described as 'one of three kings of the heathens' when he plundered the land of Uí Chonaing with Amlaíb and Ímar in 863 and on his death in 867.[15] If the son of Auisle was, like his father, attached to the Dublin Vikings then the above 883 incident would fit into the longstanding pattern of Clann Cholmáin appearing in opposition to the Dublin Vikings but here drawing on support from another Viking faction.

There is no mention of Flann or Clann Cholmáin for the next several years until we learn of a major defeat inflicted on him by the Dublin Vikings in 888.[16] Flann was at the head of a composite force but many of his allies fell. These included Áed, an obscure king of Connacht from the Síl Muiredaig branch of Uí Briúin Aí, the bishop of Kildare, Lergus son of Cruinnén, and Donnchad son of Máel Dúin. Donnchad was an important figure described as 'prin*ceps* Cille Delca 7 aliarum ciuitatum.'[17] The *AU* entry for this battle is glossed 'Cath ind Ailithir' i.e. 'The battle of the Pilgrim'. *Baile in Scáil* refers to this battle, confirmed by mention of the death of Áed 'king of Crúachu' and

13 *AU* 888.9 Sichfrith m. Imair, rex Nordmannorum, a fratre suo per dolum occisus est. *AU* 896.3 Sitriucc m. Imair ab ali[i]s Nordmannis occisus est.

14 *AU* 852.3; *CS* 852. Another son of Iercne, killed a *lethrí* of the Ulad in 886. See *AU* 886.1; *CS* 886. *Onom.*, 614 *s.v.* snám aignech. The location is given as on the Newry river above Carlingford Lough.

15 *AU* 863.4; *AU* 867.6.

16 *AU* 888.5; *CS* 888. The death of the otherwise unknown midland dynast, Máel Dúin king of Coílle Fallomuin, is recorded in 885. *AU* 885.6. His son Indrechtach's death is recorded in 895 when he fell with one of Flann Sinna's sons. *AFM* 890 [895].

17 *AU* 888.5. The church is Kildalkey, west of Trim. See: http://monasticon.celt.dias.ie/showrecord.php?id=1477

also makes reference to a pilgrim 'who will proclaim the slaughter of the Goídil at Dublin.'[18] Murray suggests that the pilgrim might be one or other of the churchmen said to have died in the battle according to the annals.[19] If the explicit detail from *Baile in Scáil* that the battle took place at Dublin is accurate then it may represent a failed attempt by Flann to exert his influence over the settlement. Further challenges awaited as in 889 when Domnall son of Áed Findliath came, 'co feraibh tuaisc*eir*t Er*enn* 7 co nGall*aib*' against the southern Uí Néill.[20] Flann was surely the primary target of this aggression.

We also learn that the *óenach Tailten* was neglected at this time. Before considering whether the defeats suffered by Flann in 888 and 889 had anything to do with the failure to hold the *óenach* in those years, we might firstly examine several earlier examples, all of which occurred during the reign of Áed Findliath (d.879), for potential parallels.[21] Áed took the kingship of Tara following the death of Máel Sechnaill (d.862) but he appears in the annals, defeating the Ulaid, as early as 855.[22] The failure to hold the *óenach* in 873, 876 and 878 all occurred late in his reign. He does appear to have been a lot less active in the closing years of his reign as a comparison of the annals for the 860s and those for the 870s shows. While Áed led a hosting against the Laigin in 874, there is no further mention of him until his death in 879. One might speculate then that the failure to hold the *óenach* on three separate occasions in the 870s can be related to his fading power.

AU 873.6 Oenach Tailten cen aigi sine causa iusta 7 digna, q*uod* non audiuimus ab antiquis temporibus, cecidit.
The fair of Tailtiu was not held, although there was no just and worthy reason for this-something which we have not known [to happen] from ancient times.

AU 876.3 Oenach Tailten cen aigi sine causa iusta 7 digna.
The fair of Tailtiu was not held, although there was no just and worthy cause for this.

AU 878.7 Oenach Tailti*n* cen aigi sine causa iusta 7 digna.
The fair of Tailtiu was not held, although there was no just and worthy reason for this.

That said, the wording of the annal entries themselves suggests a certain amount of contemporary bafflement and the tone is certainly disapproving. Turning to the failures to hold the *óenach* during

18 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45-46, 63-64 §52.
19 This pilgrim, 'a messenger from heaven' is one of many signs predicted to come during Flann's reign. Murray provides references to the notices of a solar eclipse, 'fiery sky', a storm and a 'shower of blood' also found in the annals and to which *Baile in Scáil* may be alluding. Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 95 n.364-6, §52.
20 *AU* 889.1. Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill's edition does not translate the phrase '7 co nGall*aib*'. See also *CS* 889.
21 The failures to hold the Fair can be found at: *AU* 873.6; *AU* 876.3; *AU* 878.7; *AU* 888.10; *AU* 889.4. This failure is also considered as part of a wider discussion on the so-called 'disturbances' at Tailtiu which can be found at Appendix 5.
22 *AU* 855.3.

Flann's reign, firstly we should note that the wording in these instances is slightly different to the above examples:

AU 888.10 Oenach Tailten cen aigi ceci*dit.*
It happened that the fair of Tailtiu was not held.

AU 889.4 Oenach Taillten cen aige.
The fair of Tailtiu was not held.

But a more convincing case could be made for specific political opposition here. As we have just seen, Flann suffered major defeats in both 888 and 889, the years in which the *óenach* was not held. That he held the *óenach Tailten* shortly afterward, in 891, suggests that he did have an interest in the institution.[23]

The year 891 also saw the death of the king of Uí Fhailgi, Conchobor, who was 'destroyed by fire' in the church of Cluain Foda Libráin (Clonfad) situated about half way between Lough Ennell and Clonard.[24] The proximity of Clonfad to Clonard is significant here as the relics of Finnian, patron saint of the latter church, were also violated on this occasion.[25] According to *AFM* the relics were violated by the Fir Thulach, a local grouping based nearby along the eastern shore of Lough Ennell, and that Conchobor was 'on his way from parleying with Flann, son of Maelseachlainn, King of Ireland.' From this we can assume that the Fir Thulach burnt the church and killed Conchobor.

AFM also contains a unique piece of information for 895 informing us that Máel Ruanaid son of Flann and unnamed sons of Ímar led an army against the Osraige. It seems that this hosting was not successful but interesting are the nobles who fell from Máel Ruanaid's force. These included Ruadacán son of Cathalán of the Fir Chúl and Indrechtach son of Máel Dúin of Coílle Fallomuin.[26] This would both confirm the still close links between Clann Cholmáin and Coílle Fallomuin in Mide and alliance with a Síl nÁedo Sláine branch. Flann faced recurring rebellion from many of his sons including Máel Ruanaid (war broke out between them soon after this[27]) so one possibility is that this 895 hosting was not sanctioned by Flann but rather saw a rebellious section of Clann Cholmáin in alliance with Dublin Vikings. Because interestingly the *Banshenchas*

23 *CS* 891. From this period we might also note the death of Flann's mother Land 'queen of the king of Temair'. *AU* 890.5. According to *AFM* she died 'after a good life, and after penance at Cluain-mic-Nois; and she was there interred.' *AFM* 886 [890].

24 *AU* 891.2; *AFM* 887 [891]. See: http://monasticon.celt.dias.ie/showrecord.php?id=2735

25 Charles-Edwards points out that the *AU* entry is problematic. An 'm' with suspension stroke before 'Fini' might perhaps be read as 'Máel', i.e 'devotee of Finnio' if there is confusion here between this abbreviation and that for 'maic'. Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 337 n.3.

26 *AFM* 890 [895].While this entry is not found in any of the other annal collections, the obits of both kings' fathers, namely Cathalán and Máel Dúin, are recorded in *AU.* See: *AU* 887.8; *AU* 885.6.

27 *CS* 897 [898]

also tells us of a Clann Cholmáin queen of the Osraige who must have been a (half) sister of Flann Sinna. Ailbi daughter of Máel Sechnaill is given as a wife of Cerball (d.888) king of Osraige and mother of his son Díarmait (d.928). She was also mother of Tadgg (d.900) son of Conchobor of the Connachta.[28] Political alliances formed through marriage alliance continued to be important but it is also clear that they were no lasting guarantee. In 897 Flann invaded Connacht and took hostages; this is information again unique to *AFM*.[29]

Flann had seven sons in all. Máel Muire daughter of Cináed mac Ailpín, 'rig Alban', was the mother of Flann's son Domnall (d.921).[30] Gormlaith daughter of Flann mac Conaing of Síl nÁedo Sláine was the mother of Donnchad Donn (d.944),[31] while Eithne daughter of Áed Findliath of Cenél nEógain was the mother of Máel Ruanaid (d.901).[32] The mothers of Flann's other sons, Óengus (d.915), Áed (blinded 919), Conchobor (d.919) and Cerball (d.?), are not recorded.[33] As we shall see, the complex and oftentimes strained relationship between Flann and various of his sons was an enduring and important characteristic of his reign.

It may well be that, with his authority and control of the midlands weakened during the closing years of the ninth century, the Connachta decided it was an opportune moment to attack Flann. While earlier in his reign the king of Connacht had fought alongside Flann, perhaps when he took their hostages in 897 it was with a sense of growing unease. Now in 899 the Connachta launched an attack into western Mide.[34] A man was killed on Inis Ainghin (Hare Island, Lough Ree)[35] during this offensive and on the occasion of a synod presided over by the bishop of Clonmacnoise and in the presence of 'the shrine of Ciaran'.[36] But the offensive was ultimately unsuccessful as we are told that the Connachta were ultimately defeated at Athlone.[37]

The following year (900) *AFM* is alone in telling us that a great meeting (*Mordhál*) took

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28 See (Metrical) Margaret Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 312, 336; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* §226 at 136, 204; (Prose) Margaret Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234: 187; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* §403 at 268, 386.

29 *AFM* 892 [897].

30 See (Metrical) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 311, 335; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* §134 at 202. (Prose) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234: 186, 225; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* §393 at 266, 383.

31 See (Metrical) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 312, 336; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* §227 at 136, 205. (Prose) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234: 187, 226; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* §404 at 268, 386.

32 See (Metrical) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 311, 335; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* §220 at 135, 203. (Prose) Margaret Dobbs, (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234: 187; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* §396 at 267, 384.

33 See accompanying Family Tree. Cerball's own death is not recorded but that of his son Conchobor can be found at *AU* 993.1. There is also some doubt over Óengus' position, which will be discussed below.

34 Though not named and like his predecessor very obscure, the king of Connacht at this stage would appear to have been Tadgg, whose obit can be found at *AU* 900.5.

35 See: http://monasticon.celt.dias.ie/showrecord.php?id=3882

36 Hare Island was said to be Ciarán's first foundation, before Clonmacnoise. Plummer *Vitae,* i 210.

37 *CS* 899; *AFM* 894 [899].

place at Athlone, the site of the previous year's battle, and surely organised to deal with the fall-out.[38] Flann met with Cathal son of Conchobor. Under the protection of the clergy of Ciarán, Cathal 'came into the house of Flann' and 'was afterwards obedient to the king.' But it is unclear whether Cathal had actually taken part in the attack the previous year. Tadgg, who died in 900, seems to have been king of Connacht until his death and it may simply be that Flann sought to regularise relations with Cathal, the incoming king, and to reestablish friendly relations with Connacht. Cathal would seem to have been an important ally for Flann afterwards, participating as he did in the major battle of Belach Mugna in 908. That the community of Clonmacnoise was involved and interested in securing peace at Athlone comes as no surprise considering the affront it had suffered the previous year. But Flann's position was clearly strengthened at this time and the killing of his son Máel Ruanaid the following year must have provided a further boost.[39] This, of course, was the son who had clashed with him in 898. The details provided in the annals about Máel Ruanaid's killing also provide interesting information on the political makeup of the midlands at this period.

He was killed along with many other nobles by the Luigne, by the sons of Cernachán son of Tadgg and the son of Lorcán.[40] As discussed previously, we know that following the death of Máel Sechnaill (d.862) Lorcán was briefly king of Mide until his blinding.[41] If Lorcán had held his position as a deputy of Máel Sechnaill then perhaps his unnamed son held a similar position under Máel Sechnaill's son, Flann. The Clann Cholmáin leader certainly had much to gain from the removal of Máel Ruanaid. *AU* names two of the 'many nobles' who were killed along with Máel Ruanaid- Máel Crón son of Domnall, the king of Cenél Loegairi and Dub Cuilind, head (*princeps*) of Ross Ech.[42] That the king of Cenél Lóegairi was among Máel Ruanaid's party is significant. In the early eleventh century this dynasty held official positions of authority under Clann Cholmáin kings. For example, in 1018 we hear of the death of one Domnall ua Caíndelbáin, 'ri Loegaire', who is described as Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill's steward (*rechtaire*).[43] These political links were clearly longstanding. Dub Cuilind's involvement in the 901 incident must be also be seen in the context of longstanding ties between the church of Ross Ech and Clann Cholmáin.[44]

In 903 Flann, though not involved personally, instigated and supported violence at Treóit

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38 *AFM* 895 [900].

39 *AU* 901.1; *CS* 901; *AI* 901. His unnamed son is given the title 'Tighearna Midhe' in the *AFM* version of the event. *AFM* 896 [901].

40 *CS* says he was killed 'o luignib*h* Connacht' but it seems much more likely that the midland Luigne were involved.

41 See *AU* 863.4 for the notice of Lorcán involvement in the raids on the passage tombs of the Boyne with the Vikings.

42 The *CS* version of this entry is slightly different and probably defective. Instead of naming these men among the slain nobles, we are told that many fell 'with the exception of three, viz., Maelcron, son of Domhnall, King of Cinel Laeghaire, and the Abbot of Ros-ech, namely, Dubhcuilinn, and another.' *CS* 901.

43 *AU* 1018.6.

44 The abbot of Ross Ech who died in 823 was probably a member of Clann Cholmáin. See *AU* 823.1. As previously discussed, the church seems to have been in Coílle Fallomuin territory.

(Trevet, Co. Meath).[45] While we do not know who died, the church was closely associated with the Uí Chernaig branch of Síl nÁedo Sláine based in southern Brega. Their principal seat was nearby Loch Gabair (Lagore). The killing was carried out by Máel Mithig son of Flannacán who was an Uí Chonaing king from northern Brega[46] and by Óengus of Clann Cholmáin.[47] The killing, we are told, was carried out 'per consilium Flainn'.

But in 904 Flann was again in violent conflict with one of his own sons, this time Donnchad:

AU 904.2 Sarug*ad* Cenannsa la Flann m. Mael Sechn*aill for* Donnch*ad,* .i. a mc. fadhesin, 7 alii multi decollati sunt circa oratorium.

Cenannas was profaned by Flann son Mael Sechnaill against Donnchad, i.e. his own son, and many were beheaded there around the oratory.

We can only really speculate on the context surrounding this incident.[48] It seems possible that Donnchad was in rebellion against his father and had sought sanctuary or support at Kells. As we shall see, Donnchad was certainly to rebel against Flann in 915.[49] *Baile in Scáil,* which is noticeably hostile towards Flann, tells us he will 'wreak kinslaying on his kinsmen' which clearly refers to these incidents.[50]

Over the next several years Flann was active outside of his midland base, with varying success, and enjoyed a period of relative peace from internal challenges. In 905 he led a force against the Osraige.[51] The following year Flann was in Munster accompanied, according to *CS,* by the king of Leinster, Cerball son of Muirecán.[52] We are told that he 'harried from Gabrán to Luimnech', perhaps yet another example of an annalistic formula not to be taken literally but rather

45 *AU* 903.4. See http://monasticon.celt.dias.ie/showrecord.php?id=5414

46 Máel Mithig's father Flannacán, described as 'ri Breagh', was killed by Vikings in 896. *AU* 896.9.

47 Óengus was probably Flann Sinna's son though there is some confusion. While his obit at *CS* 914 [915] where he is described as 'mac Flainn mic Maeilec*h*lainn' is unambiguous, the further comment that he died 'in ripe old age' seems an odd detail if Flann Sinna was his father. After all Flann did not die until the following year, aged sixty-eight. The treatment of the entries at *AU* 914.7 and *AU* 915.1 adds further confusion where 'Oenghus h. Mael Sechl*ainn*' and 'Oengus h. Mael Sechnaill' are translated as 'Aengus son of Mael Sechnaill' and 'Aengus grandson of Mael Sechnaill' respectively. His description in 903 as 'Oengus nepote Mael Sechnaill' has been translated as 'Aengus grandson of Mael Sechnaill'. *AU* 903.4. Charles-Edwards provides the same translation. Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i 344.

48 The corresponding entries in *CS* and *AFM* also include the obit of the bishop of Clonmacnoise Coirpre Crom under this year. 'It was to him the spirit of Maelechlain, son of Maelruanaidh, showed itself.' *CS* 904. Also see *AFM* 899 [904]. This is a reference to an interesting legend found in the Martyrologies where Máel Sechnaill (d.862) appears to the bishop of Clonmacnoise to tell him of his sufferings in purgatory. Through the intercession and prayers of the bishop and his community Máel Sechnaill secures entry into heaven. See: John O'Donovan (trans.), James Henthorn Todd and William Reeves (ed), *The Martyrology of Donegal, A Calendar of the Saints of Ireland* (Dublin 1864) 67; John Colgan, *The Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae of John Colgan with introduction by Brendan Jennings* (Dublin 1948) 508-09.

49 *AU* 915.3.

50 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45-46, 63-64, §52.

51 *AU* 905.2.

52 *AU* 906.3; *CS* 905 [906]. *AU* makes no mention of Cerball's involvement but he is named along with Flann as a victory at Belach Mugna in 908. See below.

signifying that his activity in Munster was widespread. Flann's actions are the first in a series of attacks and counter-attacks between Munster and Clann Cholmáin and its allies over the next few years.

In 907 the king of Munster, Cormac mac Cuilennáin, led two hostings north. The first of these proceeded to Mag Léna where Cormac met and defeated the forces of *Leth Cuinn* led by Flann. This plain, identified with modern Moleen north of Tullamore by Ó Murchadha, is near the Eiscir Riada traditionally regarded as dividing *Leth Cuinn* from *Leth Moga*.[53] This then could be regarded as an example of the 'hosting to the border' as mentioned in *Críth Gablach*.[54] In Cormac's second hosting he succeeded in extracting hostages from the Connachta and he sacked the islands of Loch Ree.[55] Cormac was supported in both hostings by Flaithbertach son of Inmainén who was to later assume the kingship of Cashel.[56] We are told the Munstermen took the hostages of Uí Néill before proceeding into Mag Aí and securing a similar submission from the Connachta. 'On Christmas Day they were in the east, and on the Kalends [1st] of January in the west.'[57] It should however be noted that these claims are unique to *AI,* an unashamedly biased Munster text.

