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THE PRACTICE AND SITING OF ROYAL INAUGURATION

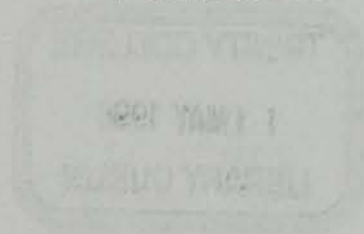
IN

MEDIEVAL IRELAND

BY

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VOLUME 1



Submitted for a Ph.D. degree to Trinity College Dublin

Conducted in the Department of Medieval History

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I, Elizabeth FitzPatrick, declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and that it has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other University.

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ABSTRACT

The Practice and Siting of Royal Inauguration in Medieval Ireland

Elizabeth FitzPatrick

This work presents the results of a detailed investigation into the ceremony and landscape setting of royal inauguration in medieval Ireland. Commencing with Giraldus Cambrensis' controversial account of the king-making ritual of the Cenél Conaill, a series of documented rites which constituted the Irish *banais ríge* (king's wedding feast) are identified and discussed. Five distinct rites emerge, but their sequence of performance and the extent to which they occurred in combination is unclear. The elaborate ritual variously involved robing; the performance of a *deiseal* (ceremonial turn); the rite of the single shoe; proclamation; acclamation; and the surrendering of the king's horse and raiment. The principal ritual prop and archetypal symbol of legitimate authority was the unsophisticated *slat na ríge* (rod of kingship) which occurs in ceremonies as late as the sixteenth century. Additional rites may have included bathing, the chanting of the royal candidate's genealogy, and possibly the recitation of an inaugural ode composed specially for the occasion. The ceremony culminated in feasting, and there is evidence to suggest that a *creach rígh* (king's raid) was the expected first duty of the newly-elected royal. There is marked continuity in the ritual props and rites, but nuances and symbolic transformations are also obvious. Some of these could be attributable to regional variations, but the majority are a reflection of ecclesiastical influence, or changes in the nature and distribution of secular power in the Gaelic polity. Places of inauguration are generally low hills lying between 50-800 feet OD, offering exceptional views from their summits. Their place-names frequently combine allusions to topography, royalty, a sept name, or a hilltop monument. Twenty-nine sites (Class A), identified as places of inauguration in reliable historical sources, were recorded in the field and subsequently classified. A further twenty-six sites (Class B), some of which display morphological affinities with the attested group, were drawn from folk tradition and the observations of travellers and antiquaries. An analysis of both categories reveals that Class A sites are characterised by a range of approximately eight different monument types, some of which are also common to the Class B sites. In both groups, enclosed and unenclosed mounds represent the more common choice of venue. Documentary and archaeological evidence is also presented for ritual furniture (in the form of stone chairs, *leaca*, footprint stones and rock-cut basins) which, while not always specific to inauguration, played a central role in the performance of the ceremony. Patterns of later medieval land-holding indicate that there is a tendency for some inauguration hills to be located within the freehold of the inaugurator. Chiefly residences are in many instances situated at a convenient distance to them, and there is some evidence to suggest that they had their ultimate use as lordship administrative centres.

SUMMARY

In this thesis the Irish *banais ríge* (king's wedding feast), which conferred legitimate authority to rule upon a king or chief-elect, is portrayed as open-air political theatre. The monumental stage, the cast, the principal players and props are drawn together in an interdisciplinary exercise which explores in detail the hills appointed for the ceremony, with their monuments and ritual furniture, and the formal acts which constituted the medieval inauguration rite.

In chapter I, the nature, possible origins and endurance of the two most important ritual symbols of legitimised authority, the rod and the shoe, are investigated. The evidence put forward shows a remarkable absence of sophisticated royal regalia in the medieval rite of inauguration. A simple hazel rod, an otherworld symbol which had its roots in Indo-European tradition, was used instead of the ornate metal sceptres common to royalty elsewhere in Europe, and it is suggested that its survival into the later medieval period is peculiar to royal practices in the Gaelic world. The symbolic import of the single shoe as a sign of a rightful claimant in the Irish tradition is treated in the broader context of the spectrum of associations which it holds in Indo-European and Classical tradition. It is suggested that its original meaning may have been as a symbol of chaos prior to the re-integration of social order through the election of a new king, or that it is meaningfully related to the condition of being one-legged, one-footed (or standing on one leg) which is associated with magical increase in potency (i.e. *corrguinecht*). The phenomenon of single footprint impressions in stones, variously attributed to saints and legendary heroes, and cited as inauguration furniture in both Irish and Scottish kingship traditions, finds its counterpart in the theme of the single shoe.

While the same rites and ritual props reoccurred in ceremonies as chronologically polarised as the twelfth and late sixteenth centuries, the precepts of Irish royal ritual were not immutable. As new influences came to bear on the nature and distribution of power, the substance of ceremonial was transformed. Under the influence of the church, there were subtle alterations to the officiators, the *ollamh* in some instances being replaced by the *coarb* as king-maker, the *deiseal* or ceremonial turn being performed with a reliquary; and *slat na ríge* (rod of kingship) apparently becoming a symbol of authority conferred by God. At its most potent, ecclesiastical will was capable of displacing the ceremony from traditional inauguration places to church sites. The rise of secular power in the late fourteenth and fifteenth century introduced still more nuances into the ceremony, many of which have already been the subject of thorough elucidation by Simms (1987, 32-40). With the resurgence of Gaelic practices in the late sixteenth century despite Tudor censures, increasing irregularities crept into the ceremony, with Ó Néill and Ó

Domhnaill performing impromptu inaugurations in the Midlands, Connacht and Munster, and occasionally at sites other than those traditionally used by the chieftains they appointed.

A corpus of fifty-five inauguration sites are presented (see vol. 2, appendix 1&2) and discussed. They are divided into two classes: Class (A) are those which are attested as places of medieval inauguration in authoritative documentary sources, such as native seventeenth-century histories, English administrative documents and plantation surveys, Tudor maps, bardic poetry, genealogical compilations, the Irish annals, and some of the saints' *Lives*. Class (B) are those which have morphological affinities with some of the categories of Class (A) monuments, and which are cited in folk tradition or were previously noted by antiquaries and travellers as possible places of inauguration. The conclusions are based on the data provided largely by the twenty-nine Class (A) sites. Essentially, the value of the documentary sources lies in the fact that they cite the inauguration places in the first instance. They offer leads, but they are limited in the information which they provide on the precise location and morphology of the sites themselves. For instance, the O'Connor inauguration tract tells us that the mound of Carn Fraích had a gate to it, and no more. In other instances folk tradition and local history conflict with more authoritative sources on the nature of inauguration furniture. Shirley in his *History of the County Monaghan* notes a former footprint stone on the hill of Mullach Leic, while Richard Bartlett's 'Generalle Description of Ulster', 1603, illustrates a possible chair on the hilltop.

The principal findings are that the venues used for medieval inauguration ceremonies are predominantly characterised by both enclosed and unenclosed mounds, and enclosures on hilltops. It is proposed that the mounds (a few of which are attributed to the eponymous ancestor of the sept, or a legendary hero) could be best described as *foraid* (platforms), and that in some instances they may have been primarily erected for assembly purposes. It is demonstrated that nineteen of the combined fifty-five Class (A) and Class (B) sites present evidence (varying in certainty) for *leaca*, footprint stones, stone basins, and stone chairs. A fourteenth-century origin is proposed for the Uí Néill chair at Tulach Óg, and it is suggested that the Clann Aodha Buidhe chair may have come about in imitation of the former. Locations are offered for Carn inghine Bhriain and Lis na nUrlann, and alternative sites are argued for Lios na Ríogh and Áth an Termoinn. Finally, in a test case (chapter II, 2.20) of the territorial siting of four northern inauguration places, it is shown that within the context of the later medieval Gaelic land-holding system, there is a tendency for them to be situated in freehold land, generally occupied by the traditional inaugurator, adjacent to the mensal lands and within easy reach of the main chiefry residences.

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INTRODUCTION

Seventeenth-Century Commentaries

The historiography of the Irish rite of royal inauguration commenced in the seventeenth century with the works of Seathrún Céitinn, Philip O'Sullivan Beare and John Lynch. Their commentaries are defensive in nature and were essentially refutations of Giraldus Cambrensis' twelfth-century account of the king-making practices of the Cenél Conaill.¹ Following Camden's publication in 1602 of Cambrensis' *Topographia Hiberniae*, together with his *Expugnatio Hibernica*, O'Sullivan Beare responded by devoting the first four books of his *Zoilomastix* (written c.1625-6) to a refutation of the *Topographia*.² One section of the *Zoilomastix* was dedicated to a bitter attack on Cambrensis' description of the Cenél Conaill king-making ritual. O'Sullivan Beare prescribed a *sanctissimus ritus* for the kings of Tír Conaill (held at the church site of Cill Mhic Nénáin) instead of Cambrensis' unsavoury rite, which involved sexual union with a white mare followed by a ritual bath in the broth of the mare.

In a similar manner, John Lynch, in his *Cambrensis Eversus*, published in 1662, vehemently opposed Cambrensis' view of the ceremony. He protested that 'those princes who have left so many monuments of their munificence to man, and signal piety to God ... could never have inaugurated themselves by a rite so execrably degrading to human nature'.³ Céitinn's discussion of the Irish ceremony was also driven by his disenchantment with Cambrensis,⁴ but unlike O'Sullivan and Lynch he did not dwell solely on the Cenél Conaill debate. Some of his comments are enlightening, as he recorded a number of inauguration sites and the officiators involved in the ceremonies of particular septs. In his *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, which he began in 1620, Céitinn 'set down ... from the seanchus the manner in which kings were inaugurated in Ireland, and for what object they were inaugurated, including high kings and provincial kings and territorial high chiefs'. Part of this discussion involved attempts to explain some of the rites and ritual symbols of the ceremony, such as the 'the rod of kingship'.⁵ But perhaps of most significance was his listing of seven inauguration sites (Tulach Óg, Cill Mhic

¹ J.J. O'Meara (ed.), *Gerald of Wales: the history and topography of Ireland* (London, 1982), 110.

² T.J. O'Donnell (ed.), *Selections from the Zoilomastix of Philip O'Sullivan Beare* (Dublin, 1960).

³ Rev. M. Kelly (ed.), *Cambrensis Eversus*, vol. 3 (Dublin, 1851-2), 345.

⁴ D. Comyn (ed.), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, vol. 1 (*ITS* vol. 4, London, 1902), 21-5.

⁵ P.S. Dinneen (ed.), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, vol. 3 (*ITS* vol. 9, London, 1908), 12-13.

Nénáin, Magh Adhair, Lios Beannchair, Cnoc on Bhogha, Leac Mhic Eochadha and Dun Caillighe Beirre), the last four of which are unique to his record. He also named the inaugurators in each case.⁶

Later, in 1704, Tadhg O'Neachtain, in his manuscript copy of Céitinn's *Foras Feasa*, added the undocumented inauguration sites of Mag Eochagáin, Ó Maolmhuidh and Ó Catharnaigh to Céitinn's list. In unambiguous terms O'Neachtain named each site and the officiators involved:

Ar Chnoc Buadha do goirthí Magochagáin,
Maigemhuin do goire é,
O Branain a maruscal sluagh,
Clann Aodhaghain a bhreithemhuin,
O Cionga a ollamh ré dán.
Ar Mullach Chruich do goirthí o Maolmhuidh,
Magemhuin do goire é.
Ar Leic Mhichil do goirthí an Sionach,
Oh Uarain do goire é.⁷

Romantic Journeys and Notices of Inauguration Places

Eighteenth and early nineteenth-century scholars did not indulge in any major discourse on Irish medieval king-making practices, but compilers of travelogues and gazetteers frequently passed fleeting remarks on inauguration and assembly sites, which they noted during their journeys. Brewer in his *Beauties of Ireland*, for instance, observed a large natural rock outcrop in the grounds of Jamestown House, Co. Westmeath, which the local people referred to as 'Mageoghegan's Chair', and a boulder in the garden of Cloghatanny House, Co. Offaly, which carried the name 'Fox's Stone' [Cloch on tSionnaigh].⁸ During their tour through Donegal in 1837, Frances and Emily Ponsonby visited Doon Rock, the traditionally cited place of inauguration of the Uí Dhomhnaill, and there learnt something of its local history and lore, which they duly recorded in a diary.⁹ The more intrepid traveller, Caesar Otway, made the same journey in 1839 and spent time in the company

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷ NLI, MS G 192, p. 306. 'Upon Cnoc Buadha Mag Eochagáin used to be named, Maigemhuin named him, Ó Braonáin [was] his marshal, Clann Aodhagáin [were] his brehons, Ó Cionga [was] his poet. On Mullach Chruaich Ó Maolmhuidh used to be named, Maigemhuin named him. On Leic Mhichil the Sionnach (Ó Catharnaigh) used to be named, Ó hUarain named him.

⁸ J.N. Brewer, *The beauties of Ireland*, vol. 2 (London, 1826), 257.

⁹ F. and E. Ponsonby, 'Diary of a tour through Donegal, 1837', *Donegal Annual* 10, no. 3, 1973, 286.

of one Tony O'Donnell who informed him at length about a *síd* and a cave at the foot of the Rock.¹⁰ In his *Sketches in Erris and Tyrawley*, published in 1845, Otway also provided the only descriptive record of Carn Amhalgaidh¹¹ - one of two Uí Dhubhda inauguration sites in Co. Mayo - which had already begun to be undermined by quarrying by the time H.T. Knox visited the site in c. 1911.¹² John Barrow, during the course of his journey from Londonderry to Enniskillen in 1835, noted surviving folklore about inaugurations at Ard Fothaid,¹³ while George Petrie was the first to document the Clann Aodha Buidhe stone inauguration chair, which in 1833 was on show in the garden of the antiquary, R.C. Walker, at Rathcarrick, Co. Sligo.¹⁴

The most significant aspect of the collective observations of eighteenth and nineteenth-century romantic travellers and antiquaries is that in this period a considerable wealth of knowledge and traditions still prevailed regarding places of inauguration. In the absence of authoritative historical documentation, their gleanings on places of inauguration and assembly are important, and in this thesis local traditions, past and present, are treated as contributory evidence.

Antiquarian Research of the Nineteenth Century

In the climate of the Gaelic Revival of the first half of the nineteenth century, there was an awakening of scholarly interest in the subject of inauguration, largely spear-headed by John O'Donovan and to a lesser extent by George Petrie and Herbert Hore. Petrie undertook the first comprehensive archaeological survey of the monuments on the Hill of Tara in the 1830s, the results of which were published in 1839 in the *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*.¹⁵ O'Donovan's most important contribution to the understanding of the rituals of Irish royalty was his edition of the *Genealogies, tribes and customs of Hy-Fiachrach* which made the description of the inauguration ceremony and king-making sites of the Uí Dhubhda of Uí Fiachrach, preserved in the *Book of Lecan*,

¹⁰ C. Otway, *Sketches in Ireland descriptive of interesting portions of the counties of Donegal, Cork and Kerry* (Dublin, 1839), 30-43.

¹¹ C. Otway, *Sketches in Erris and Tyrawley* (Dublin, 1845), 189.

¹² H.T. Knox, 'The croghans and some Connacht raths and motes', *JRSAI* 41, 1911, 94-5.

¹³ J. Barrow, *A Tour round Ireland, through the sea-coast counties, in the autumn of 1835* (London, 1836), 118.

¹⁴ G. Petrie, 'Coronation chair of the O'Neils, of Castlereagh', *The Dublin Penny Journal*, vol.1, no. 26, 1832, 208.

¹⁵ G. Petrie, 'On the history and antiquities of Tara Hill', *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 18, 1839, 25-232.

available for the first time in the Irish, with translation. In an appendix to that text, he drew together some of the information on the Irish practice of royal inauguration which he believed was warranted because it had been 'so imperfectly described by modern Irish writers'.¹⁶ He reiterated Céitinn's earlier thoughts and provided the full text of both Edmund Spenser's late sixteenth-century account of the inauguration of Irish chieftains, from his *View of the present state of Ireland*, and an abstract of a Chancery Court law suit which took place in 1592 between the brothers Domhnall and Tadhg O' Donovan concerning the succession to the lordship of Clancahell.¹⁷ He also offered opinions on the role of the single shoe and the footprint stone in the ceremony, and he added five more inauguration places to Céitinn's inventory (Caisil, Carn Amhalgaidh, Carn Fraích, Cruachain ó Cupráin, and Sciath Ghabhra).¹⁸ In a footnote to his edition of the *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland*, he proposed yet another site - Carn Mhic Táil, near Kilshanny, Co. Clare - which he conjectured may have been an early inauguration place of the Corcu Modruad.¹⁹

O'Donovan pursued his interest in inauguration sites during the progress of the first Ordnance Survey of Ireland in the 1830s and 1840s. His invaluable county by county OS letters and fieldname books contain several allusions to places of inauguration and to some of the prevailing folk traditions about them. Although the locations which he suggested for a few sites have since been disputed,²⁰ his contribution broadened the potential for archaeological fieldwork on inauguration sites in use in the medieval period - a challenge which was not taken up until Manning produced his M.A. thesis on royal inauguration sites, in 1976.

Inspired by O'Donovan's work, Herbert Hore also attempted a synthesis of the components of the inauguration ceremony. He discussed the role of the single shoe, and made interesting comparisons between aspects of the Irish rite and the respective installation ceremonies of the dukes of Carinthia and the lords of the Isle of Man.²¹ The

¹⁶ J. O'Donovan (ed.), *The genealogies, tribes, and customs of Hy-Fiachrach* (Dublin, 1844), 425.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 444-50

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 434.

¹⁹ *AFM*, vol. 5, 1669, footnote u.

²⁰ He proposed, for instance, that the MacMathghamhna was inaugurated at Tullyvea, Co. Monaghan, but Richard Bartlett's map of South-east Ulster and his 'Generalle description of Ulster', 1603, indicate that the inauguration site of that sept was Mullach Leic, Leck Hill, south of Monaghan town.

²¹ H.F. Hore, 'Inauguration of Irish chiefs', *UJA* 5, 1857, 220-27.

Carinthian and Manx practices are more fully investigated in chapters I and III of this thesis. Hore's list of inauguration sites added nothing new to O'Donovan's catalogue,²² but to his credit he included a useful account of the traditions and antiquities of the Uí Néill inauguration site at Tulach Óg, which was prepared by Rev. Thomas H. Porter, the rector of the parish of Desertcreat. This section dealing with Tulach Óg included the first detailed ground plan and profile of the hilltop enclosure, drawn by Getty and Quigley in 1849.²³ It is an important plan as it differs somewhat in its configuration to the present plan of the site, the details of which are discussed in chapter IV, case study 1.

Investigations of stone chairs, *leaca* and footprint stones, which are the concern in chapter III, began in earnest in the 1860s, with contributions from the architect and antiquary, Richard Rolt Brash, and the Scottish historians and antiquaries, W.F. Skene and J. Stuart. Brash declared - 'there is one class of our megalithic monuments which seems to have almost entirely escaped the notice of our antiquaries - I allude to the "stone chair"'. Having met with a couple of these interesting relics in my researches, my attention has been directed towards their origin and uses'.²⁴ He attempted to demonstrate the widespread use of the stone chair as a symbol of 'power, sovereignty and dignity', drawing on examples as far apart as Ireland (the Clann Aodha Buidhe chair); Cornwall (the 'Druid's seat of Judgement at Carnbre); Wales (the Peel Park *gorsedd chair* which originated at a stone circle near Ruthin); Greece (the stone chair at Lilaea, in Phocis, and the so-called throne of Plutarch from the Acropolis); and South America (the marble chair at Mytilene).²⁵ He noted too that stone chairs were not peculiar to kingship, but that they were also associated with the enthronement of bishops - citing the examples of the 'frith stool' at Beverley Minster, the chairs at St Vigors and Durham Cathedral, and St Canice's chair in the cathedral, Kilkenny.²⁶ Brash's contemporaries, Skene and Stuart, were at the same time exploring the Scottish evidence for inauguration furniture, Skene dealing at length with the coronation stone or Stone of Scone,²⁷ and Stuart broadening the field of enquiry to include footprint stones and depictions of chairs on early historic

²² Ibid., 231.

²³ Ibid., 235-41.

²⁴ R.R. Brash, 'On ancient stone chairs and stones of inauguration', *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Review* 1, 1865, 429.

²⁵ Ibid., 429-31, 552-55.

²⁶ Ibid., 556-8.

²⁷ W.F. Skene, 'The coronation stone', *PSAS* 8, 1868-9, 68-99.

sculptural monuments.²⁸ While antiquaries took this subject quite seriously, and with good reason, modern archaeology has offered little or no comment on the use of stone chairs and inauguration stones in the ceremony of king-making. This vacuum has persisted because of the unstated but commonly held belief that such features are fanciful folk items. However, a detailed investigation of this phenomenon suggests otherwise. The documentary and cartographic evidence for the Uí Néill inauguration chair at Tulach Óg, the extant Clann Aodha Buidhe chair, and the piecemeal evidence for chairs at the MacMathghamna inauguration site of Mullach Leic, Co. Monaghan, and the Clann Uilliam Uachtair site at Caher an Iarla near Castlegar, Co. Galway, among others, provides a reasonable body of authoritative evidence. Chapter III of this thesis attempts to fill the lacuna and to rehabilitate the concept of ritual furniture into archaeological thinking.

In the first decade of the twentieth century FitzGerald, Knox and Orpen began to build upon O'Donovan's excellent groundwork. Some new insights emerged, in particular the observation that a specific monument type - the earthen mound - could be closely identified with the function of inauguration. Lord Walter FitzGerald set himself the task of compiling a more comprehensive list of inauguration places, citing documentary evidence for each entry. His main source was the *Annals of the Four Masters*. Unfortunately he never completed or published his results, which are only available in a sketchy twenty-seven page manuscript housed in the Royal Society of Antiquaries. Nonetheless, his list of twenty-four sites was the most comprehensive of its time, and to his credit he included suggestions for three new sites - the *Thingmote* at Dublin, where he proposed Ruaidrí Ó Conchobair was inaugurated in 1166; the hill of Croshy Duff in the parish of Kilcolmanbane, Co. Laois, which he identified from a reference in Dymmok's *Treatise of Ireland* as the possible inauguration place of the Ó Mordha; and Carraig an Iarla, or the 'Earl's Chair', Co. Kildare, which, on the basis of folk memory and geographical reasoning, he proposed as the pre-Norman inauguration site of the Ó Conchobair Uí Failgi. In a brief article in *JKAS*, Lord Walter reiterated his thoughts on the 'Chair of Kildare' - 'so, as there is no smoke without fire, I have come to the

²⁸ J. Stuart, 'Note on the coronation stone', *PSAS* 8, 1868-9, 99-105.

conclusion that the Chair (under whatever name it may have been previous to that of Carrickanearla) was the inauguration place of the chiefs of the O'Conors of Offaly'.²⁹

Almost at the same time, both H.T. Knox and G. H. Orpen had separately begun to investigate what they perceived to be a close correlation between the occurrence of the place-name *cruachan* and the presence of large and small enclosed and unenclosed mounds, some of which, they suggested, could be associated with inauguration. While Knox was less inclined to classify the *cruachain* as ritual sites, preferring to see the majority of those he listed as fortified artificial mounds similar in function to the later Norman motte,³⁰ Orpen expressed a contrary view, proposing that all *cruachain* could be considered as inauguration places. Furthermore, he suggested that the word *cruachan* itself denoted an inauguration mound or cairn.³¹ He advocated a 'searching scrutiny of the croghan-districts' in the likelihood that new inaugurations sites could emerge.³²

Modern Scholarship, and Indo-European Links

Both modern historical scholarship and the work of celticists have made a significant contribution to our understanding of the Irish ceremony of inauguration. The debunking of Giraldus Cambrensis' account of the Cenél Conaill king-making ritual by seventeenth-century historians has been thoroughly reassessed in an Indo-European context. Initial commentary on this subject came from Franz Schröder who recognised remarkable similarities between the complex ritual of the Cenél Conaill and the equally elaborate Indian *aśvamedha*.³³ His contemporary, J. Pokorny, had contended that this ritual was pre Indo-European in origin,³⁴ but Schröder was convinced that it was genuinely Indo-European. He extended the analogies to include the ancient Roman October horse ritual and the practice of horse phallus veneration in northern Norway as described in the Icelandic *Völsathátr*.³⁵ The debate on the authenticity of the Cenél Conaill ritual continued with M. Dillon's paper on 'The consecration of Irish kings', and F.J. Byrne's discussion of the Irish concept of kingship, in his *Irish kings and high-kings*. Dillon

²⁹ W. FitzGerald, 'The Chair of Kildare', *JKAS* 7, no. 5, 1914, 327.

³⁰ H.T. Knox, op. cit., 1911, 93-116. Knox, p. 99, summed up by saying that 'the balance of evidence is against connexion with inauguration or other ceremonial'.

³¹ G.H. Orpen, 'Croghans and Norman Motes', *JRSAI* 41, 1911, 270. Orpen, p.270, footnote 1, did caution that 'cruachan and allied forms were, however, often applied to natural hills or mountains; and we must not assume that in all cases there was an inauguration site in the neighbourhood'.

³² *Ibid.*, 270.

³³ F. Schröder, 'Ein Altirischer krönungsritus und das Indogermanische rossopfer', *ZCP* 16, 1927, 310-312.

³⁴ J. Pokorny, 'Das nicht-indogermanische substrat im Irischen', *ZCP* 16, 1927, 123.

³⁵ F. Schröder, op. cit., 311-12.

expanded the theme of Indo-European parallels, demonstrating the close relationship between the bearing of the 'rod of kingship', the practice of the *deiseal* or ceremonial turn, and the chanting of praise poetry in both the Irish and ancient Indian rites.³⁶ In a brief but comprehensive summary of kingship ritual, Byrne touched upon the role of the *fili*, the clergy, the *síd*-mound, and the curious rite of the ritual bath which was purportedly an element of the Cenél Conaill ceremony. He considered it 'reasonable to suppose that in the twelfth century Giraldus picked up from the Irish or Norse of the south-east a more primitive account of the obsolete pagan rite, which was libellously asserted to be still in force among a distant tribe on the north-west'.³⁷ Given that the motif of a curative bath of broth for a wounded hero is common in the early Irish sagas, he concluded that a symbolic bath may have formed part of the ceremonies, just as it did in the medieval feudal conferring of knighthood.³⁸ An increasing amount of comparative evidence has emerged to make the Cenél Conaill rite appear less fantastic. The present consensus of opinion, voiced by scholars such as J. Puhvel, Y. de Pontfarcy and J. Stewart, is that the kingship rites ascribed to this sept belong to Indo-European tradition and that Cambrensis may well have been reiterating a memory of a practice which had survived in the fastness of Tír Conaill after it had long ceased elsewhere.³⁹

Modern Scholarship, and Inauguration Practices in the Later Middle Ages

Primary sources dealing at length with the medieval inauguration rite are scarce, but scholars who have made those that do exist more accessible, have greatly facilitated the task of interpreting the development and expressions of the ceremony. In 1961 M. Dillon published a prose tract and bardic poem dealing in considerable detail with the inauguration of the Ó Conchobhair king of Connacht. In earlier recensions, the tract serves as an introduction to the poem. Dillon suggested that the poem was a ceremonial ode which was composed on the occasion of the inauguration of Feidhlimidh Ó Conchobhair at Carn Fraích, in 1310.⁴⁰ K. Simms, in her more recent commentary on the tract, suggests that the prototype of the tract itself may have been compiled as early as

³⁶ M. Dillon, 'The consecration of Irish kings', *Celtica* 10, 1973, 1-8.

³⁷ F.J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* (London, 1973), 20.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 18-20.

³⁹ J. Puhvel, 'Aspects of equine functionality', in J. Puhvel (ed.), *Myth and law among the Indo-Europeans* (London, 1970), 168-72; Y. de Pontfarcy, 'Two late inaugurations of Irish kings', *Études Celtiques* 24, 1987, 203-208; J. Stewart, 'Topographia Hiberniae', *Celtica* 22, 1990, 643.

⁴⁰ M. Dillon, 'The inauguration of O'Conor', in J.A. Watt, J.B. Morrall and F.X. Martin (eds.), *Medieval Studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn, S.J.* (Dublin, 1961), 186-7.

the twelfth or thirteenth century, and that the poem is more likely to have been composed in anticipation of the inauguration of Feidhlimidh Fionn, son of Ó Conchobhair Ruadh, in the fifteenth century.⁴¹ In her later work, *From kings to warlords*, Simms has demonstrated how the various rites which constitute the Irish inauguration ceremony were influenced and changed by the new political realities of the later middle ages. Traditional rites began to be noticeably modified in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with the role of king-maker being removed from the hands of churchmen and placed firmly in the remit of secular chiefs, whether overlords or leading vassals. Accordingly, the symbolism of ritual props such as the rod and shoe, and rites like the ceremonial turn, underwent transformation.⁴² The transition from the concept of kingship to lordship is reflected in the very names given to the ritual props, the rod of kingship (*slat na ríge*) becoming the rod of lordship or possession (*slat tighearnais/slat sheilbhe*). The mode of address of the chief-elect was reduced to the surname alone, and by the late sixteenth century, the mere calling aloud of the candidate's surname in an authoritative assembly was in some instances considered a valid inauguration.⁴³ Simms also considers the role of the inauguration stone and chair in the ceremony and concludes that 'whatever the function of the stone throne in pagan prehistory, we may hazard a guess that it was important in the sixteenth century principally as a symbol of continuous and immemorial tradition'.⁴⁴ The substance of the discussion of the Irish rite of inauguration in this thesis is essentially a development of some of the themes which Simms has explored in her work. An attempt is made to reconstruct the formal acts through which a king or chief-elect was invested with the authority to rule; and the origin and symbolic meaning of the rod and shoe are investigated in the context of their occurrence in Classical, Irish, Indo-European and Northern European tradition.

Modern Archaeological Scholarship, and Inauguration Sites

The attention of modern archaeological scholarship has in recent years been directed towards the prehistoric provincial 'royal sites' of Emain,⁴⁵ Temair⁴⁶ and Cruachu,⁴⁷ each

⁴¹ K. Simms, 'Gabh umad a Fheidhlimidh - a fifteenth-century inauguration ode', *Ériu* 31, 1980, 136, 143.