The year 908 saw renewed activity by Cenél nEógain in the midlands. Two sons of Áed Findliath, Domnall and Níall, came south and burned Tlachtga.[58] The choice of target was surely symbolic as Tlachtga appears to have been an important midland site with royal associations.[59] In appearing at this sensitive site we can speculate that the brothers were reminding Flann of their presence and claims to political power. Their hosting certainly had a specific political motivation and was not one of indiscriminate raiding. This was Domnall's second time to make a hosting south, he previously led a mixed force of Irish and Vikings in 889. But Domnall retired into clerical life soon after this second hosting and it was to be his brother Níall who would go on to lead Cenél nEógain, this is his first appearance in the annals.[60]

But the year 908 is most famous for the important battle of Belach Mugna, about which the annals provide uncharacteristically detailed information, though we should note that a considerable amount of that detail found in the *AU* version comes from a secondary hand.[61] The battle site,

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53 Diarmuid Ó Murchadha, *The Annals of Tigernach Index of names* (London 1997) 166.
54 D.A. Binchy (ed), *Críth Gablach* (Dublin 1941) ll. 511-12 (§37) at 20.
55 *CS* 906 [907]. The entry found at *AI* 907 is different and has probably mixed up the details of two separate hostings. The plundering of Loch Ree is said to have proceeded 'as far as Mairg Laigen and Mag Léna'. But Hogan gives a location in Co. Kilkenny for the first place. *Onom.*, 535 s.v. mairce lagen. And Mag Léna was near Durrow. A plundering expedition focussed on Loch Ree that reached either of these places makes little sense.
56 Assumption of kingship: *AI* 914. Obit: *AI* 944.
57 *AI* 907.
58 *AU* 908.1; *CS* 907 [908].
59 For example, see the battle which took place there about the same time as one also broke out at Tailtiu. *AU* 733.7.
60 *CS* 910 [911].
61 *AU* 908.3; *CS* 907 [908]; *AI* 908.

located in the wider Mag nAilbe, was north of present-day Carlow town.[62] The site might suggest that both the Munster and Uí Néill-led armies were claiming that the area was within their respective spheres of influence.[63] Judging by the list of the slain, Cormac assembled significant support. Fogartach was king of Ciarraige Cuirche, based west of Cork harbour.[64] One Ailill *princeps* of the Trian of Cork was another Munster ally.[65] Another, Colmán, was the *princeps* of Cenn Etig (Kinnitty, Co Offaly).[66] As we saw in the previous chapter, this church had a high-cross with a dedication to Flann's father, Máel Sechnaill.[67] But it was contested and according to *CS* Colmán was also 'rí Corca Duibne' and it is clear that the church had strong and longstanding links with Munster.[68] *CS* also lists two further kings who fell with Cormac who are not mentioned in *AU,* Máel Mórda king of Ráith Linne,[69] and Máel Gorm king of the Ciarraige Luachra. The presence of the king of Osraige, Cellach, among Cormac's allies is interesting. As we saw previously, Flann's father Máel Sechnaill had succeeded in alienating Osraige to *Leth Cuinn* in 859 with Munster acquiescence.[70] Throughout the reign of Cerball (d.888) Osraige was consistently hostile to Munster. Of his successor Cellach, nothing is known other than his participation in and death at Belach Mugna. However judging by the fact that Flann Sinna had led a hosting into Osraige in 905 it seems clear that he was having difficulty in keeping this region loyal and Cellach's appearance in Cormac's army confirms as much.[71]

Flann was supported by Cerball the king of Leinster and Cathal the king of Connacht.[72] Confronted by this formidable alliance, Cormac was killed along with the various supporters mentioned above.[73] Whether six thousand died at the battle as *CS* claims is open to question but it

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62 *Onom.,* 102, 511-12 s.vv. belach mugna, mag ailbe. At *AI* 908 the encounter is called 'Cath Maige Aillbe' and Belach Mugna is not mentioned. Likewise *Baile in Scáil* refers to his victory with the Laigin of the 'battle of Mag nAilbi'. Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45-46, 63-64, §52.

63 The name Belach Mugna suggests that the fighting was centred on one of those lowland gaps or passes best described in the 'Song of Dermot and the Earl'. For example, see Evelyn Mullally (ed), *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland* (Dublin 2002) l.1324ff at 87. The land of Uí Muiredaig, southernmost of the Uí Dúnlainge lay to the north, Uí Bairrche to the south. Had Cormac managed to separate the kingdoms of central and southern Leinster from the Uí Dúnlainge?

64 Though Charles-Edwards says it is uncertain which branch of the Ciarraige Fogartach was from, *CS* provides the detail that it was *Ciarraige Cuirchi.* Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* ii 127. This information is not presented in his reconstructed text.

65 *Trian* meaning a third part and sometimes used of settlements to mean 'district' or 'quarter' etc. See *DIL* s.v. 1 trían.

66 http://monasticon.celt.dias.ie/showrecord.php?id=2464

67 Liam de Paor. 'The High Crosses of Tech Theille (Tihilly), Kinnitty, and Related Sculpture', Etienne Rynne (ed), *Figures from the Past:Studies on Figurative Art in Christian Ireland in honour of Helen M. Roe* (Dublin 1987) 140.

68 Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 347 n.1.

69 Perhaps Raithlind, about Bandon in Co. Cork. *Onom.,* 573 s.v. Raithleand. A supposition which probably implies scribal error.

70 *AU* 859.3; *CS* 859.

71 The *AI* entry is typically brief but the importance of Ceallach is suggested by his inclusion.

72 This detail is in a secondary hand in *AU,* the main hand simply reading 'Bellum et*er* firu Muman 7 Leith Cuinn 7 Laighniu'. *AU* 908.3.

73 *CS* tells us that one Fiachu descendant of Ugfadán from Dennlis actually killed Cormac though both he and his place of origin evade identification. Cormac's death is noted in the *Annales Cambriae* (B and C versions) and in the

was clearly one of the largest and most important of the period and claimed several high-profile casualties. After several years of clashes Flann had won a decisive victory over Munster and we can be sure he reestablished southern Uí Néill influence over Osraige too.

Soon after winning this important victory Flann turned his attention to less warlike activities. The construction of the stone church at Clonmacnoise by Flann and Colmán Conaillech is noted under the year 909.[74] It may well be that this is in fact the same person as Colmán mac Aililla, *princeps* of Clonmacnoise and Clonard, whose obit at 926 contains the detail that 'it was by him the stone church of Cluain-muc-Nois was made'.[75] The inscriptions on the 'Cross of the Scriptures' at Clonmacnoise are of course another crucial source and confirm Flann's partnership with Colmán in large scale building work. Though badly worn, the inscription on the East Face appears to record that one Colmán made the Cross for the king Flann while that on the West Face asks for a prayer for Flann son of Máel Sechnaill, the king of Ireland.[76] It seems likely that the Cross dates to about the same period as the stone church mentioned in the annals and in erecting it Flann was clearly following the example of his father who, as we have seen, had several Crosses erected during his reign.[77]

In 910 we learn of conflict between Clann Cholmáin and 'the men of Bréifne'. Flann and several unnamed sons defeated and killed the king, Flann son of Tigernáin, and his unnamed son.[78] Many other nobles were killed, three thousand according to *CS*.[79] Further detail under this year informs us that one Domnall, a grandson of Máel Sechnaill and son of Flann, took a fleet onto Lough Derg with Innrachdach son of Conchobor where they defeated a Munster fleet and killed many.[80] While we know nothing else of Innrachdach it is tempting to regard him as a son of Conchobor (d.882) and brother of the reigning king of Connacht, Cathal (d.925). Domnall was a

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Scottish Chronicle. See John Morris (ed), *Nennius, British History and The Welsh Annals* (London 1980) 90; Alan Orr Anderson (ed), *Early Sources of Scottish History A.D. 500 to 1286* i (2 vols. Edinburgh 1922 repr. Stamford 1990) 445.

74 *CS* 908 [909].

75 *CS* 925 [926]. His obit is also found at *AU* 926.3; *AI* 926.

76 R.A.S. Macalister, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum* ii (Dublin 1949) 70-71, Plate XXVII; Domhnall Ó Murchadha, 'Rubbings Taken of the Inscriptions on the Cross of the Scriptures, Clonmacnois', *JRSAI* 110 (1980) 47-51.

77 See: Andy Halpin and Conor Newman, *Ireland: An Oxford Archaeological Guide to Sites from Earliest Times to AD 1600* (Oxford 2006) 377-384; Clonmacnoise contains another church, 'Temple Melaghlin', dated to the late twelfth century which was probably erected by Flann's later descendants.

78 Flann was probably the son of the Tigernán whose death is recorded at *AU* 892.4. This, the ruling line of Bréifne, would inflict huge damage on Clann Cholmáin in the years to come. Though their pedigree is bogus in its upper reaches, where it links Uí Briúin Bréifne to Uí Briúin Cúalann, by this stage it can be taken as genuine. See *CGH*, 145g25 at 175.

79 *AU* 910.1; *CS* 909 [910]. The battle site is given as 'Mag Cumma' in *AFM* but this has not been identified with any precision. *AFM* 905 [910]; *Onom.*, 516 s.v. mag cummai. *Baile in Scáil* also mentions that Flann 'will defeat the men of Bréifne'. Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45-46, 63-64, §52.

80 *CS* 909 [910]; *AFM* 905 [910]; *Onom.*, 497-98 s.v. loch dercderc.

product of Flann Sinna's union with Máel Muire (d.913).[81] As noted earlier, she was a daughter of Cináed mac Ailpín (d.858), the famous king of Dál Riata and the Picts, and had been previously married to Áed Findliath (d.879) of Cenél nEógain. She was also the mother of Níall Glúndub (d.919), Flann's immediate successor as Uí Néill overking.[82] It seems likely that one of Cináed mac Ailpín's successors and sons, either Constantine I (d.877) or Áed (d.878) married his sister to these powerful Uí Néill kings.[83] We can imagine Domnall and Innrachdach operating on Flann's behalf in maintaining pressure on Munster.

Southern Brega was the target of Clann Cholmáin aggression over the next few years. In 913 Flann's son Donnchad and Máel Mithig son of Flannacán of Uí Chonaing defeated the king of southern Brega, Fogartach son of Tolarg, who was supported by both kinsmen and Leinstermen.[84] This was the latest in an ongoing feud between northern and southern Brega in which Clann Cholmáin had become involved.[85] The following year (914) Flann invaded southern Brega himself and 'many churches were profaned by him'.[86] We are also told that he invaded 'deisc*ir*t Ciannachta' on this occasion which refers to the Ard Ciannachta located in the barony of Ferrard, Co.Louth and here distinguished from the Ciannachta of Derry.

In December 914 a large force was led south by Níall Glúndub and halted at Grellach Eilte, west of Kells.[87] While seeking provisions, they were attacked by Clann Cholmáin and a large number of nobles killed. According to *AU* the midland force was led by Flann Sinna's son Óengus while *CS* says Flann himself with the help of his sons won the battle. *Baile in Scáil* also refers to this battle in discussing Flann Sinna, saying '[h]e will wage with fame the battle of Grellach Eilti (won by his son Óengus)'.[88] Óengus was certainly involved in the fighting in some capacity as a later annal entry will confirm and we might speculate that while perhaps present, the aging Flann Sinna may have left the actual fighting to his son(s). Of those who fell on Níall Glúndub's side there are four or possibly five names common to both *AU* and *CS* but several others found only in one or other text. Níall does however seem to have been supported by the Ulaid, Dál nAraide and Airgialla. We saw Níall's appearance at Tlachtga several years previously but it seems the immediate context for this major hosting into the midlands can be found in his recent successes in

81 *AU* 913.1.

82 See (Metrical) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlvii (1930) 283-339: 311, 335; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta* §134 at 202. (Prose) Margaret Dobbs (ed), 'The Ban-Shenchus', *Revue Celtique* xlviii (1931) 163-234: 186, 225; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *The Prose Bansenchas* §393 at 266, 383.

83 See Marjorie O. Anderson, *Kings and kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh 1973) 188ff; Alfred P. Smyth, *Warlords and holy men: Scotland AD 800-1000* (London 1984) 191ff; Benjamin T. Hudson, *Kings of Celtic Scotland* (London 1994) 45ff.

84 *AU* 913.4; *CS* 912 [913]. Lorcán is probably the 'ri bregh' whose death in old age is recorded at *AU* 925.2.

85 See the events recorded at *AU* 903.4 and discussed above for example.

86 *AU* 914.1.

87 *AU* 914.7; *CS* 913 [914].

88 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45-46, 63-64, §52.

the north which culminated in a peace established between him and Áed mac Eochocáin of the Ulaid at Tullyhogue in November.[89] This no doubt secured military backing for Níall and freed him to turn his attention south.

The involvement of Óengus son of Flann is confirmed by the fact that he died from wounds sustained at the battle after several months, in early February 915.[90] He appears to have been a loyal supporter of Flann throughout and is described as a *ridomna Temrach* in *AU*.[91] In 915 Flann Sinna faced another rebellion from within Clann Cholmáin. This time his sons Donnchad and Conchobor 'harried Mide as far as Loch Rí'.[92] Donnchad is the son Flann attacked in Kells over ten years previously. It may be that when *Baile in Scáil* mentions a battle at Lough Ennell immediately before recording Flann's death that this rebellion is in mind. The 'Sunday battle [...] at the end of autumn in which he [will] vanquish them.'[93] As Lough Ennell was the centre of Clann Cholmáin territory it seems reasonable to suggest that an attempt to topple Flann by his sons may have led to conflict in this area. *Baile in Scáil* also notes the recurring problem of opposition to Flann from within Clann Cholmáin, commenting, 'his own family will revolt against him (i.e. his seven sons).'[94]

But ultimately it is clear from the annals that Flann's position was not upheld at this point through his own effort alone. Instead Níall Glúndub came south with a northern army and exacted pledges from the rebellious sons to obey their father 'and made a truce between Mide and Brega', perhaps suggesting that there had also been some Síl nÁedo Sláine involvement. This tells us a great deal about Flann's position and strength at this time. It seems possible that both his sons and Níall Glúndub sensed the end of his reign was near.

AU 916.1 Flann m. Mael Sechl*ainn* mc. Mael Ruanaidh mc. Donnch*ada* ri Temrach, regnans annis .xxx. ₇ ui., ₇ mensibus .ui., ₇ diebus .u., anno ętatis sue .lx°.uiii°., octaua die K*alendar*um Iunii, feria septima, hora diei quasi septima, moritur.
Flann son of Mael Sechnaill son of Mael Ruanaid son of Donnchad king of Temair, having reigned 36 years 6 months and 5 days, dies in the 68th year of his age, about the seventh hour of day, on the seventh feria, the eighth of the Kalends of June [25 May].[95]

CS tells us he died at the church of Cenn Eich, a midland church affiliated with Clonmacnoise.[96]

89 *AU* 914.6.
90 *AU* 915.1; *CS* 914 [915]. *AFM* alone tells us that Óengus was killed by 'Cernn son of Bernn.' *AFM* 911 [915].
91 *Ridamna Eirenn* in *CS*.
92 *AU* 915.3.
93 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45-46, 63-64, §52.
94 Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45-46, 63-64, §52. The bracketed section is an interlinear gloss in MS Rawlinson B 512 (f.104vb), the only manuscript copy of this portion of the text. The diplomatic transcription is at Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 110. For a digital image, see http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msrawlb512.
95 Also see: *CS* 915 [916]; *AI* 916.
96 See: http://monasticon.celt.dias.ie/showrecord.php?id=2461. *AFM* on the other hand says that Flann died at Tailtiu. *AFM* 914 [916].

Baile in Scáil tells us Flann was buried at Clonmacnoise.[97] Several high status poets were associated with Flann and we are told that the following lines, attributed to Óengus son of Óengus (d.932) *prímhfhili Érenn,* formed part of a eulogy for the king.[98]

Immon cathbarr, imma cléithe	Around the protector, around the chief
co rrían réilsheng,	as far as the clear and slender sea,
immon ríg réil,	around the illustrious king,
immon ngréin ar inchaib Éirenn,	around the sun in front of Ireland
immon daig nde(a)rb ndergóir mbuidi	around the fire-firm, red-golden, yellow,
bátar ili,	there are multitudes,
immon mbarr fo-n-talla uili;	around the leader under whom all found room,
im Fhlann Midi.	around Flann of Meath.[99]

Another as yet unedited poem beginning *Flann for Éirinn i tig thogaid Tuathail Techtmair* was composed by Máel Mura Othna (d.887) earlier in Flann's reign, perhaps about 885.[100] This lengthy poem traces Flann's ancestry back to Tuathal Techtmar stressing the longstanding dominance of Clann Cholmáin and it in effect claims power for Flann equivalent to the island wide authority supposedly exercised by the legendary Tuathal. As Herbert has pointed out

> the representation of the conduct of Tuathal's kingship reflects the actuality and aspiration of ninth-century Irish sovereignty. [...] Thus, poetic testimony supports annal inference that the 'kingship of Ireland' was not constituted by territorial rule over the island. Rather, it involved overlordship over Irish provincial rulers, and the right to mobilize their followers collectively as fir Érenn, 'the men of Ireland'.[101]

Though Flann continued to pursue the ambitious policies of his father Máel Sechnaill, his reign is in fact characterised by considerable fluctuations in his real power, notwithstanding Máel Mura's rhetoric and the claim of the Cross of the Scriptures inscription. The links between Clann Cholmáin and the major midland churches remained important and the physical evidence at Clonmacnoise which dates from Flann's reign specifically attests to the particular significance of that relationship. Aggression towards Munster continued to characterise Clann Cholmáin policy but Flann's grip over Osraige does not appear to have been as assured as that of his father. Crucially, we see periods of real deterioration in the relationship between Clann Cholmáin and their longtime allies in Connacht. Also, Flann faced considerable and enduring internal opposition from his sons, the type of

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97 Though it does contradict the annals in saying that Flann was seventy-six when he died. Murray, *Baile in Scáil* 45-46, 63-64, §52.

98 *AI* 932; *AFM* 930 [932].

99 Ó hAodha, 'The first Middle Irish metrical tract', 226.

100 *AU* 887.5 'righfiled Erenn'; *CS* 887. See the Poetry section in Part I.

101 Máire Herbert, '*Rí Éirenn, Rí Alban,* kingship and identity in the ninth and tenth centuries', Simon Taylor (ed), *Kings, clerics and chronicles in Scotland 500-1297* (Dublin 2000) 62-72: 65-66.

opposition which had previously been confined to the years immediately following the death of a king. The ability of several Cenél nEógain kings to make symbolic appearances in the midlands during Flann's reign might ordinarily be dismissed as representing the vagaries of campaigning but Níall Glúndub's influence in restoring peace between Flann and his sons suggests a real weakness in Clann Cholmáin's position. The dynasty's ambitions remained great and it certainly was able to realise them on occasion. But equally it seems that broader shifts in the political landscape were beginning to tell against Clann Cholmáin.

Conclusion

This study has firstly provided a fresh examination of Clann Cholmáin's history to the early tenth century. For the earliest times, the sixth and seventh centuries, the evidence is sparse and difficult to interpret. Nevertheless, it has been possible to trace the activities of several early Clann Cholmáin figures and in particular throw further light on the dynasty's strategy in dealing with their Laigin and Síl nÁedo Sláine rivals. Investigating the earliest period inevitably required resort to non-contemporary sources. These were considered firstly for what, if any, value they had in considering the dynasty's earliest history and secondly as the products and reflections of a later milieu.

For example, in the chapter dealing with the 'Two Colmáns' there was both an attempt to consider these later sixth century individuals themselves, but also reflect on later traditions and thinking about this earliest period. In that chapter and throughout the remainder of the thesis it has been strongly argued that the now prevalent scholarly consensus regarding the two Colmáns, that they represent a genealogical contrivance reflecting eighth-century political reality, is seriously flawed. That theory fails to take account of several eighth-century texts which would seem to tell against such an interpretation and it has created a potentially misleading impression of both Clann Cholmáin's earliest history and of the later period when the supposed contrivance took place.

In considering Clann Cholmáin's seventh-century history it was difficult to progress much beyond rather vague statements and speculation, especially in the period following Conall Guthbind's death (635). This was largely due to the virtual absence of the dynasty from the record during a period of overwhelming Síl nÁedo Sláine dominance in the midlands and we were forced to speculate on the position of Clann Cholmáin from the wider political context. A further difficulty was interpreting how Uí Néill kingship was organised more generally at this early stage though several different possibilities have been examined and their relative merits weighed. But from the late seventh and particularly from the eighth century, we have found evidence which firstly allows us trace Clann Cholmáin's fortunes in much greater detail and which also throws further light on the system of kingship in operation in the Irish midlands. The list of Guarantors attached to Adomnán's *Lex Innocentium* promulgated in 697 is crucial in this respect. Throwing light not only on the relative strengths of the various Uí Néill branches themselves at this stage, it also clearly suggests the existence of a hierarchy of kings from within the same branch.

Though we have really very little information about Murchad Midi (d.715), it has been argued

that there is sufficient evidence to see him at the apex of a Clann Cholmáin hierarchy and supporting the position of relatives who occupied lesser midland kingships but at the same time acting as a midland deputy himself for a northern Uí Néill overking. Jaski's claim that no overkingship is attested among the southern Uí Neill appears to be undermined by this and other examples.[1] Charles-Edwards has highlighted the hierarchical and territorial system of kingships operated by Síl nÁedo Sláine and in use among the Uí Néill more generally and it is hoped that this study has clearly shown that Clann Cholmáin and the system of kingship they operated in Mide can be fitted into his overarching model.

As we have seen in tracing the kingship of Mide through the eighth and ninth centuries, it began initially as a local deputy kingship held by Clann Cholmáin supporters. With the death of Fallomon in 766 we have the first *reliable* reference to the kingship of Mide which in this and other early appearances represented a local deputyship. Later it was held directly by the dynasty itself but even then, we have seen that the title was used flexibly reflecting the arrangement of power not only in the midlands but among the Uí Néill more generally. This was certainly an important consideration once Clann Cholmáin came to regularly hold the Uí Néill overkingship from the latter half of the eighth century. When Donnchad of Clann Cholmáin made a hosting north in 779 he took hostages from a Cenél Conaill king described as 'king of the North', the northern Uí Néill overkingship and equivalent to the southern Uí Neill position held by Murchad Midi earlier in the eighth century.

While the organisation of kingship and use of kingly title under Donnchad was clearly an important element in his efforts to extend his power, we have seen that his was a reign characterised by other important developments in the growth of increasingly ambitious overkingship. His ability to preside over formal assemblies of leading ecclesiastical and secular figures and his alliance with the Columban church with whom he jointly sponsored the promulgation of *Cáin*-law certainly all attest to wideranging ambition. His strategy towards the Laigin and Munster was politically astute and invariably aggressive and had long-term consequences for Clann Cholmáin's position.

Over the first third or so of the ninth century we have further evidence for the hierarchical, layered but adaptable system of kingship operated by Clann Cholmáin and their midland supporters with deputyship continuing to be an important element. As well as reflecting further on the use of the title 'king of Mide', we have also seen some evidence for the occupation of lesser midland kingships by lesser members of Clann Cholmáin. Alliance with and control of the major churches must also be

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1 'The records show that the Northern Uí Néill recognized a common overking, called the 'king of the North' (*rex in Tuaiscirt, rí ind Fhochlai, rex Aquilonis*). Among the Southern Uí Néill such an overkingship is not attested.' Bart Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession* 214.

considered in the context of the pursuit of power by Clann Cholmáin, and indeed by Cenél nEógain. We have also seen the continued emphasis by overkings, be they Clann Cholmáin or Cenél nEógain during this period, on the control of lesser provincial powers in the pursuit of ambitious, wide-ranging authority. Attempts to divide kingships and appoint rulers, strategies which would be followed with increasing regularity, can be clearly identified from this period and in the case of Máel Sechnaill we dealt not only with an important Clann Cholmáin king, but an example of increasingly ambitious Uí Néill overkingship in action.

The hierarchical arrangment of kingship is of course well attested in the legal corpus. In the eighth-century *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* under the heading *De ratione provinciae* we are informed that a province should have 'unum regem et tres minores potestates sub se.'[2] It should be noted that the number of sub-kings is modelled on the minimum number of bishops required under a metropolitan or archbishop. In the vernacular legal corpus several texts focussed on the lay grades in society include reference to the various grades of king. Perhaps not surprisingly, these texts are not all in absolute agreement on how many grades there were, what they were called and the relative status, measured by honour-price, of the various types of king. For example, the early eighth-century *Críth Gablach* distinguishes between three grades of king.[3] The least of these is the *rí benn* or 'king of peaks', later also described as the *rí túaithe* or 'king of a (single) túath.'[4] Next is the *rí buiden* or 'king of bands' who is a king over three or four *túatha.*[5] Finally there is the *rí bunaid cach cinn* or 'ultimate king of every individual', later also described as the *ríi rurech* or 'king of great kings'.[6] Another Old Irish status text *Míadslechtae,* concerned with the lay grades but also poets, churchmen and ecclesiastical scholars, also has a tripartite division of kings. The *rí túaithe* or 'king of a túath' is below the *rí ríg* or 'king of kings' to whom seven lesser kings owe allegiance.[7] Finally there is the *tríath*, a mighty king who 'goes through the kingdoms of Ireland from wave to wave [...] the five provinces of Ireland, he goes through all their submissions.'[8] Clearly this represented a king with greater power than that of a provincial king. In *Uraicecht Becc,* a later text perhaps dating from the early Middle Irish period,[9] several more grades

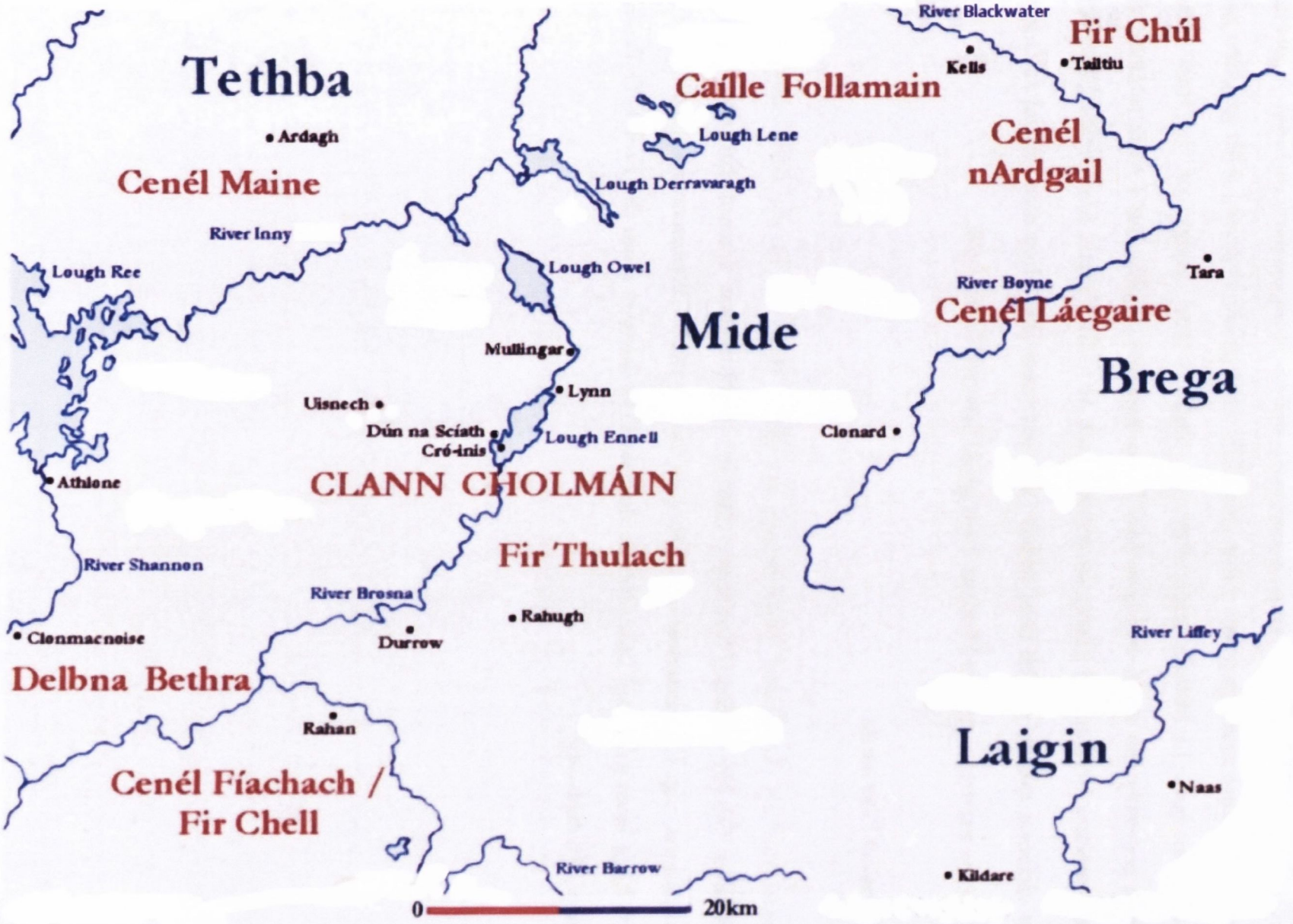
2 Herrmann Wasserschleben (ed), *Die Irische Kanonensammlung* (Leipzig 1885) 71 (Liber XX, Cap.2) .
3 Liam Breatnach, *A companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici* 241ff.
4 D.A. Binchy (ed), *Críth Gablach* (Dublin 1941) §§30, 31 [ll.446, 448] at 18.
5 Binchy, *Críth Gablach* §§30, 32 [ll.446, 459] at 18.
6 Binchy, *Críth Gablach* §§30, 33 [ll.446, 475] at 18, 19.
7 *CIH* 582.32, 583.13, 583.20.
8 *CIH* 583.7. See Breatnach, *A companion* 264ff; *idem*, 'Varia VI', *Ériu* xxxvii (1986) 191-93.
9 Breatnach, *A companion* 315ff. This text is of Munster provenance claiming '*ollam úas rígaib rí Muman*', 'supreme over kings is the king of Munster' and going on to equate this king's honour-price with the head of such Munster foundations as Emly and Cork.

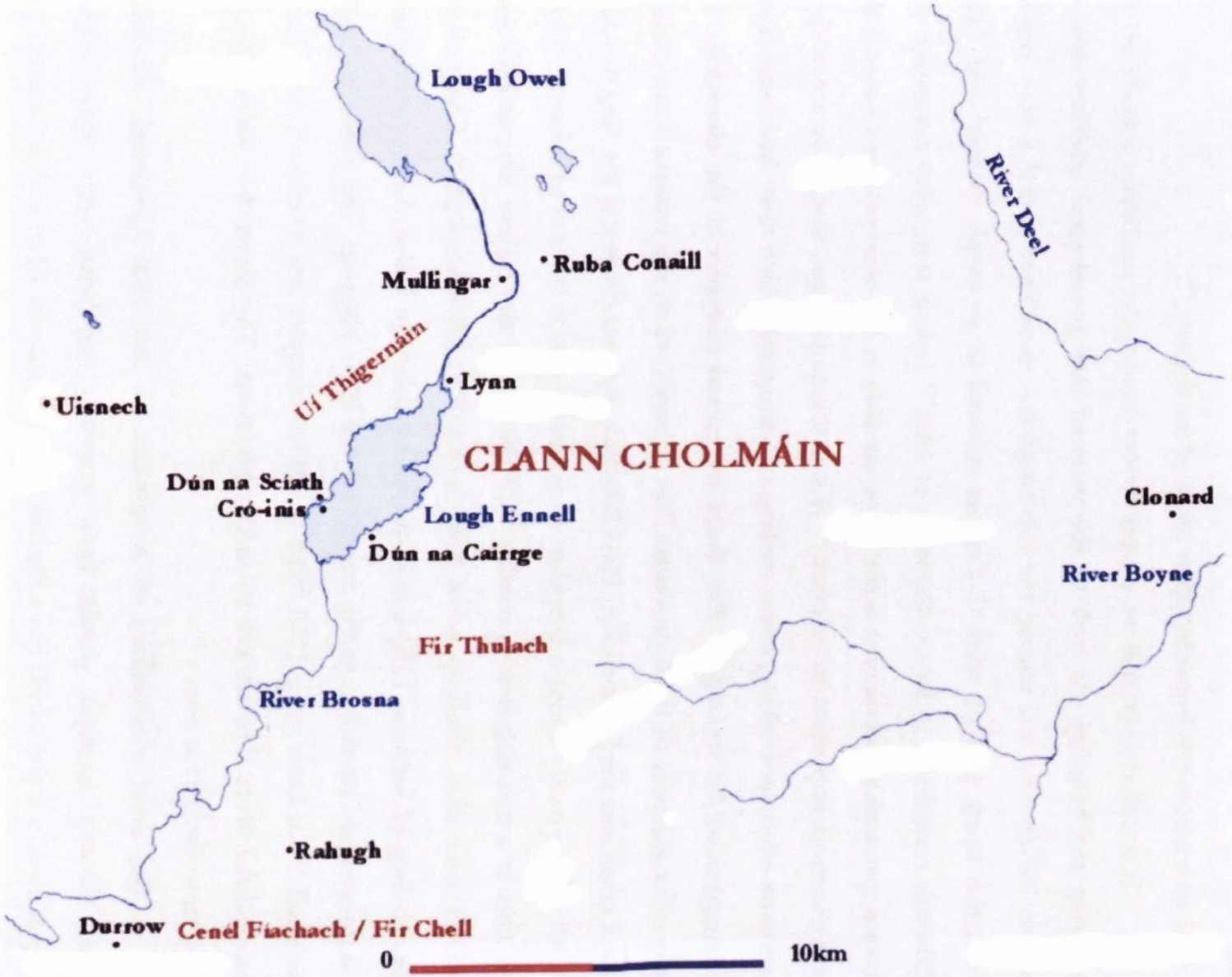
of king are mentioned and in this and later glossing on various other early texts the *rí Érenn co/cen fresabra* or 'king of Ireland with/without opposition' appears.[10]

Though showing a certain amount of variation and change over time, these models are also highly schematised and reflect the lawyers' interest in categorisation. In certain respects the type of organisation outlined in the law texts does not sit easily with the impression of kings, kingship and political organisation we find in the annals. Even our earliest evidence shows the presence of what become increasingly powerful dynasties so that the king of a single *túath,* for example, leaves little trace. But while the legal classification of rank and status perhaps bears 'a limited resemblance to reality'[11], the hierarchical arrangement of kings in these texts with the position of greater ones dependant on the submission or support of lesser ones, clearly show that these ideas were current. These texts all show an interest in the grading of kings, in their hierarchical arrangement and in the importance of overkingship as an organising principle.

A great deal of success has already been achieved in broadening our understanding of how Uí Néill kingship worked but it is hoped this study further highlights the organised, hierarchical but flexible system of kingship operated by Clann Cholmáin. Furthermore, while a crucial element in the operation of the dynasty's overlordship locally, our analysis has also placed this local system in a wider context, recognising that it changed to reflect the power and status of Clann Cholmáin kings relative to their rivals for the Uí Néill overkingship.

10 Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession* 102.
11 Fergus Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish law* 9.


Tethba
Ardagh
Cenél Maine
River Inny
Lough Ree
Lough Owel
Caílle Follamain
Lough Lene
Lough Derravaragh
River Blackwater
Kells
Tailtiu
Fir Chúl
Cenél nArdgail
Tara
River Boyne
Cenél Láegaire
Mide
Brega
Mullingar
Lynn
Uisnech
Dún na Sciath
Cró-inis
Lough Ennell
Clonard
CLANN CHOLMÁIN
Athlone
River Shannon
Fir Thulach
River Brosna
Rahugh
Durrow
Clonmacnoise
Delbna Bethra
Rahan
Cenél Fíachach /
Fir Chell
River Barrow
River Liffey
Laigin
Naas
Kildare
0
20km


Lough Owel
River Deel
Ruba Conaill
Mullingar
Uí Thigernáin
Lynn
Uisnech
CLANN CHOLMÁIN
Dún na Sciath
Cró-inis
Lough Ennell
Clonard
Dún na Cairrge
River Boyne
Fir Thulach
River Brosna
Rahugh
Durrow
Cenél Fiachach / Fir Chell
0
10km

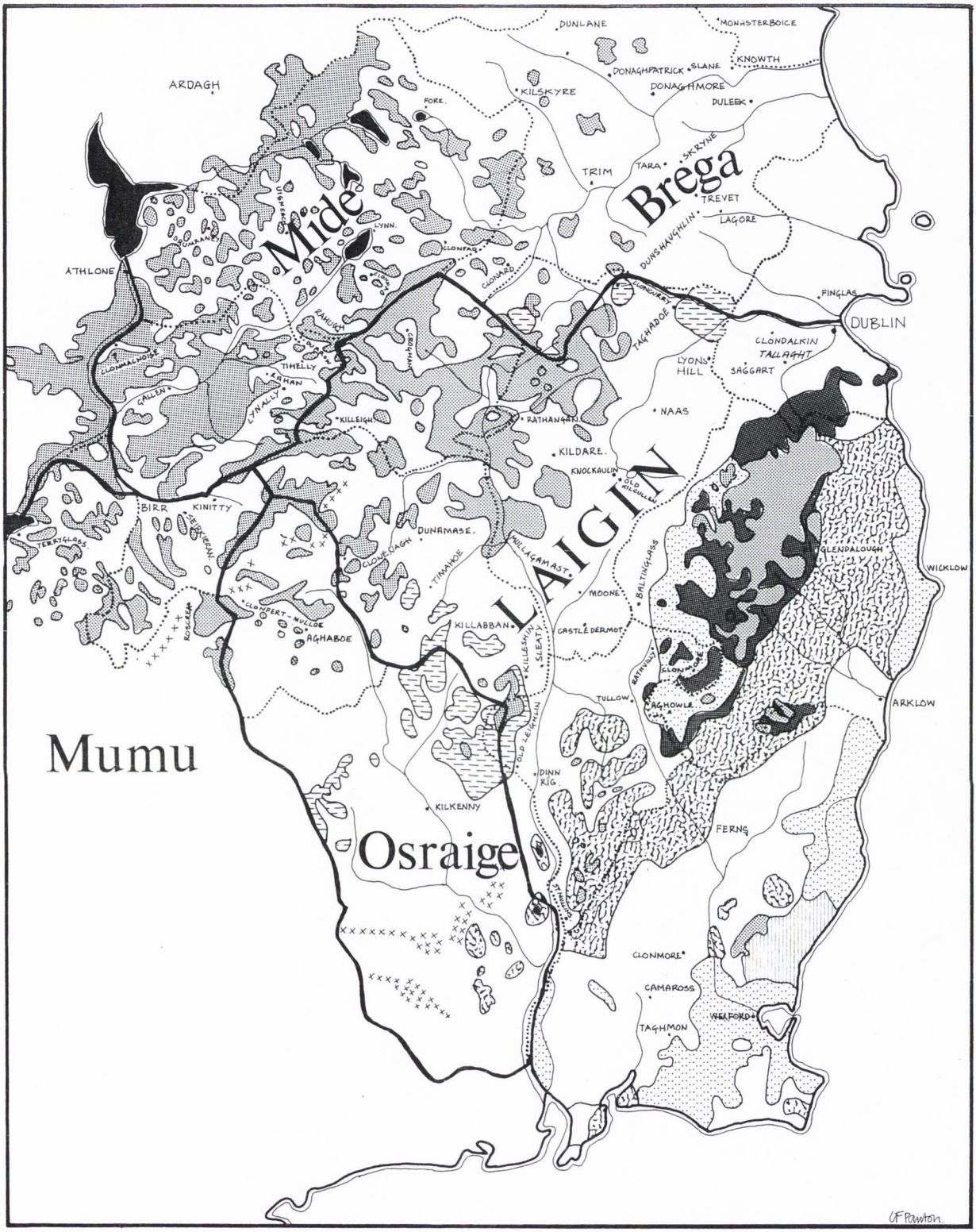
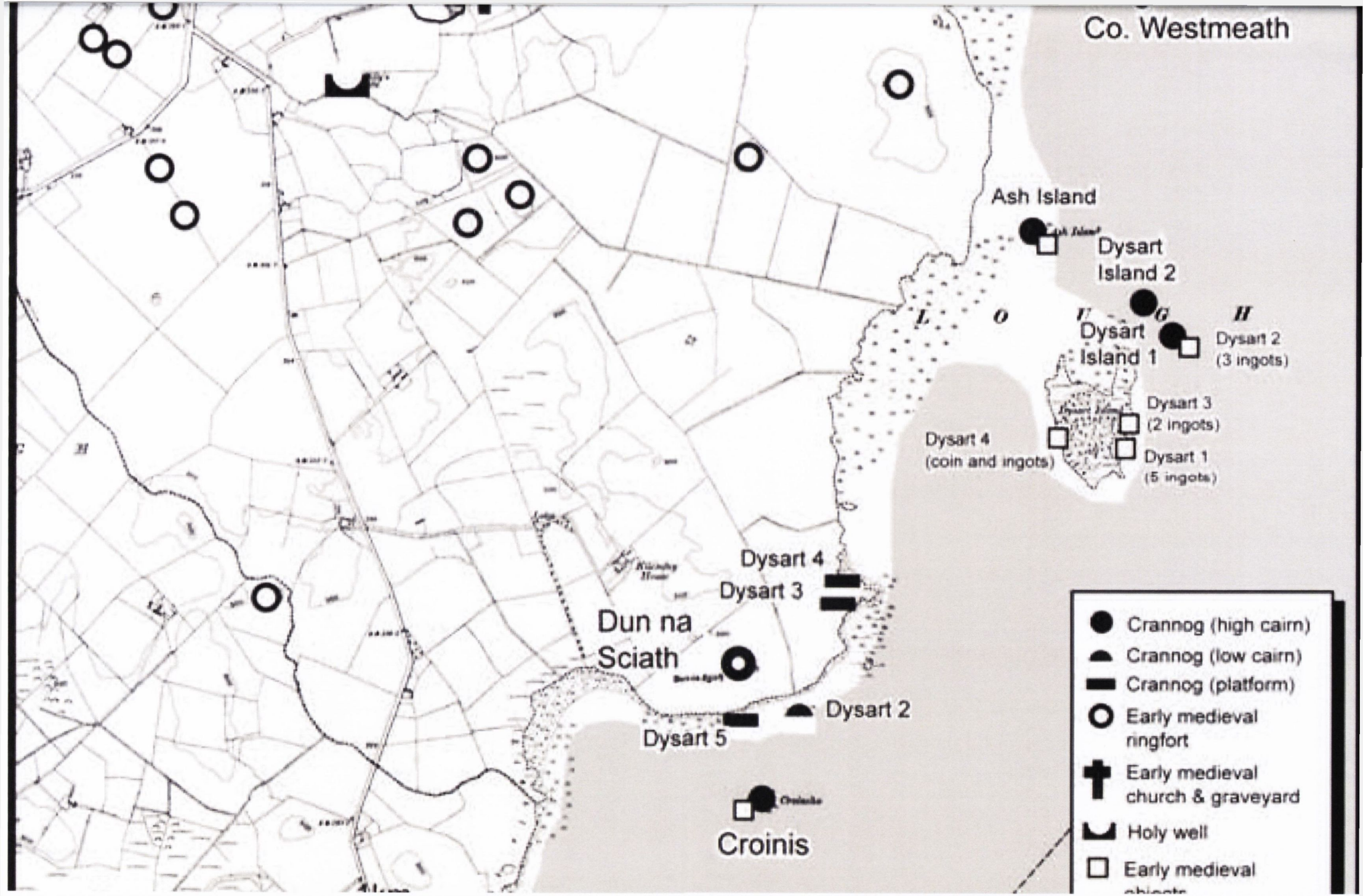


Plate III Soils and Settlement


Co. Westmeath
Ash Island
Dysart Island 2
Dysart Island 1
Dysart 2 (3 ingots)
Dysart 3 (2 ingots)
Dysart 1 (5 ingots)
Dysart 4 (coin and ingots)
Dysart 4
Dysart 3
Dun na Sciath
Dysart 2
Dysart 5
Croinis
Crannog (high cairn)
Crannog (low cairn)
Crannog (platform)
Early medieval ringfort
Early medieval church & graveyard
Holy well
Early medieval

The Clann Cholmáin Genealogies[1]

Rawlinson B.502. (Oxford Bodleian Library).