⁴² K. Simms, *From kings to warlords: the changing political structure of Gaelic Ireland in the later middle ages* (Suffolk, 1987), 30-33.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁵ C.J. Lynn, 'Navan Fort: a draft summary of D.M. Waterman's excavations', *Emania* 1, 1986, 11-19; C.J. Lynn, 'The Iron Age mound in Navan Fort: a physical realization of Celtic religious beliefs?', *Emania* 10, 1992, 33-57.

of which are accorded kingship and inauguration associations in early Irish sources. In particular, methodologies and theories have been explored in order to construct an approach to the sites. Opening the debate on interpreting the 'royal sites', B. Wailes suggested that while mutual collaboration between archaeologists and historians is ultimately desirable in order to reach an understanding of these sites, this ideal approach is hindered by the absence of critical methods for assessing the interrelationship of the very different types of data used by the two disciplines.⁴⁸ His contribution is essentially a review of the salient written evidence for Emain, Temair, Cruachu, Dún Ailinne, and Uisneach, out of which he develops a series of 'archaeologically testable criteria' for the identification of a 'royal site'.⁴⁹ His signposts for the recognition of 'royal sites' include unusual size or form, or both; evidence of ritual and residential activities; artefacts reflecting high-status living; and an essentially pre-Christian Iron Age date, with perhaps some indication of continued use into the early historic period.⁵⁰

C. Newman has recently remarked that since the provincial royal centres are essentially 'palimpsests of prehistoric monuments, dating from the Neolithic to the later Iron Age', there is need to reappraise the use of the term 'royal site' to describe them. In his published field survey of the monuments at Temair, he prefers to use the term 'developed ritual complex' in order to emphasise the continuous development of the site into the later Iron Age.⁵¹ He is of the opinion that the identification and understanding of such ritual complexes tends to fall out of the range of historical enquiry, one of the reasons being that 'historians have for their part become increasingly reluctant to project documentary evidence into the prehistoric period'.⁵² Conversely, one of the premises of this present thesis is that the problem of identifying and defining inauguration places used in the medieval and later medieval periods is greatly facilitated by a synthesis of

⁴⁶ *Discovery Programme Reports 1* (Dublin, 1993), 69-103; *Discovery Programme Reports 2* (Dublin, 1995), 62-76.

⁴⁷ J. Waddell, 'Rathcroghan: a royal site in Connacht', *JIA* 1, 1983, 21-46; Y. Brennan, F. Delaney and J. Fenwick, 'The anatomy of a mound: geophysical images of Rathcroghan', *Archaeology Ireland*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1996, 20-23.

⁴⁸ B. Wailes, 'The Irish "Royal Sites" in history and archaeology', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, no. 3, 1982, 1, 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁵¹ C. Newman, *Tara: an archaeological survey* (Discovery Programme Monograph 2, Dublin, 1997), xiv-xv.

⁵² *Ibid.*, xiv.

archaeology and history. In the first instance a small corpus of attested sites, at which inauguration ceremonies were held in the medieval period, can be identified from authoritative primary sources, and in a few instances the sources citing the performance of inaugurations at specific monuments are contemporary, or near contemporary with the events they describe. The monuments themselves are of course frequently accorded great antiquity, some such as Carn Amhalgaidh being attributed to the eponymous ancestor of the sept. Although the provincial 'royal sites' are not the concern of this thesis, they are frequently and irresistibly drawn into the discussion, more particularly because ten of the attested twenty-nine medieval inauguration sites are classified as enclosed or unenclosed mounds, a feature which is common to each of the provincial ritual complexes. The fact that a significant number of the inauguration sites investigated in this study can be classified as mounds leaves the way open to interpreting other enclosed and unenclosed mounds, not cited in historical sources, as potential inauguration places, judgement seats, assembly sites, or administrative centres of some nature. The use of the term *forad* (a mound or platform used as a seat or stand for spectators) to describe the mound adjoining Tech Cormaic within Ráith na Ríg and the mound at Emain, in early Irish texts, suggests that there was at least a retrospective understanding of the function of these monuments at the time in which they were documented.⁵³ It is argued in chapter II (2. 12) that the Irish *forad* is perhaps the most appropriate descriptive term for mounds used for ceremonial or assembly purposes. Moreover, it is demonstrated that further insights into their nature and function can be discerned through comparative analysis with assembly/king-making mounds and enclosures found elsewhere in Europe, namely the *ting voll*, the *köenigberg*, the *moot* hill and the *gorsedd*.

Shortly after Wailes' publication in 1982, R.B. Warner recognised that an interpretative approach to the early historic kingship centres also needed to be devised. He attempted to impose Wailes' hypothetical expectations of the prehistoric centres on sites such as Caisil, Clochar, Ráith Raithleann and Cnogba, but found that unlike their prehistoric counterparts they demonstrate little uniformity in their archaeology.⁵⁴ The majority of the sample of sites he chose for analysis present little or no field evidence for ritual

⁵³ *Forad na Ríg* and *Foradh Mag Emna*.

⁵⁴ R.B. Warner, 'The archaeology of early historic Irish kingship', in S.T. Driscoll and M.R. Níeke (eds.), *Power and politics in early medieval Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1988), 67.

activity *per se*, a problem which he fully acknowledges. In a sense, he was perhaps looking for the ritual element in the wrong place, but the negative evidence led him to his most significant observation - that in the early historic period the functions of residence and ritual appear to have been separated out to different locations.⁵⁵ This statement remains to be more fully proven. The separation of ritual and residence, which Warner conjectures for the early medieval period, is certainly demonstrated by the juxtaposition of inauguration sites to the principal chiefry strongholds within later medieval lordships (see chapter II, 2.20).

In his M.A. thesis on royal inauguration sites, 1976, C. Manning presented the results of an archaeological survey of approximately forty inauguration sites (with varying degrees of certainty), which included the prehistoric provincial centres.⁵⁶ The principal value of his work is that it assembled a substantial corpus of sites with accompanying documentation, for the first time. By presenting this evidence and demonstrating the diversity of site types used for inauguration in the medieval period, it broadened the scope for further archaeological investigation of royal activity beyond the prehistoric centres. Manning also noted the tendency towards the use of enclosed mounds and he raised the question as to whether they were sepulchral or otherwise. He also proposed locations for some sites which were mentioned by Céitinn, but which eluded identification by O'Donovan. Among them is Dun Caillighe Beirre, which Manning suggested might be identified with a small but prominently appointed ringfort commanding the southern entrance to the Glen of the Downs, in Ó Broin's lordship of Uí Faoláin. This thesis expands on some of the aspects of inauguration places explored in Manning's work, adding more sites to the corpus and proposing alternative locations to some of those offered by earlier scholars. It raises new questions, and makes extensive use of authoritative documentary evidence, integrating it into the archaeological discussion. It also takes the classification of the sites used for inauguration further, and makes use of comparative analysis in drawing conclusions.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 57-8; More recently, Warner in 'On crannogs and kings (part 1)', *UJA* 57, 1994, 61 - 9, has turned his attention to 'royal' islands and crannóga. He suggests that while they may not strictly be seats of kingship, they could conceivably be part of wider royal complexes which incorporate inauguration and assembly features.

⁵⁶ C. Manning, *The royal inauguration sites of Ireland* (M.A. thesis, UCD, 1976).

CHAPTER I. THE CEREMONY AND RITUAL SYMBOLS OF ROYAL

INAUGURATION

1. 1 Indo-European Tradition and the Cenél Conaill Kingship Ritual

The origins of the Irish rite of royal inauguration, which conferred a quasi-divine status on the king-elect, are believed to lie in Indo-European tradition.¹ Parallels have been drawn between elements of the Irish rite and those of the ancient Indian *aśvamedha* or ritual sacrifice of a horse, and the *râjasûya* or royal consecration. The fascinating, if complex, *râjasûya* has been described as an ‘endless series of cycles stretching over a number of years’, involving among other rituals, unction and acclamation, a chariot drive, a warring or raiding expedition, and enthronement.² Schröder was the first to recognise some of these parallels. He claimed a close correspondence between the ceremony of the *aśvamedha*, in which the queen engaged in a semi-symbolic mating with a dead stallion, and the king-making ritual of the Cenél Conaill of Tír Conaill (described by Giraldus Cambrensis in the twelfth century), in which a white mare was sacrificed after the royal candidate had engaged in sexual union with it.³ In his account, Cambrensis explained that once the mare had been killed, it was cut up in pieces and boiled in water and that a bath was then prepared for the king, from the same solution. As the ceremony proceeded, or as Cambrensis implies, degenerated, the king surrounded by his assembly ate of the meat of the mare. He drank of the broth in which he was bathed, ‘not in any cup, or using his hand, but just dipping his mouth into it round about him’. When this ‘unrighteous rite’ had been carried out, his kingship and dominion had been conferred (fig. 1).⁴ While this account has been dismissed by some scholars as a fanciful tale related by a propagandist Cambro-Norman, others tend to believe that comparative evidence lends some credibility to Cambrensis’ account, and that it may represent a memory of a survival of the ceremony in a relict area.⁵

¹ M. Dillon, ‘The consecration of Irish kings’, *Celtica* 10, 1973, 1.

² J.C. Heesterman, *The inner conflict of tradition: essays in Indian ritual, kingship, and society* (Chicago and London, 1985), 117-20.

³ F.R. Schröder, ‘Ein Altirischer Krönungsritus und das Indogermanische Rossopfer’, *ZCP* 16, 1927, 310-12.

⁴ J.J. O’Meara (ed.), *Gerald of Wales: the history and topography of Ireland* (London, 1982), 110.

⁵ J. Stewart, ‘Topographia Hiberniae’, *Celtica* 21, 1990, 643.

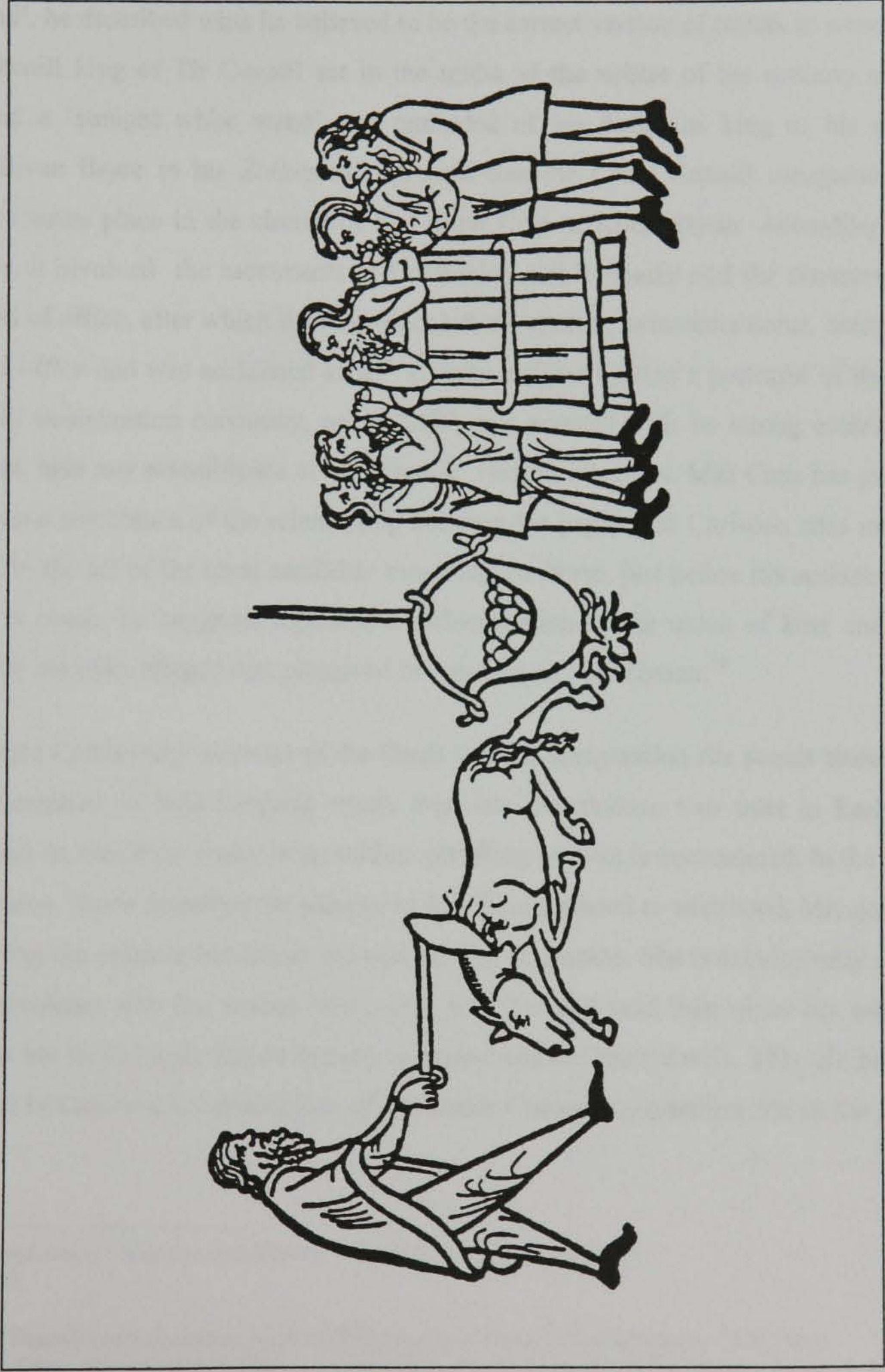


Fig. 1 The Cenél Conaill inauguration rite as portrayed by Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hiberniae*.

Among the more adamant refutations of the Cambrensis' account were those of the seventeenth-century historians, Seathrún Céitinn and Philip O'Sullivan Beare. An indignant Céitinn considered Cambrensis' account 'a malicious unwarranted lie',⁶ and claimed that it was not 'credible that the nobility of Ireland would permit the king of *Cinéal Conaill* to have in use that barbarous custom'.⁷ Drawing on the 'ancient records of Ireland', he described what he believed to be the correct version of events in which the Ó Domhnaill king of Tír Conaill sat in the midst of the nobles of his territory and was handed a 'straight white wand' and reminded of his duties as king of his people.⁸ O'Sullivan Beare in his *Zoilomastix* stressed that the Cenél Conaill inauguration had always taken place in the church of St Colum Cille at Kilmacrenan. According to that author, it involved the sacraments of Confession and Eucharist and the consecration of the rod of office, after which the king-elect left the church, mounted a horse, received the rod of office and was acclaimed king.⁹ Clearly, neither Céitinn's portrayal of the Cenél Conaill inauguration ceremony, nor O'Sullivan's account with its strong ecclesiastical content, bear any resemblance to Cambrensis' version of events. Mac Cana has proposed that some semblance of the relationship between the pagan and Christian rites might be found in the act of the royal candidate mounting the horse, just before his acclamation as king. It could, he suggests, represent a rationalisation of the union of king and mare, echoing the older alleged rite, preserved in Cambrensis' description.¹⁰

Although Cambrensis' account of the Cenél Conaill inauguration rite stands alone in the documentation of Irish kingship ritual, there are nonetheless, two tales in Early Irish literature in which the theme of an initiate partaking of meat is encountered. In the first of these tales, which describes the passage of Mis from girlhood to adulthood, Mis goes mad following the death of her father and takes to the wilderness. She is subsequently rescued by a musician who has sexual intercourse with her and who then gives her meat and washes her in its broth. Mis is thereby reformed and becomes a wife. This tale has been likened to Cambrensis' description of the Cenél Conaill inauguration rite in the respect

⁶ D. Comyn (ed.), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, vol. 1 (ITS 4, London, 1902), 25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ T.J. O'Donnell (ed.), *Selections from the Zoilomastix of Philip O'Sullivan Beare* (IMS, 1960).

¹⁰ P. Mac Cana, 'Review of selections from the *Zoilomastix* of Philip O'Sullivan Beare', *Celtica* 6, 1963, 290-2.

that the social identity of the initiate is transformed as a result of the ritual.¹¹ In a second tale involving cooking, in *Cóir Anmann*, the five brothers Lugaid, each contending for kingship, capture a fawn, roast it and consume it. The brothers then go hunting and finding themselves suddenly in a snowstorm, two of them seek shelter in a mansion inhabited by an ugly hag. Lugaid Laígde agrees to sleep with her and she consequently transforms into a beautiful young woman, revealing herself as the sovereignty. This tale has been interpreted as carrying the same import as the story of Mis, emphasising in this instance the passage from wilderness to the acquisition of kingship.¹²

In a recent detailed study of Cambrensis' account, Pontfarcy, drawing on the details of the consecration of the king of Tara as related in the twelfth-century *Life of Colmán son of Lúachain*, and the ritual procedure in the *ašvamedha* and *râjasûya*, proposes a sequence of formal acts which might have constituted the Cenél Conaill rite.¹³ She identifies five possible stages in the ritual cycle, namely the mating of the future king with the mare; the sacrifice, butchery and boiling of the mare; the bath of the king in the broth; the eating of the meat of the mare by the king and his assembly; and finally the drinking of the broth by the king, directly with his mouth. It is suggested that, collectively, each of these acts symbolise the 'course of the universal rhythm of the fertility process during which the king is born, re-enters the womb, dies and is reborn', simulating the relationship of the king with his subjects, territory, and ultimately with sovereignty.¹⁴ The inauguration of the king of Tara as described in the twelfth-century *Betha Colmáin Mheic Lúacháin* is a rather more simple affair than the elaborate ritual surrounding the Cenél Conaill rite, but Pontfarcy suggests that they have a shared symbolism in some respects. The sexual act of mating with the mare in the Cenél Conaill rite, the sacrifice of the horse, the bath and the consumption of food is reflected to some extent in the acts which constitute the rite of the king of Tara. The king stands at the foot of the Pillar-stone of the Hostages at Tara while Maelumae, son of Forannan, who is empowered to proclaim the king, stands on a flagstone below the royal candidate. Maelumae is portrayed as the guardian of sovereignty - the mediator between the king and his territorial bride. In the course of the inauguration

¹¹ K. McCone, *Pagan past and Christian present in Early Irish literature* (Maynooth, 1990), 173 (citing J. F. Nagy, *The wisdom of the outlaw: the boyhood deeds of Finn in Gaelic narrative tradition*, 1985, 132-3).

¹² K. McCone, *ibid.*, 173-4.

¹³ Y. De Pontfarcy, 'Two late inaugurations of Irish kings', *Études Celtiques* 24, 1987, 203-208.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 205-6.

rite the royal candidate casts a spear at Maelumae. He is given a horsewhip to protect himself and he must not step off the flagstone.¹⁵ This is essentially a gesture of killing or sacrifice which Pontfarcy compares with the ritual sacrifice of the horse, but it could also be said that it recalls one of the rites of the *rajasuya* where, prior to his enthronement, the Indian king shot arrows in the direction of one of the inauguration officiators who was posted at the end of a chariot course.¹⁶ It is of interest too, that a spear features in the inauguration ceremony of the Mac Mathghamhna of Oirghialla as described in the seventeenth-century tract *Cíos Mhic Mhathghamhna*. The author of the tract states that Ó Connalaigh, the chief marshal of all Oirghialla, had to supply the 'appropriate horse, the jerkin, the sword, the head-dress and the great spear for the inauguration ceremony.'¹⁷

The ritual which confirms the recognition of Conaire Mór as king of Tara in the saga *De Shíl Chonairi Moir* bears no resemblance to the rite described in *Betha Colmáin Mheic Lúacháin*; but again, the use of a chariot course as the venue for Conaire Mór's rite of passage recalls the significance of the chariot course in the Indian *râjasûya*. The saga tells how there was a king's chariot at Tara to which were yoked two steeds of the same colour, which had never been harnessed. If a claimant to the kingship proved unworthy, the chariot would tilt up before him and the horses would spring at him. A king's mantle lay within the chariot and 'whoso might not receive Tara's sovereignty the mantle was ever too big for him'. The ultimate test took place on the chariot course. Two flagstones - 'Blocc' and 'Bluigne' - would part for the chariot of a worthy claimant and the Lia Fáil at the head of the course would screech against his axle, crying out in recognition of the new king. In the saga, Conaire Mór passes each test and he assumes the kingship.¹⁸

A point overlooked by Pontfarcy is the obvious difference in the details of the *ašvamedha* and the Cenél Conaill ritual; in the former, the queen or *mahisi* engages in a semi-symbolic sexual union with a dead stallion, while the king of Tír Conaill mates with a mare. This problem of role reversal is however, somewhat offset by Puhvel's recent

¹⁵ K. Meyer (ed.), *Betha Colmáin Lúacháin* (Dublin, 1911), 72.

¹⁶ J.C. Heesterman, *op. cit.*, 119.

¹⁷ S. Ó Dufaigh, 'Cíos Mhic Mhathghamhna', *Clogher Record*, vol.4, no. 3, 1962, 132. This tract provides an account of the rents claimed by the Mhic Mhathghamhna from the Norman settlers in Louth and Meath, and of the rights and duties of their own sub-chiefs in Monaghan in the early fifteenth century; Sir Henry Piers, in his Chorographical description of the County of Westmeath, written A.D. 1682, C. Vallancey (ed.), *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicus*, no. 1 (Dublin 1786), 122-3, notes that it was customary during a wedding day in the county for short darts to be cast at the company that attended the bride.

¹⁸ L. Gwynn, 'De Shíl Chonairi Mór', *Ériu* 6, 1912, 138-40.

suggestion that the prototype pattern of the Indo-European rite may have been 'King and Mare'.¹⁹ In addition, possible depictions of the union of king and mare have been noted in Indian art dated to c. 1000AD, a fine example of which is a stone sculpture of a man [possibly a king] mating with a horse, from Laksmana temple, Khajuraho.²⁰ The replacement of king and mare with queen and stallion has been attributed to the decline in the status of the mare as goddess, and the absorption of the Near Eastern ritual union of queen or goddess and beast.²¹

The debate with regard to the function of the horse in the rituals of Indo-European society has tended to concentrate on a search for parallels in the symbols of the ritual itself. Puhvel has criticised this comparativist approach as an exercise in cataloguing data which remain 'repositories of ethnological curiosities rather than mythical matter'.²² He believes that the only viable comparisons are those between the ancient Indic *ašvamedha*, the Roman *October Equus* and Cambrensis' description of the Cenél Conaill rite. The common denominator between these three comparative rites is not so much to be found in the details of the ritual itself (as they differ in many respects), but in the origin-myth upon which that ritual was founded. The Indo-European equine myth is essentially that of the mating of a kingship class candidate with a goddess who embodies sovereignty and sexual and warlike strength.²³ By identifying and returning to this Indic hierogamic cult myth (and not to the details of the ritual itself), an underlying theme which is common to all the various ritual expressions of that myth, is revealed. The reason why the details of the ritual sacrifice of a horse in its Indian, Roman and Celtic expressions do not compare well, has been attributed to the fact that the ritual was 'cut adrift from the cult myth that once explained its meaning'.²⁴ It is not known over what time-span the royal candidates of Tír Conaill practised this ritual, or whether it was peculiar to that northern sept or more widespread, but that it did occur in the pre-Norman period seems quite probable. It can be concluded that the mating with and sacrifice of the mare in the Cenél Conaill inauguration

¹⁹ J. Puhvel, 'Aspects of equine functionality', in J. Puhvel (ed.), *Myth and law among the Indo-Europeans* (London, 1970), 168.

²⁰ J.E. Doan, 'Women and Goddesses in Early Celtic history, myth and legend', *Working papers in Irish studies* (unpublished paper, Boston, 1987), p. 84, fig. 27.

²¹ J. Puhvel, *op. cit.*, 168.

²² *Ibid.*, 171.

²³ *Ibid.*, 172.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

ritual was part of a 'pan-Celtic Indo-European inheritance'.²⁵ In effect, it was an expression of the Indic *aśvamedha* which at some point was incorporated into the consecration ceremony as a royal rite - a rite which symbolised the union of the king with sovereignty.

Apart from the similarities between the Cenél Conaill ritual and the Indic *asvamedha*, there are a number of symbolic elements in the Indian *râjasûya* (royal consecration ritual) which find echoes in the ritual of medieval and later medieval Irish inauguration ceremonies. Features of the *râjasûya*, such as the bearing of a rod of kingship; the ritual stepping towards each of the five regions of the king's territory; the chanting of praise poetry; and the performance of a mock chariot race or cattle raid, find analogies in the Irish rite, well into later medieval times. Each of these rituals seem to represent a survival of the earliest form of the Indo-European king-making customs on the fringe of the old Indo-European world.²⁶ Some of the similarities will be discussed below.

1.2 The Inauguration Ceremony in Medieval Ireland

The medieval Irish inauguration rite is substantially divorced in many of its details from both the Cambrensis' model and the elaborate cycle of acts surrounding the inauguration of the kings of Tara related in early Irish literature. Detailed accounts of the medieval inauguration ceremony are scant, but from what survives, it is possible to identify a set of surprisingly coherent formal acts which legitimised the authority of the Irish king or chief in this period. Not all the rites are ubiquitous or consistent, however, and explanations must be sought for apparent nuances and transformations. The earliest annalistic reference to a royal inauguration is for the year 1106 and concerns the election of Toirrdelbach Ó Conchobhair as king over the Síol Muireadhaigh at Áth an Termoinn, near Boyle.²⁷ No details of that ceremony are provided, but as suggested in case study IV, it had a strong Christian aspect, and may have been an attempt by the church to arrest a traditionally practised, pagan provincial kingship rite. There are a few sketchy references to royal inaugurations in the thirteenth century. These concern the respective elections of the later Toirrdelbach Ó Conchobair, by Aodh Ó Néill in 1225,²⁸ the succession of Aodh Ó

²⁵ Ibid., 164.

²⁶ M. Dillon, *op. cit.*, 5-8.

²⁷ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 983.

²⁸ *Ann. Conn.*, 9.

Conchobair in 1228,²⁹ and the *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* records Uí Bhriain inaugurations at Magh Adhair in 1242, 1268, and 1277.³⁰ At Conchobair Ó Briain's inauguration in 1242, 'all heads of kindreds, captains of peoples, and all district assemblies', attended. He was proclaimed by Sída Mac Con Mara, acclaimed by the other chiefs 'and the thing was done'.³¹ Apart from the act of assembling, and the king's proclamation by the Mac Con Mara, no further details of the ceremony are imparted in the *Caithréim*'s records of the Uí Bhriain inaugurations of 1268 and 1277.

More promising material manifests itself in a prose tract accompanying a ceremonial ode which celebrates the inauguration of the Ó Conchobhair of Connacht. Dillon suggested that the ode itself was probably composed for the inauguration of Feidhlimidh Ó Conchobhair at Carn Fraích in 1310,³² but more recently, Simms has proposed that it may have been written by the *ollamh* Torna Ó Maoil Chonaire (d.1468) in anticipation of the inauguration of Feidhlimidh Fionn, son of Ó Conchobhair Ruadh, in the fifteenth century.³³ Simms has also argued that the prototype of the accompanying prose tract may have been originally compiled as early as the twelfth or thirteenth century.³⁴ The tract provides a relatively detailed account of the members of the gathering, and the function of the various officials. Although it does not enunciate the actual sequence of formal acts which comprised the ceremony, these can be perceived to a certain extent through the roles of the officiators. The tract opens with the statement 'This is how kings of Connacht are made king, as Patrick ordained when he made Duí Galach son of Brión, son of Eochu [Muigmedhón] king', and proceeds to explain that the *coarbs* of twelve bishops of Ireland and the twelve chieftains of Síol Muireadhaigh were obliged to attend at the inauguration. These, together with the kings of Bréifne, Uí Fhiachrach and Luighne Connacht, Ó hEidhin, Ó Seachnusaigh, Mac Diarmada, and the other nobles of Connacht who were obliged to attend, formed the assembly at the inauguration.³⁵ On the mound of Carn Fraích, the *ollamh* Ó Maol Chonaire, who was the only member of the assembly entitled

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1228.

³⁰ S.H. O'Grady (ed.), *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*, vol. 2 (*ITS* 27, London, 1929), 2, 6, 10.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³² M. Dillon, 'The inauguration of O'Conor', in J.A. Watt, J.B. Morrall and F.X. Martin (eds.), *Medieval Studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn*, S.J. (Dublin, 1961), 186-8.

³³ K. Simms, 'Gabh umad a Fheidhlimidh - a fifteenth-century inauguration ode', *Ériu* 31, 1980, 136.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

³⁵ M. Dillon, *op. cit.*, 196-7. Dillon's text erroneously extends the abbreviation for 'Muigmedhón' as 'son of Muireadhach (communication from K. Simms). See *Ann. Conn.*, 1310:7.

to stand on the mound with the royal candidate, gave the *slat na ríge* - the rod of kingship, to Ó Conchobhair. All the while, another officiator, Ó Connachtáin, kept 'the gate of the mound', for which he received an ounce of gold. The royal candidate, as implied in the tract, arrived on horseback and he was apparently dressed in particular raiment for the occasion. Both the king's clothing and his horse were given to the *coarb* of Da Chonna who mounted the horse from the king's back.³⁶ Likewise, the late medieval Second Irish Life of Máedóc of Ferns states that the newly made king of Bréifne gave his horse and robes to the family of Máedóc, and among Máedóc's dues from Leinster on the day of inauguration of the king of the province, was the 'suit of the king ... except his silk shirt and his one spear'.³⁷ In *Cíos Mhic Mhathghamhna* there is no specific mention of the chief's garments being given to the inaugurator, but on the day of his inauguration the Mac Mathghamhna gave a 'rider's suit or forty marks of old silver in its stead' to the three principal chieftains of the Oirghialla - Ó Buidhellan of Dartraighe, Mac Ceanaithe in the Triúcha, and Duthach of Teallach Gealagain.³⁸ The surrendering of the king's attire is not peculiar to the Irish rite. In Johann Abbot of Viktring's fourteenth-century account of the inauguration of Meinhard II as Duke of Carinthia in 1286, the duke-elect is freed of his precious garments and put into peasant dress (a grey linen shirt, a pale hat and simple shoes) by a hereditary 'dresser'. A bargain is made between the peasant inaugurator and the duke whereby the latter is granted the dukedom in exchange for his ceremonial attire, along with an ox and mare, sixty denarii and freedom from tax.³⁹ Another fourteenth-century description of the Carinthian ceremony, from Ottokar of Styria, gives further details of the duke's humble ceremonial robes.⁴⁰ Apart from the hat and the shirt which was decorated with no more than four pieces of embroidery, he wore grey trousers and two red shoes symbolic of his sovereignty.⁴¹ In what is the fullest surviving account of the Scottish ceremony, the seventeenth-century historian Hugh MacDonald explained that

³⁶ Ibid., 197.

³⁷ C. Plummer (ed.), *Bethada Náem nÉrenn* (Oxford, 1922), vol.1 202-3, 257, vol. 2, 196-7, 249; F.J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* (London, 1973), 22.

³⁸ S. Ó Dufaigh, op. cit., 131-2.

³⁹ F. Schneider (ed.), *Johannis Abbatis Victoriensis, Liber Certarum Historiarum* (MGH Scriptorum Rerum Germanicarum in usum Scholarum, Hannover, 1909), vol. 1, 290-93.

⁴⁰ J. Seemüller (ed.), *Ottokar's Österreichische Reimchronik* (MGH Deutsche Chroniken 5, Hannover, 1890), 264-6 [19964-20135]. Ottokar's account actually refers to the inauguration of Albrecht II as the first Habsburg Duke of Carinthia, in 1335, but at the close of the tract he explains that the same ceremony was conducted on the occasion of Meinhard II's inauguration in 1286. I am indebted to A. Kehnel for access to her unpublished study of both this and the above text.

⁴¹ R. Graves, in *The White Goddess* (London, 1961), 324, discusses the significance of scarlet or crimson shoes as a symbol of royalty and sacredness.

the Lord of the Isles wore a white habit during his inauguration, and that afterwards this belonged to the poet by right.⁴² Somewhat like his Carinthian and Scottish counterparts, the Ó Conchobhair king-elect of Connacht probably arrived in some finery. He was then divested and dressed again in a simple habit which, along with his horse, symbolically became the property of the *coarb*. The outstanding difference however, is that the Ó Conchobhair's horse and raiment were not presented to the inaugurating *ollamh*, but to the *coarb* - a variation which expresses the increased intervention of the church in the Ó Conchobhair ceremony at that time.

The annals record three Uí Chonchobhair inaugurations for the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but none, with the exception of that relating to Feidhlimidh Mac Aedha at Carn Fraích in 1310, provides any further insight into the ritual of the ceremony. Feidhlimidh's inauguration of 1310, described as 'the most splendid kingship-marriage (*banais ríge*) ever celebrated down to that day', involved a curious act which is not noted in any other record of medieval Irish king-making. In the aftermath of Feidhlimidh's marriage to the Province of Connacht, his foster-father, Maelruanaidh Mac Diarmada, 'waited upon him during the night in the manner remembered by the old men and recorded in the old books'.⁴³

A somewhat later insertion in the early fifteenth-century *Book of Lecan* provides a brief but revealing account of the protocol surrounding the inauguration of the Ó Dubhda chief of Uí Fiachrach. Whether it is contemporary with the ceremony as it was performed in the fifteenth century, or a record of earlier practices, is open to question. A number of parallels can be drawn between the Ó Conchobhair and the Ó Dubhda ceremonies. Like the former, there were two principal officiators at Ó Dubhda's inauguration (which was variously held at either Carn Amhalgaidh in Tír Amhalgaidh, or Carn inghine Bhriain in Tír Fhiachrach), namely, the *ollamh* Mac Firbis, and Ó Caomháin, one of the leading tributary chiefs of Uí Fiachrach. It was unlawful to nominate the Ó Dubhda until Ó Caomháin and Mac Firbis first pronounced the name and Mac Firbis brought the 'body of the rod [*corp na slaiti*] over the head of O'Dubhda'.⁴⁴ Once these two formal acts had been performed, the general assembly which comprised the *coarbs* and tributary chiefs of

⁴² J.R.N. Macphail (ed.), *Highland Papers*, vol.1 (Edinburgh, 1914), 23-4.

⁴³ *Ann. Conn.*, 223.

⁴⁴ J.O'Donovan (ed.), *The genealogies, tribes and customs of Hy-Fiachrach* (Dublin, 1844), 441.

the district, responded with an acclamation of Ó Dubhda as chief of his name.⁴⁵ After the nomination of the new chief, Ó Caomháin walked thrice round him,⁴⁶ a rite which would more usually have been the preserve of the *ollamh*, Mac Firbis (see *deiseal* below). The assumption of this privilege by Ó Caomháin was a measure of his importance as Ó Dubhda's principal vassal in the later Middle Ages.⁴⁷ In the case of the Ó Conchobhair ceremony, as noted above, the *coarb* of Da Chonna was given the chief's raiment and his horse. This act differs slightly in the Ó Dubhda ritual where the chief's 'weapons, battle dress and steed' were given to Ó Caomháin, and in turn Ó Caomháin gave his own battle dress and weapons to the *ollamh* Mac Firbis.⁴⁸ It may also be inferred from the Ó Dubhda account, that a feast was held after the nomination, at which further ritual took place. The privilege of 'the first drinking' was given to Ó Caomháin, but he was not to partake of that drink until he first presented it to Mac Firbis.⁴⁹ In his citation of the 'privileges of the race of Caomhan', Giolla Isu Mór Mac Firbis adds that not only was Ó Caomháin entitled to take the first drink, but also to take the first bath.⁵⁰

The account of the medieval inauguration ceremony of the Ó Dubhda is invaluable as it spells out at least some of the rites which constituted the ceremony in this region. To sum up, on the occasion of an election, the tributary chiefs and *coarbs* of the district assembled at Carn Amhalgaidh or Carn inghine Bhriain, as required. The chief-elect arrived on horseback, and standing on the mound, he was named by the *ollamh*, Mac Firbis and by Ó Caomháin, the principal tributary lord, who then walked thrice round him. The *ollamh* brought *slat na ríge* down over the king's head and proclaimed him, and this was followed by the acclamation of the general assembly. His garments, weapons and horse were given to the tributary lord who in turn bestowed his weapons and raiment to the *ollamh*. The ceremony culminated in a feast at which the first drink and first bath was the preserve of the tributary lord. Feasting was apparently the celebratory climax of the ceremony and according to Hugh MacDonald in his account of the inauguration of the Lord of the Isles at Finlaggan, Isle of Islay, it was usual for the assembly to be royally

⁴⁵ Ibid., 441-2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 142-3.

⁴⁷ K. Simms, *From kings to warlords: the changing political structure of Gaelic Ireland in the later middle ages* (Suffolk, 1987), 31.

⁴⁸ J. O'Donovan (ed.), *op. cit.*, 440.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ 'Geinealach Ua bh-Fiachrach' in J.O'Donovan (ed.), 143.

feasted for a week after the election of their new leader.⁵¹ The presentation of the first drink to Ó Caomháin at the inauguration feast of the Ó Dubhda may well be a variation on the drinking rituals so closely identified with the process of king-making in the early Irish sagas. In the ninth-century tale *Fled Bricrenn*, Medb, the ‘intoxicating one’ and prophetess of Irish kingship, presents Loégaire the Triumphant, Conall Cernach and Cúchulainn successively, with a champion’s portion of meat and a bronze cup full of undiluted wine which they drink in one swallow as part of their accession ritual.⁵² Likewise, in the late seventh-century text *Baile in Scáil, flaith Érenn*, the female personification of the sovereignty of Ireland, offers a silver vat full of red ale, a golden can and a golden cup to Conn of Temair.⁵³ Enright has demonstrated that a drinking ritual including a royal naming by the lord’s consort was central to the Germanic *comitatus* in the early Middle Ages and he argues that this liquor ritual is of considerable antiquity extending back to the Mid-La Tène period. Drawing on the Irish sagas, *Beowulf*, and Scandinavian iconography, he shows that the presentation of the cup and the drinking were integral to the champion’s accession ritual in the Anglo-Saxon, Viking and medieval Irish worlds.⁵⁴ The continuance of this rite into the later Middle Ages in Ireland has not been examined in any detail, but the allusion to the ‘first drink’ in the Ó Dubhda ceremony, combined with references to royal drinking horns in the annals and the survival of the Kavanagh ‘Charter Horn’, suggests that this may have been the case. In 1151 Toirrdelbach Ua Briain presented the drinking horn of Brian Boroime together with ten score ounces of gold and sixty jewels to the nobles of Síl Muiredaig and Conmaicne, and on the death of Toirrdelbach Ó Conchobhair in 1156, his bequest to the churches of Ireland included 160 ounces of gold, sixty marks of refined silver and among other personal possessions, his drinking horn.⁵⁵ Byrne has also remarked on the use of drinking horns as *tuarastal* distributed by Leinster kings and he has noted that *coirn buaball*, drinking horns of wild ox, were symbols of royal power among the Laigin.⁵⁶ The so-called Kavanagh ‘Charter Horn’, an ivory horn with brass mounts, may originally have served as a hunting horn or trumpet as its narrow end was formerly hollow, but it was in

⁵¹ J.R.N. MacPhail (ed.), *Highland papers*, vol.1 (Edinburgh, 1914), 24.

⁵² G. Henderson (ed.), *Fled Bricrend: The Feast of Briciu* (London, 1899), 75-9.

⁵³ E. O’Curry, *Lectures on the manuscript materials of ancient Irish history* (Dublin, 1861; reprint 1995), 618f. Text in R. Thurneysen, ‘Baile in Scáil’, *ZCP*, vol. 20, 1936, 219-20.

⁵⁴ M.J. Enright, *Lady with a mead cup: ritual, prophecy and lordship in the European warband from La Tène to the Viking Age* (Dublin, 1996), 264-282.

⁵⁵ W. Stokes, *The Annals of Tigernach*, vol.2 (1896/97; reprint Felinbach, 1993), 388, 396.

use as the Kavanagh ceremonial drinking cup at least as early as the end of the fifteenth century.⁵⁷ Ó Floinn in his detailed study of the horn does not go so far as to say that it may have been used in the inauguration ceremonies of the MacMurrough-Kavanaghs, but he does suggest that its refurbishment by them in the fifteenth century coincides with their renewed claims to the kingship of Leinster at that time.⁵⁸ The ancestral drinking vessel of the MacLeods of Lewis and Harris, more commonly known as ‘Rory Mor’s Horn’ compares very well with the Kavanagh horn. It has a plain ivory body and decorative silver rim mount. On his coming of age, the MacLeod’s heir had to drain a full horn of claret in one draught ‘without setting down or falling down’.⁵⁹ Returning to the case of Ó Caomháin taking the ‘first drink’ in the Ó Dubhda ceremony, the fact that it is a tributary lord and apparently not the newly elected chief who assumes this privilege, needs some explanation. The genealogist’s explanation was that the first drink symbolised Ó Caomháin’s theoretically superior right to the kingship as a descendant of the senior line.⁶⁰ Tradition is not immutable and significant changes took place in the Gaelic polity in the later Middle Ages which were simultaneously reflected in the ritual of inauguration ceremonies. Foremost among these changes was the rise in status and importance of the leading vassals and this may be what is demonstrated in the act of Ó Caomháin taking the first drink. Additional ritual transformations will be discussed below.

In a third detailed account of an inauguration rite, in the late Irish *Life* of St Máedóc of Ferns, there are obvious analogies with the Ó Conchobhair and Ó Dubhda ceremonies, but some different formalities are also introduced. The *Life* outlines the inauguration ceremony of the king of Bréifne which commenced with the procession of the twelve *coarbs* of Máedóc carrying the reliquary called the *Brecc Máedóc* around the kingship candidate. This assembly then paid honour to the *coarb* Ó Dubhthaigh, the chief officiator at the ceremony, who subsequently gave the *slat na ríge* (rod of kingship) to the king. According to the *Life*, it was imperative that the *slat* was cut from ‘the hazel of Máedóc in Sescenn Uairbeóil in Leinster’. Like the Ó Conchobhair inauguration, during which the king-elect gave his horse and raiment to an ecclesiastic, the twelve *coarbs* of Máedóc

⁵⁶ F.J. Byrne, *op. cit.*, 153

⁵⁷ R. Ó Floinn, ‘The Kavanagh “Charter Horn”’, in D. Ó Corráin (ed.), *Irish antiquity: essays and studies presented to M.J. O’Kelly* (Cork, 1981), 275.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁵⁹ F. Maclean, *Highlanders: a history of the Scottish clans* (London, 1995), 73.

⁶⁰ J. O’Donovan (ed.), *The genealogies, tribes and customs ...*, *op.cit.*, 109.

were presented with the horse and robes of the newly elected king. A third of this equipment was due to Ó Dubhthaigh, 'in honour of his nurture and fosterage of Máedóc'.⁶¹

From all of the above, it is possible to identify specific ritual acts which were common to the medieval inauguration ceremony. The assembly invariably comprised the tributary chiefs of the sept lands, and select neighbouring lords who were privileged to attend. An ecclesiastical presence in the form of the *coarbs* of the respective churches which lay within the kingdom or lordship, was also usual. The preliminaries are unrecorded, but both the Ó Conchobhair tract and the account of the Ó Dubhda ceremony intimate that the king or chief-elect arrived at the place of inauguration on horseback, and probably in processional fashion. Comparative evidence suggests that he may then have been divested of the attire he had arrived in and put on a simple habit or robe. The rod of kingship (*slat na ríge*), or as it would later become, the rod of lordship (*slat tighearnais*), re-occurs as the principal symbolic prop of the ceremony and was generally handed to, or as suggested in the Ó Dubhda inauguration, brought down over the head of the royal candidate by the main officiator who might occasionally be a *coarb*, but more commonly an *ollamh*. This rite, together with the proclamation of the king-elect by the *ollamh*; the performance of a ceremonial turn around the chief; his acclamation by the general assembly; and the passing of the king's horse and raiment, either to the *ollamh*, *coarb*, or both, represent five clearly defined formalities.

The curious rite of the ceremonial turn, practised in the inauguration ceremonies of the Ó Dubhda, the king of Bréifne, and the king of Leinster,⁶² was also noted by Edmund Spenser in his *View of the present state of Ireland, 1596*. According to Spenser, the chief-elect stood on an inauguration stone and on descending from it, following his proclamation, the newly elected royal 'turneth himself round, thrice forward and thrice backward'.⁶³ Spenser's observation suggests a clockwise turn or *deiseal*, simulating the course of the sun, followed by a counter-clockwise turn or withershins.⁶⁴ This is an

⁶¹ C. Plummer (ed.), op. cit., vol. 2, 197.

⁶² Ibid., 'the successor of Áed son of Sétnae to go three times round him'; *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*, vol. 2, 249.

⁶³ W.L. Renwick (ed.), *A view of the present state of Ireland by Edmund Spenser* (Oxford, 1970),

⁶⁴ Withershins, also widdershins (Scottish) meaning counter-clockwise; widersinnes (Middle High German) meaning counter-course.

incongruous combination, as the *deiseal* was considered propitious (the ceremonial turn south, auguring luck), while the contrary motion north was deemed inauspicious.⁶⁵ It can only be concluded that Spenser's record of this rite is inaccurate. Some support for the idea that it was solely the *deiseal* or cosmical rotation which was practised, can be found in the inauguration ceremony of the king of Bréifne where as we have seen, the Brecc Máedóc was carried three times clockwise around the potentate, and in the ceremony of the king of Leinster the *coarb* of Máedoc went three times round about the royal candidate. It is noteworthy that the Shrine of the Cathach was also put to use as a periapt and in much the same manner. That particular shrine was the battle standard of the Uí Dhomhnaill and it was believed that when it was taken thrice right-hand wise around the army of Tír Conaill prior to their engagement in battle, their safe return was ensured.⁶⁶ It is suggested in case study III that it could also have been used in the king-making ritual of the Uí Dhomhnaill. The *deiseal* performed with a reliquary may have featured too in the Mac Mathghamhna ceremony which was held at Mullach Leic; oral tradition collected in the townland of Leck, Co. Monaghan, in the early part of this century, relates that the shrine known as the Domhnach Airgid was used in the inauguration ceremony of the chief of that sept.⁶⁷ In the *Life of Findchua of Brí-Gobann*, the *deiseal* is performed by Findchua who comes to the aid of the Munstermen in their preparation to do battle with the Ulaid. Holding a crozier in his hand, he 'strengthens the counsel, and heartens the battalion, and comes thrice righthandwise round the host'.⁶⁸ Simms has drawn attention to the performance of the ceremonial turn in a mid thirteenth-century elegy for the chiefs Maghnus and Eachmharcach Ó Catháin. The poet, reminiscing on his boyhood days spent with Eachmharcach, describes how they once played at king-making on a mound - 'We, and the king on a mound which he disgraced not,/Going thrice around it [*or* "around him"]'.⁶⁹ Dillon proposed that the Irish *deiseal* might in some way be compared with a gesture in the Indian *rajasuya* where the king walked towards each of the five regions of his territory i.e. to the north, south, east, west, and centre, in order to symbolise the extent of his dominion. There may be some underlying analogy with the Irish rite in this act, in the sense of the king or chief-elect spinning around to view his territorial bride. Closer to

⁶⁵ S. Ferguson, 'On the ceremonial turn called "Desiul"', *PRIA* 1, 1879, 359.

⁶⁶ Rev. H.J. Lawlor, 'The Cathach of St Columba', *PRIA* 33C, 1916-17, 322-3.

⁶⁷ P. Livingstone, *The Monaghan story: a documented history of the County Monaghan from the earliest times to 1976* (Enniskillen, 1980), 46.

⁶⁸ W. Stokes, *Lives of the saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford, 1890), 240.

⁶⁹ K. Simms, *From kings to warlords*, op. cit., 23.

home, Johann, Abbot of Viktring indicates that a ceremonial turn was integral to the medieval Carinthian ceremony. After taking possession of the inauguration stone, the duke apparently turned around on it, swinging the sword to the four cardinal points, an act which combined the auspicious clockwise rotation with the gesture of delimiting the extent of his territorial dominion.⁷⁰

The reading aloud of the genealogy of the king or chief-elect and the recitation of an inaugural ode may also have taken place during the ceremony. There is no direct evidence for either practice in the Irish rite, but the abundance of Irish inaugural odes and some evidence for the incanting of genealogies in the Scottish king-making rite are suggestive otherwise. Dillon has noted that the chanting of *narasamsi* (verse lyric in form and heroic in content) was an integral part of the Indian *râjasûya*. He has drawn an analogy between *narasamsi* and some of the oldest fragments of Irish verse, suggesting, for instance, that poems written in praise of the legendary Labraid Loingsech Moen, ancestor of the Lagen, may have been recited at the inauguration ceremonies of the kings of Leinster.⁷¹ Adam in his work on the Highland clan system explained that it was common practice for the *seanchaidh* as inaugurator to fall on bended knee and declaim the genealogy of the royal candidate back to the eponymous founder of the race.⁷² This is borne out by an illustrated page from Jordan's fifteenth-century History of Scotland which shows a highland *seanchaidh* on bended knee reciting the descent of the boy king Alexander III at his inauguration on the Moot Hill of Scone in 1249 (fig. 2).⁷³ The fact that a large proportion of the Highland bardic families in the late fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were Irish, makes the likelihood of this practice being a shared custom of the Gaelic inauguration rite in both kingdoms, even stronger.⁷⁴

It has also been proposed that a *creach rîgh* or king's raid was a 'normal, if not indispensable concomitant' of the inauguration ritual.⁷⁵ Lucas provides an impressive

⁷⁰ F. Schneider (ed.), op. cit., 290-93.

⁷¹ M. Dillon, 'The consecration of Irish kings', *Celtica* 10, 1973, 5-8.

⁷² F. Adam, *The clans, septs and regiments of the Scottish Highlands* (1908; reprint Glasgow, 1984), 114-5.

⁷³ Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 171.

⁷⁴ W.F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland: a history of ancient Alban*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh, 1890), 337-8; J. MacInnes, in 'The oral tradition in Scottish Gaelic poetry', *Scottish Studies* 12, 1968, 33, argues that of the three families of professional composers of *dân díreach* who are most prominent in Scotland, and who survived longest, two - the MacMhuirichs and the O Muirgheasans - are in the nature of reinforcements from Ireland. He also notes that Angus Matheson has shown that the ancestry of the third - the MacEwens - may be Irish as well.

⁷⁵ A.T. Lucas, *Cattle in ancient Ireland* (Kilkenny, 1989), 146.



Fig. 2 A highland seanchaidh recites the descent of the boy king Alexander III at his inauguration on the Moot Hill of Scone, 1249 [From the MS of Jordan's History, early 15thc; Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 171].

amount of documentary evidence to support his thesis. He suggests that a reference to Domnall son of Aed 'wasting' Leinster at the commencement of his reign in AD 628 might be the earliest recorded example of the custom, followed by a similar entry in *AU* concerning the 'wasting' of Mide by Aed son of Niall Frasach in 796.⁷⁶ The annals are rich in references to this activity. The *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, for instance, note that following his succession to the kingship of Connacht in 1265, Aodh Ó Conchobhair 'immediately made his first and Regall prey upon the Contry of Affalie'.⁷⁷ Likewise, in 1559 when William Odhar Ó Cearbhaill assumed the lordship of Éile he made 'a captain's [first] expedition' against Mac Uí Bhriain Ara.⁷⁸ Tudor administrators also observed the frequency of this practice in Ulster. It was reported that when Aodh Ó Domhnaill was made the Ó Domhnaill in 1566 he immediately proceeded to Ó Cathain's country and 'took a great prey'.⁷⁹ The problem remains that we cannot be sure whether this was seen as a particular rite of the inauguration ceremony or simply the first expected duty of the newly elected king or chief. However, it may be of some consequence that a symbolic chariot drive, or warring or raiding expedition, was an integral part of the Indian *râjasûya*. In the *râjasûya* the symbolic war expedition or ritualised cattle raid was performed between the king's unction and enthronement. The king shot arrows in the direction of a *ksatriya* (a royal official who is transformed into a brahmin at the end of the *râjasûya* cycle) posted at the end of a chariot course, an act which symbolised a heroic raiding expedition abroad, after which the king triumphantly returned and mounted the throne.⁸⁰

1.3 Ritual Symbols

Simms has demonstrated that in the later Middle Ages there was a perceptible change of personnel officiating at inauguration ceremonies and an accompanying change of emphasis in the ritual symbols of inauguration. This transformation, which is discernible as early as the fourteenth century, was essentially an expression of the marked transition from the traditional concept of kingship to lordship, from *rí* to *tighearna*.⁸¹ Significantly, the Irish annalists' and compilers' terminology for inauguration also underwent change,

⁷⁶ Ibid., 147-8.

⁷⁷ *Ann. Clon.*, 245-6.

⁷⁸ *AFM.*, vol. 5, 1573.

⁷⁹ *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1509-73, 321.

⁸⁰ J.C. Heesterman, *op. cit.*, 119.

⁸¹ K. Simms, *From kings to warlords* (Suffolk, 1987), 30-33.

reflecting this new order.⁸² The term *do ríogadh* - to enking or enthrone, is used quite frequently in annalistic references to inaugurations in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries ['Toirrdelbhach do ríogadh occ Ath an Tearmoint'].⁸³ References for the later medieval period, however, tend to use *do ghairm* [Tigerna do ghairm do Fhelim Ócc O Dhochartaig];⁸⁴ *do goirthi*[do goirthi Ó Maolmhuidh];⁸⁵ *do dheanamh* [Mac Cathmhail do denum d'Eoghan MacCathmhail];⁸⁶ and more commonly *d'oirdneadh* [An Giolladubh d'oirdneadh ina ionad].⁸⁷ The latest annalistic use of *do ríogadh* [by then an archaism] occurs in a reference to the abortive attempt at inaugurating Donnchadh Ó Ruairc on Cruachain Ó Cupráin in 1470.⁸⁸

The fleeting and disparate references to medieval and later medieval Irish inauguration ceremonies indicate that both the rod and the shoe were the archetypal ceremonial symbols of legitimised authority.⁸⁹ The transition from *rí* to *tighearna* is mirrored in the declining potency or demystifying of the 'rod of kingship' (*slat na ríge*) evident from the fifteenth century onwards. It has been pointed out that although the rod endured well into the later medieval period, it was no longer called *slat na ríge* but rather *slat tighearnais* the 'rod of lordship', and *slat sheilbhe* or *craobh sheilbhe*, the 'rod of possession' which was simply indicative of legitimate seisin.⁹⁰ The late medieval and early modern emphasis on the rite of the single shoe (discussed below) a rite which was performed by the royal candidate's most powerful vassal as a demonstration of his support, is also a manifestation of this new political order.

1. 4 Otherworld Rods/Branches, and Kingship

The origins of *slat na ríge* are not clear, but it is possible that it had its roots in Indo-European kingship paraphernalia, surviving in the Irish and Scottish contexts in its primordial form well into the later medieval period, albeit that its meaning and name alter significantly with the passage of time. There are no pre-Norman historical references to

⁸² Ibid., 32-5.

⁸³ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 983.

⁸⁴ P. Walsh (ed.), *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill (ITS42, London, 1948)*, 288.

⁸⁵ NLI MS G192, 306.

⁸⁶ *AU.*, 1461.

⁸⁷ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 1225.

⁸⁸ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 1069.

⁸⁹ K. Simms, *From kings to warlords: the changing political structure of Gaelic Ireland in the later middle ages* (Suffolk, 1987), 29-33.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 31.

slat na ríge. It makes its first documented appearance in the inauguration ceremony of the king of Bréifne as related in the late twelfth-century *Life* of Máedóc of Ferns. Subsequently, it is referred to in a prose tract (possibly based on a twelfth/thirteenth-century prototype) describing the inauguration ceremony of the king of Connacht,⁹¹ and it features in an account of the Ó Dubhda ceremony in the addition to the early fifteenth-century *Book of Lecan*.⁹² However, in two Old Irish literary texts, namely the eighth-century *Fled Bricrenn*, and the ninth-century *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait*, there are references to the royal sceptre of Conchobar mac Nessa.⁹³ The implement in question is described in the first instance as a ‘silver sceptre [cló nargit]’ and in the second as a ‘silver spike [clobae argaid]’ which Conchobar strikes against a bronze pillar in order to silence the Ulster heroes who are arguing over which of their wives will take precedence. In the later *Tochmarc Emire* the details of the implement wielded by Conchobar are slightly different. It is described in that text as a ‘royal rod [flesc rígdai]’ which he strikes against a silver panel.⁹⁴ Both *Fled Bricrenn* and *Táin Bó Fraích* also contain references to a ‘silver rod [flesc airgdide]’ which in this instance is used by Ailill, king of Connacht.⁹⁵ In the eleventh /twelfth-century literary texts *Scéla Conchubair meic Nessa*, *Immram Brain*, and *Echtrae Chormaic*, the peace-bringing royal sceptre becomes an Otherworld rod or branch associated with sovereignty, which when shaken induces peace or sleep. It is described in the first instance as a ‘silver rod [slatt argait] ...with three golden apples upon it’, in the second case as a ‘branch of silver with white blossoms [cróib n-arggait fua bláth]’ and in the third as both a ‘branch of silver’ and a ‘fairy branch [craebh sidhamhail]’ with three apples upon it.⁹⁶ The motif of the peace-bringing or sleep-inducing royal object variously described as *cló*, *cloba*, *flesc*, *slatt* and *craebh* in these texts, evokes two obvious aspects of sacral kingship - namely that the Otherworld is the source of legitimate kingship and that the reign of a just ruler is characterised by peace.⁹⁷

⁹¹ M. Dillon, ‘The inauguration of O’Conor’, in J.A. Watt, J.B. Morrall and F.X. Martin (eds.) *Medieval Studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn, S.J.* (Dublin, 1961), 197.

⁹² J. O’Donovan (ed.), *The genealogies, tribes and customs of Hy-Fiachrach* (Dublin, 1844), 441.

⁹³ K. Hollo, ‘Conchobar’s “Sceptre”: the growth of a literary topos’, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 29, 1995, 12-15.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15-18.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23-4.

Rods or branches cut from sacred trees are associated with the Otherworld and kingship from a very early period in classical myth and legend. In his *Golden Bough*, Sir James Frazer set out to explain the strange rule which regulated the succession to the kingship of Diana Nemorensis at the sacred grove of Nemi in Aricia. The rule of the sanctuary was that a kingship candidate could only succeed to office by slaying the existing king and having slain him, the victor retained his office until he himself was slain by yet another contender for the kingship. The worship of Diana and this peculiar succession practice was supposedly instituted by Orestes who, having successfully broken away a bough from a certain forbidden tree in Diana's sanctuary, killed Thoas, King of the Tauric Chersonese and assumed the title of King of the Wood (Rex Nemorensis) or the oak god.⁹⁸ This bough is identified in Virgil's *Aeneid* with the golden bough which Aeneas plucks from an evergreen oak and carries with him to lake Avernus, the entrance to the Underworld.⁹⁹ The theme of the sacred tree also appears in Greek myth. In Homer's *Iliad*, for instance, we meet with Dodona's Grove in Epirus. Sacred to the god Zeus and his consort Dione, the rustling of oak leaves in the grove was interpreted as the voice of the god.

Beyond literary motifs, myth and legend, the rod occupies an important position in the Indian consecration ritual. In Vedic ritual texts, the archetypal symbol of kingship and maintenance of the *dharma* or monolithic world order is the king's *danda* or staff. The king himself held the title *dandahara* - 'bearer of the rod'. Frequently referred to as 'lord of the forest', the rod was the exclusive symbol of the king's capacity to punish and the 'voice' of superior authority which had to be found in the outside world.¹⁰⁰ It has also been pointed out that the *danda* was the typical equipment of the wandering warrior's life abroad. In this respect it is significant that in the Indian *râjasûya*, the *danda* was not given to the king at the beginning of that ceremony but was transmitted after the wandering phase to the officiating brahmin. At the end of the ritual cycle the *danda* was sent together with the king's shoes to the rival kings.¹⁰¹ This concept of the warrior's rod or wand as ultimate symbol of authority and power also makes its way into the early Irish tale *Eachtra Airt meic Cuind ocus tochmarc Delbchaime Inghine Morgain*, in which it is

⁹⁸ J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: a study in magic and religion* (Reprint 1994, Hertfordshire), 1-4.

⁹⁹ F. A. Hirtzel (ed.), *Vergil, Aeneid*, Book VI. (Oxford, 1900), 124-211; W.F. Jackson (trans.), *Virgil: the Aeneid* (Harmondsworth, 1956), 151-3.