(Fol. 78r.) To consult the manuscript directly, See: http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msrawlb502

See: M.A. O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin 1962 repr. 2001) 143 bc 39, 159.

GEN*ELACH* CL*AINNE* COLMÁI*N*

Murchad $_7$ Māelsechnaill $_7$ Murcherdach $_7$ Dia*r*mait cethri m*eic* Domnaill m. Flai*n*d m. Māel-sech*naill* m. Do*m*naill m. Donnch*ad*a m. Flai*n*d m. Māel-sech*naill* m. Māel-ruanaid m. Donnc*had*a m. Do*m*naill m. Murch*ad*a m. Dermata m. Airmedaich m. *Con*aill Guthbind m. Suibni m. Colmāi*n* m. Diarmata m. Ferg*us*a Cerrbēoil m. *Con*aill Cremt*h*ai*n*ni m. Neill Noigiall*aig*

[The genealogy then continues back past Niall through a prehistoric/legendary section ultimately reaching Úgaine Máir.]

The Book of Leinster, i.e. MS H.2.18 (1339) (Trinity College Dublin).

(p.335) To consult the manuscript directly, See: http://isos.dias.ie/libraries/TCD/TCD_MS_1339/tables/17.html#335

See: M.A. O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin 1962 repr. 2001) 335 d 27, 425.

G*ENELACH* RIG MID*E*

Māel-Sech*naill* m. Murc*h*aid m. Domnaill m. Flaind m. Do*m*naill m. Māel-Sech*naill* m. Do*m*naill m. Dondc*hada* m. Flaind m. Māel-Sechnaill m. M[ā]el-rua*naid* m. Dondc*hada* m. Do*m*naill m. Murc*h*ada m. Ai*r*medaig m. *Con*aill Gut*h*bin*d* m. Suibn*i* m. Colmāi*n* Móir m. Dia*r*mata m. Ferg*us*a Ce*r*rbē*oil* m. *Con*aill C*h*rem*th*ai*nne* m. Nēill No*ī*gi*a*llaich.

H.2.7 (1298) (Trinity College Dublin).

This MS is not available to consult via ISOS and no published edition exists. The relevant sections reproduced below are taken from Donnchadh Ó Corráin's as yet unpublished edition which he has very kindly made available to me. He also provides cross references to MS Rawlinson B.502 directly, *CGH* and the Book of Ballymote (Atkinson's edition). See Spreadsheet 1 columns C –O .

1 References have been provided to published editions, facsimiles and online digital images where available. Where published editions exist, the transcription has been taken from these sources. Otherwise fresh transcriptions have been made from the MSS directly. Some of the crucial data has also been entered into accompanying tables below for ease of comparison. The considerable body of genealogical material from MS. Laud Misc 610 contains nothing specific to Clann Cholmáin so this collection will not be discussed here. See Kuno Meyer, 'The Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories', *ZCP* 8 (1912) 291-338 and John [Eoin] MacNeill, 'Notes on the Laud Genealogies', *ZCP* 8 (1912) 412. There is material of some relevance for this study in the 'Laud Synchronisms' but this might better be considered a kinglist and will therefore be dealt with elsewhere.

H 24b9 = R 143bc39 (= CG i 159) = BB 80aa34

GEDNELACH CLAINNE COLMAIN[a]. Concobar mac Mail Sechnaill meic Concobuir meic Domnaill meic Mail Sechnaill meic Domnaill meic Dondcada meic Flaind Sinna meic Mail[b] Sechnaill meic Mail Ruanaid meic Donnchadha meic Domnaill meic Murcada meic Diarmata meic Armedaig Caich meic Conaill Guthbind meic Subni meic Colmain Moir meic Diarmata meic Fergusa Cerrbeoil meic Conaill Cremthainni meic Neill Noigiallaig. Murcad mac Domnaill meic Flaind meic Domnaill meic Mail Sechnaill Moir.

Murcad 7 Mael Sechlaind, Murcertac 7 Diuarmait .iiii. meic Domn/aill meic Flaind meic Moel Sechnaill[c] Moir.

(a) .i. O Mael Eaclainn in r.m. in add. hand.
(b) Mai corr. to Mail.
(c) ls made on e

H 25a3 = R 144c47 (= CG i 162)

Cathalan mac Brotuda meic Oengusa meic Fiachrach meic Fallamain meic Con Congalt meic Maile Tule meic Faelcon Findmona meic Maili Uamai[a] m. Oengusa[b] meic Colmain Moir

(a)sic; leg. Umai
(b) o written over a

H 25a14 = BB 80ac32

Oengus m Carraig Calma m Murchada m Oengusa meic F*laind meid Concobair meic F*lainf. Domnall mac Conchobair.

Dondcad mac Aeda Bic meic F*laind meic Muredaig meic Aeda meic Mail Ruanaid. Loingsech sapiens mac Flaind meic Mail Sechnaill meic Mail Ruanaid meic Concobair meic Flaind

H 25a34 = BB 8- bal.

Domnall 7 Murcad da mac F*laind meic Domnaill meic Mail Sechnaill meic Domnaill meic Dondchada meic Flaind /25b/ meic Mail Sechnaill meic Mail Ruanaid. Muredach mac Mail Ruanaid meic Gillai Cormaic meic Conaing meic Muredaig meic Oengusa meic Flaind

H 29a14
CLANND COLMAIN MOIR. Catal 7 Muredach da mac Diarmata meic Caich F*oichi meic Conaill meic Subne meic Cummaeni meic Colmain Maair meic Diarmada.
Tomaltach mac Duir meic Aermedaig meic F*ingin meic Cummaene meic Colmain Mair.
Congal mac Airmedaig meic Fingin 7r

H. 185d 12
Genelach O Mael Eachlaind

Cormac mac Airt meic Cormaic meic Airt meic Mael-Sechlaind
Crossaig meic Murchaid meic Domnaill meic Loind meic Domnaill meic Loind meic

Domnaill m. Mael-Sechlaind MÓir meic Domnaill meic Dondchaid meic Flaind Thinna meic Mael-Sechlaind meic Mael-ruanaid meic Dondchaid meic Domnaill meic Murc[h]aid meic Diarmata meic Oirmedaig Caeich meic Conaill Guthbind meic Suibni meic Colmán meic Diarmata m. Fergusa Ceirrbeoil m. Conaill C[h]rem thaind meic Neill Noigiallaig.

'Ó Cianáin' MS G2 (The National Library of Ireland).

(f.10vb9)
To consult this manuscript directly, See:
http://www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/NLI/NLI_MS_G_2/tables/2.html

Cormac2 m*a*c Air*t* m*e*ic Corm*a*ic m*e*ic Airt m*e*ic Maeileaclai*n*d m*e*ic Murc*h*aid*h* m*e*ic Do*m*naill m*e*ic Conc*h*obair m*e*ic Do*m*naill m*e*ic Maeileac*h*lai*n*d m*e*ic Domnaill m*e*ic Don*n*c*h*ad*h*a meic Floi*n*d Stinda mic Maeileac*h*lai*n*d m*e*ic M*h*aelruanaid*h* m*e*ic Don*n*c*h*ad*h*a m*e*ic Domnaill m*e*ic M*u*rc*h*ada Mid*h*e m*e*ic Dia*r*mada Dea*n* m*e*ic Oirm*h*eadaig*h* C*h*aich m*e*ic Conaill Gut*h*bi*n*d m*e*ic S*h*uibni m*e*ic Colman M*ór* m*e*ic Dia*r*mada Derg m*e*ic Derg m*e*ic F*e*rgu*s*a Cerrbeoil.

(f.11ra1)
Cairbri m*a*c Cai*r*b*ri* m*e*ic Corm*a*ic m*e*ic Cormaic m*e*ic Cai*r*b*ri* m*e*ic Cormaic m*e*ic Air*t* m*e*ic Mailec*h*lai*n*d.

The Book of Uí Maine, i.e., MS D ii 1 (The Royal Irish Academy).

(fol. 1 vc.) To consult the manuscript directly, See:
http://isos.dias.ie/libraries/RIA/RIA_MS_D_ii_1/tables/1.html#004

See: R.A.S. MacAlister (ed.) *The Book of Uí Maine, otherwise called the book of the O'Kelly's* (Dublin 1942) 24 vb.

[g*e*ne*l*a*ch* ?] c*l*a*i*nne *Co*naill Creamt*h*ai*n*d m*e*ic Neill ix. gillaig [anseo?]

m*e*ic Corm*a*c m*e*ic Maileaclai*n*d m*e*ic M*u*rcaid m*e*ic Domnaill m*e*ic Flaind m*e*ic Domnaill m*e*ic Maileaclaind M*ór* m*e*ic Domnaill m*e*ic Do*nn*c*h*a*da* m*e*ic Flaind Sin*n*a m*e*ic Mailseachlaind m*e*ic Maelruanaig m*e*ic Dondcaid m*e*ic Domnaill m*e*ic Diarmada m*e*ic A*i*rmeadaig Caic*h* m*e*ic *Co*naill Guthbi*n*d3 m*e*ic Suibni m*e*ic Colmai*n* Moir m*e*ic Dia*r*[?]da m*e*ic [?]g[?]rrbeoil m*e*ic *Co*naill C[?]t*h*ainn m*e*ic Neill ix giallaig.

The Book of Ballymote, i.e., MS 23 P12 (The Royal Irish Academy).

(f.49v34) To consult this manuscript directly, See:
http://www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/RIA/RIA_MS_23_P_12/tables/6.html#108

2 There are insertion marks in a slightly lighter ink above this name. Above the line in the same lighter ink are the words: 'Corm*ac* Ball*ach* m*ac*' seemingly providing further elaboration on Cormac's identity. Cormac Ballach, king of Meath, died in 1362. See: *AC* 1362.7; *ALC* 1362.

3 Though 'Guthbind' is placed directly after 'Diarmada' on the line above, it belongs with Conall, i.e. Conall Guthbind son of Suibne.

See: Robert Atkinson (ed), *The Book of Ballymote* (Dublin 1887). In this facsimile the relevant genealogy can be found at f.80.

GENEL*ACH* CL*AINNE* COLMAN

Murchad m*ei*c Domnaill m*ei*c Flaind m*ei*c Maelsec*h*loi*nd* Moir m*ei*c Flai*nd* Si*n*da m*ei*c Maelsec*h*loi*nd* m*ei*c Maelrua*n*aig*h* m*ei*c Dondc*h*ad*h*a m*ei*c Do*m*naill Moir m*ei*c Murc*h*aid*h* m*ei*c Dia*r*mada m*ei*c Ai*r*medaig*h* Caic*h* m*ei*c *Con*aill Gut*h*bi*n*d m*ei*c Suibne m*ei*c Colm*an* Moir

Su*n*d c*on*drecait Cl*ann* Colm*ain* Moir uili m*ac* Dia*r*mada ag Dia*r*maid *con*drecait Cl*ann* Colm*ain* 7 Sil Aeda Sl*aine* m*ei*c Ferg*us*a Cerrbeoil m*ei*c *Con*aill Errbr*eg*
Sund *Con*dreg*ait* Cl*ann* Ardgail 7 Cl*ann* Colm*an* Moir m*ei*c Neill .ix. g*iallaig*.
Su*n*d *Con*drecait h*uí* Neill uili .i. Eoga*n* 7 *Con*all 7 Cai*r*p*re* 7 Fiac*h*a 7 Maine m*aic* Ec*h*ach Muigm.i.*dóin* m*ai*c M*u*redaig*h* Tirig*h*.

Concob*hor* m*ei*c Maelsecl*oind* m*ei*c *Con*cob*or* m*ei*c Do*m*naill m*ei*c Maelecl*oind*

Seac*h*t m*ei*c Floi*n*d m*ei*c Maelecl*oind* m*ei*c Maelr*uanaig* .i Dondc*h*ud*h* Aeng*us* Aed*h* Concob*h*ar Domnall Mealrua*n*ig*h* Cerball Maelec*h*loi*n*d m*ei*c Maelrua*n*ig.

The Book of Lecan, i.e., MS 23 P 2 (The Royal Irish Acadamey).

(fol.180vc1.) To consult the manuscript directly, See:
http://isos.dias.ie/libraries/RIA/RIA_MS_23_P_2/tables/19.html#362

See: Kathleen Mulchrone, *The Book of Lecan: Leabhar Mór Mhic Fhir Bhisigh Leacain* (Dublin 1937) 456.

Diarmaid m Do*m*naill m Mu*r*chaid m Do*m*naill m F*h*loi*n*d m Mailechl*ainn* m Do*m*naill m Dondchada m F*h*loi*n*d S*hi*nda m Mailech*ainn* m Mailruan*aid* m Dondchada m Do*m*naill m M*ur*c*h*ada Midi m Diarmada m Airmedaich m *Con*aill Guthbi*n*d m S*h*uibne m Colmai*n* Moir m Diarmada Derc m F*herg*usa Ceirrbeoil m *Con*aill Cremthai*n*d m Neill Naigiall*aig*

[This genealogy then continues back through a prehistoric section.]

An Leabhar Donn, i.e., MS 23 Q 10 (The Royal Irish Academy).

(f.37rd32) To consult this manuscript directly, See:
http://www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/RIA/RIA_MS_23_Q_10/tables/5.html#081

G*ENEL*A*CH* CL*AINN*E *CON*AILL C*REM*TH*AINNE*

Corm*ac* m Ai*r*t m Corm*aic* m Ai*r*t m Mailtsecl*ainn* m M*ur*ch*ada* m Do*m*n*aill* m *Con*cob*air* m Dom*naill* m Mailec*hlainn* m Do*m*n*aill* m Don*n*ch*ada* m Floi*nn* Sin*n*a m Mails*echlainn* m Mailruan*aid* m Don*n*ch*ada* m Do*m*n*aill* m M*ur*ch*ada* Midig m Dia*rm* [?] m Air*met*aig*h* C*h*aic*h* m

*Con*aill Gut*h*bi*n*d m Suibne m Colmai*n* Moir m Dia*rm*da*i*g m F*ergu*sa Cirrbeoil m *Con*aill Cr*e*mt*h*ai*nne* [m] N*eill* N*oígiallaig.*

The O'Clery Book of Genealogies, i.e., MS 23 D 17 (The Royal Irish Academy)
(pp 76-77)

See: Séamus Pender (ed), 'The O'Clery Book of genealogies', *Analecta Hibernica* 18 (1951) 59.

G*ENELACH* SIL COLMAIN MOIR

M*urch*a*d* m Domhn*aill* m Floinn m Mail s*ech*l*ainn* m*oir* m Flai*nn* t-si*n*da m Mail s*ech*loi*nn* m M*ail* ruan*aid* m Don*nch*a*da* m Domhn*aill* m*oir* m M*urch*a*dha* midhigh m Dierma*da* m Oir*m*ed*aigh* caich m *Con*aill *guth*bi*nn* m Suibne m Colm*ain* m*oir* (sun*n* *con*dr*egait* cl*ann* Colm*ain* uile et sil Aeda slaine) m Diermada m F*ergusa cer*rb*eóil* m *Con*aill e*rr* b*reg*

G*ENELACH* .H. MÁ*IL* ECHL*AINN* RÍ MIDHE

Art m Cuinn m Corpm*aic* m Corbm*aic* ballaigh m Airt m Corbm*aic* m Airt m M*ail* secl*ainn* m M*urch*a*da* m Domhn*aill* m *Con*cob*air* m Floi*nn* m Domhn*aill* m M*áil* secl*ainn* m M*áil* ruan*aidh.*

*Con*cobar m M*ail* secl*ainn* m *Con*cob*air* m Domhn*aill* m Mail s*ech*l*ainn.*

.Uii. m*ic* Flai*nn* m M*ail* secl*ainn* m M*ail* ruan*aid* .i. Don*nch*a*d,* Aengh*us,* Aedh, *Con*ch*obar,* Do*m*nall, Mael ruan*aidh,* Cerball.

Leabhar Mór na nGenealach, i.e., Add Irish MS 14 (University College Dublin)

To consult the manuscript directly, See:
http://www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/UCD/UCD_MS_14/large_jpgs/157.jpg

See: Nollaig Ó Muraíle (ed. & trans.) *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach/ The Great Book of Irish Genealogies* (Dublin 2003 5 vols.) 284-87, 362-65, 442-43.

161.4 Genelach Cenél no Clainn Colmain Mhóir

Murchadh m*ac* Domnuill m. Floinn m. Maoileac*h*lainn Mhoir, RE, m. Floinn tShionna, RE, m.Maoileac*h*lainn m. Maoil-Ruanaidh m. Donnchadha m. Domnuill Mhoir m. Murchaidh m. Diarmada m.Airmeadoigh Caich m. Conuill Ghuithbinn m. Suibhne m. Colmain Mhóir (remhraite) m. Diarmada, RE, m. Feargusa Cirrbheoil m. Conaill Earr Breagh.

161.5: Conchabhar m*ac* Maoileachlainn m. Conchabhair m. Domnuill m. Maoileachlainn.

161.6: Donnchad*h,* Aongus, Aodh, Conchabhar, Domhnall, Maolruanuidh, agus Cearbhall, seacht mec Fhloinn mc Maoileachlainn m. Maoil-Ruanaidh.

161.7 Genealach I Maoileachluinn <Milleaghlin>

Art m*ac* Cuinn m. Cormaic m. Airt m. Cormaic m. Airt m. Maoileachlainn m. Murchuidh m. Domhnuill m. Conchabhair m. Domhnuill m. Maoileachlainn, RE 2, [162.1] m. Domhnaill m.

Donnchuidh m. Floinn Sionna (remhraite) m. Maoileachlainn, 7c.

162.2: Calbhach m. Fedhlimidh m. Cuinn m. Cormaic m. Nell m. Cormaic m. Airt mc Airt (remhraite) m. Maoileachlainn m. Murchaidh, 7c.

1113.1 Conall Cremhthainne

[] SUIBHNE; a*thar* CONUILL GUITHBINN; a*thar* AIRMEADHAIGH CHAICH; a*thar* DIARMADA; a*thar* MURCHAIDH; a*thar* DOMNUILL MOIR, RE 20 bl.; a*thar* DONNCHADHA, RE 27 bl., a*thar* Conchabhair, RE 14 bl., a*thar*MAOILRUANAIDH; a*thar* MAOILEACHLAINN, RE 16 BL.; a*thar* FLOINN SHIONNA, RE 38 bl.; a*thar* MAOILEACHLAINN MHÓIR; a*thar* FHLOINN; a*thar* DOMHNUILL; a*thar* MHURCHUIDH.

1114.2: Flann Sionna reamhraite, RE 38 bl., athair Donnchuidh, RE 25 bl., athar Domhnuill, athar Maoileachlainn Mhoir, RE 32 bl., athar Domhnuill athar Conchabhair athar Domhnuill athar Murchaidh athar Maoileac*h*lainn athar Airt athar Cormaic athar Airt athar Cormaic athar Cuinn athar Airt Ui Maoileac*h*lainn

The Caille Follomain Genealogies.

Rawl. B.502. (Oxford Bodleian Library)

(Fol. 78v.) To consult the manuscript directly, See: http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msrawlb502

See: M.A. O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin 1962 repr. 2001) 144 c 47, 162.

G*ENELACH* CAĪLLE FALLO*MAIN*

Fiachra m Cathalain m Brotuda m Oeng*u*sa m Fiachrach m Fallomuin m *Con*congalt m Faelc*hon* Fi*n*dmona

H.2.7 (1298) (Trinity College Dublin)

H 29a31

CENEL COLMAIN BIC a. qui prius magnus fuit.
Tuathal mac Maili Tule meic F*aelcon meic Mail Umai meic Oengusa meic Colman Bic / /29b/ meic Diarmata

(a)added above line

The Book of Ballymote, i.e., MS 23 P12 (The Royal Irish Academy)

(f.49v) To consult this manuscript directly, See:
http://www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/RIA/RIA_MS_23_P_12/tables/6.html#108

See: Robert Atkinson (ed), *The Book of Ballymote* (Dublin 1887) f.80.

G*e*n*e*l*ach* Luc*h*t C*r*i*ch*i na Cedach

Fiachna m*eic* Cathalan m*eic* Broduda m*eic* Aengusa m*eic* Fiacra*ch* m*eic* Fallamain otait m*uinter* Fallama*in* m*eic* *Con*galaig m*eic* Maelituili m*eic* Fael*chon* Fi*n*dmona m*eic* Mailum*h*a m*eic* Aeng*u*sa m*eic* Colman.

Aeng*u*s m*eic* Car*r*aig C*h*al*ma* m*eic* Murc*h*ada m*eic* Aengossa m*eic* Floi*n*d Big.

Dondcad m*eic* Aeda m*eic* Floind m*eic* M*ur*edaig*h* m*eic* Aeda m*eic* Maelrua*n*aig m*eic* *Con*cobur m*eic* Flaind.

Domnall m*eic* *Con*cobur m*eic* Cerbaill m*eic* Aeda m*eic* F*h*loind.

Loi*n*gsec*h* Sapie*n*s m*eic* Flaind m*eic* Maelec*h*loind m*eic* Maelruanaid*h* m*eic* Concobur m*eic* Floind.

Domnall 7 M*ur*c*h*ad*h* da m*eic* Domnaill m*eic* Floind m*eic* Maelecl*ainn* m*eic* Do*m*naill m*eic* Dondc*h*ada m*eic* Floi*n*d m*eic* Maelec*h*loi*n*d m*eic* Maelrua*n*ig.

Muired*h*ach m*eic* Maelrua*n*aid m*eic* Gilla Cor*mac* m*eic* *Con*ai*n*g m*eic* M*ur*edaig m*eic* Aeng*u*sa m*eic* Floi*n*d.

The O'Clery Book of Genealogies, i.e., MS 23 D 17 (The Royal Irish Academy)
(p.77)

See: Séamus Pender (ed.), 'The O'Clery Book of genealogies', *Analecta Hibernica* 18 (1951) 60.

G*ENELAIGH CRI*CHE NA CEDACH

Fiachna m Ferad*aigh nó* Cathal m B*r*odadha m Aengh*u*sa m Fiacr*ach* m Fallamai*n* (o tait m*uinter* Follam*ain*) m *Con*ghal*aigh* m M*aile* tuile m Fael*chon* fi*n*d mona m Máil u*m*a m Aeng*u*sa m Colm*ain* big.

Aengh*us* m Carra calma m M*ur*ch*ad*a m Aengh*u*sa m Floi*n*n bicc.

Donnch*ad* m Aedha m Floi*n*n m M*uir*ed*aig* m Aedha m Maol ruan*aid* m *Con*cobhair m Fl*ainn* t-sin*na.*

Domnall m *Con*cobhair m C*er*bhaill m Aeda m Fl*ainn* t-sin*n*a.

M*uircer*tach et Domhnall *da* m Loingsigh m Floinn m M*ail* seachl*ainn* m M*ail* ruan*aid* m *Concobair* m Fl*ainn* t-sin*n*a

Mael s*echlainn* god m M*ail* t-seachloi*n*n m Cinaetha m Domhn*aill* m Fl*ainn* t-sin*n*a

M*uir*ed*ach* m Mael ruan*aid* m Gille corpm*aic* m *Con*ai*n*g m M*uir*ed*aigh* m Aeng*u*sa m Flai*n*n t-sinna

Domhnall et M*urchad da* m Floi*nn* m Domhn*aill* m M*ail*seachl*ainn*

Leabhar Mór na nGenealach, i.e., Add Irish MS 14 (University College Dublin)

To consult this manuscript directly, See:
http://www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/UCD/UCD_MS_14/small_jpgs/158.jpg

See: Nollaig Ó Muraíle (ed. & trans.) *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach/ The Great Book of Irish Genealogies* (Dublin 2003 5 vols.) 364-65.

Genealach Lucht Chriche na Cétoch <.i. Cétach>

Fiachna m*a*c Cathalain m. Brodudha m.Aonghusa m. Fiachrach m. Fallamhuin, o ttaid Muintir Fallamhuin .i. na riogha, m.Conghaluigh m.Maoil-Tuile m.Faolchon Fionnmhóna m. Maoilumha m. Aonghusa m. Colmain Bhig m. Diar[*m*]ada, 7c.

Aonghus mac Dhonnchadha .i. An Carrach Calma, m. Murchadha m. Aonghusa m. Floinn Bhig

Donnchadh m*a*c Aodha m. Floinn m. Muiredhoigh m. Aodha m. Maoilruanaidh m. Conchabhair m. Floinn

Domhnall m. Conchabhair m. Cearbhaill m. Aodha m. Floinn

Loingsioch sapiens mac Floinn m. Maoileachluinn m. Maoilruanaidh mc Conchabhair m.Floinn.

Domhnall m*a*c Murchadha m. Domhnuill m. Floinn m. Maoileachlainn m. Domhnuill m. Donnchaidh m. Maoileachlainn m. Maoil-Ruanaidh

Muiredhoch m*a*c Maoil-Ruanaidh m. Giolla Corma m.Conaing m. Muiredhoigh m. Aonghusa m. Floinn.

Table 1: The Clann Cholmáin genealogies

Rawl. B502 Genelach Clainne Colmáin	**LL** Genelach Rig Mide	**H.2.7 (1298)** Gednelach Clainne Colmain	**H.2.7 (1298)**	**H.2.7 (1298)** Clannd Colmain Moir	**H.2.7 (1298)**
	Máel Sechnaill				
Murchad 7 Máel Sechnaill 7 Murcherdach 7 Diarmait	Murchad	Conchobor			
Domnall	Domnall	Máel Sechnaill			
Flann	Flann	Conchobor			
- - -	Domnall	Domnall			
Máel Sechnaill	Máel Sechnaill	Máel Sechnaill			
Domnall	Domnall	Domnall			
Donnchad	Donnchad	Donnchad			
Flann	Flann	Flann Sinna	Cathalán		
Máel Sechnaill	Máel Sechnaill	Máel Sechnaill	Brotud		
Máel Rúanaid	Máel Rúanaid	Máel Rúanaid	Óengus		
Donnchad	Donnchad	Donnchad	Fiachra		
Domnall	Domnall	Domnall	Fallaman	Cathal 7 Muredach	
Murchad	Murchad	Murchad	Cú Congalt	da mac	Tomaltach
Diarmait	- - -	Diarmait	Máil Tule	Diarmat	Dor
Airmedach	Airmedach	Airmedach Cáech	Faelcú Findmona	Cáech (Caich F*oichi)	Airmedach
Conall Guthbind	Conall Guthbind	Conall Guthbind	Máil Umae	Conall	Fingin
Suibne	Suibne	Suibne	Óengus	Suibne	
- - -	- - -	- - -	- - -	Cummaine	Cummaine
Colmán	Colmán Mór	Colmán Mór	Colmán Mór	Colmán Már	Colmán Már
Diarmait	Diarmait	Diarmait		Diarmad	
Fergus Cerrbél	Fergus Cerrbél	Fergus Cerrbél			
Conall Cremthainne	Conall Cremthainne	Conall Cremthainne			
Niall Noígiallach	Niall Noígiallach	Niall Noígiallach			

H.2.7 (1298) Genelach O Mael Eachlaind	**NLI G2** **(Ó Cianáin)**	**UM**	**BB**	**Lec**	**Leabhar Don** Genelach Clainne Conaill Cremthainne
Cormac					
Art					
Cormac	Cormac				Cormac
Art	Art				Art
Máel Sechlaind Crossach	Cormac				Cormac
Murchad	Art	Cormac		Diarmad	Art
Domnall	Máel Sechnaill	Máel Sechnaill		Domnall	Máel Sechnaill
Lond	Murchad	Murchad	Murchad	Murchad	Murchad
Domnall	Domnall	Domnall	Domnall	Domnall	Domnall
Lond	Conchobor	Flann	Flann	Flann	Conchobor
Domnall	Domnall	Domnall	- - -	- - -	Domnall
Máel Sechnaill Mór	Máel Sechnaill	Máel Sechnaill Mór	Máel Sechnaill Mór	Máel Sechnaill	Máel Sechnaill
Domnall	Domnall	Domnall	- - -	Domnall	Domnall
Donnchad	Donnchad	Donnchad	- - -	Donnchad	Donnchad
Flann	Flann Sinna	Flann Sinna	Flann Sinna	Flann Sinna	Flann Sinna
Máel Sechnaill	Máel Sechnaill	Máel Sechnaill	Máel Sechnaill	Máel Sechnaill	Máel Sechnaill
Máel Rúanaid	Máel Rúanaid	Máel Rúanaid	Máel Rúanaid	Máel Rúanaid	Máel Rúanaid
Donnchad	Donnchad	Donnchad	Donnchad	Donnchad	Donnchad
Domnall	Domnall	Domnall	Domnall Mór	Domnall	Domnall
Murc[h]ad	Murchad Midi	- - -	Murchad	Murchad Midi	Murchad Midi
Diarmat	Diarmait Dían	Diarmad	Diarmad	Diarmad	Diarmait
Airmedach Cáech	Airmedach Cáech	Airmedach Cáech	Airmedach Cáech	Airmedach	Airmedach Cáech
Conall Guthbind	Conall Guthbind	Conall Guthbind	Conall Guthbind	Conall Guthbind	Conall Guthbind
Suibne	Suibne	Suibne	Suibne	Suibne	Suibne
- - -	- - -	- - -	- - -	- - -	- - -
Colmán	Colmán Mór	Colmán Mór	Colmán Mór	Colmán Mór	Colmán Mór
Diarmat	Diarmait Derg	Díarmat		Diarmad Derc	Diarmait
Fergus Cerrbél	Derg	Fergus Cerrbél		Fergus Cerrbél	Fergus Cerrbél
Conall Cremthainne	Fergus Cerrbél	Conall Cremthainne		Conall Cremthainne	Conall Cremthainne
Niall Noígiallach		Niall Noígiallach		Niall Noígiallach	Niall Noígiallach

O'Clery Bk of Gen	**LMG**
GENELACH SIL	Genelach Cenél
COLMAIN MOIR	no Clainne Colmain Mhóir
Murchad	Murchad
Domnall	Domnall
Flann	Flann
- - -	- - -
Máel Sechnaill Mór	Máel Sechnaill Mór
- - -	- - -
- - -	- - -
Flann Sinna	Flann Sinna
Máel Sechnaill	Máel Sechnaill
Máel Rúanaid	Máel Rúanaid
Donnchad	Donnchad
Domnall Mór	Domnall Mór
Murchad Midi	Murchad
Diarmait	Diarmad
Airmedach Cáech	Airmedach Cáech
Conall Guthbind	Conall Guthbind
Suibne	Suibne
- - -	- - -
Colmán Mór	Colmán Mór
Diarmait	Diarmad
Fergus Cerrbél	Fergus Cerrbél
Conall Err Breg	Conall Earr Breagh

Baile Chuinn	**Laud 610 (High-king)**	**Laud 610 (Midland)**	**Marianus Scottus**	**Baile in Scáil**
Loígaire	Laegair[e] mac Neill		Loegaere mac Nell	Lóegaire
Corpre				Túathal Máelgarb
Ailill	Ailill Molt	Conall m. Neill	Aillill Molt	Lugaid mac Lóegairi
Lugaid	Lugaid mac Lægaire	Fiachraig m. Neill	Lugaed mac Loegaere	Muirchertach Mac Erca
Mac Ercéni	Muirchertach mac Ercæ	Ardgal m. Neill	Murchertach macc Ercca	Ainmire
Oengarb	Tuathal Mælgarb	Mane m. Cerbaill	Túathal Mailgarb	Báetán, Echu
Aed				
Aed Allán				
Diermait	**Dermait mac Cerbaill**	**Diarmaid m. Cerbaill**	**Diarmeat mac Fergusa**	**Díarmait**
Féchno	Domnall 7 Fergus	**Colman Mor m. Diarmata**	Fergus 7 Domnall	
Suibne	Bætan 7 Eochu		Muiredach Munderg	
	Anmere mac Setnai		Anmire mac Sétnai	
	Bætan		Baitan mac Muirchertaig 7 Echoid	Fergus, Domnall
	Aed mac Anmerech		Baetan mac Murchada	Aed Uaridnech
	Colman Rime 7 Aed Slaine		Anmire	Aed Sláine
	Aed hUairidnach	**Colman Beg m. Diarmada**	**Colman Bec mac Diarmata 7 Aed**	Aed Ollán
	Mæl Coba	**Suibne m. Colmain**	**Suibni mac Colma[i]n moir**	Domnall Mend
	Suibne Mend	**Fergus m. Colman**	Aed Slane mac Diarmata	Suibe Menn
	Domnull mac Aeda		Aed Alaeinn mac Domnaill	Blathmac mac Aeda
Oengus	Conall 7 Cellach	**Oengus m. Colman**	**Oengus mac Colma[i]n**	Díarmait Daithi
Domnall	Blathmac 7 Diarmuit	**Conall Guthbinn m. Suibne**	Suibni Mend mac Fachtna	Fínnachta
	Sechnassach m. Blathmeic		Domnall mac Aeda	
Blathmac, Diermait	Cenduælad m. Crunnmail	**Moel Doaid m. Suibne**	Conall 7 Cellach sa mac Mailecoba	Sechnussach
Snechta Fína	Finnac[h]ta Fledach		Bladmecc 7 Diarmait da macc Aeda Slane	Cend Fáelad
Níell	Loingsech m. Oengusa	**Diarmait m. Airmedaig**	Sechnasach mac Bladmeicc	
Kenning			Cendfaelad mac Bladmeicc	Loingsech
Kenning			Finnachta mac Dunchada	
Flann Asail	Congal m. Fergusa		Longsech mac Oengusa	
Furbaide	Fergal m. Maile Duin	**Murchad m. Diarmata**	Congall mac Fergusa	Fogartach, Congal mac Fergusae
Kenning	Fogartach m. Neill	**Diarmait Airmedach**	Fergal mac Maeleduin	Fergal
Kenning	Cinæth m. Irgalaich		Fogartag mac Cernaig	Flaithbertach
Kenning	Flathbertach m. Loingsig		Cinaid mac Irgalaig	Aed Allán
	Aed Ollan m. Fergaile	**Aed 7 Colgu**	Flaithbertach mac Longsig	
			Aed mac Fergael	
	Domnull m. Murc[h]ada	**Domnall m. Murchada**	**Domnall mac Murchada**	**Domnall mac Murchada**
	Niall Frosach		Niall mac Fergaele	Níall Frossach
	Dondchad m. Domnaill		**Donnchad mac Domnael**	**Donnchad**
	Aed Orddente		Aed mac Neil	Aed Ingor
	Conc[h]obor m. Dondchada		**Conchobor mac Donnchada**	**Conchobor mac Donnchada**
	Niall Caille		Niall mac Aeda	Níall Caille
	Mæl Sechnaill		**Maelsechnaell**	**Máel Sechnaill**
	Aed Findliath		Aed mac Nel	Oed Olach
	Fland m. Mælsechnaill		**Flann mac Moilsechnaill**	**Flann Sinna**

Rig Uisnig (LL)	**Ríg Themra tóebaige iar tain** Loegaire	**Mide Maigen Clainne Cuind**	**Annálad anall uile**	**At-tá sund forba fessa** Lóegaire
Conall Cremthaind	Ailill Molt	Conall		Ailill Molt
Fiachu	[meic Loegaire] Lugdach	Fíachu		Lugaid mac Lóegaire
	Murchertach mac Erca			Muirchertach
Ardgal	Tuathal Mael Garb	Ardgal		Túathal Máel Garb
Mane		Maine		
Diarmait mac Cerbaill	**Diarmait mac Cerbaill**	**Diarmait**	**Díarmait**	**Díarmait mac Cerbaill**
Colman Mór	Domnall, Fergus	**Colmán Mór**		Domnall, Fergus
	Baetan, Eochaid			Báetán, Eocho
	Ainmere mac Sétna			Ainmere
	Baetan mac nár Nainneda			Báetán
	Aed mac Ainmerech			Aed
	Colmán Rímid, Aed Sláne			Aed Sláine, Colmán Rímid
Colman Bec	Aed Allán	**Colmán Bec**		Aed Uairidnach
Suibne mac Colmain	Mael Coba	**Suibne**		Máel Coba
Fergus mac Colmain	Suibne	**Fergus**		Suibne
	Domnall mac Aeda			Domnall
Oengus mac Colmain	Cellach mac Maele Coba, Conall Cael	**Oengus**		Conall Cáel, Cellach Cairn
Conall Guthbind	Blaithmac, Diarmait	**Conall**		Blathmac, Díarmait
	Sechnasach mac Blaithmeic			Sechnasach
Mael Doid	Cend Faelad	**Máel Dóid**		Cenn Fáelad
Airmedach mac Conaill Guthbind	Finnaechta Fledach			Fínnachta
Diarmait mac Airmedaig	Loingsech mac Oengusa	**Díarmait**		Loingsech
	Congal Bregrusa			Congal
	Fergal			Fergal
	Cinaed			Fogartach
Murchad mac Diarmata		**Murchad**		Cináed
Dermait 7 Airmedach	Flaithbertach mac Loingsich	**Díarmait, Airmedach**		Flaithbertach
	Aed Allán			Aed Alláin
Aed 7 Colgu		**Aed, Colcu**		
Domnall mac Murchada	**Domnall**	**Domnall**	**Domnall**	**Domnall**
Niall mac Diarmata	Niall Frossach	**Níall**		Níall Frossach
Muridach mac Domnaill		**Muiredach**		
Dondchad mac Domnaill	**Dondchad mac Domnaill**	**Donnchad**		**Donnchad**
	Aed	**Domnall**		Aed Orddnide
		Muiredach		
		Ailill		
Conchobor mac Dondchada	**Conchobor mac Dondchada**	**Conchobar**		**Conchobor**
Mael Ruanaid mac Dondchada	Níall	**Máel Rúanaid**		Níall Frossach
Mael Sechnaill mac Mael Ruanaid	**Mael Sechnaill**	**Máel Sechnaill**		**Máel Sechnaill**
Lorcan mac Cathail	Aed Findlíath	Lorcán		Aed fergach Findlíath
Dondchad m Eochocain		**Donnchad**		
Fland mac Mael Sechnaill	**Fland mac Mail Sechnaill**	**Flann**	**Flann**	**Flann**

de regibus Hiberniae (*AI*)
Loegare macc Néill

Ailill Molt macc Nath I
Lugaid mc. Loegare
Muirchertach mc. Erca
Tuathal Moelgarb

Doarmait mc. Cerbaill
Fergus 7 Domnall
Anmere macc Setnai
Boetan macc Muirchertaich 7 Eochu Find

Aed mc. Ainmrech
Colman Rimed et Aed Sláne
Aed Alláin
Mael Coba mc. (A)eda
Suibne Mend
Domnall mc. Aeda
Conall Coel 7 Cellach
Diarmait 7 Blaithmacc
Sechnassach macc Bla(ith)meicc
Cen(d) Faelad macc Blaithmeicc
Finnachta Fledach mc. Dunc(ha)da
Loingsech mc. Oengussa
F(o)gartach

Congal mc. Fergussa
Fergal mc. Muile Duin
Fogartach hua Cernaich
Cinaed hua Conaing mc. Irgalaig
Flaithbertach mc. Loingsich
Aed Allain mc. Fergaile