¹⁰⁰ J.C Heesterman, *op. cit.*, 122.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 122-3.

referred to as an *flesc miledh* 'the warrior's rod'. In the tale, Art requests Bécuma Cneisgel, daughter of Eogan Inbir, to fetch for him 'the warrior's wand which Cúrói son of Dare had in his hand when taking possession of Ireland and the great world'. Having searched most of the *síd* mounds of Ireland Bécuma eventually comes to the *síd* of Eogabal where she is instructed to take thrice fifty youths to the stronghold of Cúrói on the top of Sliabh Mis. There she finds the wand and returns to Tara where she lays it on Art's knees.¹⁰²

1.5 *Slat, Bile, and Kingship/Lordship*

The Irish rod of kingship, *slat na ríge*, is first encountered in a christianised context, in the late Irish *Life* of St Máedóc of Ferns. In the *Life* it is specified that the rod which the *coarb* Ó Dubhthaigh gives to the king of Bréifne during his inauguration must be cut from the hazel of Máedóc at Dísert Máedóc in Sescenn Uairbeóil in Leinster.¹⁰³ The hazel is significantly also associated with the birth of Máedóc as related in the *Martyrology of Donegal*. The saint was reputedly born on a flagstone, the son of Eithne of the race of Amhalghaidh. Among the details of his remarkable birth is that his mother had in her hand 'the spinster's distaff ... a withered hard stick of hazel' which at the moment of his birth 'grew up with leaves and blossoms and afterwards with goodly fruit' and thrived as a 'green tree without decay or withering, producing nuts every year in Inis-Breach-mhaighe'.¹⁰⁴ Both references to Máedóc's association with the hazel seem to suggest an important connection between the rod and the *bile* or sacred tree, a small number of which are recorded at inauguration sites in the annals.¹⁰⁵ The implication seems to be that *slat na ríge* may have been cut as a matter of course from the *bile* growing at a traditional inauguration site. In the case of the twelfth-century Bréifne inauguration, however, a sacred tree growing at a church site (Dísert Máedóc) is the source for *slat na ríge* which indicates the strong intervention of the church in the Bréifne en-kinging ceremony. Sacred trees are associated in the annals with three known inauguration sites from the late tenth century to the mid twelfth century. In 982 the *bile* of 'Aenach-Maighe-Adhair was cut after being dug from the earth with its roots' by Máel

¹⁰² R.I. Best, 'The adventures of Art son of Conn, and the courtship of Delbchaem', *Ériu* 3, 1907, 163.

¹⁰³ C. Plummer (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 196-7.

¹⁰⁴ J. O'Donovan (ed.), *The martyrology of Donegal: a calendar of the saints of Ireland* (Dublin, 1864), 32-33; In the life of Senán, in W. Stokes, *Lives of the saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford, 1890), 204, that saint is also attributed a similar miraculous birth but in this instance his mother holds a 'stake of rowan' in her hand which at his birth took earth and 'burst at once into flower and leaf; and still that tree remains.'

¹⁰⁵ A.T. Lucas, 'The sacred trees of Ireland', *CHAS* 68, 27-34; K. Simms, *op. cit.*, 30.

Sechnaill, king of Meath and high-king of Ireland.¹⁰⁶ In 1051, its replacement was also felled, this time by Áed Ua Conchobhair, king of Connacht.¹⁰⁷ Later in 1099 the annals relate how in an encounter between the forces of Domhnall Ua Lochlainn and the Ulidians, at Cráeb Telcha (the presumed inauguration place of the Ulaid), the Ulidian camp was burnt and the tree called Cráeb Telcha cut down by Ua Lochlainn and the Clanna-Neill.¹⁰⁸ The *biledha* of Tulach Óg, possibly a grove of sacred trees situated within the hilltop enclosure, were uprooted in an act of revenge by the Ulidians against the Uí Néill in 1111.¹⁰⁹ The latest reference to a sacred tree associated with a royal site concerns the felling of the ‘Ruadh-bheitheach’. This, as its name suggests, was a ‘red birch’ which grew either within or close to a *caiseal*. During an attack by the men of Munster in 1129 the *caiseal* was demolished and the tree cut down.¹¹⁰

The sacred tree is inextricably linked with the concept of kingship and sovereignty, not only in terms of its presence at inauguration sites, but also in its evocation of the image of the rightful king. This analogy is expressed almost to a monotonous extent in literary sources, namely in early Irish verse and bardic poetry. The concepts of *rí* and *bile* appear to be synonymous, so that it is hardly surprising that the greatest insult that a rival could pay to a king was to desecrate the sacred tree of his inauguration site. To cut down the *bile* was in all respects an injury to the king himself. A further expression of this synonymy may lie in the fact that both *slat* and *bile* have secondary meanings as ‘scion’ or ‘hero’, terms frequently used in bardic poetry to describe a potential, or acting king or chief. This immutable identification of *slat* and *bile* with king is, for instance, given voice in a praise poem to Domhnall Óg Ó Domhnaill composed after 1262, in which, in an apologue to that poem, Conall Gulban is described by the poet as ‘an tslat réidh’, ‘the stately, virile, pure prince’.¹¹¹ Likewise, a sixteenth-century poem to Cú Chonnacht Mág Uidhir describes him as both ‘Slat do bhláth fhola hÚna’, ‘the Scion of the flower of the race of Úna’ and ‘ceinnbhile Cláir na cCuradh’, ‘the chief hero of the land of Ireland’.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 715.

¹⁰⁷ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 861.

¹⁰⁸ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 963.

¹⁰⁹ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 991.

¹¹⁰ *Chron. Scot.*, 1129.

¹¹¹ N.J.A. Williams (ed.), *The poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe (ITS 51, Dublin 1980)*, 82-3.

¹¹² D. Greene (ed.), *Duanaire Mhéig Uidhir* (Dublin 1972), 13, 51.

Similarly, the poet Eoghan Ruadh Mac an Bhaird praises Toirdhealbhach Ó Néill as ‘slat na bhfirfreaga ngeal glan’, ‘the scion of true answers, bright, pure’.¹¹³

1.6 The Hazel, Sacred Wisdom, and Kingship

To return to the sacred hazel tree of Máedóc at Sescenn Uairbeoil in Leinster, from which the *slat na ríge* of the king of Bréifne was cut, the question arises as to why the hazel tree was chosen in this instance and what it represents. It has been suggested that the hazel and more particularly its fruit, was the source of poetry or sacred wisdom and as such it was essentially the poet’s tree. Furthermore, it has been proposed that as king-maker, the poet imparted sacred wisdom, which was ‘the basic component of sovereignty’, to the king in the symbolic form of the hazel rod.¹¹⁴ The hazel rod can perhaps be seen as a conductor or medium through which, in the instant that it was passed from the *ollamh* or the *coarb* to the king, imbued the king with that sacred knowledge, or superior authority so essential to the just ruler. The king, through possession of the *slat*, was essentially an extension of the *bile* from which the *slat* was cut, and hence perhaps became an anthropomorphic representation of ‘lord of the forest’, the voice of superior authority.

The strong association between wisdom and the hazel is alluded to in early Irish literary sources. In Celtic mythology the well of Segais, which was situated beneath the sea in Tír Tarnaire (the Otherworld), was the source of both the Shannon and the Boyne and of all wisdom. Hazel trees grew around it and the fruit which dropped into the well created bubbles of mystic inspiration or *imbais* which, when imbibed, provided its recipients with the seer’s gift, enabling them to become accomplished *filid* (or ‘poets’).¹¹⁵ The hazel as poet’s tree is also referred to in the *dindshenchas* of the River Shannon where it is related that ‘over the well of the mighty waters stands the poets’ music-haunted hazel’.¹¹⁶ The *Rennes Dindshenchas* also refers to supernatural hazels ‘of the science of poetry’ growing at Connla’s Well in the Otherworld.¹¹⁷ The carrying of wands by poets, mentioned by Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe in his *aisling* regarding the en-kinging of Roalbh Mac Mathghamhna,¹¹⁸ may also be significant and although there is no explicit reference to the

¹¹³ T. O Raghallaigh (ed.), *Duanta Eoghain Ruaidh Mhic an Bhaird* (Gaillimh, 1930), 258, 390.

¹¹⁴ A. Watson, ‘The king, the poet and the sacred tree’, *Études Celtiques* 18, 1981, 177.

¹¹⁵ T.F. O’Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology* (Dublin, 1971), 322-3.

¹¹⁶ E. Gwynn, *The metrical dindshenchas*, part 3 (Reprint, Dublin 1991), 287.

¹¹⁷ W. Stokes (ed.), ‘The prose tales in the Rennes Dindshenchas’, *Revue Celtique* 15, 456.

¹¹⁸ N.J.A. Williams, *op. cit.*, 175.

fleasga fileadh ('poets' rods') being of hazel, its vital force as provider of the seer's gift gives good reason to believe that this was the case.

Allusions to kings and chiefs being the source of the hazel tree's fruitfulness, and themselves described as being fruits of trees, is commonplace in bardic poetry. In the *Book of Lecan*, a lengthy poem which accounts for the various chieftains of the territory of Uí Fhiachrach, uses the hazel and its fruit in no less than thirteen instances to evoke both the image of the chieftains themselves and their bountiful territories: 'each hazel is rich from the hero' Ó Connachtáin of Cabrach¹¹⁹, and Doire na n-ath is the territory of Ó Duinnchinn 'on which every fair-nutted hazel is constantly found'.¹²⁰ Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe refers to Maoileachlainn Ó Domhnaill, who succeeded his father as lord of Tír Conaill in 1241, as 'the nut of a fruitful hazel' and 'the acorn of a richly productive oak',¹²¹ while a late fifteenth or early sixteenth-century poem to Pilib Ó Raghallaigh explains that because of him, among many other happy portents, 'heat begot hazel-trees, bright with nuts'.¹²² In general terms abundance of fruit is considered an excellent sign of a rightful king and this metaphor appears as such in the eighth-century literary work *Audacht Morainn*, - 'It is through the justice of the ruler that abundances of great tree-fruit of the great wood are tasted'.¹²³ It is perhaps also significant that brehon law lists the hazel as one of the 'Seven Chieftain Trees'¹²⁴ and the *Triads* stress that for its unlawful felling, the death penalty is exacted - 'three unbreathing things paid for only with breathing things: an apple tree, a hazel tree, a sacred grove'.¹²⁵

As the only direct reference to the 'rod of kingship' being of hazel, is that in the *Life* of Máedóc, we cannot assume that all 'rods of kingship' were necessarily cut from sacred hazel trees. It is possible that other trees such as yew, oak, ash, hawthorn, apple and birch, which were also apparently deemed sacred, were voices of superior authority and thereby sources for *slat na ríge*, albeit that the kingship-related properties associated with some of these trees are not altogether clear. In the old Irish tree-list, in the eighth-century legal

¹¹⁹ J. O'Donovan (ed.), *The genealogies, tribes, and customs of Hy-Fiachrach* (Irish Archaeological Society, Dublin, 1844), 253.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹²¹ N.J.A. Williams, *op. cit.*, 39.

¹²² J. Carney (ed.), *Poems on the O'Reillys* (Dublin, 1950), 154.

¹²³ F. Kelly, *Audacht Morainn* (Oxford, 1976), 7.

¹²⁴ *Laws IV*, 147.

¹²⁵ K. Meyer (ed.), *The Triads of Ireland* (RIA Todd Lecture Series 13),

tract *Bretha Comaithchesa* ('The Laws of Neighbourhood'), oak, hazel, holly, yew, ash, pine and apple are listed as *airig fedo* ('nobles of the wood').¹²⁶ It has already been stated that a silver branch with three golden apples features as a peace-bringing or sleep-inducing royal object in early Irish literary texts. In the case of the ash, the pre-eminent Otherworld tree in Scandinavian mythology, it has been suggested that its wood may have been used to make the Irish king's seat, being attributed 'support of a royal thigh [folach rigsliasta]' in the tree-list.¹²⁷ It has also been noted above that a 'red birch' [Ruadh-bheitheach], a sacred tree possibly associated with an inauguration site of the Ui Fhiachrach Aidhne, was felled by the men of Munster in 1129. The birch is considered to be the tree of inception being one of the earliest woodland trees to put out new leaves. It has a smooth silvery-white bark, but its timber although even-grained and fine-textured, is not durable.¹²⁸ Listed as one of the seven *aithig fedo* ('commoners of the wood'), it is afforded no kingly attributions.¹²⁹ However, its use elsewhere may provide some insight into its auspicious properties. Roman lictors carried birch rods during the installation of the Consuls, a ceremony held at the end of the year, and in rustic ritual, birch rods were traditionally used for driving out the spirit of the old year.¹³⁰ An association between the hawthorn tree, another 'commoner of the wood', and an inauguration site may be implied in a sixteenth century bardic poem by Laoiseach Mac an Bhaire. The poet laments the cutting down of a whitethorn tree on a hilltop and while he simply refers to it as a 'place of assembly', he also calls it 'the thorn of acclamation', perhaps suggesting a relationship with inauguration.¹³¹

However, if we are looking for a specific candidate for *slat na ríge*, the undisputed association of the hazel with wisdom and its Otherworld connotations would seem to argue strongly in its favour. Furthermore, if we examine the necessary physical properties of the rod, a stronger case may be made for the hazel. Both Irish and Scottish sources describe the 'rod of kingship' as being white, straight and smooth.¹³² It is perhaps noteworthy that a typical hazel branch is quite straight with a remarkably smooth bark and

¹²⁶ F. Kelly, 'The Old Irish tree-list', *Celtica* 11, 1976, 108-13.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹²⁸ E. C. Nelson *Trees of Ireland* (1993), 54-60.

¹²⁹ F. Kelly, *op. cit.*, 115.

¹³⁰ R. Graves, *The White Goddess* (London, 1961), 166.

¹³¹ O. Bergin, *Irish bardic poetry* (Dublin, 1984), 51-2 and 232-3.

¹³² J.R.N. MacPhail (ed.), *op. cit.*, 23-4.

that its wood is white, straight-grained, fine-textured and heavy.¹³³ The exact nature of the whiteness attributed to the *slat* is a matter of some debate but it was either the result of stripping bark from a branch to reveal the white wood beneath, or perhaps it is a reference to the bark of the hazel itself which has a bright silvery hue. In this respect, it is not insignificant that in the few instances in which it is described, the adjective employed is not *bán* ('white'), but *geal* (bright).¹³⁴ The silvery hue of the hazel is a quality alluded to in two instances in the Uí Fiachrach poem. In describing the tuath of Ó hEidhneacháin, the poet refers to 'shower shaken hazels of white bark [coll cneis-gel]',¹³⁵ and it is related that the territory of Ó Discin is named from the man 'for whom the fair-skinned [cneis-geal] hazel grows fair and large'.¹³⁶

In his *Foras Feasa*, Céitinn purported to explain the meaning of the three attributes of the 'rod of kingship'. He claimed that the wand which the *ollamh* placed in the king's hand was 'altogether white, as a token of truth' and that the straightness of the wand signified 'to the people and the tribes that the king [was] bound to be straight and faultless'. Its smoothness indicated that 'the lords [were] bound to be free from unevenness or roughness in dealing justice and equity to all'.¹³⁷ Similarly, accounts of Scottish inaugurations refer to the white wand as a symbol of 'power to rule, not with tyranny and partiality, but with discretion and sincerity'.¹³⁸ It appears perhaps that the qualities of the rod itself, its straightness, whiteness and smoothness are a reflection of the desired attributes of the just king. It is noteworthy in this respect that it has been suggested that the Indo-European verb *reg-* which corresponds to the Irish *rigid* means to stretch forth or extend and later to protect and to rule. The root-noun *reg-s* is itself the common ancestor of the Sanskrit *raj*, Latin *rex*, and Irish *rí*.¹³⁹ The Irish *rí* has also been interpreted, in the broadest sense, to mean 'the one who traces out the line', or the one who determines what is right and straight.¹⁴⁰ The act of extending and determining what is right and straight may in some sense be related to the king's white rod; just as the *slat na ríge* is straight

¹³³ E.C. Nelson, op. cit., 68.

¹³⁴ P. S. Dinneen (ed.), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, vol. 3 (London, 1908), 12.

¹³⁵ J. O'Donovan (ed.), op. cit., 194-5.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 260-61.

¹³⁷ P.S. Dinneen, op. cit., 13.

¹³⁸ J.R.N. MacPhail (ed.), op. cit., 23-4.

¹³⁹ D.A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon kingship* (Oxford, 1970), 3-4.

¹⁴⁰ E. Benveniste, op. cit., 307-12.

and smooth, so too must the rightful king create a straight, honest and just path for his people.

1.7 Rods and Sceptres

The question as to whether the rod was simply used as a ritual symbol in the ceremony of inauguration or subsequently became part of the royal regalia, prompts broader debate on the constituents of medieval Irish kingship regalia. Was *slat na rígh*e seen as a badge of office and did the king keep it about his person on ceremonial occasions as a symbol of his delegated authority? Arguably, as *slat na rígh*e appears to have been the branch of a tree and not a precious metal object, it is more likely that its use was exclusive to the inauguration ceremony alone. It is important to note that in medieval European regalia the presence of a rod does not preclude a sceptre. On the contrary, rods and sceptres feature together in the coronation regalia of Carolingian, Anglo-Saxon, Norman and Angevin kings, and they had distinct functions. The insignia of dominion of the Carolingian kings were the sword, the ring, the sceptre¹⁴¹ and the rod, and in the 'Egbert' recension of the West Saxon coronation 'Ordo of St Dunstan' there is mention of investiture with a short sceptre and a long rod.¹⁴² In a rubric of that particular *ordo*, the princes join with the bishops in handing the sceptre to the king - a demonstration, according to Schramm, that the act was 'originally a secular conferment of the lawful possession'.¹⁴³ Rod and sceptre also feature together in the coronation procession of Richard I, with his insignia listed as the King's cup, the spurs, the sceptre, the rod, and the crown. Nelson sees the short sceptre signifying law as equity and the long rod or *virga* denoting law as chastisement.¹⁴⁴

The short metal sceptre generally surmounted with an ornamental fleur-de-lis which became a hallmark symbol of medieval European kingship is remarkably though not entirely absent from portrayals of Irish kings of the same period. While the emphasis is on the rod in documentary records, there are depictions of Irish royals bearing sceptres and fleur-de-lis crowns, the most noteworthy of which are the very late thirteenth or early

¹⁴¹ P.E. Schramm, *A history of the English coronation* (Oxford, 1937), 9.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 19-20.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 148; J.L. Nelson, 'The earliest surviving royal ordo: some liturgical and historical aspects', in B. Tierney and P. Linehan (eds.), *Authority and Power: studies on medieval law and government presented to Walter Ullmann on his seventieth birthday* (Cambridge, 1980), 44, suggests that the participation of both laymen and clergy in this rite represents a 'transitional phase in the evolution of a part of the inauguration ritual which, by the tenth century, would be monopolised by clergy'.

¹⁴⁴ J.L. Nelson, *ibid.*, 44.

fourteenth-century Ó Conchobhair tomb effigy at Roscommon Abbey and the Ó Briain effigy at Corcomroe Abbey, Co. Clare, which is later and apparently based on the Ó Conchobhair tomb. The Roscommon Abbey tomb is reputed to be that of Feidhlimidh Ó Conchobhair, king of Connacht (d. 1265), but on stylistic grounds it has been dated no earlier than 1290 and possibly as late as 1315.¹⁴⁵ The right arm of the king is extended beside the body and in his hand he holds a fleur-de-lis tipped sceptre, the head of which lies against the shoulder. He also wears a simple fleur-de-lis crown or circlet around his head. The important point here is that this effigy is apparently based on an English prototype and if it does commemorate king Feidhlimidh, it was made posthumously, some thirty-five years or more after his death. It has also been suggested that it was carved in Dublin or Waterford and even possibly in England. It is a depiction then of the ideal royal using the English king as model. There are of course modifications, such as a reduction in the number of insignia used. Just the crown and sceptre are shown as opposed to the usual crown, sceptre and orb, or crown and two sceptres. The second effigy, claimed to be that of Conchobhar Ó Briain (d. 1265) on the basis of an entry in the *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*,¹⁴⁶ is almost identical in its details to the Ó Conchobhair monument, albeit less competently executed. Stylistically it can be dated c. 1300 but it may be as late as 1330 and it is believed to be of local workmanship and based on the Roscommon Abbey tomb.¹⁴⁷ The Ó Briain king wears a fleur-de-lis crown and with his right hand he grips the lower end of what is most likely a sceptre. The head of this sceptre is chipped off but it retains its leaf-shaped outline. There are other noteworthy instances in which the ideal or fanciful king is characterised, like the little king figure holding a short foliage-tipped sceptre and wearing a crown in the illustration of Noah's Ark from the *Book of Ballymote* c. 1400 and the six crowned figures, three draped kings and three skeleton kings representing the popular medieval *Moralité* 'Le dit des trois morts et des trois vifs', painted on the north wall of the chancel at Abbey Knockmoy and generally dated about

¹⁴⁵ J. Hunt, *Irish medieval figure sculpture 1200-1600*, vol.2 (Dublin, 1974), 42. The mantle of the figure is shown with opening down the front - a fashion of the English royal mantle which did not arise until the very end of the thirteenth century.

¹⁴⁶ S.H. O'Grady, *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* (ITS 27, London, 1929), 5. '...and by the monks Conor nobly and honourably was buried in the monastery of east Burren or "the abbey of Corcomrua". Over the place of his rest, there they set up his stone'.

¹⁴⁷ J. Hunt., op. cit., 119-20.

the fifteenth century.¹⁴⁸ It can be concluded then, that where depictions of royal regalia occur in an Irish context they are not a true reflection of the insignia of Irish kingship but an idealistic portrayal based on the English model.

1. 8 *Slat na Ríge* as Symbol of Kingship Conferred by God

The handing of *slat na ríge* to the king of Bréifne by the *coarb* of Máedóc, instead of the *ollamh*, opens an important area of enquiry. While the medium remains the same, the symbolism inherent in the rod being presented by a representative of the church and having been cut from a sacred tree growing at a monastic site marks a new point of departure and prompts reflection on the meaning of the inauguration ceremony and the role of the king himself in this context. The active participation of ecclesiastics in inauguration ceremonies is manifest in the presence of the *coarb* of Máedóc at the Ó Ruairc ceremony, the *coarb* of Da Chonna at the Ó Conchobhair ceremony, the *coarb* Ó Miadhacháin who inaugurated Ó Ceallaigh of Uí Maine,¹⁴⁹ and the *erenach* Ó Firghil who presided over the ceremonies of Ó Domhnaill and Mac Suibhne. It has been pointed out that by the twelfth century there is obvious competition between *ollamh* and ecclesiastic for the role of inaugurator. There was tendency among ecclesiastics to promote the idea of the king's authority being conferred by God, a concept which is given expression in the ninth century *Tecosca Cormaic* in the words 'it is through the truth of a ruler that God gives all that [prosperity]'.¹⁵⁰ It is important to note however, that while the ecclesiastical presence was clearly strong, the handing of the 'rod of kingship' to the king did not apparently become the exclusive preserve of the *coarb*. The prose tract describing the installation ceremony of the king of Connacht explains that the *ollamh* Ó Maol Chonaire was the only member of the assembly entitled to stand on the mound of Carn Fraích with the royal candidate and that it was he who gave *slat na ríge* to Ó Conchobhair.¹⁵¹ Likewise, in the inauguration ceremony of the king of Uí Fhiachrach, it was the *ollamh* Mac Firbis who bore 'the body of the rod over the head of O'Dubhda'.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ J.A. Glynn, 'Knockmoy Abbey, County Galway', *JRSAI* 34, 1904, 242-3; R. Cochrane, 'Abbey Knockmoy, County Galway; notes on the building and "frescoes"', *ibid.*, 251-3. Cochrane observed evidence to indicate that this wall-painting could be as late as the seventeenth century.

¹⁴⁹ J. O'Donovan (ed.), *The tribes and customs of Hy-Many* (Dublin, 1843), 79.

¹⁵⁰ K. Meyer (ed.), *The instructions of king Cormac Mac Airt* (Todd Lecture Series 14, Dublin RIA 1909), 5; see K. Simms, *From kings to warlords*, *op. cit.*, 24 (on competition).

¹⁵¹ M. Dillon, *op. cit.*, 197.

¹⁵² J. O'Donovan (ed.), *op. cit.*, 441.

The intentions of the church with regard to the rituals of kingship are apparent perhaps as early as AD 700. It has been argued that there was a strand of thinking in the Irish church which was predisposed to alter the very nature of Irish kingship and which to that end targeted the inauguration ritual as a critical starting point.¹⁵³ The intervention of the church in royal inauguration, however, is not reflected in any of the known material culture of the early medieval period. Royal insignia of Irish kings, for instance, are not readily identifiable in high cross iconography of the ninth and tenth centuries. Nonetheless there are at least two thought-provoking scenes on Muiredach's Cross and the Cross of the Scriptures. On the west face of Muiredach's cross at Monasterboice there is a portrayal of the mocking of Christ as King of the Earth, Irish style. Christ is dressed in kingly raiment and holds a plain straight rod in his right hand. It is not beyond possibility that the apparel and insignia of Christ the King are modelled on that of a typical Irish king of the late ninth or early tenth century. In the case of the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly, it is now generally accepted that it was probably erected to commemorate Flann Sinna's accession to the high kingship of Ireland in 879.¹⁵⁴ Of particular interest is a scene on the bottom panel of the east face, which has not yet received a satisfactory interpretation (fig. 3). The panel shows two figures in profile grasping between them a stick which Harbison describes as expanding into a triangular shape on each side with a rounded knob-like form on top. He also explains that the head which Crawford had earlier noted as being carved on the knob, is almost certainly secondary.¹⁵⁵ This scene has been variously interpreted as King Diarmaid and St Ciarán planting a stake to delineate the ecclesiastical boundary of Clonmacnoise, or King Flann and the Abbot Colman founding the cathedral at the site, while Harbison prefers to see it as purely scriptural, i.e. Joseph interpreting the dream of Pharaoh's Butler.¹⁵⁶ However, an earlier drawing of this face of the cross by Henry O'Neill, dated 1857, depicts the stick or staff held between the two figures as a blossoming rod, a bunch of leaves clearly sprouting from its top. The details of the rod are now so degraded that it is impossible to tell whether O'Neill's depiction is accurate, or simply what he chose to see, and consequently any interpretation based upon it is highly conjectural. Nonetheless, it is

¹⁵³ M.J. Enright, *Iona, Tara and Soissons; the origin of the royal anointing ritual* (Berlin, 1985), 48.

¹⁵⁴ L. De Paor, 'The high crosses of Tech Theille, Kinnitty, and related sculpture', in E. Rynne (ed.), *Figures from the past, studies in figurative art in Christian Ireland in honour of Helen M. Roe* (Dun Laoighaire, 1987), 131-67.

¹⁵⁵ P. Harbison, *The high crosses of Ireland* (Bonn, 1992), vol. 1, 49.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*



Fig. 3 A depiction of Abbot Colmán and the high-king Flann Sinna on the east face of the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise.

tempting to suggest that in this panel Flann Sinna and the Abbot Colman hold between them Flann Sinna's 'blossoming rod of kingship', his *virga Aaron*, symbolic of his being appointed by God to rule, with the support of the church. A strong case has also been made for the staff depicted on the Cross of the Scriptures being a pastoral implement or *bachall* and consequently the scene has been interpreted as the ritual delineation of the ecclesiastical boundary of Clonmacnoise.¹⁵⁷ However, blossoming rods, albeit executed in metal and from later periods, are present in the regalia of both thirteenth-century Scottish kings and twelfth-century Scandinavian kings, and we have already seen that blossoming rods associated with sovereignty are employed as a motif in eleventh and twelfth century Irish literary works. A thirteenth-century seal of Scone Abbey shows Alexander III holding a sceptre terminating in a lily. A king's seal, dated c. 1260, again shows the boy king holding a foliated sceptre. In addition, an inventory of the Scottish treasury, dated 1291, lists among the king's wardrobe *virga Aaron*, which translates as Aaron's rod, so called from the biblical story in which Aaron, having left his rod in the tabernacle, discovered that it had brought forth blooms, indicating to him that the Levites were chosen by God to lead the people of Israel. The flowering rod of Alexander III, his *virga Aaron*, was symbolic of his being divinely appointed by God to rule.¹⁵⁸ Likewise, St Erik, elected king of Sweden at Uppsala c. 1150, is depicted both in a medieval parochial coat of arms of old Uppsala, and in the former Gothic stained glass windows of Old Uppsala Church, holding a lily sceptre in his right hand.¹⁵⁹ It is perhaps of interest too, that in Scandinavian myth, Thor the god of thunder and the oak, is usually depicted bearing a sceptre identical to that wielded by St Erik.¹⁶⁰

If the instrument on the Cross of the Scriptures is a 'rod of kingship', the tentative possibility follows that Flann Sinna may have been handed his *slat na ríge* by the *coarb* of Ciarán at Clonmacnoise and that the rod may have actually been cut from a sacred tree growing there. It is perhaps noteworthy that *Chronicum Scotorum* records the destruction of the 'great oak of Regles-Finghin' during a great wind in the autumn of 1013, and that the 'yew tree of Ciaran' was struck by lightning, killing 113 sheep in 1149.¹⁶¹ Sacred

¹⁵⁷ N.B. Aitchison, *Armagh and the royal centres in Early Medieval Ireland* (Suffolk, 1994), 271-2.

¹⁵⁸ A.A.M. Duncan, *Scotland; the making of a kingdom* (Edinburgh, 1975), 555-7.

¹⁵⁹ T. Littmarck, trans. R.G. Tanner, *Gamla Uppsala* (Uppsala, 1987), 26-7.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁶¹ *Chron. Scot.*, 1013, 1149.

trees are associated with several monastic sites, among them the oak of St. Brigid; Cuaille Mhic Duach commemorating St. Colman of Kilmacduagh; the yew of Iubhar Chinntrechta burned in 1162; the hazel of Máedóc at Dísert Máedóc; and the burning yew bush on the Rock of Cashel seen in a swineherd's prophetic vision as a portent of the founding of a dynasty of Munster kings.¹⁶² It has been suggested that the presence of sacred trees at these sites may be indicative of their original function as sacred groves and pagan seats, which were subsequently christianised - the church coming to the tree, rather than the tree to the church.¹⁶³ Kingship associations with ecclesiastical sacred trees are not well-attested in the historical record, the hazel of Máedóc being the only instance in which a direct link is made between an inauguration ritual symbol and a sacred tree growing at a monastic site. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the many references to sacred trees at church sites are necessarily indicative of associations with kingship rites at those sites.