Domnall mc. Muirchertach
Nial Frasach mc. Fergaile

Donnchad mc. Domnaill
Aed mc. Néill

Conchobur mc. Dondchada
Niall mc. Aeda
Mael Sechnaill mc. Mail Ruanaid
Aed mc. Néill

Fland macc Muil Sechnaill

Haec sunt credentium regum nomina Rawl.B.502
Loegaire mac Neill

Ailill Molt
Lugaid mac Laegairi
Murchertach mac Ercca
Tuathal Maelgarb

Diarmait mac Cerbaill
Domnall (a tri) 7 Fergus, Baetan 7 Eochaid
Ainmere
Baetan

Aed mac Anmerech
Colman Rimid 7 Aed Slaine
Aed hUaridnach
Mael-Coba
Suibne Menn mac Fiachna
Domnall mac Aeda
Conall 7 Cellach mac Maeli-Cobi
Blaithmac 7 Diarmait
Sechnassach mac Blaithmeic
Cenn-faelad
Finnachta Fledach mac Dunchada
Longsech mac Oengusa

Congal Cennmagar
Fergal mac Maeli-duin
Fogartach
Cinaed mac Irgalaich
Flaithbertach mac Loingseich
Aed Allain

Domnall mac Murchada
Niall Frossach

Donnchad mac Domnaill
Aed Oirdnide mac Neill

Conchobor mac Donnchada
Niall Caille
Mael-Sechnaill mac Maelruanaid
Aed Findliath

Flann mac Mael-Sechnaill

Eriu Og inis na naem
Loegaire

Oilill Molt
Lughaidh
Murchertac
Tuathal Maelgarb

Diarmaid
Domnall, Forgus
Cochaidh, Baedan Brige
Ainmire
Baedan
Aedh mac Ainmírech
Aedh Slaine, Colman Rímíd
Aedh Uairidhnach
Mael Cobha
Suibne
Domnaill
Conall Cael, Cellach
Diarmaid, Blathmac
Sechnasach
Cennfaelad
Findachta Fleadach
Loingsech

Congal Cindmagair
Ferghal
Fogartach

Flaithbertach
Aed Allan

Domnall mac Murchada
Niall Frassach

Donnchadh mac Domnaill
Aedh Ornidi

Conchobur m Donnchada
Niall Caille
Mael-Seclainn
Aedh Findliath

Flann Fodla

Do flaithesaib hErend ia creitim (*LL*)
Loegaire

Ailill Molt mac Dath I
Lugaid mac Loegairi
Murchertach mac Erca
Tuathal Máel Garb

Diarmait mac Cerbaill
Domnall 7 Fergus
Baetan 7 Eochaid
Ainmire mac Setnai
Baetan mac Nainneda
Aed mac Ainmerech
Colmán Rímid 7 Aed Sláne
Aed Uaridnach
Mael Coba
Suibne Mend
Domnall mac Aeda
Cellach 7 Conall Cáel meic Maeli Coba
Blaithmac 7 Diarmait
Sechnassach mac Blathmaic
Cend Faelad mac Crundmáel
Finnachta Fledach
Loingsech mac Oengusa

Congal Chind Magair
Fergal mac Maeli Dúin
Fogartach mac Néill
Cinaed mac Irgalaig
Flaithbertach mac Longsig
<A>ed Allain mac Fergaile

Domnall mac Murchada
Niall Frossach mac Fergaile

Dondchad mac Domnaill
Aed Ordnide

Conchobor mac Dondchada

Mael Sechnaill mac Mael Ruanaid
Aed Findliath

Fland mac Mael Sechnaill

Comaimserad rig n-Erenn 7 rig na coiced iar cretim in-so
Laegaire mac Neill

Ailill Molt
Lugaid mac laegairi
Muirchertach mac Erca
Tuathal Maelgarb

Diarmait mac Fergusa Ceirrbeoil
Domnall 7 Fergus
Eochu 7 Baetan
Ainmire mac Setna 7 Baetan mac Ninneda

Aed mac Ainmirech
Aed Slaine 7 Colman Rimid
Aed Uairidnach
Mael-Coba mac Suibne
Suibne Mend
Domnall mac Aeda
Conall 7 Cellach
Blathmac 7 Diarmait
Sechnasach 7 Cenn-Faelad
Finnachta Fledach mac Dunchada
Loingsech mac Oengusa
Congal CinnMagair
Fergal mac Maile-Duin
Fogartach ua Cernaig
Cinaed mac Irgalaich
Flaithbertach mac Loingsig

Aed Allan mac Fergaile

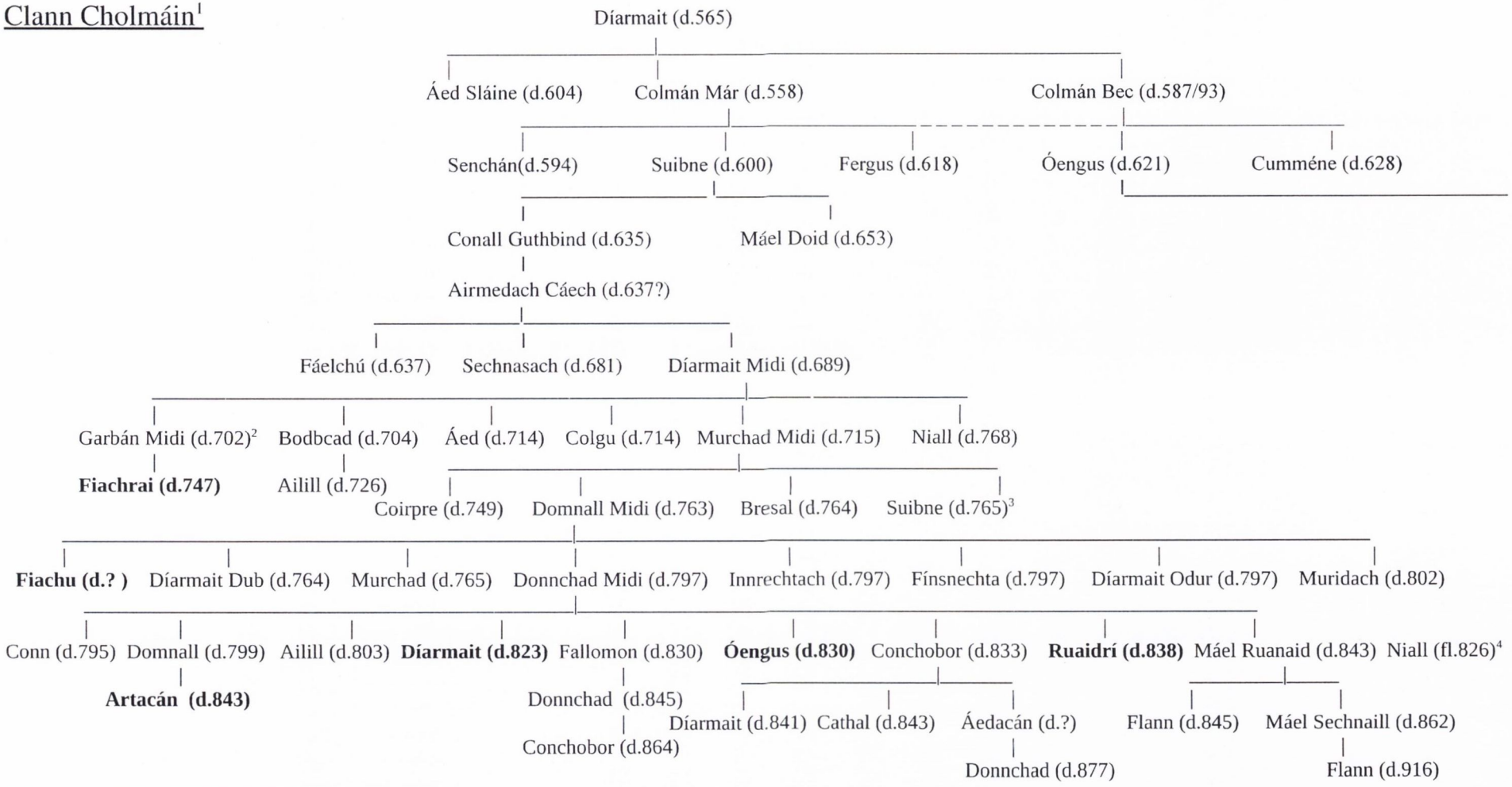
Domnall mac Murchada
Niall Frosach mac Fergaile

Donnchad mac Domnaill
Aed Oirdnide mac Neill

Conchobar mac Donnchada
Niall Caille mac Aeda
Mael-Sechlaind mac Maelruanaid
Aed Findliath mac Neill

Flann mac Mail-sechlainn

Clann Cholmáin[1]

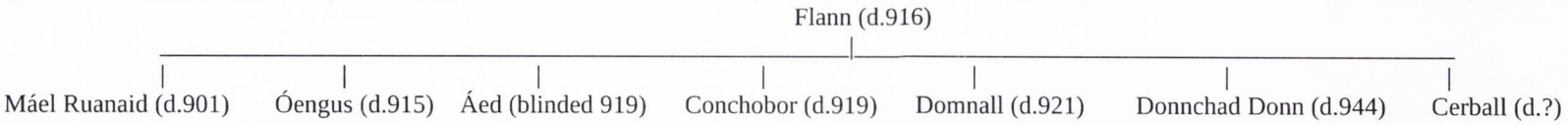


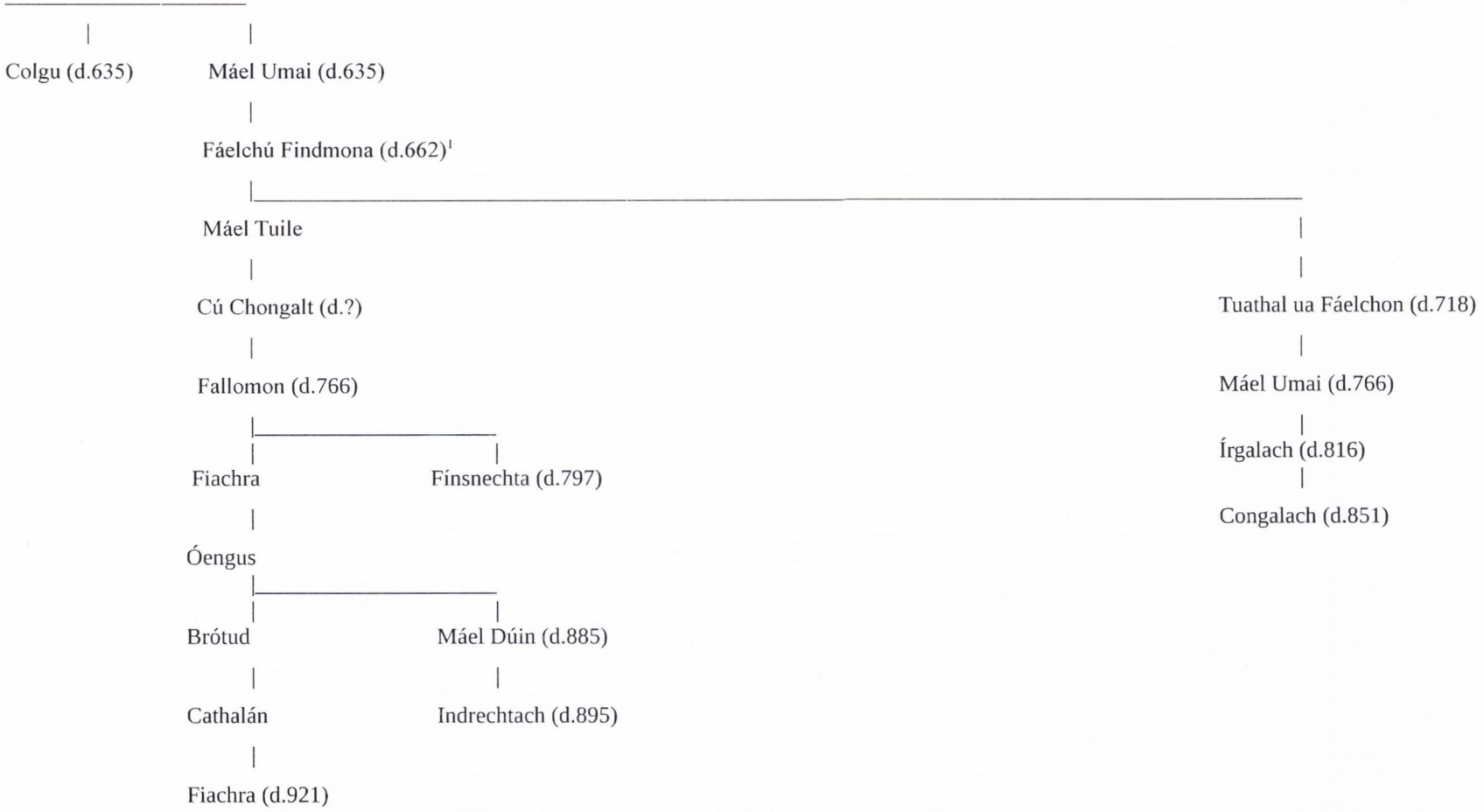
[1] It has been generally possible to draw this information from the annals, though in a few cases exact obits are unknown (d.?). Individuals not included in Jaski's table are marked in bold. See Bark Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession* 308-09. Recourse to the genealogies has been restricted to the Cóille Fallomain branch descended from Colmán Bec where annalistic information is often lacking. Byrne's work has been drawn upon for this section. See Paul Byrne, *Certain Southern Uí Néill kingdoms* 276 (Table 3).

[2] I assume Garbán was Díarmait's son, though there is no partonymic given in the aíinnals.

[3] He died along with two of his unnamed sons, not entered in here. These were not, as Jaski's table seems to suggest, two of Domnall Midi's sons.

[4] Described as a son of 'Díarmait', there are two possible dynasts in the previous generation who might have been his father. This position in the family-tree seems more likely than that proposed by Jaski where he is inserted in the next generation.


Flann (d.916)
Máel Ruanaid (d.901)
Óengus (d.915)
Áed (blinded 919)
Conchobor (d.919)
Domnall (d.921)
Donnchad Donn (d.944)
Cerball (d.?)



1 The Coílle Fallomuin genealogy in MS Rawlinson B.502 gives Fáelchú's father as one Findmon. But the later copies in *BB* and *LMG* do not have this generation instead identifying a single person, Fáelchú Findmona, a son of Máel Umai. This corresponds with the annalistic evidence where Fáelchú is given as a son of Máel Umai. *ATig* [662]; *CS* 658 [662]

Appendix 5

The 'disturbances' at *Óenach Tailten*

During our study we have encountered several instances of Clann Cholmáin involvement in so-called 'disturbances' at Tailtiu, oftentimes at the *óenach* held there. These incidents were clearly important but the 'disturbance' phenomenon is complex, confusing at times, and cannot be dealt with in the main body of the thesis without an overly long digression. As a result, the phenomenon will be given detailed examination here and the conclusions, such as they are, incorporated into the main body of the thesis as we come upon the individual incidents. This study of the 'disturbances' will begin by considering Tailtiu, the *óenach* held there and political activity at the site more generally.

In the Old Irish gnomic text known as the 'Triads of Ireland' the *óenach Tailten* or 'Fair of Tailtiu' is described as one of the 'three fairs of Ireland'.[1] The *óenach* was probably held annually at *Lugnasad*, an important festival held in early August marking the commencement of the harvest. As a major annual party, entertainment such as horse and chariot racing featured. In the absence of fully-fledged towns, the *óenach* may also have facilitated trade and exchange for what was otherwise a largely dispersed, rural population. But we should also point out that much of the detail we have about what the *óenach Tailten* actually involved is found in one of Cúán ua Lothcháin's early eleventh century poems.[2] This period also saw the revival of *óenach Tailten* following a long period of desuetude, which Cúán's poem in part marked, and hence it is difficult to be certain how far his description of the *óenach* corresponds with reality, to an extent even in the eleventh century, but certainly in the eighth and ninth. We should acknowledge that our understanding of the institution's political significance, including phenomena such as the 'disturbances', is largely determined by annalistic coverage, which in keeping with the nature of the format, is restricted to records of extraordinary events.[3]

For the political dimension of the *óenach,* which will primarily concern us here,[4] the

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1 The other two being the Óenach of Crúachain and of Colmán Ela, Connacht and Leinster affairs respectively. Kuno Meyer, *The Triads of Ireland* (Dublin 1906) 4 §35. The editor dates the language to the Old-Irish period. 'Their verbal system indeed is on the whole that of the Continental glosses, and would forbid us to put them later than the year 900'. *Ibid* x.

2 Edward Gwynn (ed), *The Metrical Dindshenchas* iv (5 vols. Dublin 1903-35 repr. Dublin 1991) 146-63.

3 'Disturbance' is the term used by the modern editors of these annalistic collections. By the later ninth century this extraordinary event had become the failure to hold the *óenach*. *AU* 873.6; *AU* 876.3; *AU* 878.7; *AU* 888.10; *AU* 889.4. Following this cluster of notices the annals no longer record the fact as the *óenach* appears to have fallen into a period of desuetude. There is one exception, at *CS* 891 there is a notice that Flann Sinna held the *óenach Tailten.*

4 Of the broader literature see Charles Doherty, 'Exchange and Trade in Early Medieval Ireland', *JRSAI* 110 (1980) 81-84; Cathy Swift, '*Óenach Tailten,* the Blackwater Valley and the Uí Néill kings of Tara', Alfred P. Smyth (ed), *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin 2000) 118; Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish Farming* (Dublin 1997) 99, 360, 458-61; Máire Mac Neill, *The*

scholarly debate has long been dominated by Binchy's article on the subject which opens with his stated aim to separate 'fact from fiction in the conventional accounts of it which are now common form in all modern textbooks of Irish history.'[5] His main target was of course Eoin MacNeill who had argued that the *óenach* was 'the principal assembly of Ireland, and to preside over it was a function of the king of Ireland.'[6] Binchy countered that to project such 'national' characteristics onto the *óenach* was anachronistic and he instead saw it simply as an Uí Néill gathering at which 'no external tribe or province is ever mentioned as taking part.'[7] We will return to consider these statements below.

But first it is clear from various Old Irish texts that a disturbance at an *óenach* was, as Charles-Edwards puts it, 'a more serious incident than a mere drunken brawl.'[8] The eighth-century *Airgíalla Charter Poem* includes a section about the four crimes the king of Uí Néill was allowed to judge without consulting the Airgialla.

> Mesc n-óenaig fair mesc cuirmthige mesc a dúnaid
> díguin im fhér a fhaithche is damnae mbúraig.
>
> The disruption of an assembly upon him, the disruption of a drinking-hall, the disruption of his encampment, violation of the grass of his *faithche*, it is an occasion of offence.[9]

Audacht Morainn also highlights the special character of assemblies, stresses a lord's rights and uses the term *blaí*, 'exemption' or 'immunity', to show that legal arrangments were in place to promote order at these events.

> Is tre f. fl. aran-demat tre blaí búraig im cech n-óenach cech comdeth cenn for costuthaib cuicilche a rechto ráin riuth. Óende blaí án ech n-óenag. Aile blaí díb dúnath. Tress blaí búaid cuirmthige co coímaib co mannaib móraib midchórto medarde baíth 7 gaíth, gnáith 7 ingnaith.
>
> It is through the justice of the ruler that the three immunities of violence at every assembly protect every lord(?) from the restraints(?) of collision during the course of his noble rule. The first immunity [is] the racing of horses at assemblies. The second immunity of them [is] a hosting. The third immunity [is] the privilege of the ale-house

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Festival of Lughnasa (Oxford 1962) 322-38.

5 D.A. Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara', *Ériu* 18 (1958) 113-38: 113.

6 Eoin MacNeill, *Phases of Irish History* (Dublin 1919 repr. Dublin 1937) 256.

7 Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu', 117.

8 T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695-743: the Rise and Fall of Dynasties', *Peritia* 16 (2002) 406.

9 Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray (ed), '*The Airgíalla Charter Poem:* Edition', eadem (ed), *Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005) 134-35 §32. See also: Máirín O Daly, 'A Poem on the Airgialla', *Ériu* xvi (1952) 182, 187 §32. The translation provided by the more recent editors for this stanza is quite close to that of O Daly though for the second line she has:
'to violate his protection in the matter of one (who is) in his precinct, it is a cause for anger.'
Bhreathnach and Murray support their reading by reference to the *maigen dígona*, a protected area around a freeman's house, which if violated, necessitated the payment of honour-price. See Fergus Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin 1988) 141; *idem*, *Early Irish Farming* 567-9.