The intervention of the church in the inauguration of Irish kings was a manifestation of an intention to alter the role of kingship and render Irish kings, as with their Carolingian counterparts, the 'secular arm of the Church'.¹⁶⁴ It may be concluded that in an inauguration rite presided over by churchmen, *slat na ríge* essentially became a symbol of delegated authority, an authority conferred by God and supported by the Church.

1.9 *Slat Tighearnais* and *Slat Sheilbhe*

In literary and historical documentation dealing with inauguration in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in which rods of office are mentioned, it is noteworthy that they are referred to either as *slat tighearnais*, 'rod of lordship', or *slat sheilbhe*, 'rod of possession'. These new attributions have been explained as a reflection of the changing political structure of Gaelic Ireland, within the framework of which, from as early as the fifteenth century, the ceremony of the handing of the rod instituted lords or landlords rather than kings.¹⁶⁵ This change is also mirrored in Gaelic Scotland, with the fifteenth-century MacMhuirich poets to the MacDonald Lords of the Isles referring to the white rod

¹⁶² A.T. Lucas, op.cit., 37-34.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁶⁴ K. Simms, op. cit., 25-6.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 31.

as the ‘staff of lordship’.¹⁶⁶ In bardic poetry of this period, the term *slat na ríge* continues to be used, but must be perceived as a poetic conceit in the same sense as the bards continue to draw upon the theme of marriage to the goddess of sovereignty (*banais ríge*).¹⁶⁷ For instance, in a sixteenth-century eulogy to Richard Burke, possibly written while Richard was contending for the title of Mac Uilliam Burc, the poet Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn urges his subject with the words ‘the young maiden is the wand of kingship [slat na ríge an inghean óg], yours was that woman at first; be not slumbering, thou bright of cheek, the maiden has been stolen from thee’.¹⁶⁸

The introduction of the term *slat sheilbhe* is evident as early as the fifteenth century in bardic poetry.¹⁶⁹ In an ode composed for Éamonn Búrc who was Mac Uilliam Íochtair from 1440-58, the poet eulogises with the words ‘thine by right is the wand of office [an tslat sheilbhe]’¹⁷⁰ - more accurately translated as the wand of possession.¹⁷¹ The use of this term by the bards persists well into the sixteenth century, an ode to Pilib Ó Raghallaigh, for instance, referring to Pilib with ‘his stainless honour’ who ‘has today newly taken up the wand of possession [slat shealbha a-nú go nuaidhe]’¹⁷², and the poet Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn claiming for Cormac Ó hEaghra (d. 1612) ‘the wand of possession of the fair land [slat sheilbhe an fhíonfhuinn aga]’.¹⁷³

References to the handing of rods, in late sixteenth-century English administrative records, indicate the persistence of this custom and suggest that this act in particular legitimised chieftainship and the possession of the lands which accrued to that position. For example, in communications of this period emphasis is placed upon the rod as the pre-eminent feature of the respective inauguration ceremonies of Mac Uilliam Burc, Ó Donnabháin and Mac Cárthaigh Mór. A letter to the Privy Council of October 25, 1589 claimed that the Blind Abbot had been made Mac Uilliam and had ‘the rod’ given to him

¹⁶⁶ J. Bannerman, ‘The Lordship of the Isles’, in J.M. Brown (ed.), *Scottish society in the fifteenth century* (London, 1977), 225.

¹⁶⁷ K. Simms., op. cit., 32.

¹⁶⁸ E. Knott (ed.), *The bardic poems of Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn* (ITS vol. 22, 1922, 147 and vol. 23, 1926, 96).

¹⁶⁹ K. Simms, op. cit., 31.

¹⁷⁰ L. McKenna (ed.), *Aithdioghluim Dána*, vol. i, 79 (ITS 37, 1939) and vol. ii, 90 (ITS 40, 1940).

¹⁷¹ *DIL*, 1953, 163; used attributively = a symbol of possession.

¹⁷² J. Carney (ed.), op. cit., 35,

¹⁷³ E. Knott., op. cit., vol.i, 234, vol.ii, 155.

‘with all the ceremonies accustomed’.¹⁷⁴ In 1600 the Bishop of Cork and Ross wrote to Robert Cecil stating that Florence Mc Carthy ‘had a rod given him by O’Sullivan More ... and so was made McCarthy More’.¹⁷⁵ Perhaps more telling of the true significance of the rod at this time is the fact that it was cited as formal evidence of legitimate holding of lordship and lands during the settlement of a dispute between Domhnaill Ó Donnabháin and his brother Tadhg, in the Dublin Court of Chancery in 1592.¹⁷⁶ Domhnaill claimed that by virtue of Mac Carthaigh Reagh handing him a rod, he had ‘entered to all Lordshipp and Lands, and was seised without interruption these eight years past, as was and is for him lawful’.¹⁷⁷ To no avail, Tadhg counter-claimed that Mac Carthaigh was ‘an intrudor and that the Ceremony of giving a Rodd by him [was] not by the usadge of the said Lordshipp warrantable’.¹⁷⁸

One of the last detailed references to the rod occurs in Mathew De Renzy’s retrospective account of the inauguration of Sir John Mac Coghlan in 1590. De Renzy claimed that in that year Mac Coghlan had assembled the inhabitants of Delvin Mac Coghlan ‘uppon the hill of Ard na Grossa..and there ...did at the hands of one Melaghlin O Duire (to whom this part of the act by auntient custome belonged) receive a scepter or white wand into his hands, and by him was named and wellcomed Mac Coghlan’.¹⁷⁹

1. 10 Single Sandals and Shoes

The respective documentary surveys of O’Brien,¹⁸⁰ Killeen¹⁸¹ and Mac Cana¹⁸² relating to the *topos* of the single sandal in the Irish tradition, have demonstrated that there is a substantial corpus of allusions to the wearing of either a single sandal, shoe or slipper, or to a pair of gilded sandals or shoes in early Irish literary texts, saints’ *Lives* and Bardic poetry, with occasional references in the Irish annals and in English administrative accounts. The purpose here is to add to that corpus, to investigate the contexts in which

¹⁷⁴ *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1588-92, 255.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1600, 477.

¹⁷⁶ K. Simms, *op. cit.*, 31.

¹⁷⁷ J.O’Donovan, *op. cit.*, 446.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 447.

¹⁷⁹ B. Mac Cuarta (ed.), ‘Mathew De Renzy’s letters on Irish affairs 1613-1620’, *Anal. Hib.*, 34, 1987, 116.

¹⁸⁰ M.A. O’Brien, ‘Fear an énaís’, *Celtica* 2, 1954, 350-353.

¹⁸¹ J.F. Killeen, ‘Fear an énaís’, *Celtica* 9, 1971, 202-4.

¹⁸² P. Mac Cana, ‘The *topos* of the single sandal in Irish tradition’, *Celtica* 10, 1973, 160-66.

the references occur and to highlight in particular the application of the single shoe or sandal to Irish kingship and lordship.

The Irish and classical sources drawn upon by O'Brien, Killeen and Mac Cana, and the additional references provided here, indicate in the broadest sense that the single sandal or shoe is the preserve of an array of otherworldly beings, mythological heroes, supernatural visitors to the mortal world, kingship claimants, warriors, sorcerers, and saints. A pair of gilded sandals or shoes of bronze or silver are also seen to be worn by some of these persons, a guise which in some instances has a parallel or at least tangential meaning. The symbolism inherent in the wearing of one or two precious sandals or shoes in relation to kingship, variously concerns the prophecy and recognition of a rightful claimant and may be interpreted as a visual expression of the sacral or at least semi-divine nature of authority. The single shoe is an immediate revelatory sign, perhaps given its most obvious expression in Perrault's fairy-tale, Cinderella. In some instances it is used as a symbol of tribute, homage or subjection, and in the religious context, like a relic, it assumes the potency of a talisman.

1. 11 The Single Sandal/Shoe as Recognition Symbol

The expression *fear an énaís* - 'the man with one sandal' - as used in classical Irish verse has been interpreted as possibly meaning either a claimant to the chieftaincy or an inaugurated chief.¹⁸³ Where the literary motif of the single sandal or shoe occurs in bardic poetry, it is usually but not exclusively described as being of gold - *an ais óir, enaís óir, órasa* - and in most instances it is generally used of a reigning chief. In a poem written by Donnchadh Caoch Ó hUiginn to Pilib Ó Raghallaigh who was nominated chief of Bréifne by Ó Néill in 1596, Pilib is referred to as 'do mhac Aodha na n-as n-óir' ('to the son of Aodh of the golden sandals'), Aodh being his father Aodh Conallach, chief of Bréifne who died in 1583.¹⁸⁴ Likewise, Aodh Uí Bhroin, chief of Gabhal Raghnuill from the mid-sixteenth century until his death in 1579 is described in an encomiastic poem by Uilliam Mac Taidhg Mic Eochadha as 'a man of a gold-wrought shield and a single sandal [*fear scéith óir is aonasa*].¹⁸⁵ In the *duanaire* of Brian mac Feilim Ó Broin, son of and successor to Feilim mac Fiachaidh (d. 1630) he too is ascribed 'an ais óir' by the poet Aonghus mac

¹⁸³ M.A. O'Brien, op. cit., 351-53.

¹⁸⁴ J. Carney (ed.), *Poems on the O'Reillys* (Dublin 1950), 82, 182-3.

¹⁸⁵ S. Mac Airt (ed.), *Leabhar Branach* (Dublin, 1944), 29.

Doighre Í Dhálaigh,¹⁸⁶ and the poet Muirheartach Ó Cobhthaigh addresses Toirdhealbhach Luinneach Ó Néill as the ‘son of Niall of the bright-gold sandal [Mac Neill an ais órsholais]’.¹⁸⁷ The use of this formulaic bardic motif is an acknowledgement of the legitimate authority of each of these elected chiefs and in a more real sense perhaps relates to each having received the single shoe in their respective inauguration ceremonies.

The literary motif is complemented and somewhat borne out by actual documented accounts of the presence of a single shoe as a ritual symbol in a number of Irish inauguration ceremonies in the later Middle Ages. It occurs in the Ó Conchobhair ceremony in two instances in the latter half of the fifteenth century, and in both the Ó Néill ceremony at Tulach Óg and in relation to Conchobhar Mag Uidhir’s claim to the chieftaincy of Fir Manach in the late sixteenth century. In 1461 Aodh Mac Diarmada performed the rite of placing a shoe on the foot of Feidhlimidh Fionn Ó Conchobhair at Carn Fraích [do chuir mac Diarmada a brocc fair iar na chennach].¹⁸⁸ The qualification ‘iar na chennach’ has been variously translated by O’Donovan as ‘after having purchased him’ and by Mac Firbis as ‘after having purchased it [the shoe].’¹⁸⁹ It has been suggested that this statement refers to the shoe, and that it may mean, that as part of the ritual, Mac Diarmada paid some customary fee to the *ollamh* Ó Maol Chonaire who was possibly custodian of the shoe.¹⁹⁰ In 1488 following the death of Donnchadh Dubhshuileach Ó Conchobhair, Feidhlimidh Fionn Ó Conchobhair Ruadh was inaugurated in his place by Ó Domhnaill, Mac Uilliam Burc and Mac Diarmada ‘in as meet a manner as any lord had for some time before been nominated’ and once again his shoe was put on him by Mac Diarmada.¹⁹¹ It is only in these two instances that the actual placing of the shoe on the foot is documented; in respect of the Mag Uidhir episode and the Ó Néill ceremony, additional if unprecise details of the rite are introduced. Following the death of Cú Chonnacht Mag Uidhir in 1589, a succession dispute ensued between Cú Chonnacht’s son, Aodh, and Conchobhar Ruadh, son of Conchobhar Magh Uidhir. Aodh sought the aid of Ó Domhnaill who responded immediately and requested Aodh to meet him at

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 253.

¹⁸⁷ D.I. Ó Cróinín, ‘A poem to Toirdhealbhach Luinneach Ó Néill’, *Éigse* 16, part 1, 1975, 58.

¹⁸⁸ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 1015.

¹⁸⁹ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 1161.

¹⁹⁰ P. Mac Cana, ‘The *Topos* of the single sandal in Irish tradition’, *Celtica* 10, 1973, 160-1.

¹⁹¹ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 1488.

Sciath Ghabhra, the Magh Uidhir inauguration site. The annals relate that Conchobhar, anxious to stake his claim to the chieftaincy, had arrived at Sciath Ghabhra the previous day and there 'left a token (namely, one slipper) that the name of lord should be conferred on him on the day following'.¹⁹² Conchobhar's claim was overlooked in favour of Aodh who was subsequently inaugurated by Ó Domhnaill. In this instance the single shoe is clearly portrayed as a symbol of a claimant's intention and suggests that the rite of the single shoe was probably integral to the Mag Uidhir inauguration ceremony in this period. The emphasis placed upon the casting of a shoe over the newly elected Ó Néill's head by his most powerful vassal, Ó Catháin, in English administrative records of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, seems to imply that this rite was the most notable if not the most auspicious part of the Ó Néill inauguration ceremony.¹⁹³ The role of caster, however, was also claimed by the Uí Ágáin, a privilege which they may have held in their earlier capacity as *reachtaire* at Tulach Óg¹⁹⁴ and which is commemorated in their armorial bearings by the presence of a shoe in the top dexter quarter of the shield. This rite of the single shoe is illustrated in an unsigned map of Ulster dated c.1602, possibly the work of the Tudor cartographer Richard Bartlett, or a copyist.¹⁹⁵ A group of eight figures are shown on the hilltop of Tulach Óg engaged in the inauguration ceremony of the Ó Néill who is seated in a chair at the centre of the group, while the figure immediately on his left-hand side, probably Ó Catháin, holds a shoe above the Ó Néill's head (fig. 4).¹⁹⁶ In each of the accounts of this ceremony the shoe is seen to be cast and not as such placed on the Ó Néill's foot, although comparative evidence suggests that this would have been the logical conclusion to the rite. The actual throwing of the shoe which is documented only in the case of the Ó Néill ceremony possibly relates to the custom of casting a shoe for luck and may have been one of the formal acts which constituted the rite of the single shoe as a whole. Hore in his investigations at Tulach Óg claimed, but did not substantiate, that 'an inaugural shoe formed of brass', reputedly that used in the Ó

¹⁹² *AFM.*, vol. 5, 1877.

¹⁹³ *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1576, 102; Rev. R. Butler (ed.), 'J. Dymmok, A Treatise of Ireland', *Tracts relating to Ireland*, Irish Archaeological Society, vol. 2 (Dublin, 1843), 32; *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1607, 155-6.

¹⁹⁴ H. Wood (ed.), *The Chronicle of Ireland, 1584-1608* (Dublin, 1933), 106; K. Simms, *From kings to warlords* (Suffolk, 1987), 32.

¹⁹⁵ J.H. Andrews, *IHS* 14, 1965, 269.

¹⁹⁶ G.A. Hayes-McCoy, 'The making of an O'Neill: a view of the ceremony at Tullaghoge, Co. Tyrone', *UJA* 33, 1970, 91.

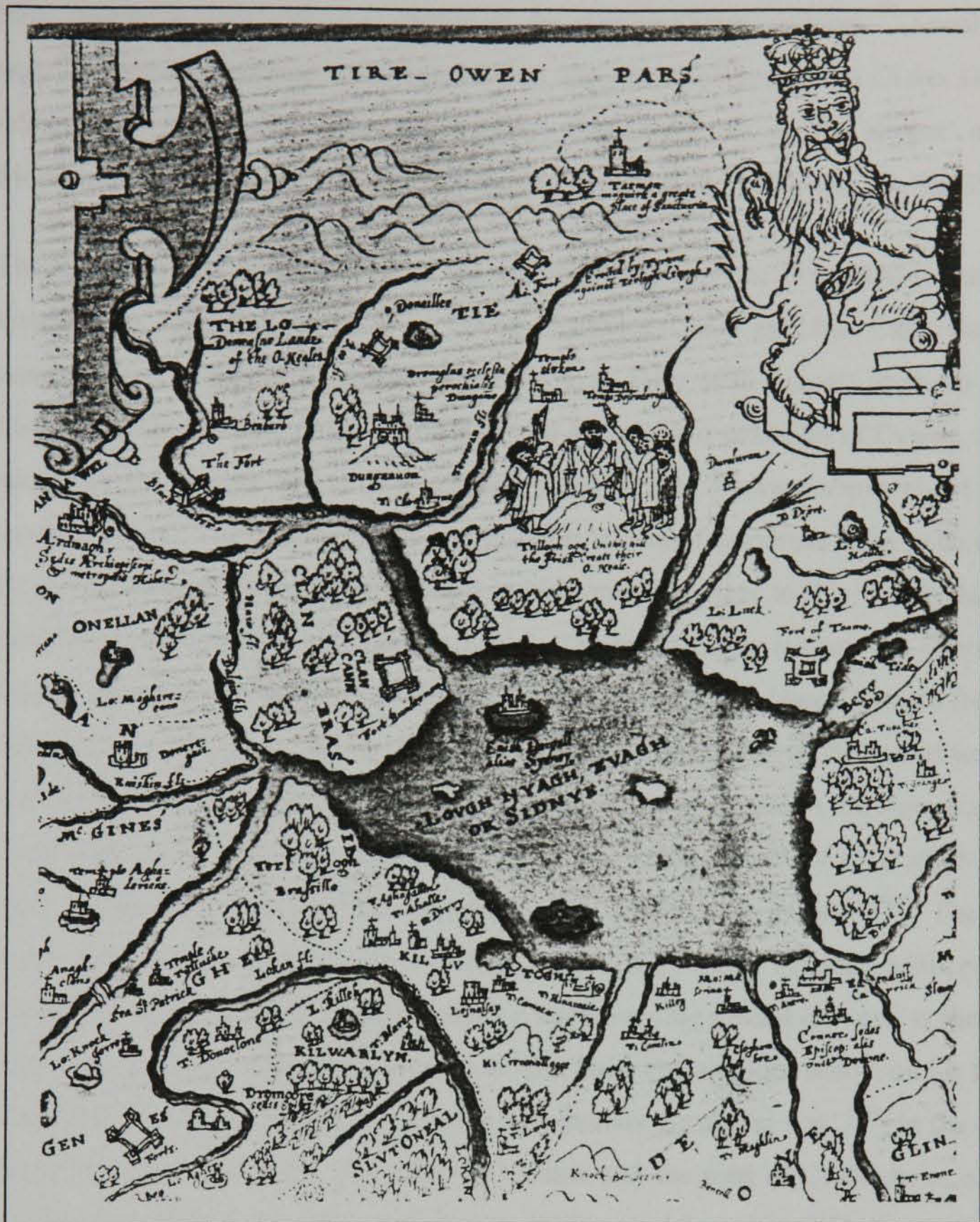


Fig. 4 The inauguration of Ó Néill at Tulach Óg [Map no. 16, Darmouth Collection, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London].

Néill ceremony, was still in existence in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁹⁷ Local folklore regarding the rite was also vibrant at the time, the Rector of Ballymully Glebe, Dr. Porter, relating how local children used to hunt for 'Phelimy Roe's golden slipper' on Easter Monday during a 'sort of patron-like gathering' which used to take place in the Glebe.¹⁹⁸

The single sandal as a symbol of the rightful king and the Otherworld character of kingship is well-attested both in Greek mythology and as Mac Cana has amply demonstrated, it makes a frequent appearance in early Irish literary texts. In Pindar's Fourth Pythian Ode composed c. 462 B.C. and dedicated to Arkesilas of Cyrene, an oracle speaks to the usurper Pelias of Iolcos and warns him to 'beware above all of the one-sandalled man'. The one-sandalled man is Jason 'a man of wondrous form' who comes to Pelias and declares that he has returned to his home 'to gather to [his] hands the ancient lordship, held now by a king unrighteously'. The tyrant Pelias realises the import of the oracle 'glaring at the well-known sign, the single sandal on his [Jason's] right foot'.¹⁹⁹ In the Irish context too, the wearer is generally a supernatural visitor to the mortal world who appears in the guise of a handsome warrior. In *Acallam na Senórach*, the three sons of the king of Ireland see a warrior approaching in fine raiment, wearing a shoe of white silver [assa findairgit] which was 'on whichever foot touched the ground'.²⁰⁰ The warrior visitor also makes an appearance in *Betha Colaim Chille* where the saint while praying at Carraic Eolairc beholds 'a passing beautiful youth coming toward him across the lake, as if he were treading on the earth or ground. And there was a golden sandal on his foot, and whichever foot he set upon the ground, it was thereon the sandal was'.²⁰¹ In the Ossianic poem 'A chorr sa léanna', Diarmaid Ó Duibhne and the sons of Cruimchenn observe a warrior coming towards them wearing 'a golden sandal on his right foot and a silver sandal on the left. In this instance, Mac Cana has suggested that the poet, perhaps finding the motif of the single golden sandal somewhat anomalous, added the silver shoe in order to make the warrior more credible.²⁰² Pease in his referencing of the 'one shoe off and one shoe on' theme, points to a number of works of art where this condition is apparent.

¹⁹⁷ H.F. Hore, 'Inauguration of Irish chiefs', *UJA* 5, 1857, 222.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁹⁹ L.R. Farnell, *The works of Pindar* (London, 1930), 102-3.

²⁰⁰ P. Mac Cana, *op.cit.*, 163-4.

²⁰¹ A. O'Kelleher and G. Schoepperle (eds.), *Betha Colaim Chille* (Dublin, 1994), 79.

²⁰² P. Mac Cana, *op.cit.*, 164-5.

Among those he cites is a statuette of Mercury in the Museum of S. Germain-en-Laye which shows the Wayfinder or 'guide of souls' with left foot shod and right bare and another figure in a similar pose, from Torre Nova - a seated Heracles, son of Alcmena by Zeus, who was set twelve labours by the Pythia at the end of which immortality would be conferred on him.²⁰³ Killeen has also noted another instance of this in the figure of Dionysus in the fresco at the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii.²⁰⁴

The image of one shoe off and one shoe on, is one of chaos, a contradictory and undesirable state which initially seems incredible as an attribute of a god, a king or a hero. But the recent work of Heesterman²⁰⁵ in relation to the inherent conflict in Indian kingship ritual and Bloch's²⁰⁶ understanding of the ritual of the royal bath in Madagascar have shown that a 'chaotic state' is integral to and a prerequisite of royal ritual as performed in traditional societies. Heesterman and Bloch both show that chaos is a necessary overture to the resolution of contradiction. But as Bloch points out, the 'royal resolution' is illusory because it can only exist in terms of the contradiction it recognises and which it acts out and appears to resolve through the drama of ritual.²⁰⁷ If the Irish rite of the single shoe was symbolic of an imperfect order prior to the formal election of a king or chief, in viewing the entire inauguration ceremony as an organic sequence it would follow that the shoe rite came at the very beginning of the ceremony. The rituals which followed were presumably contrived to distinguish the royal person as an exceptional being whose election brought order and stability to bear on society.²⁰⁸ However, apart from this conjectured symbolic meaning, both Mac Cana²⁰⁹ and Killeen,²¹⁰ and more recently McCone, have noted the very plausible relationship between the motif of the single shoe and its wearer, and the theme of the monstrous physique typified by the lack of a leg, an arm or an eye which is largely ascribed to mythical warriors in early Irish sources. McCone cites several examples of the occurrence of this

²⁰³ A.S. Pease (ed.), *Publi Vergili Maronis Aeneidos: Liber Quartus* (Harvard, 1935), 432-3.

²⁰⁴ J.F. Killeen, op.cit., 203.

²⁰⁵ J.C. Heesterman, 'The conundrum of the king's authority', in *The inner conflict of tradition: essays in Indian ritual, kingship, and society* (Chicago, 1985), 108-27.

²⁰⁶ M. Bloch, 'The ritual of the royal bath in Madagascar: the dissolution of death, birth and fertility into authority', in D. Cannadine and S. Price (eds.) *Rituals of royalty: power and ceremonial in traditional societies* (Cambridge, 1992), 271-97.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 297.

²⁰⁸ P. Mac Cana, op. cit, 166.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 165-6.

²¹⁰ J. F. Killeen, op. cit., 202-4.

condition and proposes some meaning for it. In Lug's act of hopping on one leg, in the *Cath Maige Tuired*, he sees a 'bellicose and imprecatory *cétal* or incantation to stir up the men of Ireland'. He proposes that it is essentially a ritual act reminiscent of the practice of *corrguinecht* which involved standing on one leg (or being one-legged) in order to increase potency or place a hex on an enemy.²¹¹ The placing of a shoe on a royal candidate's foot, or the placing of his foot in a footprint impression in an inauguration stone could by association have been symbolic of a magical increase in potency (see footprint stones, chapter III, 3. 2).

1. 12 Between Earth and Sky: The Otherworld Visitor

Several of the Greek Gods, and the heroes whom they foster, wear a pair of *talaria*²¹² or winged sandals which find their counterpart in the pairs of magical shoes worn by some of the Irish heroes. Unlike the wearing of the single shoe, the motif of two shoes presents a picture of completeness and order and where it occurs the shoes are seen to be imbued with supernatural properties which establish the wearer as an exceptional being. In Homer's *Odyssey* (1:96 f.) the goddess Athena bends to 'tie her beautiful sandals on, ambrosial, golden, that carry her over water or over endless land on the wings of the wind'.²¹³ In the same work (5:44 f.), Hermes the Wayfinder performs the identical act, his *talaria* described in the same terms,²¹⁴ and this formula is repeated in the *Iliad* (24:340 f.) in respect of the 'ambrosial, golden' sandals of Argeiphontes.²¹⁵ Mac Cana has drawn attention to the thirteenth-century version of the story of King Fearghus mac Léide - *Imtheachta Tuaithe Luchra agus Aidheadh Fearghusa* - in which the king of the sea-sprites asks Fearghus to choose from among his possessions; and appropriately Fearghus opts for his shoes because they allow the wearer to travel equally well on land or sea.²¹⁶ Although they are not described as winged, Fearghus' shoes clearly carry the same magical property as those of Athena and Hermes. In Greek mythology the Gods are also

²¹¹ K. McCone, 'The Cyclops in Celtic, Germanic and Indo-European Myth', *Studia Celtica* 20, 1996, 95-8. McCone, p. 109, notes that the loss of an eye, arm or leg (probably a regular occurrence in warriors' lives) seems to have become an emblem of the young warriors of the Indo-European *koryos* of 'Männerbund' and was subsequently exploited mythically.

²¹² R. Graves, *The White Goddess* (London, 1961), 331, suggests that the word *talaria* deriving from the Latin *talus*, meaning heel-bone, could be interpreted as a sign of the sacredness of the heel and paradoxically, a symbol of lameness.

²¹³ R. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Homer: The Odyssey* (London, 1961), 16.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

²¹⁵ R. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Homer: The Iliad* (London, 1974), 578.

²¹⁶ P. Mac Cana, *op. cit.*, 165.

seen to bestow their magical *talaria* to heroes in peril and to rightful kingship claimants such as the young heroes Perseus of Mycenae and Tiryns, and Theseus of Attica. Perseus, in his quest to slay the Gorgon Medusa receives Hermes' golden sandals which he is told will guide him on the road as they are divine and cannot stray.²¹⁷ Theseus, the son of Aethra of Troezen²¹⁸ is sent by his mother into a sacred grove at the Temple of Poseidon, requested to lift a great, flat stone at the foot of a plane-tree and to retrieve what lies underneath. After a year passes, on his third attempt Theseus lifts the stone and finds beneath it the gold-hilted, bronze sword of Cecrops and a pair of golden sandals which have been placed there by Aegeus, King of Athens.²¹⁹

The apparent underlying theme in the wearing of magical shoes, generally a pair, is that the wearer's feet are seen never to touch the earth. The idea that the sacred or tabooed king or chief must be insulated from contact with the earth in order to preserve his sacredness is an almost universal condition of the royal person and one which is well documented in Vedic ritual texts in relation to the Indian *râjasûya*, and which still pertains in the royal ritual of some traditional societies.²²⁰ Following unction, and before the war or raiding expedition which preceded his enthronement, the anointed Indian king was subject to a number of restrictions one of which precluded his treading upon the earth without shoes.²²¹ In contemporary traditional societies this taboo is also observed. During the formal investiture of the chief-elect of Tongo, he is robed in a new tunic, a new red fez is placed on his head and new sandals are tied on his feet - 'thereafter he may never step on the earth bare-footed'. If he does so it is tantamount to a curse which will destroy him and the land and the people.²²² The King of Akuapem, a small Akan kingdom in south-eastern Ghana, is believed in that tradition not to occupy ordinary space in the respect that 'he is neither of the earth nor of the sky, the domains of people and of deities' and therefore he is never permitted to tread barefoot on the ground, nor does he walk without an umbrella over his head.²²³ This taboo is also implicit in the wearing of a

²¹⁷ Ibid., 11-12.

²¹⁸ His father was rumoured to be the sea-god Poseidon but was actually Aegeus.

²¹⁹ C. Kingsley, *The heroes* (London, 1856), 35-8.

²²⁰ For a broad range of references to this rule see J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (1922; reprint Hertfordshire, 1994), 592-5.

²²¹ J.C. Heesterman, *op. cit.*, 120.

²²² M. Fortes, 'On installation ceremonies', *PRAI.*, 1968, 13.