> with friends and great abundances of mead-circuit, where foolish and wise, familiars and strangers are intoxicated.[10]

While violence and disorder were clearly deplored by these texts, they might well suggest that such outbreaks were not uncommon. Indeed according to the *Vita Tripartita* a specific *blaí* was applied to the area of Tailtiu during the *óenach* which seems to be further confirmation that disruption and violence were regarded as distinct possibilities to be prepared for.[11] The *blaí* does suggest an aspiration to reduce or curtail violence and it was probably 'necessary precisely because so many feuds and enmities might otherwise have erupted into violence.'[12] While the *Vita Tripartita* provides but a solitary example where this immunity had come under threat, 'i lláithib Donnchodo', 'during the reign of Donnchad',[13] this stands in stark contrast to the annalistic evidence, to be considered later, which clearly shows that violence and disruption were regular features of the *óenach Tailten.*

At this point we should also point out that the outbreak of violence at Tailtiu must be considered in the context of Tailtiu's close association with Tara, something which is clear from our earliest sources. Tírechán tells us that Patrick:

> venit ad Taltenam, ubi fit agon regale
> came to Tailtiu, where there is (held) a royal assembly[14]

This passage is quickly followed by his encounter with Loéguire at Tara. Adomnán tells us that the synod which sought to excommunicate Columba, and which probably comprised the leading churchmen in Uí Néill territories, met at Tailtiu.[15] But it is the eighth-century *Airgialla Charter Poem,* cited above, which is most explicit as it labels the Uí Néill overking, 'lord of Tailtiu' in the opening line.[16] Hence violence at Tailtiu, even if it is unclear whether this took place during an *óenach,* must be regarded as politically significant.

There are also parallels to consider. The evidence for other large public gatherings, some of

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[10] Fergus Kelly, *Audacht Morainn* (Dublin 1976) 8-11 §28. *DIL* s.v. 1.blaí. Disturbing a Fair (*mescbuid aenaig*) is also listed among several serious offences in the Old Irish tract on distraint, *Chetharshlicht Athgabála.* See *CIH* 401.15= *AL* i 231.

[11] This information appears in the form of Patrick blessing the *blaí,* a detail added by the author of the *Vita Tripartita* to the textual core concerning Tailtiu and the church of Donaghpatrick derived from Tírechán. See: Kathleen Mulchrone (ed), *Bethu Phátraic: The Tripartite Life of Patrick* (Dublin 1939) 46-47. cf: Ludwig Bieler (ed), *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979)132-33. It seems that the term *blaí* was also used to denote the physical area where violence was prohibited. See Swift, '*Óenach Tailten,* the Blackwater Valley and the Uí Néill kings of Tara', 113-16.

[12] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 558. According to the Heptads, an *óenach* was among the places where battles were prohibited. *CIH* 50.28=*AL* 302ff.

[13] Surely a reference to Donnchad Midi (d.797). Mulchrone, *Bethu Phátraic: The Tripartite Life of Patrick* 47.

[14] Bieler, *The Patrician documents in the Book of Armagh* 132-33 § 9.

[15] *VSC*, 468-71.

[16] 'Ar-síasair coimdiu Tailten suidi coimdemmar' 'Let us estimate the seats over which the lord of Tailtiu presided'. Bhreathnach and Murray, '*The Airgíalla Charter Poem:* Edition', 129. A later glossator added 'temrae scéo', 'and Tara' immediately before 'Tailten' which 'underlines the symbiotic relationship between these two sites as focal centres of superior kingship in Ireland.' *ibid* 140.

which includes reference to outbreaks of violence or disruption may also give us some sense of the dynamic of these events, their political dimension and the phraseology used by the annalists in recording such incidents.

Church sites/festivals:

AU 781.2 Magna comixtio i nArdd Machae in Quinquagissima | die in qua cecidit Condalach m. Ailello.
A great disturbance in Ard Macha on Quinquagesima day, in which Condálach son of Ailell fell.

In this entry, as with many below, the Latin term *comixtio* is that translated as 'disturbance'. In this case it is unclear who instigated the violence or the reasons behind it. This incident, like several below, took place on Whitsunday.[17]

AU 800.4 Ailill m. Fergusa, rex deisceirt Bregh, traiectus est de equo suo in circio ferie filii Cuilinn Luscan, 7 continuo mortuus est.
Ailill son of Fergus, king of the south of Brega, was thrown from his horse around [*sic*] the Feast of MacCuilinn of Lusca, and died immediately.[18]

AU 819.8 Cengciges Airdd Machae cen aigi cen tucbail scrine, | 7 cumusc ann i torchair m. Echdach m. Fiachnae.
At Ard Macha Whitsun [5 June] was not [publicly] celebrated nor the shrine taken on tour; and there was a disturbance in which the son of Echaid son of Fiachna fell.

In this Irish entry the term translated as 'disturbance' is *cumusc*, meaning 'the act of mixing together, commingling' and in the extended sense of 'disturbance, strife, conflict, battle, brawl'.[19] It is the verbal noun of *con-mesca*, 'mixes together, commingles, joins, unites' and in a hostile sense, 'joins issue with, attacks, routs'.[20] *Cumusc* seems then to share a similar semantic range to *commixtio*. Again we do not know who instigated the violence but the victim, the son of Echaid, was a son of a former king of the Ulaid.[21] On this occasion the violence clearly interfered with the normal religious ceremonies and practices due to take place.

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[17] *Cengciges*, used in the later examples, appears to be a loan-word derived from *quinquagesima*. See Rudolf Thurneysen, *A Grammer of Old Irish* (Dublin 1946 repr Dublin 2003) 569 §917.

[18] According to Charles Doherty: '*Circius* (Hiberno-Latin for *Circus*) is one of the Latin words used to gloss *óenach*. I would suggest that the adoption by major churches of the function of *óenach* is a response to the need for local exchange.' Doherty, 'Exchange and Trade in Early Medieval Ireland' 81. It is easy to see how gatherings at major church sites on important feast days could take on such functions and probably no accident that the *óenach* held at the traditional sites began to fall into disuse about the same time.

[19] *DIL* s.v. cummasc.

[20] *DIL* s.v. con-mesca.

[21] T.M. Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* i (2vols. Liverpool 2006) 278 n.4.

AU 893.2 C*u*musc a Cengcigis i nArd Macha et*e*r Cen*e*l nEog*ain* 7 Ultu du i torcradu*r* ili.
A disturbance in Ard Macha at Whitsun between the Cenél nEógain and the Ulaid, in which many fell.

CS 893 Cumusc cengigis a nArd Mac*h*a etir Cinel nEogain ocus Ulltoib*h*, dú attorchair sochaid*h*e .i. eidir Aidéid mac Laigne ocus Flait*h*berac*h* mac Murcha*d*a, cor scar Maolbrígde. Ríar Maolbrigde iarsin, ocus enig*h* Padraicc o cuigedib*h* hErend, la gabail a naitire, tricha sect ccumal et cet*h*rar hi crocaib o Ulltoib*h*, cenmot*h*ad cealla ocus manchu.

The contention of Whitsuntide at ArdMacha, between the Cinel Eoghain and the Ultonians (*i.e.* between Aideid, son of Laighne, and Flaithbhertach, son of Murchadh), in which many were slain, but Maelbrighde separated *them.* The award of Maelbrighde afterwards, and *the satisfaction* for Patrick's honour from the Provincials of Erinn,[22] besides receiving their hostages, was thirty times seven cumhals, and four of the Ultonians to be hanged, besides churches and gifts.

This entry gives no detail on who instigated the violence as such. Aidéid was king of the Ulaid while Flaithbertach was from Cenél nEógain and described as 'king of Ailech' on his death three years later.[23] The clash of two local northern groups almost a century later is recorded as follows:

AU 986.1 C*u*masc mor, .i. i nArd Macha, isin Domnuch ria Lughnasadh eter H. Echach 7 H. Niallan du i torchair m. Trenair m. Celecan 7 alalii.

A great disturbance in Ard Macha on the Sunday [25 July] before Lammas between the Uí Echach and the Uí Nialláin, and in it the son of Trénar son of Celecán and others fell.

Further examples of gatherings at major religious sites which also saw violence include the death of Níall 'rigdamna Teabt*h*a' at the hands of the Calraige in Clonmacnoise on the feast of Ciarán in 999. The construction used, 'do marbad*h* do Calraig*h*ib*h*', is unambiguous.[24] In 1038 we find a record of a clash between the Uí Maine and Delbna 'in the middle of Cluain Moccu Nóis' also on the feast of Ciarán. The Clonmacnoise texts use the straightforward construction 'Cat eidir/cath iter' followed by the two parties. *AU* is somewhat different reading:

AU 1038.5 Maidhm for Huibh Maine ria Dealbna for lar Cluana M. Noiss i nAine Feile Ciaran in quo multi occisi sunt.

A defeat was inflicted on the Uí Maine by the Delbna in the Middle of Cluain Moccu Nóis on Friday, the feast of St. Ciarán [9 Sept.], and many were slain there.

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[22] Read 'Provinces' as suggested in Hennessy's n. 4 at 172.
[23] *CS* 896.
[24] *CS* 997 [999]; *AFM* 998 [999].

Maidm 'breaking (a battle), defeat, rout, flight' is the verbal noun of *maidid*, 'breaks, bursts' and in the extended sense 'is routed, flees'. The preposition *for* introduces the vanquished party, *re/ria* the victor.[25] But importantly we can appreciate how such major gatherings, whatever the location, would throw lots of high status individuals together and latent tensions, rivalries and animosities had the potential to come to the surface and lead to violence.

Other secular sites:

AU 827.6 Coscradh oenaigh Colmain la Muiredhach for Laigniu Desgabair in quo ceciderunt plurimi.

A disturbance of the Fair of Colmán [caused by an attack] on the Laigin Desgabair by Muiredach, and very many fell therein.

In this example the word translated as 'disturbance' is *coscradh*, 'overthrowing, destroying, hacking, tearing apart, disturbing'.[26] It is the verbal noun of *con-scara*, 'destroys, breaks, knocks down, kills, hacks, dismembers, slaughters'.[27] The wording in this case would seem to clearly suggest that the aggressor, introduced by the preposition *la*, was Muiredach. This was a Leinster affair and he can probably be identified as the son of Ruaidrí from the Uí Fháeláin branch of Uí Dúnlainge and king of Leinster at this time.[28] Though no-one is named specifically, the *Laigin Dessgabair*, which generally refers to Uí Cheinnselaig, were clearly the recipients of his assault, introduced by the preposition *for*. The *óenach* of Colmán may have been near the site of the saint's church, Land Ela in Tír Cell, or in Mag Lifi where there was supposedly a race-track associated with the saint.[29] In 942 the death is recorded of Fáelán king of Leinster who died of a fall at the *óenach* of Colmán further confirming the link between this event and the kings of Leinster.[30]

AU 841.5 Slogadh la Feidlimid co rici Carmain. Slogad la Niall ara cenn co rice Magh nOchtair.

Feidlimid led an army as far as Carmain. Niall marched against him to Mag Óchtar.[31]

This of course refers to the famous king of Cashel, Fedilmid mac Crimthainn, who was opposed by

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[25] *AU* 1038.5; *CS* 1036 [1038]; *ATig* 1038. *DIL* s.v. maidm, maidid.
[26] *DIL* s.v. coscrad.
[27] *DIL* s.v. con-scara.
[28] He is described as such in his obit at *AU* 829.1.
[29] See Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 285 n.4.
[30] *CS* 941 [942]; *AFM* 940 [942].
[31] Also: *AFM* 840 [841].

Níall Caille, the Uí Néill overking. Carman was the site of an important *óenach* associated with the kingship of Leinster.[32] By coming to Carman Fedilmid boldly claimed to be in control of Leinster. The previous year he had invaded Mide and Brega and 'halted at Temair'.[33] Taking possession of politically sensitive sites, however briefly, was clearly an important element in his strategy to challenge Uí Néill hegemony.

AFM 859 [861]	Atnuad*h*ad*h* aenaig*h* Roig*h*ne la Cerb*h*all, mac nDung*h*aile. The renewal of the fair of Roighne by Cearbhall, son of Dunghal.
FA 861 §280	Oenach Raighne do dhénamh la Cearbhall mc. Dunlaing. The Oenach Raigne was held by Cerball son of Dúnlang.

The location here would seem to have been in Osraige and the king was the powerful ruler of that region.[34] The practice of regularly holding an *óenach* at the traditional sites appears to have been gradually abandoned, including at Tailtiu to be discussed below, before we find records of sporadic renewals or revivals, presumably one-off events designed to bolster the political standing of a particular king. Whether this can be regarded as an early example of such a renewal or whether Cerball simply held the *óenach*, is open to debate.

Reference to an 'aonaig*h* Life' held by Congalach mac Máel Mithig in 956 can probably be regarded similarly to Fedilmid's activity at Carman, namely as a provocative act designed to humiliate a political rival and demonstrate power. Whether the reference is to the *óenach Colmáin* or the *óenach Carmain*, the event was clearly a Leinster one.[35] Further examples from the annals which would seem to confirm the link between the *óenach Carmain* and the kingship of Leinster include:

AU 1033.4	Aenach Carmain la Donnchad mc. Gilla Patraicc iar ngabail righi Laigen. The Fair of Carman was held by Donnchad son of Gilla Pátraic after he had taken the kingship of Laigin.[36]

In this case the holding of the Fair appears to have marked the commencement of Donnchad's reign or at least his claim to the kingship of Leinster. It may be that he did not make this claim a reality

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[32] Ó Murchadha has made a convincing case for identifying Silliothill in the parish of Carnalway, Co.Kildare, as the location of Carman. This is about half way between Naas and Dún Ailinne, two sites intimately connected with the kingship of (north) Leinster. Diarmuid Ó Murchadha, 'Carman, site of Óenach Carmain: A Proposed Location', *Éigse* xxxiii (2002) 57-70. This location in north Leinster certainly makes sense in this case as Mag Óchtar has been identified as Cloncurry, near the northern border of modern Co. Kildare.

[33] *AU* 840.4.

[34] Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i 314 n.5.

[35] See *AU* 956.3; *CS* 955 [956] ; *AFM* 954 [956].

[36] Also *ATig* [1033]; *AFM* 1033.

until 1036 when he blinded the previous holder, Donnchad of Uí Muiredaig.[37]

We can draw a number of lessons from the above material. Large gatherings of high status people, whether at the traditional *óenach* site or a major church site, occasionally saw political tensions and rivalries break into outright violence. While a powerful king would claim to demonstrate his power and standing at such a gathering, it also clearly provided an opportunity for a rival to challenge that standing. As the *óenach* sites were associated with a particular territory and its kingship, control could be claimed by occupying the site, even briefly, or presiding over the *óenach* itself.

The 'disturbances' at Tailtiu.

It should be noted that Tailtiu is not named explicitly in every entry reproduced below. For example, the 777 entry involving Donnchad is recorded simply as 'Cumuscc ind oenaigh'.[38] Just as an annalist might omit a well-known individual's patronymic, it seems likely that when referring to a well-known *óenach,* the precise identification could be omitted. In these cases it has been assumed that the *óenach Tailten* is meant, something which seems reasonable from the individuals involved and the general context. As well as the 'disturbance' entries themselves, several other entries are also included which may help us interpret them, and of course Clann Cholmáin's involvement in them.

AU 717.6 Comixtio agonis Talten la Fogartach ubi ceciderunt filius Rubai 7 filius Duib Sleibhe.
Disturbance of the Fair of Tailtiu by Fogartach, in which Ruba's son and Dub Sléibe's son fell.[39]

AU 733.7 Coscrath Cathail do Domnall a Tailtae 7 coscradh Fallomuin do Chathal a Tlactghu.
The overthrow of Cathal by Domnall in Tailtiu, and the overthrow of Fallomun by Cathal in Tlachtga.

AU 746.11 Sarughadh Domnaigh Phatraicc; .ui. cimmidi cruci*ati.*
Violation of sanctuary at Domnach Pátraic, six captives being hanged.

AU 774.7 Comixtio agonis la Donnchad.
Disturbance of the fair by Donnchad

AU 777.6 Cumuscc ind oenaigh la Donnch*ad for* Ciannacht. In coccadh it*er* Donnch*ad* 7 Congalach.
Disturbance of the assembly by Donnchad against the Ciannacht. Warfare between Donnchad and Congalach.

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[37] *AU* 1036.3. This may account for the discrepancies found in the various Leinster king-lists regarding the length of his reign. See Edel Bhreathnach, 'Kings, the kingship of Leinster and the regnal poems of *laídshenchas Laigen*: a reflection of dynastic politics in Leinster, 650-1150', Smyth (ed), *Seanchas* 299-312: 307.

[38] *AU* 777.6.

[39] See also: *ATig* [717] Cumusc Aenaigh Thaillten la Fogartach, ubí ceci*dit* m*ac* Maile ruba m*aic* Duib Slebe.
AI 716 [717] Cummasc Oenaich Talten la Fogartach. The remainder of the *AU* entries have no counterparts in other collections.

AU 784.9 Aduentus reliquiarum filii Eirc ad ciuitatem Tailten.
The coming of the relics of Erc's son to the city of Tailtiu.

AU 789.17 Sarug*ad* Bachlu I*s*u 7 minn Patraic la Donnch*ad* m. nDomnaill oc Raith Airthir ar oenach.
Dishonouring of the staff of Jesus and relics of Patrick by Donnchad son of Domnall at Ráith Airthir at an assembly.

AU 791.5 Cathc(*h*)oscradh re n|Donnch*ad* a Tailti Ducairn m. Cairthin f*or* Aedh nIngor in quo ceci*derunt* Cathal m. Ecdhach, rex nepotum Cremhthain, 7 Mael Fothartaich m. Artrach 7 Domnall m. Colggen.
A battle-overthrow was inflicted in Tailtiu Ducairn Meic Cairthinn (?) by Donnchad on Aed Ingor, in which Cathal son of Echaid, king of Uí Chremthainn, and Mael Fothartaig son of Artri, and Domnall son of Colgu fell.

AU 808.4 Slog*ad* Muirgussa m. Tomaltaigh co Connachtaibh la Conchob*ur* m. nDonnch*ad*a co rici Thir in Oenaigh. 7 fugerunt repente post tres noctes, 7 migrauit Aedh m. Neill in ob[u]iam eorum | 7 combussit terminos Midi eorumque fuga capris 7 hinulis simulata est.
An expeditionary force of Muirgius son of Tomaltach, with the Connachtmen, [was led] by Conchobur son of Donnchad as far as Tír ind Aenaig, and they hastened away suddenly after three nights, and Aed son of Niall marched to oppose them, and burned the borders of Mide; and their flight was likened to that of goats and kids.

AU 811.2 Derbaid aige Dia Sathairnn oinigh Ta|ilten conna·recht ech na carpat la Aedh m. Neill, i*d* est muinnt*er* Tamlachta dod·rorbai iar sarug*ad* t*er*mainn Tamlachtai Maele Ruain du U Neill, 7 postea familiae Tamlachtae multa munera reddita sunt.
The fair of Tailtiu was prevented from being held on Saturday under the aegis of Aed son of Niall, neither horse nor chariot arriving there. It was the community of Tamlacht who caused the boycott after the Uí Néill had violated the sanctuary of Tamlacht of Mael Ruain; and many gifts were subsequently made to the community of Tamlacht.

AU 827.5 Coscradh oinaigh Taillten f*or* Gailengaibh la Concobu*r* m. nDonnch*ad*a in quo ceci*derunt* multi.
A disturbance of the Fair of Tailtiu [caused by an attack] on the Gailenga by Conchobor son of Donnchad, and many fell therein.

AU 831.5 Oenach Tailten do cumusc oc Foradhain im scrin M. Cuilind 7 im minda Patraicc condid·aptha ile de.
The fair of Tailtiu was disturbed at the platforms owing to [dissension over] the shrine of MacCuilinn and the halidoms of Patrick, and many died as a result.

AU 873.6 Oenach Tailten cen aigi sine causa iusta 7 digna, q*uod* non audiuimus ab antiquis temporibus, cecidit.
The fair of Tailtiu was not held, although there was no just and worthy reason for this-something which we have not known [to happen] from ancient times.[40]

The difficulties in interpreting this evidence are illustrated by the varying treatment the 827 entry received from MacNeill and Binchy. MacNeill proposed the possibility that Conchobar (d.833) 'failed to hold the Assembly, being preoccupied with the hostile activities of the Norsemen' and 'with the equally troublesome activities of Feidlimid, king of Cashel.'[41] He went on to suggest that

[40] See *AU* 876.3; *AU* 878.7; *AU* 888.10; *AU* 889.4 for similar notices.
[41] MacNeill, *Phases of Irish History* 257.

the Gailenga 'attempted to hold the Assembly on their own account but were forcibly prevented by the high-king.'[42] Binchy pointed out that 'the text of the entry does not contain a single word which could be used in favour of this curious construction.'[43] He continues, 'on the contrary, it has the stereotyped formula found in all the other cases.'[44] But having alerted us to this 'stereotyped formula', Binchy proceeds to treat the various entries quite inconsistently. For example, he says the 717 'disturbance' was carried out by Fogartach but that of 777 was carried out by the Cíannachta.[45] A consistent translation policy from one entry to the next would surely mean placing the blame for the 777 'disturbance' with Donnchad. In short, it seems Binchy translated the various entries as best suited his overall aim to undermine the then prevalent notion that the *óenach Tailten* was a national assembly. His starting point was the assumption that as a purely Uí Néill institution, *óenach Tailten* was always presided over by the Uí Néill overking and that any 'disturbance' was directed against him by a challenger. This position was maintained against the evidence, because if he translated the entries consistently they would not only fail to support his interpretation but indeed would flatly contradict it.

On first examination, the wording of the 717 seems clear. Fogartach, the offending party, is introduced with the preposition *la.* He was a member of the Uí Chernaig branch of Síl nÁedo Sláine and while he later did secure the Uí Néill overkingship, the position was held by Fergal mac Máele Dúin at this stage. In this case, Fogartach was probably attempting to challenge Fergal's authority and highlight his own overking credentials.

The wording of the 733 example is also quite clear recording Cathal's defeat by Domnall at Tailtiu but his victory over Follaman at Tlachtga. Domnall was certainly not Uí Néill overking at this stage but, as discussed elsewhere, he may have been a midland deputy or held some broad authority in the 'southern Uí Néill' region.

The 774 entry, though extremely laconic, would seem to suggest that Donnchad was the instigator. If Níall Frossach was still Uí Néill overking and in a position to convene the *óenach* then it may be that Donnchad was following up his recent hostings into the North with a further display of aggression as he pushed for supremacy. In 777 he caused another disturbance. This came after a series of impressive victories over Munster forces for Donnchad and it seems possible he was himself overking by this stage.[46] The year 777 also saw him demonstrate his power over the

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[42] MacNeill, *Phases of Irish History* 257.

[43] Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu', 120.

[44] *ibid.*

[45] *ibid*, 118.

[46] This came after a series of impressive victories over Munster forces for Donnchad. *AU* 775.5; *AU* 776.11. In the first instance Donnchad is named explicitly while in the latter the involvment of 'alii de filiis Domnaill' is recorded, quite possibly including Donnchad. The edition of *AU* is correct on this point, both MSS clearly reading 'Domnall' and we are not dealing with sons of Donnchad as suggested by translations found in Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle of Ireland* i

Leinstermen by adding their forces to his own in an attack on Brega.[47] It is quite possible that this was directed specifically at Uí Chonaing and that the various events of 777, the hosting to Brega with the Laigin, warfare between him and Congalach and the 'disturbance', can be viewed together.[48] Congalach belonged to the Uí Chonaing branch of Síl nÁedo Sláine which had held the kingship of the Ciannachta Breg since the time of his father.[49] Swift convincingly argues that an Uí Néill overking wishing to preside at *óenach Tailten* had first to master any local political opposition. Ráth Airthir and the Patrician church of Donaghpatrick were in the immediate vicinity of Tailtiu and the entire area was of importance to the Síl nÁedo Sláine of northern Brega. The 'disturbance' of 777 and ongoing violence between Donnchad and Uí Chonaing show that despite his successes in Munster and the North, the Clann Cholmáin king still faced opposition in Brega.[50] But in fact while the wording of the 777 entry, 'la Donnch*ad for* Ciannacht', seems quite clear, namely that the 'disturbance' was carried out by Donnchad and directed against the Ciannachta, it has been interpreted in a number of different ways.

Paul Byrne has made an interesting suggestion which if adopted would allow us view the structure of these entries somewhat differently. He firstly notes the 'use of a stock formula to describe these incidents' which has 'sometimes been taken to mean that the king, whose name is governed by the preposition *la* disturbed the fair.'[51] But instead, he suggests that 'the first clause, referring to the disturbance, should stand on its own as a statement that there was a conflict at a particular fair; the second, should read as indicating the outcome of the disturbance.'[52] Byrne argues that these 'entries can be substantiated by analogy with similar accounts of battles in the annals; a conventional phrase used to describe battles is: bellum 'x' *la* (or *re*) 'y' (*for* 'z')'.[53] He takes the 717 entry as an example:

AU 717.6 Comixtio agonis Talten la Fogartach ubi ceci*derunt* filius Rubai 7 filius Duib Sleibhe.

Byrne concludes that this 'should be interpreted as an account of *a* conflict at the *óenach*, involving

242; *idem, Early Christian Ireland* 595. See MS TCD 1282 (H.1.8) 33va5; MS Rawlinson B.489 16va30 available at: image.ox.ac.uk/images/bodleian/msrawlb489/f16v.jpg. The unnamed sons of Domnall involved may also have included Innrechtach who died in 797 or Muridach who died in 802. *AU* 797.1; *AU* 802.1. Another possibility is Fíachu who appears only in the 'Ríg Uisnig' kinglist. Though his positioning in that list suggests he died during his father's reign, i.e. before 763. *LL* i 197.

[47] *AU* 777.3.

[48] *AU* 777.6.

[49] *AU* 742.7.

[50] The warfare which broke out in 777 between Donnchad and Congalach continued into the following year *AU* 778.1.

[51] Byrne, *Certain Southern Uí Néill kingdoms* 49.

[52] *ibid.*

[53] *ibid*, 50. Ó Riain provides a paralled in how the promulgation of *cáin* law is recorded. See Pádraig Ó Riain, 'A misunderstood annal a hitherto unnoticed *cáin*', *Celtica* xxi 561-66: 561-62.

the otherwise unknown *filius Rubai* and *filius Duib Sléibhe*, in which Fogartach was victorious.'[54] While there are several examples which do not follow the stock formula outlined above, for those that do Byrne has provided a credible model which is more consistent in its treatment of the evidence than that provided by Binchy. The 774 and 777 entries could then be interpreted as recording 'disturbances' at Tailtiu, in which Donnchad was simply involved and from which he emerged victorious. Perhaps in recording an outbreak of violence or disruption, the annalist is not primarily concerned with recording who instigated the violence but rather how it progressed, who was most disruptive, and who was the ultimate victor. In short, we may not necessarily have to regard each 'disturbance' entry as structured to record a political challenge by an attending king against a presiding king.

The 827 entry, involving Conchobar, could be regarded in the same way, as simply recording the outcome of this clash rather than necessarily commenting on who instigated the violence.[55]Byrne's approach would not seem to impact on the reading of the 733 entry, nor that of 791, as in these cases the 'stock formula' is not used. In the former case the agent is introduced with the preposition *do* while in the latter the preposition *for* introduces the vanquished party, *re* the victor.

Conclusions?

As we have seen, the question of whether non-Uí Néill kings participated at *óenach Tailten* has been important in shaping the interpretations of previous scholars as to the significance of the event and of politically motivated violence at it. The abandonment, hiatus and subsequent revival of *óenach Tailten* must also be considered in this context.

AFM 894 [899] Athnuuadhucchadh aenaigh Connacht la Tadhg, mac Conchobhair, 7 athnuadhucchadh aonaigh Taillten lá Diarmaid, mac Cearbhaill, 7 a náighe dibhlinnibh leó.
The renewal of the fair of Connaught by Tadhg, son of Conchobhar; and the renewal of the fair of Tailltin by Diarmaid, son of Cearbhall; and both were celebrated by them.

The above entry, found only in *AFM*, would be significant if it demonstrated the ability of a king outside Uí Néill territory to hold the *óenach Tailten*. Díarmait was the king of Osraige.[56] If accurate, it seems that Díarmait held *óenach Tailten* early in his reign.[57]

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[54] Byrne, *Certain Southern Uí Néill kingdoms* 50.

[55] The Gailenga were a local and perhaps ancient political grouping. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* 466-67.

[56] His father renewed or held an *óenach* in that territory in 861. See: *AFM* 859 [861]; *FA* 861 §280. The other annal entries relating to Díarmait are: *AFM* 900 [905]; *FA* 908 §423; *FA* 910 §431, 912 §443; *AFM* 914 [916]; *CS* 928 [929] *AFM* 927 [929]. Noticeable is that much of this information is not to be found in the older annal texts.

[57] Establishing the succession to the kingship of Osraige at this point is difficult. The very well documented Cerball son of Dúnlang died in 888. He is followed in the *LL* regnal list by 'Riacan m*ac* Dungaile'. See: *LL* i 190. A record of

AU 916.5 Niall m. Aedha i rrighe Temrach 7 Oenach Tailten do aigh[e] lais, quod*h* multis temporibus p*re*termisum est.
Niall son of Aed became king of Temair and held the Fair of Tailtiu, which had been neglected for a long time.[58]

Certainly this and the subsequent renewals of the *óenach* are best considered as specific demonstrations of political power where the ancient prestige of Tailtiu was called upon. In this case, Níall Glúndub was clearly marking the commencement of his reign as Uí Néill overking following the death of Flann Sinna. In seems reasonable to judge the following revivals, of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, somewhat differently to the earlier evidence.

AU 1007.10 [secondary hand] Athnugudh aenaigh Thailltean la Mael Sechnaill. Ferdomnach i comarbus Col*uim Cille* a comur*le* fer nEr*enn* isin oenach sin.
The assembly of Tailtiu was revived by Mael Sechnaill. Ferdomnach [was installed] in the successorship of Colum Cille by the counsel of the men of Ireland in that assembly.[59]

Again, this was a once-off event and should probably be considered as part of Máel Sechnaill's attempt to bolster his position in the face of the challenge posed by Brian Boru. It seems that to mark this occasion, Cúán ua Lothcháin wrote his famous poem about Tailtiu.[60] The two twelfth century revivals are recorded as follows:

CS 1116 [1120] Aonac*h* Taillten do denum la Tairdealbac*h* .h. Concupair.
The fair of Taillten was celebrated by Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair.[61]

ATig [1168] Aenach Taillte*n* la Ruaidhrí Ua *Con*cob*air* la *rí*g Er*enn* isi*n* bl*iadain* si.
The Fair of Teltown (was held) in this year by Ruaidri Húa Conchobair, king of Ireland.[62]

Swift refers to evidence, which while scanty, covers a long chronological time-span and suggests that the significance of the site and hence the *óenach* was recognised by non-Uí Néill players. This includes the *Airgialla Charter Poem's* discussion of the seating arrangements of the lord of Tailtiu relative to the other provincial kings, the possible presence of Cathal mac Finnguine there in 733[63], the hosting by Muirgius king of Connacht there in 808, the community of Tallaght's success in

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a victory won by him is found at *AFM* 888 [892] but we have no further information. Díarmait then seems to have been the next king though it is not clear when exactly his reign began.

58 Also *CS* 915 [916]: Oenac*h* Taillten datnuag*h*ad*h* la Niall. The Fair of Taillten renewed by Niall; *AFM* 915 [917]: Aonach Tailltin do at*h*nuad*h*ucc*h*ad*h* la Niall. The Fair of Tailltin was renewed by Niall.

59 Also *CS* 1005 [1007]; *AFM* 1006 [1007].

60 Edward Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas* iv 159ff.

61 Also *ATig* [1120]; *AFM* 1120.

62 Also *AFM* 1168.

63 Though as noted in the body of the thesis, it is far from certain that this is the Cathal in question.

preventing the holding of the *óenach* in 811, Díarmait of Osraige's hosting there in 899 and the two twelfth-century Ua Conchobhair kings who held the *óenach*.

Admittedly much of this evidence is difficult to interpret. For example, one wonders whether the *Airgialla Charter Poem*, a text written to 'explain' and underpin the Airgialla's status relative to Uí Néill, paints an aspirational picture in arranging the provincial kings around and clearly subordinate to the 'lord of Tailtiu'. The 808 hosting by Muirgius of Connacht to Tailtiu was not done alone but with Conchobar of Clann Cholmáin, perhaps in support of this Uí Néill king and the case of Díarmait in 899 is uncertain as it occurs only in *AFM*. It also seems reasonable to regard the twelfth-century Ua Conchobhair *óenaig*, like Binchy, as specific late revivals designed to draw on the ancient prestige of the site to bolster the claims of these kings.

But because non-Uí Néill kings are recorded both holding the *óenach* and occupying the site of Tailtiu, it seems reasonable to suggest that a king, whether Uí Néill or non-Uí Néill, if powerful and confident enough, would seek to make his presence felt at the site. Swift argues that the evidence 'could be seen as indicating that *óenach Tailten* was a gathering of island-wide -if not national- importance under the aegis of the king of Tara.'[64] It might be argued that the prevailing political conditions determined what any given *óenach Tailten* looked like and the local dimension must be given considerable weight. The landscape around Tailtiu contained such important sites as the church of Donaghpatrick, the site of which was granted to Patrick by Conall according to the Patrician texts, as well as the major Síl nÁedo Sláine fort of Ráith Airther. These factors must be taken into account when considering those 'disturbances' involving local political players while a king from outside this immediate area surely had to contend with and attempt to overcome local opposition.[65]

Tailtiu, a prehistoric site with associated legends and strong links to Tara, was a symbolically loaded venue where claims to political power could be expressed or where the existing order could be challenged or grievances aired. While adopting Paul Byrne's approach to the 'disturbance' entries convincingly deals with a problem ignored by Binchy, we still have a difficulty in identifying who instigated any given 'disturbance'. While MacNeill can perhaps be accused of letting his imagination get the better of him, his general approach, to consider an entry in its broader political context, seems sound. This is the approach that must be adopted when dealing with those 'disturbances' involving Clann Cholmáin kings. More generally, rather than make assumptions about the participation or otherwise of non-Uí Néill kings at the *óenach*, or that the Uí Néill overking was always in a position to preside over it, we should perhaps instead begin on the basis that the make-

[64] Swift, '*Óenach Tailten*, the Blackwater Valley and the Uí Néill kings of Tara', 119.
[65] Swift, '*Óenach Tailten*, the Blackwater Valley and the Uí Néill kings of Tara', 120.

up of any given *óenach* was determined by the prevailing political climate.

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Primary Sources: Manuscript

- Dublin, NLI MS G2.

It is believed that originally the vellum NLI MSS G2 and G3 constituted a single manuscript which dates to the earlier part of the life of the principal scribe, Ádhamh Ó Cianáin (d.1373), perhaps to the mid 1340s.[1]

- Dublin, RIA MS D ii 1 (The Book of Uí Maine).

This is a late fourteenth century vellum MS. Contents include genealogies, Dinnshenchas and Banshenchas. It was written for Muircheartach Ó Ceallaigh (d.1407), bishop of Clonfert and later Tuam.[2]

- Dublin, RIA MS D 17 (The O'Clery Book of Genealogies).

This is a mid-seventeenth century paper MS compiled by Cú Choigríche Ó Cléirigh (d.1664).[3]

- Dublin, RIA MS 23 P2 (The Book of Lecan).

This is an early fifteenth century vellum MS containing hagiographical material, various verse and prose texts and a series of genealogies. The principal scribe was Giolla Íosa Mac Firbisigh (d.1418) working under the patronage of the O'Dowds at Lecan, Co. Sligo.[4]

- Dublin, RIA MS 23 P12 (The Book of Ballymote).

This is a late fourteenth century vellum MS compiled under the patronage of the Mac Donnchaid of Corann at Ballymote Castle, Co. Sligo. Contents include hagiographical

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1 Nessa Ní Shéaghdha (ed), *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland, Fasciculus I* (Dublin 1967) 12ff; James Carney, 'The Ó Cianáin Miscellany', *Ériu* xxi (1969) 122-47: 123.

2 *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy, fasc. xxvi-xxvii* 3314ff; Françoise Henry and Geneviève Marsh-Micheli, 'Manuscripts and Illuminations, 1169-1603', Art Cosgrove (ed), *A New History of Ireland: Medieval Ireland 1169-1534* ii (Oxford 1987) 781-815: 801.

3 *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy, fasc. xvi-xx* 2502ff; Séamus Pender (ed), 'The O'Clery Book of genealogies', *Analecta Hibernica* 18 (1951) 57-58.

4 *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy, fasc. xi-xv* 1551ff; Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'Scríobhaite Leacáin Mhic Fhir Bhisigh', *Celtica* 19 (1987) 141-175.

material, Dinnshenchas and genealogies.[5]

- Dublin, RIA MS 23 Q 10 (*An Leabhar Donn*).

Judging by the genealogies included, this vellum MS dates to about the middle third of the fifteenth century. It includes astronomical and medical tracts, various homilies and extensive genealogies.[6]

- Dublin, TCD MS 1282 (H.1.8).

This is a late fifteenth century vellum MS containing the earlier and more important of two extant copies of the *Annals of Ulster*. The principal scribe was Ruaidhrí Ua Luinín (d.1528) working for Cathal Mac Maghnusa (d.1498), vicar general of the diocese of Clogher.[7]

- Dublin, TCD MS 1298 (H.2.7).

This vellum MS contains genealogical material, poetry and prose tales. The genealogies suggest a mid-fourteenth century date of compilation.[8]

- Dublin, TCD MS 1339 (H.1.18) (*Leabhar na Nuachongbhála/Leabhar Laighneach* (The Book of Leinster)).

This vellum MS dates from the second half of the twelfth century and contains an extensive series of genealogies as well as miscellaneous prose and verse texts. The MS is associated with the church of Oughaval, Co. Laois, though only one of several scribes has been securely identified, Áed mac meic Crimthaind, also linked with the church of Terryglass.[9]

- Dublin, UCD Add Irish MS 14 (*Leabhar Mór na nGenealach*).

This mid-seventeenth century paper MS is the work of An Dubhaltach mac Fhir Bhisigh

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5 *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy, fasc. xi-xv* 1610ff; Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'The Book of Ballymote', *Celtica* 14 (1981) 15-25.

6 *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy fasc.xxvi-xxvii* (Dublin 1943) 3407ff.

7 T.K. Abbott & E.J. Gwynn (ed), *Catalogue of the Irish manuscripts in the library of Trinity College, Dublin* (Dublin 1921) 20.

8 Abbott & Gwynn (ed), *Catalogue of the Irish manuscripts in the library of Trinity College, Dublin* 78-80; Donnchadh Ó Corráin's foreword in: Nollaig Ó Muraíle, *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies* i, x.

9 Abbott & Gwynn (ed), *Catalogue of the Irish manuscripts in the library of Trinity College, Dublin* 158-61; William M. O'Sullivan, 'Notes on the scripts and make-up of the Book of Leinster', *Celtica* 7 (1966) 1-31.

(d.1671).

- Oxford, Bodleian library, MS Laud Misc. 610.

As we have it today, this volume comprises parts of two fifteenth century vellum MSS. The earlier was written by an unknown scribe for James Butler, the fourth (White) Earl of Ormond (d.1452). A slightly later MS is the work of two principal scribes, Seaán Buidhe Ó Cléirigh and Giolla na Naomh Mac Aodhagáin, working for Butler's nephew, Edmund (d.1464). The composite MS contains miscellaneous prose and verse texts as well as an extensive series of genealogies. There are several references to earlier sources, including the now lost Psalter of Cashel.[10]

- Oxford, Bodleian library, MS Rawlinson B.489.

This is an early sixteenth century vellum MS containing the second of two copies of the *Annals of Ulster.* The two main scribes were Ruaidhrí Ua Caiside (d.1541) and Ruaidhrí Ua Luinín (d.1528) who made the copy for Ruaidhrí Mac Craith (d.1528) of Termon Magrath, Co. Donegal.[11]

- Oxford, Bodleian library, MS Rawlinson B.502.

Much of this vellum and paper MS dates to the late eleventh or early twelfth centuries and its contents include a copy of the Irish World-Chronicle, genealogies, law tracts and miscellaneous verse and prose texts. Ó Riain's thesis that some of this MS is in fact what remains of *Lebor Glinne dá Locha* (the Book of Glendalough) is contested by several scholars.[12]

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10 See Brian Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish language Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and Oxford College Libraries* (Dublin 2001) 62-87. Dillon argues that all of the genealogical sections relevant for our study in MS Laud 610 come from the Psalter. Myles Dillon, 'Laud Misc 610', *Celtica* v (1960) 64-77: 66. Also see: Pádraig Ó Riain, 'The Psalter of Cashel: a provisional list of contents', *Éigse* 23 (1989) 107–30; Bart Jaski, 'The Genealogical Section of the Psalter of Cashel', *Peritia* 17-18 (2003-2004) 295-337.

11 Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish language* 153-62.

12 Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish language* 163-200.

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