²²³ M. Gilbert, 'The person of the king: ritual and power in a Ghanaian state', in D. Cannadine and S. Price (eds.), *op.cit.*, 327.

single shoe in the instances referred to above in *Acallam na Senórach* and *Betha Colaim Chille*, where it appears to the respective observers as being on whichever foot touched the ground. Perhaps the most significant early Irish example of the wearing of the tabooed two precious shoes is that in *Echtrae Chormaic*, Recension I, where at dawn in Maytime, Cormac, grandson of Conn, while sitting alone on Múr Tea in Tara sees a sedate, grey-haired warrior coming towards him wearing ‘two blunt shoes of white bronze between his feet and the earth [Da mael-asa finddruine etir a troigthibh agus talmhain]’.²²⁴ The importance of the prophetic shoes as one of the symbols of the Otherworld character of kingship is perhaps compounded in this instance where they are found in conjunction with ‘a branch of silver with three golden apples’.²²⁵ Equipped with the *craebh airgid* - the peace-bringing or sleep-inducing royal object - and wearing white bronze shoes between his feet and earth, the guise of the warrior-visitor is not unlike that of Hermes who in addition to his winged sandals carries a wand with which ‘he charms asleep or when he wills, awake the eyes of men’.²²⁶

1. 13 The Shoe as Symbol of Support, Tribute and Homage

Both O’Donovan and Hore in their respective commentaries on the Irish inauguration ceremony put forward the opinion that the rite of the single shoe was purely an act of homage to the chief by his leading vassal, carried out ‘in token of obedience’.²²⁷ Mac Cana refuted this ‘rationalistic interpretation’ suggesting that to subscribe to it was perhaps to detract from the more potent meaning of *monosandalisme* as inferred in Irish literary texts and as documented in other cultures.²²⁸ More recent scholarship has looked at the rite of the single shoe in the context of the changing nature of the Gaelic polity in the later Middle Ages. It has been argued that when Mac Diarmada placed the shoe on Ó Conchobhair’s foot in the fifteenth century and Ó Catháin did likewise in the Ó Néill inauguration ceremony in the sixteenth century, the principal meaning was indeed one of demonstrable support for the chief by his most powerful vassal.²²⁹ The obvious power

²²⁴ W. Stokes and E. Windisch (eds.), ‘The Irish ordeals, Cormac’s adventure in the Land of Promise, and the decision as to Cormac’s sword’, in *Irische Texte I* (Leipzig, 1891), 211-12.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 211-12.

²²⁶ R. Fitzgerald, *op.cit.*, *Homer: The Odyssey*, 94.

²²⁷ J. O’Donovan (ed.), *The genealogies, tribes, and customs of Hy-Fiachrach* (Dublin, 1844), 451; H.F. Hore, ‘Inauguration of Irish chiefs’, *UJA* 5, 1857, 221.

²²⁸ P. Mac Cana, *op. cit.*, 165.

²²⁹ K. Simms., *op. cit.*, 32.

which accrued to the position of inaugurator is also clearly demonstrated in a prose tract on the 'Rights of Mac Diarmada', in which it is stated that 'no king is entitled to be inaugurated king of Connaught except the king who is inaugurated by Mac Diarmada',²³⁰ and in a statement made by the Archbishop of Cashel concerning the role of Ó Catháin as inaugurator of Ó Néill. Writing in 1592 the archbishop suggested that unless a chief-elect of Tír Eóghain was named by Ó Catháin, he was 'not to be obeyed nor taken for O'Neill'.²³¹

Ritual and tradition are not immutable and while the more potent archaic symbolism of the single shoe (possibly representing a 'chaotic state' prior to the reintegration of social order) may have been retained, the additional symbolism of the pledge of support by the most powerful vassal would have been a matter of certain political expedience in the altered state of the Gaelic polity. In the cases of Mac Diarmada and Ó Catháin who wielded considerable power, the legitimisation of the authority of their overlords, Ó Conchobhair and Ó Néill, appears to have been entirely dependant upon their support and it is in this sense that the vassals' shoeing of their respective lords must be seen.

There are instances too, in which shoes, both single and pairs, are associated with acts of homage to a king and the receiving of formal tribute from a king. One of the earliest recorded Irish instances of this occurs in the twelfth-century *Life* of Máedóc of Ferns in relation to the kingship of Leinster. On the day the king of Leinster was inaugurated, the *coarb* of Máedóc received one of the king's shoes full of silver. This along with the king's suit were the *coarb's* dues from Leinster.²³² The use of the shoe as a measure of entitlement or tribute also features in the *Féilire Oengusso* where Fínán Camm is described as being entitled to 'a measure of wheat for every household, the full of his brazen shoe [lan a assa umaide]: a tribute that no great saint had taken'. The same tract mentions that Finan Camm brought wheat into Ireland 'the full of his shoe [lan a assa tug]' and that Declan likewise, brought the rye 'the full of his shoe'.²³³ The *Chronicles of the Kings of Man and the Isles*, which deal with events from the late twelfth century through to the second half of the thirteenth century, relate that in 1098 Magnus king of

²³⁰ N. Ní Shéaghda, 'The rights of Mac Diarmada', *Celtica* 7, 1963, 156-72.

²³¹ *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1592, 499-500.

²³² F.J. Byrne, *op. cit.*, 22.

²³³ W. Stokes, *op. cit.*, 112-15.

Norway who made himself king of Man and Orkney turned his attention to Ireland. As a symbol of his intentions, he sent his shoes to Muirheartach, king of Ireland, instructing him to 'carry them above his shoulders through the middle of his house on Christmas Day in full view of his envoys, that he might understand from that that he had subjected himself to king Magnus'. To the aggrieved Irish, Muirheartach replied 'Not only would I prefer to carry his shoes, but would eat them, rather than king Magnus destroy one province in Ireland'.²³⁴ The shoes in this case could be viewed both as symbolic of a claimant's intentions and more obviously as a display of Muirheartach's voluntary subjection to Magnus' will.

1. 14 The Shoe as Relic and Talisman

In the *Aeneid* (7. 689 f.) there is a description of the attire of some of Praenestë's soldiery wearing 'close-fitting caps of wolfskin' and gripping earth 'with left foot bare, the right roughly booted'.²³⁵ This gesture also occurs in Thucydides' (3:22) account of the Siege of Plataea where again a company of soldiers appear with only the left foot shod. Closer to home, the thirteenth-century *Littere Wallie* portrays a Welsh soldier, brandishing a spear and sword, in the same state (fig. 5);²³⁶ and at the siege of Rouen in 1418, the Irish were described by Jean de Wavrin as having 'a shoe on one foot and none on the other'.²³⁷ As pointed out by Killeen there are two schools of thought on this practice, the one attributing it to taboo, the other to practicality.²³⁸ Fowler in the earlier part of this century suggested that the shoeing of one of two otherwise bare feet, was done in order to get a firmer hold upon the ground,²³⁹ while Frazer proposed that it was a form of consecration or devotion observed by men in any great hazard or grave emergency.²⁴⁰ In the Irish context there is an interesting mid seventeenth-century account of the talismanic properties of the single foot which lends some analogous support to Frazer's view. Lord Broghill writing to William Lenthall in 1651 described his battle with MacCarthy of Muskerry in which the Irish were defeated. Among the baggage and quilted in the

²³⁴ G. Broderick (ed.), *Cronica Regum Mannie & Insularum* (Douglas, 1991), f.35r.

²³⁵ R. Fitzgerald (ed.), *The Aeneid: Virgil* (London, 1984), 221.

²³⁶ T. Herbert and G.E. Jones (eds.), *Edward I and Wales* (Cardiff, 1988 ; reprint 1993), 32.

²³⁷ W. Hardy and E. Hardy (eds.), *Jean de Wavrin, A collection of the chronicles and ancient histories of Great Britain, now called England*, vol. 2, (London, 1864-91), 241-2. I am grateful to Cormac Ó Cléirigh for drawing my attention to this reference.

²³⁸ J.F. Killeen, *op. cit.*, 202-3.

²³⁹ W. Warde Fowler (ed.), *Virgil's gathering of the clans: being observations on Aeneid VII (601-871)* (Oxford, 1918), 60-61.

²⁴⁰ J. Frazer, *op. cit.*, 594-5.

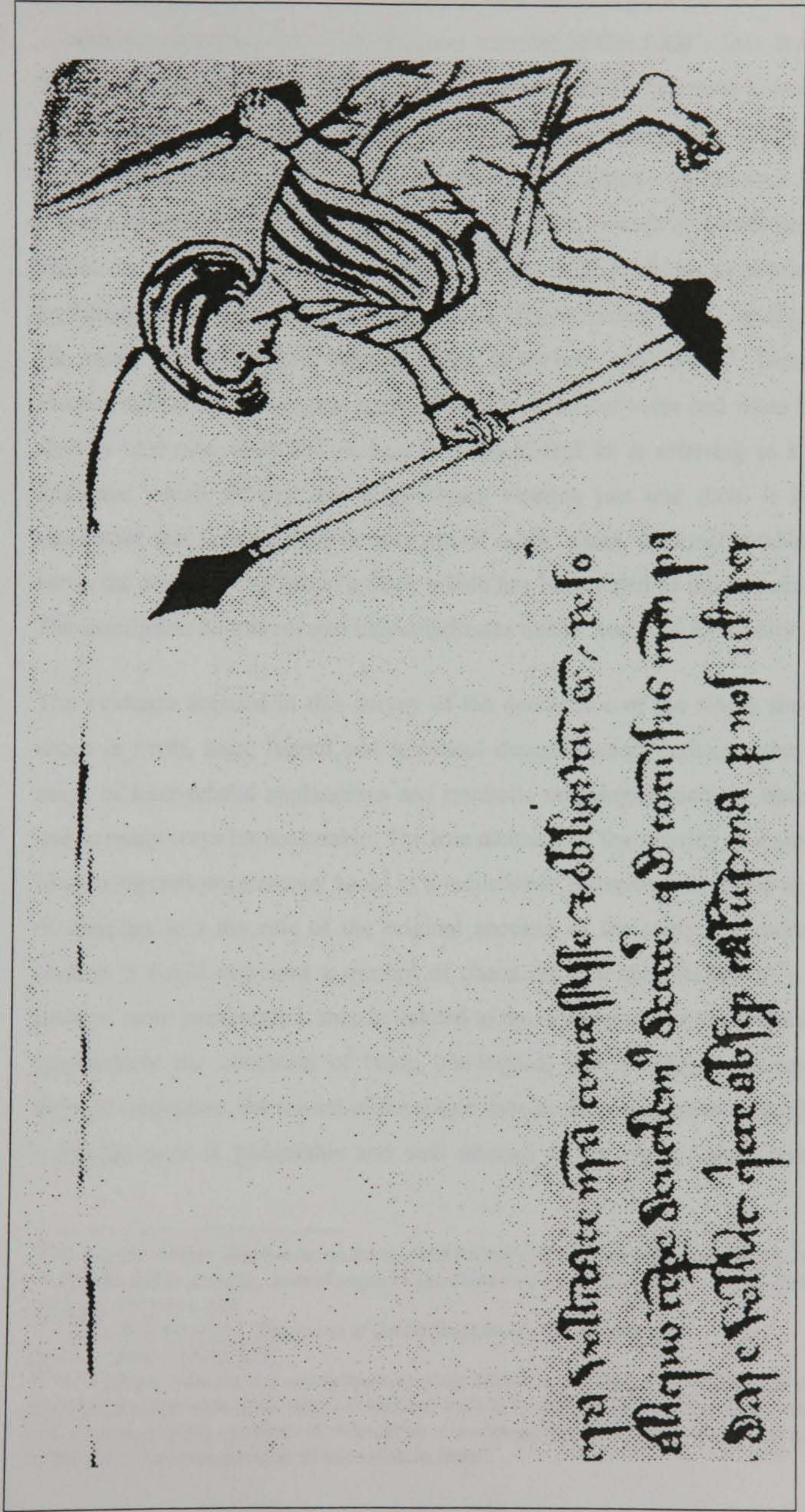


Fig. 5 A Welsh warrior brandishing sword and spear, with left foot shod and right foot bare [Littere Wallie, PRO, London].

doublets of some of the slain Irish soldiery were found 'a peck full of charms, relicks, etc. with one on paper, said to be the exact measure of Our Lady's foot, and written in it - "Whoever wears this, and repeats certain prayers, shall be free from gun-shot, sword and pike", respectively, as each desired'.²⁴¹ The religious significance of the saint's foot or shoe is further evident in the many images of saint's letting a golden shoe fall as a sign of favour to a suppliant.²⁴² In a thirteenth century poem written by Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe in defence of poets and poetry, Giolla Brighde refers to a statue of what is presumably the Virgin Mary putting off her shoe in return for an 'easily-heard poem' - 'the statue put off her shoe; indeed, since it is not now upon her'.²⁴³ This he takes as yet another indication of the good name of the composers of verse and when he says that the shoe is 'not now upon her' it may be implied that he is referring to a statue then in existence which showed the Virgin Mary wearing just one shoe. It is perhaps also significant that shrines occur in the form of saints' shoes, the most notable Irish example being the Shrine of St Brigid's Shoe which has been dated to the late sixteenth-century. The inscription on this revered object indicates that it was used for swearing oaths.²⁴⁴

The evidence accrued in this survey of the occurrence of the single shoe and pairs of shoes in myth, saga, legend and historical documentation, indicates that it has a wide range of inter-related applications and symbolic meanings which are timeless, universal and in many ways immeasurable. The true meaning of the wearing of a single shoe in the Irish inauguration ceremony could in a reductionist sense be interpreted as the simple act of stepping into the role of the original ancestor of the sept; in a more interpretative context it could represent a symbol of chaos prior to the election of a new ruler; or perhaps more pertinently it may be related to the association between monstrous physique (particularly the condition of being one-legged) and a magical increase in potency. Beyond conjecture, the import of the single shoe as the pre-eminent recognition symbol of a rightful ruler is undeniable and well attested in the sagas, bardic poetry, and in its

²⁴¹ T. Crofton Croker, *Researches in the south of Ireland* (1824; reprint Shannon, 1969), 299-302.

²⁴² J. Bolte and G. Polívka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, vol. 3, (Leipzig, 1913-31), 242.

²⁴³ N.J.A. Williams (ed.), *The poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe* (*ITS* 51, Dublin, 1980), 207.

²⁴⁴ R. Ó Floinn, *Irish shrines and reliquaries of the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1994), 44; The single shoe as testimonial is also seen in the story of Boaz and Ruth in Ruth (4) 'Now it used to be the custom in Israel that, to make binding a contract of redemption or exchange, one party would take off his sandal and give it to the other. This was the form of attestation in Israel'.

historically recorded presence in the inaugurations of Ó Néill, Ó Conchobhair, Mag Uidhir and perhaps too in the ceremony of the king of Leinster as implied in the *Life* of Máedóc of Ferns.

1. 15 Conclusions

The evidence for the Irish royal inauguration ceremony presents a remarkable picture of both continuity and radical transformation from the fabled en-kinging of Conaire Mór at Tara through to the last detailed historical accounts of the practice among Gaelic lords in the late sixteenth century. The curious rites ascribed to Conaire Mór, to the king of Tara in *Betha Colmáin Mheic Lúacháin*, and to the Cenél Conaill, differ in their details, but prove to have certain common origins in Indo-European tradition. By the time Seán Mac Cochlan was inaugurated as chief of Delbhna at Ard na Croise in 1590 and Aodh Mór Uí Néill was proclaimed at Tulach Óg in 1595,²⁴⁵ the cosmetic details of inauguration ritual had a long-established homogeneity. The evidence afforded by the *Life* of Máedóc, the Ó Conchobhair inauguration tract, the Ó Dubhda ceremony in the *Book of Lecan*, and by the many fleeting references to inaugurations in the annals and English administrative records, suggest that the formal acts and ritual symbols which in varying combinations constituted the Irish ceremony, were firmly in place by the fourteenth or early fifteenth century. A number of the Irish rites find their counterparts in Scottish and Carinthian king and chief-making practices. Among these shared attributes are the presence of the rod, the performance of the ceremonial turn and the surrendering of the royal garments. Legitimised authority must of necessity always be seen to be immutable and so despite the intervention of external forces like the church in the twelfth century and earlier, and the internal alterations in the Gaelic polity in the later Middle Ages, the perpetuation of the essential ritual symbols of rod and shoe and the practice of rites like the *deiseal* served to underpin continuity in the ritual of royalty. The plot and members of the cast in some instances altered significantly, but the same props reappeared time and time again. The recorded instances of the introduction of the *coarb* as inaugurator, the performance of the *deiseal* with a Christian reliquary, and the apparent transformation of the rod into a symbol of kingly authority delegated by God, all serve to indicate the remoulding of the ceremony under the influence of the church. The decline of the concept of kingship and its gradual replacement by lordship from the fourteenth century onward, is manifest in the

²⁴⁵ *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1595, 386.

names applied to the rod itself and in the altered symbolic function of the shoe. The motif of the single sandal or shoe which so clearly characterises or portends a kingship claimant in the sagas and continues to be used of a rightful chief in bardic poetry, finds its ultimate symbolism as an expression of the new power of the chief's principal vassal or tributary lord in the later Middle Ages.

CHAPTER II. THE NATURE, LANDSCAPE SETTING , AND TERRITORIAL

LOCATION OF INAUGURATION SITES

The medieval Irish ceremony of royal inauguration was performed almost exclusively on low-lying but far-seeing hills, many of which might seem, at least to contemporary eyes, unassuming, even unremarkable features of the modern landscape. An analysis of known and suspected inauguration sites indicates that 56.1% of them lie between 50-400 feet above sea level, 36.8% fall within the 400-800 foot range, and the remaining 7.1% occur between 800 to 1000 feet and over (fig. 6). This last group includes very doubtful inauguration places such as the traditionally cited Mag Uidhir venue on the summit of Cuilcagh, on the Cavan/Fermanagh border,¹ and MacArt's Fort on Cave Hill above Belfast.² Their somewhat prohibitive locations are untypical of the topographical setting of inauguration sites as a whole.

Several inauguration site place-names carry the descriptive root-words *ard* (height);³ *cnoc* (hill, mound);⁴ *mullach* (top or crown);⁵ and *tulach* (hill, hillock, royal hill, hill of assembly),⁶ and occasionally, in combining topography and an allusion to royalty, to a sept name, or a hilltop monument, they can meaningfully evoke the image of the inauguration stage. For instance, Mullach Leic, the Mac Mathghamhna inauguration site at Leck, Co. Monaghan, intimates flagstones on the summit of a hill,⁷ while the Mac Amhalghaidh is commemorated in the toponym Tulach Mac Amhalghaidh,⁸ and the royal attribute of the Ó Dochartaigh venue is designated in the place-name Ard na dTaoiseach ('Height of the Chieftains').⁹

¹ C. Coote, *Statistical survey of Cavan* (1802), 25-6; Anon, *The clans of Ireland: their battles, chiefs, and princes* (Sullivan Brothers, Educational publishers, Dublin, n.d.), 119; M. MacNeill, *The Festival of Lughnasa: a study of the survival of the Celtic festival at the beginning of harvest* (London, 1962), 176-7. MacNeill, quoting Dalton, points out that the presence of the so-called 'Maguire's Chair' or 'Black Rocks' - a crag of limestone overhanging the road that runs between Cuilca and Slieve Aneiran - may have misled Coote into locating the inauguration place of the Maguires on the top of Cuilca.

² Rev. J. O'Laverty, *An historical account of the diocese of Down and Connor*, vol.2 (Dublin, 1880), 454-5.

³ *DIL.*, (Dublin, 1990), 49.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 472.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 616; H. Wagner, in 'Studies in the origins of early Celtic civilisation', *ZCP* 31, 1970, p. 38, footnote 46, suggests that Old Irish *tulach/tilach*, often found in legal phrases and also meaning 'a hill of assembly', might relate to the Hittite *tuliiia* - 'assembly of the council, court-day'.

⁷ PRO, London, MPF 35/MPF 36.

⁸ J.P. Dalton, 'Ancient boundaries of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise dioceses', *JACAS* vol.1, 1926, 52.

⁹ P. Walsh (ed.), *Beatha Aodh Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill* (ITS 42, London, 1948), 288-9.

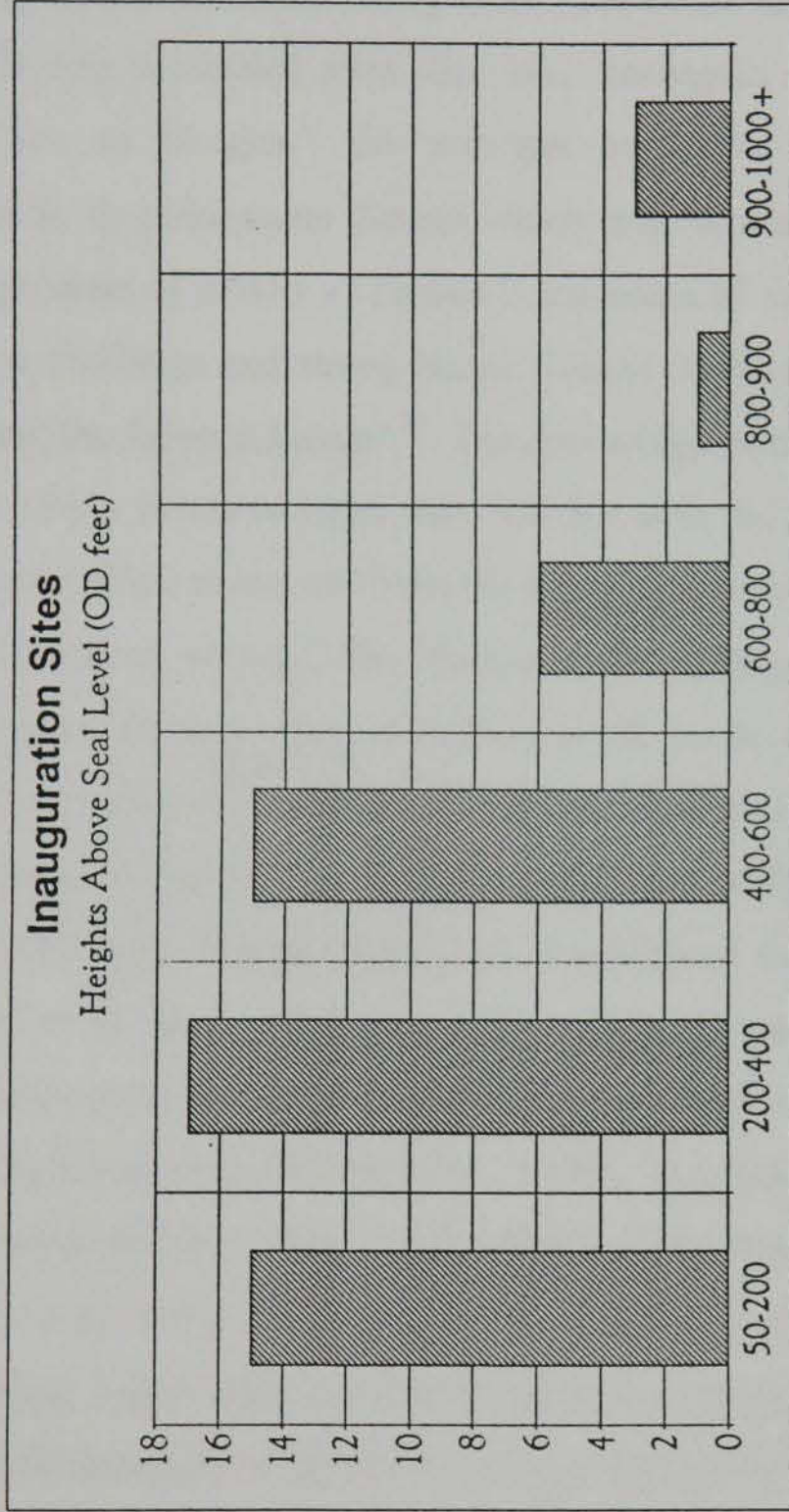


Fig. 6

2.1 The Importance of Prospect

Convenient access and an excellent prospect are the quintessential features of king and chief-making places. An extensive view of the territory which the king-elect was about to wed, or over which the chief-elect would assume lordship, was germane to the ritual of the ceremony. In the majority of cases the sites chosen within respective kingdoms and lordships offer superlative views over the surrounding landscape, not always to every point of the compass, but generally taking in the core of the territory. From the renowned Temair, down to less celebrated sites like Mag Eochagáin's Cnoc Buadha,¹⁰ or Mac Murchadha's Cnoc an Bhogha,¹¹ the principal impact is one of prospect.¹² Tara encapsulates this in its place-name *Temair* which translates as high place, eminence or hill,¹³ with the promise of a view - 'Temair is the name of every lofty and conspicuous spot whereon are dwellings and strong keeps; Temair is the name of every peaked and pointed hill except the far-seen Emain'.¹⁴ The poet exaggerates, as the ridge of Temair is a modest height which stands no more than 300 feet over the plains of Meath. Its drama lies in the spectacle which opens out from the summit of the ridge and particularly when standing upon Dumha na nGiall ('The Mound of the Hostages'). Almost a fifth of the country can be taken in from here, stretching as far north as Slieve Gullion and the Mourne Mountains, with the Blackstairs and Sliabh Bladhma on the skyline at south and southwest, and Uisneach to west.¹⁵ The less assuming and little-known esker ridge of Cnoc Buadha at Rahugh, in Mag Eochagáin's lordship of Cenél Fiachach, commands unexpected views as far north as Croghan Hill in Uí Failge and south to Sliabh Bladhma in Éile (fig. 8). Mac Murchadha's Cnoc an Bhogha, which is an almost imperceptible height, takes in the broad sweep of the Slaney Valley, including the town of Ferns, backdropping to the Wicklow Mountains, Vinegar Hill and the Blackstairs. There are a small number of sites which prove the exception to the general rule and which offer more limited views. Magh Adhair, the Uí Bhriain king-making site at Toonagh, and Carn Mhic Táil, a possible early inauguration site of the Corcu Modruad near Kilshanny, fall into this group, but it must be added that they are not entirely without some prospect. Carn Mhic

¹⁰ NLI, MS G192, 306.

¹¹ P.S. Dinneen (ed.), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn le Seathrún Céitinn*, vol.3 (ITS 9, London, 1908), 15.

¹² For the aspect afforded by each inauguration site see inventory, vol.II.

¹³ *DIL.*, 586.

¹⁴ E. Gwynn (ed.), *The metrical dindshenchas*, part 1 (Dublin, 1991), 11 [65].

¹⁵ J. Fenwick, 'A panoramic view from the Hill of Tara, Co. Meath', *Ríocht na Midhe*, vol.9, no. 3, 1997, 1-11.

Táil is a striking landmark which commands the broad flat-bottomed valley of the Dealagh River and although the Uí Bhriain site lies in a natural amphitheatre called 'Cregnakeeroge', a view southeast to the distant Slievebernagh, Knockaphunta and Woodcock Hill is still to be had from the summit of the mound of Magh Adhair.

2.2 The Multi-functional Nature of Inauguration Places

In addition to serving as king and chief-making sites, there is some evidence to suggest that many of these hills supported a variety of the institutional, cultural and social activities of Gaelic Irish society. They facilitated events such as parleys, musters, *ao-naigh* and *oireachtais*, acted on occasions as judgement seats, centres of tribute, cess and exactions, and latterly as Lughnasa festive heights. The hill was in every sense a symbol of purposeful gatherings, and something of this sentiment is preserved in bardic poetry. A number of poems on the theme of the downfall of the Gaoidhil written in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries make explicit references to the demise of the hilltop assembly. Fear flatha Ó Gnímh, the *ollamh* to Clann Aodha Buidhe, in his poignant poem on 'The Downfall of the Gael', lamented the passing of the hill of gathering and the undignified end of that institution, transformed into agricultural land - 'Cruacha ar ardaibh aonaigheadh [cornstacks on assembly hills]'.¹⁶ Another, composed during the period of the Ulster Plantation, notes the absence of the 'dark-eyed throng around the heights of fortified assembly places; their tumult is not audible to me as I traverse Ireland's plain [Ní fhaicim an ndroing ndearcghlais um dhromchluibh dhionn n-oireachtais]'.¹⁷ In a similarly moody sixteenth-century lament, Laoiseach Mac an Bhaire decries the cutting down of an ancient tree, 'the thorn of acclamation', on a hill which he used to see as a place of assembly - 'The hill of the shoutings, torment of the schools, in the possession of enemies to-day!'¹⁸ The significance of the sacred tree or *bile* to the ceremony of inauguration has been discussed in chapter 1 (pp. 20-26). Its occurrence in this poem as a symbol of assembly invites comparisons with convention trees in other cultures such as the three-hundred year old Oak of Guernica where the Juntas Generales

¹⁶ T.F. O'Rahilly, *Measgra Dánta*, vol.2 (Cork 1927; reprint 1977), no. 54, line 36; J. Hardiman (ed.), *Irish minstrelsy or bardic remains of Ireland*, vol. 2 (London, 1831; reprint 1971), 106-7, takes considerable artistic licence in his translation of the poem - this line he translates as 'The plough hath past each hallowed mound/where sages weighed a nation's right'.

¹⁷ W. Gillies, 'A poem on the downfall of the Gaoidhil', *Éigse* 13, 1969-70, 204.

¹⁸ O. Bergin (ed.), *Irish bardic poetry* (Dublin, 1984), 51-2, 232-3.

of Bizkaia used to meet.¹⁹ Considerably less enthusiastic, but more revealing, are Spenser's late sixteenth-century observations on the Irish practice of assembling on hills. Warning his readers of the sedition and plots hatched by the Irish during their meetings at such places, he wrote:

'There is a great use among the Irish to make great assemblies together upon a Rath or hill, there to parly (as they say) about matters and wrongs between township and township, or one private person and another, but well I wot ... that in these meetings many mischiefs have been both practised and wrought'.²⁰

He went on to offer his opinion on the origins of these meeting places which he termed 'Folkemotes', comparing them with Saxon assembly sites ['for the most part in form four square well trenched, for the meeting of that quarter']. From his explorations into early Irish history, he had also gathered that ancient burial mounds and cairns, and earthen and stone enclosures, had been focus points for meetings.²¹

The multi-functional aspect of many of these far-seeing hills is portrayed in historical sources and embraced in folk tradition. In an account of the en-kinging ceremony of the Uí Dhubhda of Uí Fiachrach, preserved in the *Book of Lecan*, the role and significance of Carn Amhalgaidh, which was one of two inauguration places of that sept, is clearly stated. Amhalgaidh, it is said, raised that *carn* 'to serve as a place of fairs and great meetings [do chum aonaigh agus ard-oireachtais], and so that 'he himself and his successors might be inaugurated upon it'.²² The sources for Sheantomuinn [Shantemon], which lies three miles northeast of Cavan town, indicate that in addition to inauguration, it too fulfilled a number of functions for the lords of East Bréifne. It was documented in 1703 by Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh as both the place where the chief of the Uí Raghallaigh held his *oireachtas* and the inauguration site of that sept. Ó Raghallaigh's information was drawn from a combination of earlier source material including a probable book on the history of Co. Cavan families written by Tomas Fitzsimons between 1672-7.²³ Maol Mórdha Ó Raghallaigh was inaugurated on the hill in 1534, in opposition to his nephew

¹⁹ The 300-year old tree, the trunk of which still survives, was replaced in 1860 by a new oak. A small tribuna or platform where the various representatives presented their credentials was situated beside the tree. M. Heiberg, *The making of the Basque Nation* (Cambridge, 1989), 23.

²⁰ W.L. Renwick (ed.), *A view of the present state of Ireland* (Oxford, 1970), 77.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 78-9.

²² J. O'Donovan (ed.), *The genealogies, tribes and customs of Hy-Fiachrach* (Dublin, 1844), 100-101, 444.

²³ J. Carney (ed.), *A genealogical history of the O'Reillys: written in the eighteenth century by Eóghan Ó Raghallaigh and incorporating portion of the earlier work of Tomas Fitzsimons* (Dublin, 1959), 8.

Toirdhealbach son of Fearghal,²⁴ and there is a description of Eóghan Ruadh who became chief of East Bréifne in 1514, and his son Cathal Crúbach, the tanaiste, holding an *oireachtas* on the hill [a n-oireachtus Sheantomuinn].²⁵ Hilltops were apparently regularly used for *oireachtais*, a fact observed by Tudor administrators concerned at the resurgence of Gaelic practices in the late sixteenth century. In 1573 the Earl of Desmond was actually bound over ‘to keep no parliaments on hills, no brehon law’.²⁶ Later in 1583, Sir John O’Reilly was ordered ‘not to assemble the Queen’s people upon hills, or use any Iraghtes or paroles upon hills’, and no doubt Sheantomuinn was principal among these parley hills.²⁷ MacNeill recorded a number of Lughnasa festive heights which were also at one time places of inauguration, and she noted that up until the late 1940s, the ‘Pattern of Shantemon’ was held on Bilberry Sunday.²⁸ The conjectured location of Carn inghine Bhriain, the second Uí Dhubhda inauguration place, east of the River Moy in Tír Fhiachrach, also has Lughnasa associations (see below). The headland of Aughris, which overlooks Sligo Bay, was the venue of a pattern held there on the last Sunday of July. On the headland, in the townland of Kilruisheighter, there is a small enclosed mound - the suspected Carn inghine Bhriain, which by tradition was known as the ‘fort’ where ‘the kings used to be crowned’, and where the local people spoke of ‘two tracks of feet which always remain an unchanging green’.²⁹

Although Tulach Uí Dheadhaidh near Corofin, Co. Clare is historically unattested as an inauguration site, it too is accorded a variety of purposes. This unassuming grassy ridge was the probable royal centre of Cinéal Fermaic,³⁰ and according to local tradition it was the inauguration place of the Ó Deadhaidh.³¹ The *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* reveals that it also served as a popular rallying point for battle and parleys for the Uí Bhriain (overlords of the Uí Dheadhaidh) in the fourteenth century.³² The records relating to the conjectured inauguration places of the Uí Mhordha of Laoighis and the Uí Choncheanainn

²⁴ Ibid., 42-3, 90-91, ‘Ar mbeith do Mhaoilmhordha a dhearbhrathair, maille re maithibh na Breifne na thimchioll a Seantomuin chum tighearna do ghair dho’.

²⁵ Ibid., 47-9, 94-5.

²⁶ *Cal. S.P. Ire., 1509-73*, 43.

²⁷ C. Haliday (ed.), *The Irish Privy Council Book* (IMC 40); J. Hardiman, op. cit., 159.

²⁸ M. MacNeill, op.cit., 174.

²⁹ Ibid., 112-3.

³⁰ E. FitzPatrick, ‘The historic assembly sites of Tulach Uí Dheadhaidh and Carn Mhic Táil’, *The Other Clare*, vol. 21, 1997, 17-19.

³¹ Information from Mr. Dick Cronin, Corofin, 1996.

³² S.H. O’Grady (ed.), *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*, vol. 2 (ITS 27, London 1929), 57-9, 72-3.

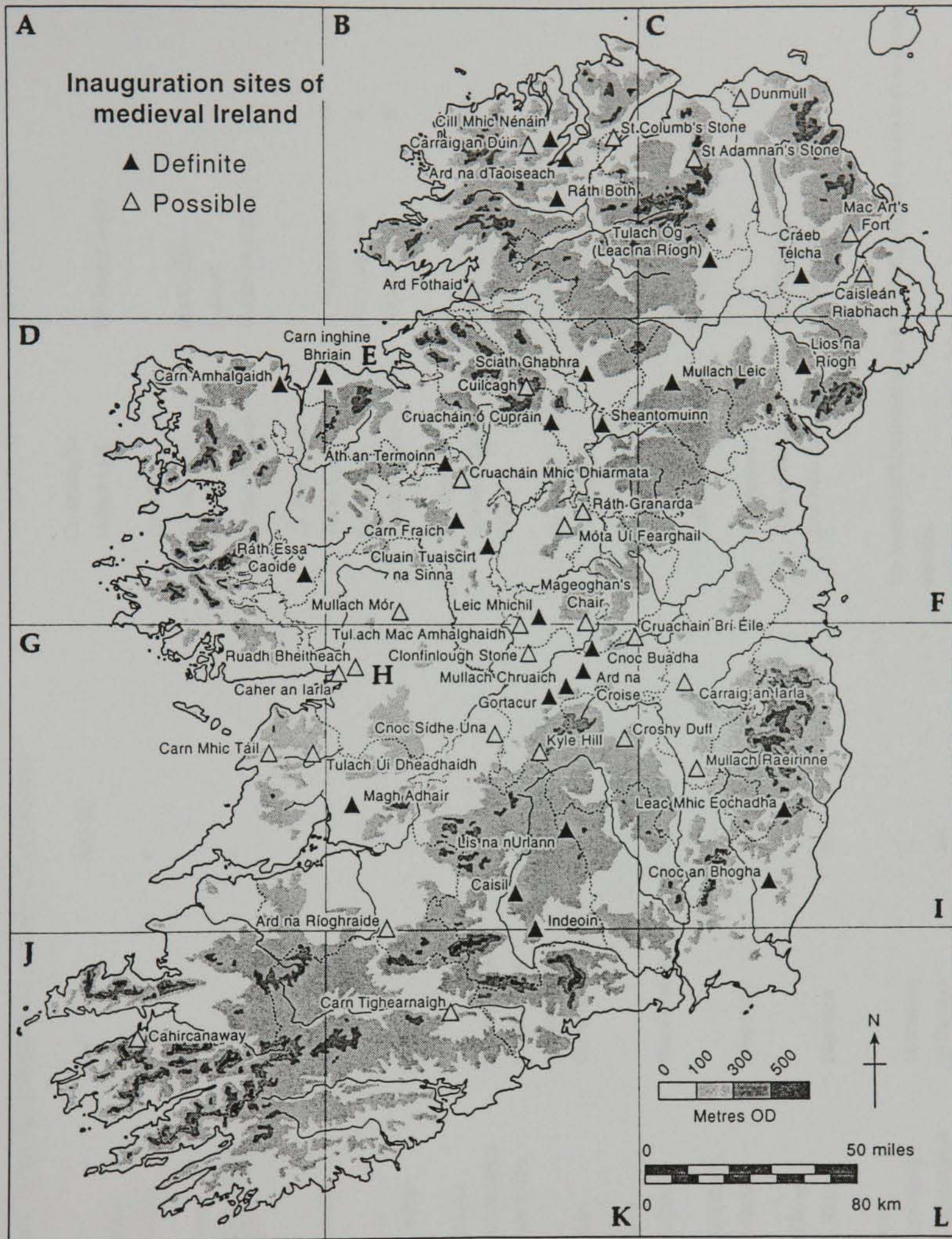


Fig. 7 Distribution map of attested and possible inauguration sites.
 St Columb's Stone, St Adamnan's Stone and the Clonfinlough Stone
 (discussed in chapter III) are also marked

TABLE I. GUIDE TO MAPPED CLASS (A) INAUGURATION SITES

| Site | Sept | Map Ref | Co. Monaghan | (Mac Uilliam Íochtar) |
|----------------------|------------------|---------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Co. Antrim | | | Mullach Leic | F |
| Cráeb Telcha | Ulaid | C | | |
| Co. Cavan | | | | |
| Cruachain ó Cupráin | Uí Ruairc | E | Mic Cochláin (various) | H H H |
| | Mág Shamhradhain | | | |
| | Mic Tighearnáin | | | |
| Sheantomuinn | Uí Raghallaigh | | | |
| Co. Clare | | | | |
| Magh Adhair | Uí Bhriain | H | Uí Chonchobhair | E |
| Co. Donegal | | | | |
| Ard na dTaoiseach | Uí Dochartaigh | B | Déisi | H/K |
| Cill Mhic Nénáin | Uí Dhomhnaill | B | Eóganacht | H |
| | Mic Shuibhne | | | |
| Ráth Both | Uí Dhomhnaill | B | Uí Néill | C |
| Co. Down | | | | |
| Lios na Ríogh | Mag Aonghuis | F | Méig Eochagáin | H |
| Co. Fermanagh | | | | |
| Sciath Ghabhra | Méig Uidhir | E | Uí Chatharnaigh (Sionnach) | |
| Co. Kilkenny | | | | |
| Lis na nUrlann | Eóganacht | H | Mic Mhurchada | I |
| Co. Mayo | | | | |
| Carn Amhalgaidh | Uí Dhubhda | D | Uí Chennselaig | I |
| Carn inghine Bhriain | Uí Dhubhda | D/E | | |
| Ráth Essa Caoide | De Burca | D | | |

The locations of Lios Beannchair and Dun Caillige Beirre have not been positively identified

TABLE II. GUIDE TO MAPPED CLASS (B) INAUGURATION SITES

| Site | Sept | Map Ref | Mullach Raeirinne | Uí Tuathail | I |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------|---|----------------------|-----|
| <i>Co. Antrim</i> | | | | | |
| Dunmull | Uí Fhloinn | C | <i>Co. Laois</i> Croshy Duff | Uí Mordha | H |
| MacArt's Fort | | C | <i>Co. Limerick</i> Ard na Ríoghraide | Uí Fídgente | H/K |
| <i>Co. Cavan/Fermanagh</i> | | | | | |
| Cuilcagh | Méig Uídhir | E | <i>Co. Longford</i> Móta Uí Fhearghail | Uí Fhearghail | E |
| <i>Co. Clare</i> | | | Ráth Granarda | Uí Fhearghail | E |
| Carn Mhic Táil | Corcu Modruad | G | <i>Co. Offaly</i> | | |
| Tulach Uí Dheadhaidh | Uí Dheadhaidh | G | Cruachain Bri Éile | Uí Chonchobhair | H/I |
| <i>Co. Cork</i> | | | Kyle Hill | Meic Ghiolla Pádraig | H |
| Carn Tighearnaigh | Fir Maige Féine | K | <i>Co. Roscommon</i> | | |
| <i>Co. Donegal</i> | | | Cruachain Mhic Dhiarmata | Mic Dhiarmata | E |
| Ard Fothaid | | B | | | |
| Carraig an Dúin | Uí Dhomhnaill | B | <i>Co. Tipperary</i> | Uí Chearbhaill | H |
| <i>Co. Down</i> | | | Cnoc Síthe Úna | | |
| Caisleán Riabhach | Uí Néill | C | <i>Co. Westmeath</i> | | |
| <i>Co. Galway</i> | Clann Aodha Buidhe | | Mac Geoghegan's Chair | Méig Eochagáin | E/H |
| Caher an Iarla | De Búrca | H | Tulach Mac Amhalghaidh | Mic Amhalghaidh | E/H |
| | (Clann Uilliam Uachtair) | | & Magawley's Chair | | |
| Rath Mór | Uí Choncheanainn | E | | | |
| Ruadh Bheitheach | Uí Fiachrach | H | | | |
| <i>Co. Kerry</i> | | | | | |
| Cahircanaway | Mic Carthaigh Mór | J | | | |
| <i>Co. Kildare</i> | | | | | |
| Carraig an Iarla | Uí Chonchobhair | I | | | |

of Uí Dhiarmada suggest that they too fulfilled other purposes. Croshy Duff, which is now a little-known feature of the rolling landscape in the hinterland of Stradbally, has been proposed as the inauguration place of the Ó Mordha,³³ and it was described by John Dymmok in the sixteenth century as the ‘generall Ratehill of the province of Leinster’.³⁴ Likewise, the gentle pasture ridge of Mullach Mór, near the village of Moylough, is believed to have been the chief-making site of the Uí Choncheanainn until that chieftainship was abolished by Ó Ceallaigh of Uí Maine *c.* 1478.³⁵ It was also where a deed was drawn up by the brehon Boethius MacEgan on May 17, 1583, in settlement of a long-standing land dispute among the local Ó Mainíns of Sodhain.³⁶ The evocative term, ‘judgement seat’, was frequently used in local tradition to describe hills like Mullach Mór and Kyle Hill on the Offaly/Laois border,³⁷ where matters of small or great contention were resolved. That brehons did conduct business at these places is witnessed in a statement made by disgruntled Tudor administrators in 1538. Due to the lack of keepers and buildings to house and promulgate legal documents, it was envisaged that a time would come when English justices would be ‘enforced to minister the laws upon hills, as it were Brehons or wild Irishmen’.³⁸

2.3 Monuments on Inauguration Hills

In contrast to the empowering views which they offer, the monuments on inauguration hills tend to be understated. Our understanding of the nature of inauguration sites has perhaps been coloured by the prehistoric grandeur and complex nature of Temair, Emain and Cruachu, but the reality is that the majority of those in use in the Gaelic lordships of the later Middle Ages were simple hilltop enclosures, raths, enclosed and unenclosed mounds and cairns, and in some instances no more than rock terraces, or lone flagstones and crude stone chairs. An analysis of the archaeological monuments at twenty-nine attested inauguration places (Class A), reveals that they break down into eight different types (fig. 9): in descending order these are (1) enclosed and unenclosed mounds; (2)

³³ W. FitzGerald, ‘Places of inauguration of Irish kings and chiefs with a description of that ceremony’ (RSAI MS); S. MacCaba, *Historical notes on Laois and place-names of Ballyroan* (n.d.), 76.

³⁴ J. O’Donovan (ed.), ‘A treatise of Ireland by John Dymmok’, in *Tracts relating to Ireland* (Dublin, 1844), 32.

³⁵ J.A. Claffey, *History of Moylough-Mountbellew* (Galway, 1983), 107, 131-2.

³⁶ J. O’Donovan (ed.), *The tribes and customs of Hy-Many* (Dublin, 1843), 160-62

³⁷ W.W. Seward, *Topographia Hibernica* (Dublin, 1795), n.p.

³⁸ *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1538, 36-7.



Fig. 8 Cnoc Buadha, inauguration site of Mag Eochagáin, Rahugh, Co. Westmeath

enclosures; (3) raths; (4) church sites; (5) outcrop knolls; (6) barrows; (7) crags; (8) unassociated stone chairs, or recorded sites of *leaca* or footprint stones. In two cases, concerning Ard na Croise, Co. Offaly where Seán Mac Cochlan was inaugurated in 1590,³⁹ and Dún Caillighe Beirre, the Ó Broin site in Co. Wicklow, the monument classifications are unknown, and the location of the latter has not yet been pin-pointed with any certainty.⁴⁰ In other instances no antiquity has survived and the place-name alone suggests what might have been there. For instance, the summit of Mullach Chruaich which was the Ó Maolmhuaidh place of inauguration is now totally bare, but the *cruach* element in its place-name may suggest the former existence of a mound. Situated about a half mile northeast of Mountbolus, Mullach Chruaich, now anglicised Mullacroghy, is a low, gently rounded hill with a commanding view. To the southwest it overlooks both Ó Maolmuaidh's castle and settlement at Rathlihen and the rath of Gortacur where Aodh Ó Néill conducted a number of impromptu inaugurations on his march south in February 1599 (see p. 86). Apart from Tadhg Ó Neachtain's identification of this hill as the Uí Mhaolmuaidh inauguration place, it is also referred to in the calendar of the Kilcormac missal. A brief note scribbled in Latin in sixteenth-century hand records the slaying of the two sons of Aodh Ó Maolmuaidh, Seán and Briain on 'Mullach Alluirc' in 1536.⁴¹

Class B sites, that is those which are cited in local tradition only, or which were recorded as such in the past by travellers and antiquaries, break down into similar classifications (fig. 10). Of the twenty-six Class B sites subjected to analysis, enclosures and mounds (both enclosed and unenclosed) feature as the dominant monument type, representing ten of the total count. The remaining categories include cairns; enclosed crags; unassociated chairs; raths; mottes; outcrop knolls; a barrow, and a cashel. It must be added that not all of the locations offered for the sites which will be discussed here are totally secure. In some instances, traditionally accepted locations, or earlier identifications by antiquaries and local historians will be questioned, and alternative sites proposed. The sampling and conclusions drawn are somewhat compromised by the debatable locations of some sites;

³⁹ B. Mac Cuarta (ed.), 'Mathew De Renzy's letters on Irish affairs 1613-1620, *Anal. Hib.* 34, 1987, 116.

⁴⁰ C. Manning in his M.A. thesis, *The Royal Inauguration Sites of Ireland* (UCD, 1976), suggest that a small ringfort which commands the southern entrance to the Glen of the Downs, in the townland of Woodlands, Co. Wicklow, may be the location of Dun Caillighe Beirre.

⁴¹ TCD MS 82, fol. 2v, 'Interfecto fuert duo filii odoins y mylmoy ioliaes et bernard i mullac alluirc A.D. 1536'.

MONUMENTS AT INAUGURATION SITES

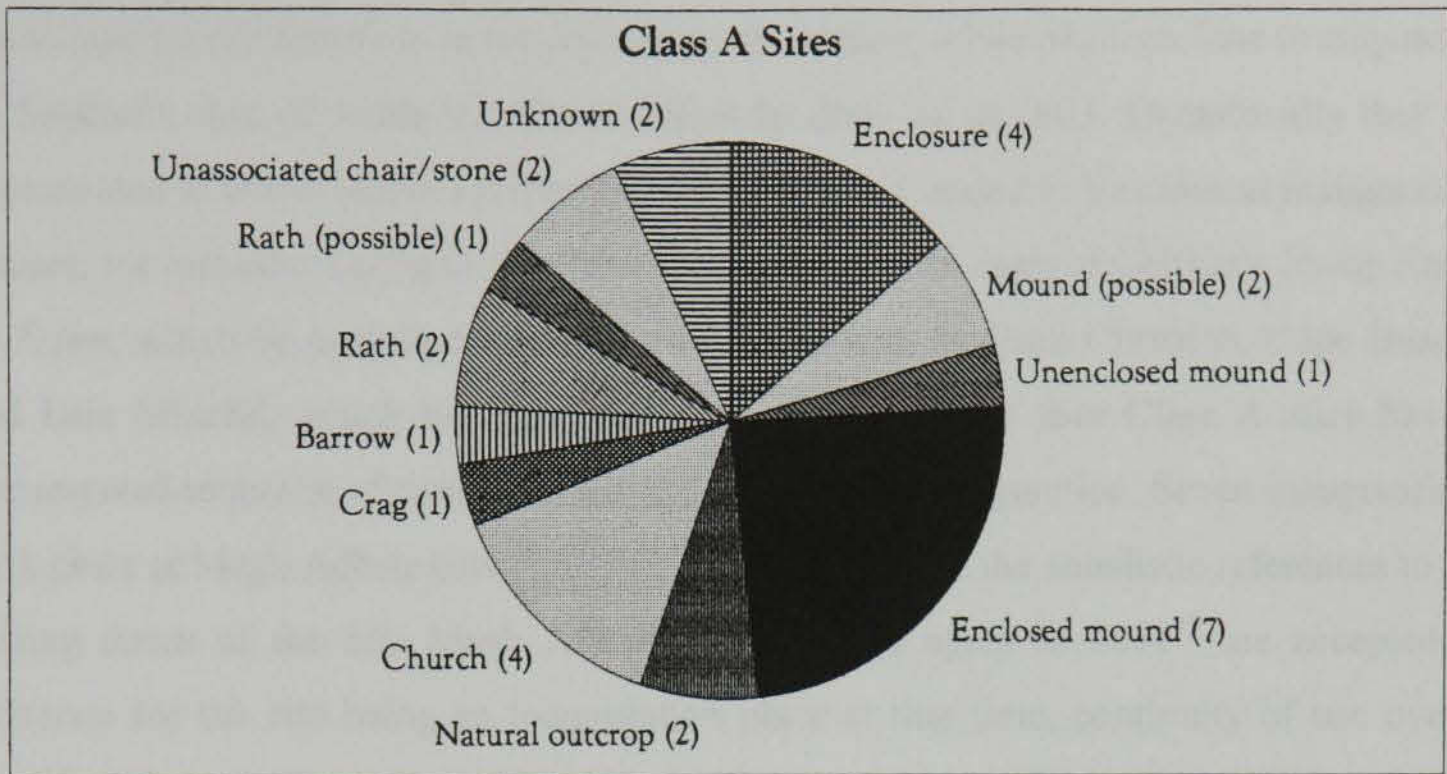


Fig. 9 Breakdown of monument types at twenty-nine attested inauguration sites

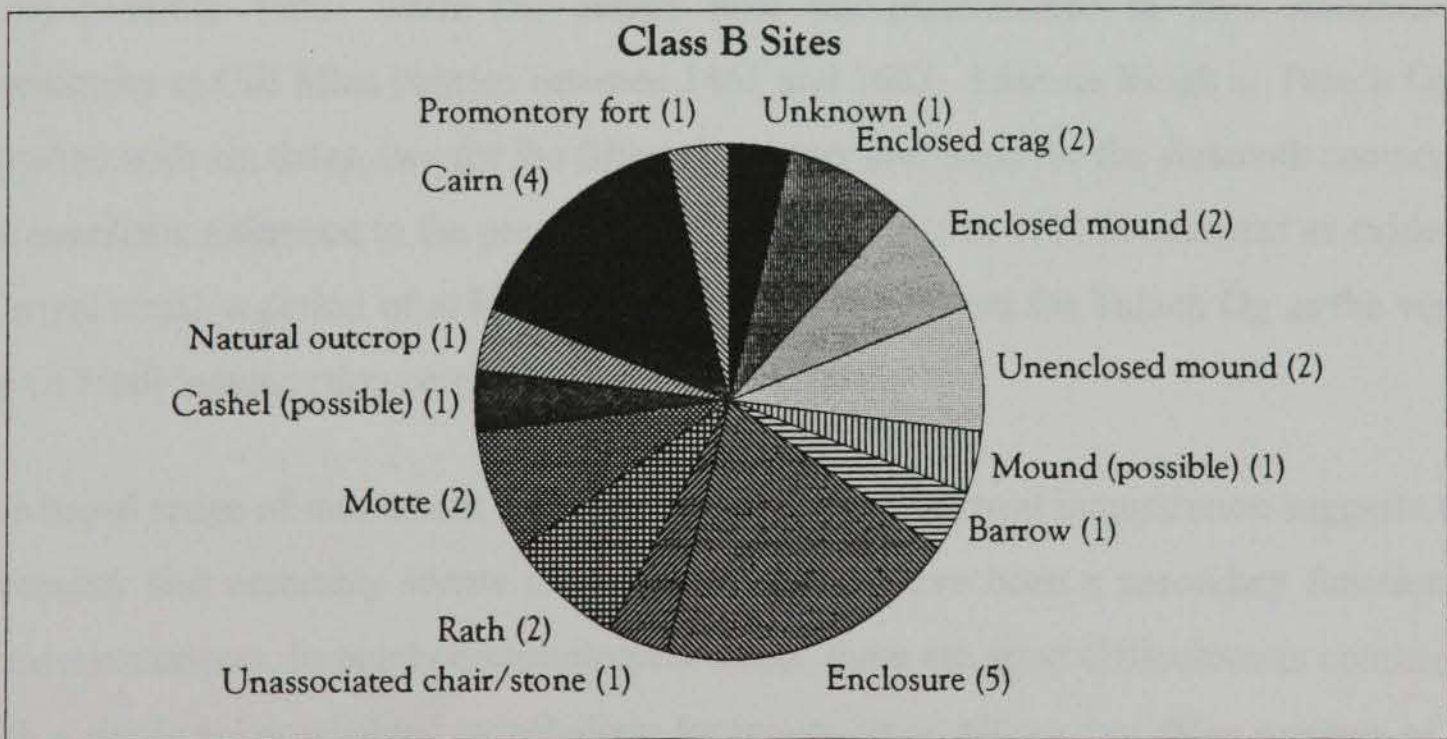


Fig. 10 Breakdown of monuments at twenty-six conjectured inauguration sites

by the fact that others have been destroyed leaving no surface trace; and in regard to the Class B sites, the conjectural nature of the evidence presents problems. The documentary evidence for attested inauguration places is sporadic and generally discontinuous. Lios na Ríogh, Ard na Croise, Ard na dTaoiseach, Ráth Essa Caoide and Sciath Ghabhra are mentioned for the first time in the late sixteenth century, while Mullach Leic is only noted on Bartlett's map of south-east Ulster which he drew up in 1603. Occasionally they are documented in authoritative sources long after they had ceased to function as inauguration venues; for instance, Tadhg Ó Neachtain in his manuscript copy of Céitinn's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, which he compiled in 1704, provides us with Mullach Chruaich, Cnoc Buadha and Leic Mhichil, which he added to Céitinn's list.⁴² Just four Class A sites have a documented sequence of dates for their use as places of inauguration. Seven inaugurations took place at Magh Adhair between 1242 and 1313⁴³ and if the annalistic references to the cutting down of the *bile* Magh Adhair in 982⁴⁴ and again in 1051⁴⁵ are accepted as evidence for the site being an inauguration place at that time, continuity of use over a period of at least 400 years can be proposed. It is also argued in case study II. that it is likely to have been used by the Uí Bhriain opponents of the Earl of Thomond who were still practising traditional inaugurations in the second half of the sixteenth century. There are seven recorded dates for inaugurations at Carn Fraích, the earliest being 1224 and the latest possibly 1643, while the annals note the performance of five inauguration ceremonies at Cill Mhic Nénáin between 1461 and 1603. Leac na Ríogh at Tulach Óg is supplied with six dates, two for the fifteenth century and three for the sixteenth century. If the annalistic reference to the presence of a *bile* at the site in 1111 is accepted as evidence of royal ritual, a period of at least 500 years can be proposed for Tulach Óg as the venue for Uí Néill inauguration ceremonies.

The broad range of monument types chosen as venues for royal inauguration suggests that ceremony and assembly seems for the most part to have been a secondary function of those monuments. In purely archaeological terms, there are great difficulties in coming up with a single acknowledged morphology for inauguration places, but close scrutiny of the

⁴² NLI. MS G 192, 306.

⁴³ S.H. O'Grady (ed.), *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*, vol. 2 (ITS 27, London, 1929), 2, 6, 10, 32, 47-8, 69.

⁴⁴ *AFM.*, 715; *A.I.*, 165.

⁴⁵ *AFM.*, 861; *A.I.*, 213.

corpus of sites used in the medieval period reveals that one site type in particular - the enclosed or unenclosed mound - was more frequently the venue. The choice of inauguration places would not have been arbitrary or without some basis. There is a distinct possibility that particular sites may have been chosen because they could accommodate a gathering in the manner of a stage or platform, and indeed certain alterations may even have been made to existing monuments in order to facilitate the business of assembly. These possibilities most clearly arise in relation to the large and small, enclosed and unenclosed, flat-topped mounds. Some of them are cited as burial places of eponymous heroes but clearly had a secondary use as *foraid* (platforms), while the literary evidence for others like Carn Amhalgaidh proposes that some flat-topped mounds may have been primarily erected as platforms for the performance of inauguration, and as stages for assembly. Although the process of assembly and inauguration may prove to be archaeologically unverifiable, archaeological excavation, or the less invasive technique of geophysical survey, could possibly contribute to an understanding of the composition of a known *forad*.

Some of the reasons why these sites were chosen and what particular significance was attached to the various mounds, raths, enclosures, crags, knolls, cairns and church sites at which the ceremony was in some instances repeatedly performed, will be explored below.

2. 4 Enclosed and Unenclosed Mounds

Ten of the known (Class A) inauguration sites fall into the category of enclosed and unenclosed mounds (including two possible sites of mounds). Of the twenty-six conjectured (Class B) inauguration places investigated on the landscape, five fell within the same classification. Given that the evidence for the Class A mounds is more reliable, they form the core material in this discussion (see Table III). The evidence for Class B mounds will be integrated into the argument (see Table IV). The Class A mounds include Carn Amhalgaidh, Carn Fraích, Carn inghine Bhriain, Cráeb Telcha, Leac Mhic Eochadha, Magh Adhair, Sciath Ghabhra, and possibly Lios na Ríogh. No monuments survive at Cruachain Mhic Dhiarmata, Mullach Chruaich and Cruachain ó Cupráin, but their place-names suggest that they may have been mounds and they are consequently included in this classification. It will also be argued in case study IV that Cruachu could have continued to function as the Síol Muireadaigh inauguration place as late as the

TABLE III. CLASS (A) ENCLOSED AND UNENCLOSED MOUNDS
Sites with attested use in the medieval period

| <i>SITE</i> | <i>SUBCLASSIFICATION</i> | <i>INAUGURATIONS</i> |
|---|--|--|
| Carn Amhalgaidh | slight remains of enclosure | 14th/15thc |
| Carn Fraích | unenclosed (Ó Conchobhair inauguration tract suggests otherwise) | 1224 1225 1228 1264 1310 1315 1407 1643 |
| Carn inghine Bhriain | enclosed (fosse and external bank) | 14th/15thc |
| Cráeb Telcha | record of enclosed mound no fosse | 1111 (sacred tree) |
| Cruachain ó Cupráin | no remains | 1419 1470 (attempted) |
| Leac Mhic Eochadha | record of large partially enclosed mound | Cited by Céitinn 17thc |
| Lios na Ríogh See also under raths | enclosed (large, single-banked, oval enclosure) | 1596 |
| Magh Adhair | enclosed (fosse & external bank) | 982AD (cutting down of <i>bile</i>) 1051 (ditto) 1242 1268 1277 1306 1311 x 2 1313 |
| Mullach Chruaich | no archaeological remains | Cited by Ó Neachtain 18thc |
| Sciath Ghabhra See also Lios O'Neill | partially enclosed by large, oval enclosure on east side of mound | 1589 |

TABLE IV. CLASS (B) ENCLOSED AND UNENCLOSED MOUNDS
 Sites with morphological affinities to Class (A) sites, noted in local tradition and by antiquaries

| <i>SITE</i> | <i>SUBCLASSIFICATION</i> | <i>SOURCE</i> |
|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Ard Fothaid | enclosed | Barrow 1835 Raftery 1994 |
| Caher an Iarla | recorded as mound lying within large cashel | Redington 1.911-12 |
| Carraig an Iarla | unenclosed | Fitzgerald 1892, 1894, 1914 |
| Cruachain Brí Éile | unenclosed | Comerford 1883 |
| Cruachain Mhic Dhiarmata | record of possible mound | 1315 (attempted) 1478 |

beginning of the twelfth century and it will be seen that Rathcroghan mound has a number of affinities with some of those mounds mentioned above. Indeed some of the enclosed mounds under review here could be considered as an abstraction of their dramatic counterparts at the great provincial royal sites. In this regard it is interesting that the thirteenth-century poet Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, in an *aisling* on the en-kinging of Roalbh Mac Mathghamhna of Oirghialla, sets the inauguration at the important prehistoric royal site of Emain Macha, perhaps revealing his historic perception of the function of the enclosed mound there. In the dream he sees Roalbh made king by the 'poet-bands of the world' who are arranged in order upon the mound within Emain's rath.

The scion of Sligeach came to the rath of Eamhain - it was his
house - with his host of poets; when everyone had been arranged
in order upon the mound, the rath was granted to Roalbh.⁴⁶

There has been much discussion in recent years on the subject of the prehistoric provincial royal centres of Temair, Emain and Cruachu, and the analogous royal sites of Dún Ailinne and Uisneach. Attempts have been made to define these places archaeologically. Among the criteria which Wailes proposes for the recognition of prehistoric royal centres are (a) the presence of a site of unusual size or form, or both; (b) the identification of a number of such sites which might well be similar to each other in form and content (c) evidence of both ritual and residential activities (d) and artifactual evidence such as gold, glass, enamel and rich grave-goods, indicative of royal living and royal burial.⁴⁷ Having reviewed the morphology of Emain Macha, Temair, Cruachu, Dún Ailinne and Uisneach, he concluded that, excluding Cruachu and Uisneach, the remaining sites share a number of features in common. They are notably large in size, and each has a very large circular or oval enclosure, defined by a substantial bank and internal ditch, with a prominent mound in or near the enclosure.⁴⁸ Cruachu can now be included in this group of sites with shared attributes, by virtue of the recent confirmation of a large enclosure encompassing

⁴⁶ N.J.A. Williams (ed.), *The poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe (ITS vol. 51, Dublin, 1980), 174-5, [21] 'Tig go ráith Eamhna - is é a theagh -/géag Shligigh 's a shluagh fileadh;/ar n-eagar cháich ar an gcarn/leagar ar ráith do Roalbh'.*

⁴⁷ B. Wailes, 'The Irish "royal sites" in history and archaeology', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* no. 3, 1982, 7-8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 19-23.

Rathcroghan mound, along with a number of barrows and pillar stones in its vicinity (see also, case study 4.).⁴⁹

More recently, Warner attempted a similar exercise in developing criteria for the identification of early historic kingship centres. He considered it reasonable to suppose that Wailes' expectations of prehistoric sites might be applicable to a study of early historic kingship.⁵⁰ However, he concluded that unlike the provincial centres, there were no clearly identifiable unique archaeological indicators for early historic 'royal' sites, and he acknowledged that 'Irish kingship is not amenable to simple archaeological generalisation'.⁵¹ The sites which he subjected to analysis included Caisil, seat of the kings of Munster; Ráith Raithleann, a trivallate ringfort at Garranes, Co. Cork; Loch Gabor, Co. Meath, capital of the Southern Brega from the mid-eight to the late tenth century; Cnogba or Knowth, Co. Meath, fortified with a double fosse in about the seventh century; and finally Clochar, seat of the Uí Crimthainn from at least the sixth to the ninth century.⁵² He found that, broadly speaking, just two of Wailes' criteria were applicable to his findings, namely that the residential evidence was indicative of high status, and that the culture implied by the archaeology coincided with that expressed in early Irish texts. His findings on inauguration and assembly activity at this sample of sites were, however, inconclusive. He conjectured that the mound associated with the later royal ringfort at Clochar might have been used for inauguration ceremonies in the early historic period, and that likewise, An Forrad at Temair may have served the same purpose. He added that the nearby Ráith na Senad could have functioned as the king's royal residence during times of inauguration or other ritual.⁵³ Since there is no reliable documentary evidence, and as yet no archaeological indications, for king-making ritual at Temair in this period, it may be rash to include it in the debate on early historic inauguration sites. Moreover, to test the application of criteria defining major prehistoric royal sites on early historic centres is highly problematic given that Irish kingship practices were not immutable. Perhaps the most significant of his proposals is that royal residences and

⁴⁹ Department of Archaeology and Applied Geophysics Unit, UCG, *ArchaeoGeophysical Imaging Project Newsletter*, no. 5, November 1996.

⁵⁰ R.B. Warner, 'The archaeology of early Historic Irish kingship', in S.T. Driscoll and M.R. Níeke (eds.), *Power and Politics in early medieval Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1988), 52.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 53-55.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 57-8.

assembly/inauguration places became separate in this period.⁵⁴ The historical and landscape evidence for the later medieval period certainly indicates that inauguration sites were for the most part distinct entities, situated in freehold land, set apart from, but generally within easy reach of the demesne lands and principal residence of the lordship (see 2.20).

The nature and function of the mounds used for inauguration purposes in the medieval period is the principal concern here. In the first two decades of this century both Knox and Orpen had begun to discern some small but fundamental patterns regarding what they termed *cruachain*. Knox compiled a list of seventeen instances in which the word *cruachan* occurred in place-names and he found that at least three of these were attested places of inauguration. The three which he cited were Carn Amhalgaidh, the Ó Dubhda inauguration site which lies in the townland of Croghan near Killala, Croghan village near Boyle, the probable Mhic Diarmata site, and Cruachain Ó Cupráin, the Uí Ruairc place of inauguration near Killeshandra, Co. Cavan.⁵⁵ He also referred to the Cruachain of Luighne in the territory of the Uí Eadhra, perhaps identifiable with an earthwork situated near Ó hEadhra's stronghold at Balliara. It is not historically documented as the inauguration place of Ó hEadhra and not mentioned as such in *Leabhar Uí Eadhra*, but it could well have been their assembly and chief-making place. The conspicuous hill of Cruachain Brí Éile in Ó Conchobhair's territory of Uí Failge can also be included as a *cruachan* site which, although historically unattested, may have been the inauguration place of the chiefs of that sept. O'Donovan had considered this possibility, but on visiting the hill in 1839 he was 'much disappointed at not finding a rath upon it, or the inauguration stone of the Chiefs of Ophalia'.⁵⁶ Curiously he did not make any connection with the possible performance of the ceremony on the flat-topped tumulus (poetically recorded as Leacht Congal)⁵⁷, which crowns the summit of the hill at 769 feet OD and overlooks Ó Conchobhair's nearby castle and village settlement to the southwest. Orpen added Mag Uidhir's mound of Sciath Ghabhra in Cornashee to the list because it adjoins a

⁵⁴ Warner, p. 58, suggests that the 'dynastically connected east-midland tribes' which had their royal centres at Ráth Airthir, Cnogba, and Loch Gabor, used Temair as their place of inauguration, and Tailtiu as their assembly site, but he provides no evidence to underpin this proposal.

⁵⁵ H.T. Knox, 'The croghans and some Connacht raths', *JRSAI* 41, 1911, 93-99.

⁵⁶ Rev. M. Comerford, *Collections relating to the dioceses of Kildare and Leighlin*, vol. 2 (Dublin, 1883), 320-21.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

townland by the name of Croghan; and he suggested that Leac Mhic Eochadha, the Uí Chennselaig king-making place near Croghan Kinsella, could be identified with a mound locally known as ‘Croaghan’.⁵⁸ The evidence accrued by both antiquaries points to a strong and hardly coincidental association between the presence of an inauguration mound and the place-name *cruachan*. The Irish *cruach/cruachan*, however, has a broad range of meanings and in some of the cases cited above, it could refer to the hills on which these monuments are located and not specifically to the mounds.⁵⁹

2. 5 Sciath Ghabhra and the Méig Uidhir of Fir Manach

The enclosed and unenclosed mounds in use as inauguration places in the later medieval period vary in size and form. A small number are well serviced with documentation implying their importance to the sept, while the associations of others are obscure. The small jigsaw puzzle of evidence for Sciath Ghabhra, Co. Fermanagh is particularly interesting. In 1589 Aodh Mag Uidhir proceeded ‘without dallying or delaying, through the territory of Lurg, and along the margin of Lough Erne’ until he came to Sciath Ghabhra where, with the support of Domhnall Ó Domhnaill, he was inaugurated chief of Fir Manach in opposition to Conchobhar Ruadh.⁶⁰ In a poem to Cú Chonnacht Mag Uidhir, the poet Uilliam Óg Mac an Bhaird intimates that Aodh’s father was inaugurated there too in 1566. The import of Sciath Ghabhra is communicated in the poet’s lines - ‘Triall ac scolaibh Cláir Chliodhna/don ráith mur tholaigh Temhra/triall sgoile co Sgiath nGabhra/tarra ó iath Moighe Meadhbha [The poets of Ireland go to the rath as to the mound of Tara; they travel to Sciath Gabhra from the rest of Ireland]’.⁶¹ The identification of Sciath Ghabhra with the large flat-topped mound on a low ridge at the western end of the townland of Cornashee has not been proven beyond doubt. Both O’Donovan and Walsh conjectured that the ceremony took place at Lisnaskea itself.⁶² Philip O’Sullivan Beare claimed that the Mag Uidhir was inaugurated in ‘O’Neill’s Fort’, which is possibly the small rath in the townland of Lisoneill which adjoins Cornashee on its southwest side (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 21-2); but ‘O’Neill’s Fort’ could equally be an

⁵⁸ G.H. Orpen, ‘Croghans and Norman Motes’, *JRSAI* 41, 1911, 270-71.

⁵⁹ *DIL.*, 161; heap, conical pile, small rick, hill.

⁶⁰ *AFM.*, vol. 6, 1876-7.

⁶¹ D. Greene (ed.), *Duanaire Mhéig Uidhir* (Dublin, 1972), 164-5 [2098-2101].

⁶² J. O’Donovan (ed.), *The genealogies ...*, op. cit., 434; Rev. P. Walsh, *Irish chiefs and leaders* (Dublin, 1960), 27.

alias for Sciath Ghabhra.⁶³ Apart from Castle Skea itself, there is no record of an enclosure or mound in the town of Lisnaskea which could have been ordained for inauguration. The place-name, Cornashee, given to the townland in which the mound is located, is also significant. It derives from the Irish *corr* meaning tapering, peaked or pointed,⁶⁴ and *síd*, a fairy hill or mound.⁶⁵ The relevance of *síd* to kingship is well attested, and in literary sources some inauguration mounds are attributed alternative names which embrace the concept of *síd*. Carn Fraích and Rathcroghan mound, for instance, are also known as Síid Fraích⁶⁶ and Síid Cruachan.⁶⁷ Given the altogether conjectural nature of the alternative locations for Sciath Ghabhra, reasonable speculation points to the mound at Cornashee as the likely inauguration place of the Méig Uidhir.

The impressive mound of Sciath Ghabhra lay in the heart of the original patrimony of the Fir Manach which extended from Enniskillen south to Lisnaskea, incorporating Tír Cheannfhada (barony of Tirkennedy) and Machaire Steabhna (barony of Magherastephana). Until their eclipse by the Méig Uidhir in the thirteenth century, this territory had been ruled by the royal dynasties of Ó hEignigh, Ó Duibh Dara and Ó Maoil Ruanaidh.⁶⁸ The first Mag Uidhir king of Fir Manach was Donn Carrach who is mentioned as such in the annals under the year 1264. By 1297 he is described as 'King of Lough Erne', a title indicative of the extension of Méig Uidhir control well beyond the confines of their original patrimony.⁶⁹ It is probable that the adoption of Sciath Ghabhra as the inauguration place of the sept dates from this time. Although there is no evidence to suggest whether it had previously been the inauguration place of the kings of Fir Manach, it is likely that in order to validate their kingship, the Méig Uidhir would have continued to use the existing king-making site. The Méig Uidhir were linked to the Airgialla and claimed Mac-Uidir son of Cernach, son of Lugan as their eponym,⁷⁰ an association which

⁶³ M.J. Byrne, *Ireland under Elizabeth: chapters towards a history of Ireland in the reign of Elizabeth, being portion of the History of catholic Ireland by Don Philip O'Sullivan Beare* (Dublin, 1903), 175. O'Sullivan also mentions a meeting between Maguire and the forces of William Gilbert at a place anciently called Skieth na bhfeart - the shield of miracles, which Byrne interprets as Sciath Ghabhra, p. 70.

⁶⁴ *DIL.*, 152.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 541.

⁶⁶ C. O'Rahilly (ed.), *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Dublin, 1976), 27 [855-7].

⁶⁷ W. Meid (ed.), *Táin Bó Fraích* (Dublin, 1974), 10.

⁶⁸ K. Simms, 'The medieval kingdom of Lough Erne', *Clogher Record*, vol. 9, 1977,

⁶⁹ K.W. Nicholls (ed.), 'The Register of Clogher', *Clogher Record*, vol.7, no.3, 1971-2, 422; K. Simms, *op.cit.*, 126.

⁷⁰ M.A. O'Brien (ed.), *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, vol.1 (Dublin, 1976), 184; S. Pender (ed.), 'O'Clery Book of Genealogies', *Anal. Hib.*18, 117.

is cited in the poembook of Cú Chonnacht.⁷¹ The great mound of Sciath Ghabhra has no recorded history as the burial place of the eponymous ancestor of the Fir Manach or Mac-Uidir, ancestor of the Méig Uidhir,⁷² but the connection between a reputed burial site of the progenitor of a sept and an inauguration place is attested in literary sources at least in the case of Carn Amhalghaidh.⁷³ The place-name Sciath Ghabhra derives from the Irish *sciath* which has a range of related meanings including shield, buckler, warrior, protector, guardian, or the act of forming a defence or protection,⁷⁴ and *gabor* which can mean a goat, a caper, a fabulous monster, and more specifically in poetic usage - a white mare.⁷⁵ If the very specific interpretation of *gabor* as white mare is applied to Sciath Ghabhra, we are immediately drawn back to Cambrensis' account of the Cenél Conaill king-making ritual during which the royal candidate mated with a white mare (see chapter 1, pp. 1-6). The place-name Sciath Ghabhra could therefore translate as the protection or defence around the white mare. The earthen mound on the ridge at Cornashee stands about 8m over surrounding ground level. It is 45m in diameter at base, narrowing to 17m across its flat-topped summit. A number of large boulders around the base suggest that the mound was retained by a kerb of stones (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 19-21). A curious feature of the monument is the small cairn of angular stones which is placed centrally on the summit. This may represent a secondary burial and it is a feature which is shared with two other inauguration mounds. At the conjectured site of Carn inghine Bhriain, a small mound crowns the flat-topped summit of a larger enclosed earthen mound, and the broad summit of Rathcroghan retains the degraded remains of a roughly oval-shaped embanked mound (5m by 4m) which may represent a ring-barrow, or alternatively, an embanked tumulus comparable to that crowning Rathscreg within the Cruachu complex.⁷⁶ In a caption to his drawing of the great mound of Rathcroghan, Beranger described the smaller one as 'a small mount whose top has only 6 feet diameter, on which it is supposed the king had his station'.⁷⁷ The mound of Sciath Ghabhra and traces of two low earthen platforms nearby

⁷¹ D. Greene (ed.), op. cit., 58-59 [736-7]; 'géill ríogh co rún ndegheinigh ar ccúl ó tsíol tsenUidhir' - 'royal hostages return from the descendants of ancient Odhar with a resolve to practise liberality'.

⁷² A. Day and P. McWilliams (eds.), *Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland*, vol. 4: Parishes of County Fermanagh I, 1843-5, 9-10. The memoir for the parish of Aghalurcher notes 'it is not unlikely that this heap, now called the Moat, covers the remains of some prince of the district in which it is situated. There is, however, no tradition extant bearing out this conjecture'.

⁷³ Ibid., 422-3 [13-20].

⁷⁴ *DIL.*, 526.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 351; see P. Kelly, in *The horse in Celtic culture*.

⁷⁶ J. Waddell, 'Rathcroghan - a royal site in Connacht', *JIA* vol. 1, 1983, 27.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 24.

at west and northwest, stands within a circular enclosure defined by a well-preserved earthen bank and external fosse. It has been suggested that this enclosure could be no more than a relatively modern tree-ring,⁷⁸ but the outline of an earlier, large oval enclosure, defined in part by a scarp and elsewhere by an earthen bank and external fosse, is traceable adjoining the east side of the mound. The field evidence suggests that Sciath Ghabhra, partly encompassed by a sizeable oval enclosure, is a covered burial (possibly a passage tomb) with a secondary burial represented by the small cairn on the summit. However, the possibility that the mound was designed for assembly and later used for burial, ought not to be dismissed. The function of the two platforms noted to the west and northwest of the mound are unknown but it has been suggested that they may be the vestiges of satellite tombs.⁷⁹

2.6 Carn Amhalgaidh and Carn inghine Bhriain: the Uí Dhubhda

Inauguration Mounds

In the *Book of Lecan* the inauguration ceremony of the Uí Dhubhda kings of Uí Fiachrach is described in some detail and the sept is attributed two places of inauguration which were in use at least as early as the late fourteenth century, one being Carn Amhalgaidh in Tír Amhalgaidh and the other Carn inghine Bhriain east of the River Moy in Tír Fhiachrach. No explanation is given for the sept having two inauguration sites but the protocol regarding their use is described as follows:

‘And there is one thing, should O’Dubhda happen to be in Tir Amhalgaidh he may repair to Carn Amhalgaidh to be nominated, so as that all the chiefs are about him: but should he happen to be at Carn inghine Bhriain it is not necessary for him to go over [the Moy] to have the title given to him, and it is not necessary for him to come across [to Carn inghine Bhriain] from Carn Amhalgaidh, for it was Amhalgaidh, the son of Fiachra Ealgach, that raised that carn for himself, in order that he himself, and all those who should obtain the lordship after him, might receive the style of lord upon it’.⁸⁰

This account implies that Carn Amhalgaidh was the more important of the two monuments because it commemorated Amalgaid, the eponymous ancestor of the Uí Fiachrach; and the author goes on to say that ‘in this carn Amhalgaidh himself is interred, and it is from him it is named’.⁸¹ The site of Carn Amhalgaidh is located on the crest of

⁷⁸ ASNI., field report 1977, 218-9.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 218.

⁸⁰ J. O’Donovan (ed.), *The genealogies ...*, op. cit., 442-4.

⁸¹ Ibid., 444.

an east-facing slope northwest of the town of Killala and it is designated 'Mullaghorn Fort' on both the first and current edition Ordnance Survey maps. The 'carn' in question is no longer extant and just the western half of the large enclosure which once delimited the site survives as a denuded scarp (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 26-7). However, there are two antiquarian accounts which provide details of its former appearance. In the 1830s Caesar Otway visited the site and described it as a 'rath' with a lofty circular mound, crowning a considerable eminence. He also noted that the 'rath' was unusual in being 'strengthened within by a stone wall',⁸² which suggests a revetment perhaps not unlike that on the internal face of the bank at Ráth Essa Caoide (see p. 84). By the time O'Donovan visited the site in 1838, the mound had apparently been removed; he noted only the 'lios' with an internal diameter of c. 24m and 'round stones of very great size placed circularly on its border'.⁸³ In the *Dindshenchas* account of Carn Amhalgaidh, it is specified that it was Amalgaid who 'first trenched that carn ... in order to behold his long ships, and to have a place of assembly to dwell in'. The author of the poem adds that Amalgaid was laid in the carn.⁸⁴ In other words, the progenitor of the race of Uí Fiachrach is credited with the erection of the enclosed mound which he used as a place of assembly and as a viewing point from which he could survey his long ships going in and out of Killala Bay. The recorded morphology of Carn Amhalgaidh compares well with other enclosed mounds identified in the Irish countryside, some of which have royal but not necessarily inaugural associations, notably the well-known Emain, Co. Armagh, Clochar, Co. Tyrone, Glasbolie and Croaghan, Co. Donegal and the recently surveyed Rathra near Castlerea, Co. Roscommon.⁸⁵ At Clogher which was the caput of the Uí Crimthainn from about the sixth century to the ninth century, Warner identified a univallate ringfort surrounded by an internally ditched enclosure which contains a large mound and a ring-barrow.⁸⁶ At Croaghan in the east of Co. Donegal, a mound which has been classified as a passage tomb lies at the centre of a stone-built circular enclosure.⁸⁷ In the southwest of the county, the hillfort of Glasbolie which has been identified with Ard

⁸² C. Otway, *Sketches in Erris and Tyrawley* (Dublin, 1845), 189.

⁸³ J. O'Donovan, *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the County Mayo collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1838*, 261-3.

⁸⁴ E. Gwynn (ed), *op. cit.*, part 3, 422-3 [17-24].

⁸⁵ Information courtesy of J. Fenwick, Topographical survey of Rathra, Castlerea, Co. Roscommon, November, 1996.

⁸⁶ R.B. Warner, *op.cit.*, 55.

⁸⁷ B. Lacy, *Archaeological Survey of County Donegal* (Lifford, 1983), 115.

Fothaid,⁸⁸ contains an earthen mound in the northeast quadrant of the interior of the summit (see vol. 2, appendix 2, p. 80, fig. 83). Raftery proposed that this may at one time have been an inauguration place,⁸⁹ a supposition which is somewhat supported by a tradition which prevailed around Donegal Bay in the last century. According to Barrow, who made a journey through the sea-coast counties in 1835, the mound was reputed to be a site of king-making.⁹⁰ Additional sites of this genre may include Sessiaghmagaroll Fort north of Benburb, Co. Tyrone, and Clogher, Co. Donegal. Sessiaghmagaroll is a univallate hilltop rath which contains quite a large mound in the northwest quadrant. Paterson and Davies, however, were of the opinion that the mound was an Anglo-Norman motte which was constructed within an existing rath.⁹¹ At Clogher, south Donegal, a subcircular enclosure defined by a series of set stones contains a low mound. A seat-like structure known as 'the Chair' lies just outside the enclosure, at north.⁹²

Carn inghine Bhriain, east of the Moy in Tír Fhiachrach, is the second inauguration place attributed to Ó Dubhda. In the last century O'Donovan proposed that it might be the very large cairn commemorating Medb, daughter of Brian son of Eochaidh Muighmheadhoin, crowning the summit of Knocknarea in Co. Sligo.⁹³ At 1083 feet above sea level, Medb's cairn would have been a particularly difficult and inaccessible location for Ó Dubhda's inauguration. In her work on Lughnasa festive heights, MacNeill provides a clue to a more likely location in the coastal pasture of Aughris peninsula. As noted above, Aughris was the venue for Lughnasa celebrations, and a particular 'fort' in the townland of Kilrusheighter was renowned in local tradition as a place of king making. MacNeill does not give a location for this site, but there are just three candidates on the peninsula. In the west and south of Kilrusheighter there are two poorly preserved enclosures, one of which contains a hut site. A more promising site lies further north overlooking Sligo Bay (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 28-9). It is a modest earthen mound, 22m in diameter at base narrowing to 10m across its flat-topped summit. It stands about 3m in height above the shallow internal fosse and the rudimentary bank which surrounds it. Like Sciath Ghabhra

⁸⁸ E.Gwynn (ed.), op.cit., part 4, 90-91.

⁸⁹ B. Raftery, *Pagan Celtic Ireland: the enigma of the Irish Iron Age* (London, 1994), 41.

⁹⁰ J. Barrow, *A tour round Ireland through the sea-coast counties, in the Autumn of 1835* (London, 1836), 118.

⁹¹ T.G.F. Paterson and O. Davies, 'Sessiaghmagaroll Fort', *UJA* 1, 1936, 42-3.

⁹² B. Lacy, op. cit., 324. Lacy describes this mound as 'probably natural'.

⁹³ J. O'Donovan (ed.), *The genealogies ...* op. cit., 443-4.

and Rathcroghan, the summit supports a second smaller mound, 7.5m in diameter and no more than 0.7m high. This may well be the old 'fort' where tradition on the peninsula claimed the 'kings used to be crowned'. A short distance further north on the coast, there is a cavern in the cliffs called Comhra Donn, a place which holds a special association with the Uí Dhubhda kings of Uí Fiachrach in local tradition. The cavern is reputed to house a flagstone bearing hoof marks which were made by 'a famous white horse of O'Dowd, the ruler of Tireragh'.⁹⁴

2.7 The Ulaid and Cráeb Telcha

Like Magh Adhair and Tulach Óg, Crew Hill, in the parish of Glenavy, Co. Antrim, has the distinction of being the site of a *bile* - the Cráeb Telcha ['the spreading tree of the hill'] - which was sacred to the Ulaid and cut down by their rivals, the Uí Lochlainn and Clanna-Néill, in 1111.⁹⁵ Crew has not yet been proven beyond doubt as the early historic inauguration place of the Ulaid, but recent place-name investigation, the recorded monuments at the site and the annalistic references to a *bile* there, combine to make a very strong case for it having been so. Tracing the documentation on Cráeb Telcha, Flanagan discovered the onomastic link between this place-name as it occurs in early Irish sources, and the modern place-name Crew Hill. The equation of Cráeb Telcha with Crew is most clearly seen in the name-forms 'K. Crewhollage' and 'Knockcruhollogh' as they appear on a *Map of Ulster c. 1590*, Jobson's, *Province of Ulster, 1590*, and Speed's *Province of Ulster Described 1610*.⁹⁶ The positive identification of Crew with Cráeb Telcha allows for an interpretation of the archaeological evidence there in terms of a royal site. Crew is a broad, flat-topped hill which rises to a modest height of 635 OD, offering exceptional views west across Lough Neagh and south to the Mourne Mountains. It has been quarried in part and is now mostly given to arable farming, a combination of activities which has destroyed some of the monuments there. Nevertheless, earlier accounts bear testimony to the range of antiquities which extended over the hill. In the last century, O'Laverty, who had claimed but did not substantiate that Crew was in fact Cráeb, noted the discovery of 'a few stone-lined graves' on the summit of the hill, and a 'great stone on which the ceremony [of inauguration] was performed'.⁹⁷ The cist-graves were probably uncovered

⁹⁴ M. MacNeill, *op. cit.*, 113.

⁹⁵ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 991; *ALC*, 85.

⁹⁶ D. Flanagan, 'Cráeb Telcha: Crew, Co. Antrim', *Dinnseanchas*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1970, 29-30.

⁹⁷ J. O'Laverty, *An historical account of the diocese of Down and Connor ancient and modern*, vol. 2, 1880, 294-5.

during quarrying and there is nothing there now to indicate whether they had been contained in a mound or a flat cemetery. The Crew Stone, to which O'Lavery was referring, is a large erratic boulder, still extant on the hilltop. A second small boulder containing a rough depression and locally known as the 'wishing chair', was situated on the southeast downslope of the hill until its removal to the roadside in 1970.⁹⁸ At the northern end of Crew there are five enclosures and just within the townland of Lurganteneill, which adjoins Crew on its south side, there is a very fine bivallate rath. In terms of the present discussion on inaugural mounds, the most significant monument on Crew Hill was an enclosed mound which was photographed from the air by the Ordnance Survey in 1962⁹⁹ and last recorded on the ground in the 1970s. It had been destroyed by 1981. The mound which was *c.* 20m in diameter at base, lay at the centre of a circular enclosure, *c.* 45m in diameter, defined by a bank *c.* 5m wide. There was no trace of a fosse and the bank had been breached in three places.¹⁰⁰ Drawing all the evidence together, the coincidence of an enclosed mound with the site of a sacred tree, and the tradition attached to the Crew Stone, seems to point to a place of inauguration. These ritual components taken in combination with the record of prehistoric burials on the hill and the presence of a defensive rath and enclosures in the hinterland, make a very strong case for Crew as a royal headquarters.

2. 8 Cruachain ó Cupráin - West Bréifne

The inauguration site of the later medieval Uí Ruairc chiefs of west Bréifne was Cruachain ó Cupráin/ó Comráin, also referred to as Cruachain Mhic Tighearnáin. This place is generally identified with the townlands of Croaghan and Shancroaghan which overlook Town Lough a short distance northwest of Killeshandra in the modern Co. Cavan, close to the county boundary with Leitrim.¹⁰¹ The precise spot at which the ceremony was performed is unknown, but it is likely to have been on the higher point of a drumlin hill which forms part of the estate of Croaghan House (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 1-2). Near the nineteenth-century house there are the remains of a corner tower of a bawn which enclosed Sir James Craig's seventeenth-century plantation dwelling.¹⁰² Cruachain had earlier been the seat of the Mac Tighearnáin of Teallach Dúinchadha and it is

⁹⁸ DOENI, MBR, 63:58.

⁹⁹ OS air photos H 46A 29926/7.

¹⁰⁰ DOENI, MBR 63:101.

¹⁰¹ See footnotes to O'Donovan's edition of *AFM.*, under the years 1412 and 1470.

¹⁰² E.S. Shuckburgh, *Two biographies of William Bedell, Bishop of Kilmore* (Cambridge, 1902), 65.

mentioned as such in the annals under the year 1412 when Cúchonnacht Mac Tighearnáin was slain 'in his own house at Cruachan Mhic-Tighearnain' during the course of a nocturnal raid by the Fír Manach.¹⁰³ The hill is intensively farmed and there is no obvious antiquity there, apart from the remains of the plantation dwelling. The *cruachan* element in the place-name could refer to a former mound, but as noted in the discussion of the term *cruachan* above, it may also simply refer to the hill. A barely perceptible rise of ground, 22m in diameter and no more than 1m high, south of Croaghan House, could be the remains of a mound or platform but it might also relate to the copse of beech trees which are planted on it. The Uí Ruairc inauguration place lay in Mac Tighearnáin's small Bréifne territory of Teallach Dúnochadha (barony of Tullyhunco) which together with Mág Shamhradháin's Teallach n-Eachach (barony of Tullyhaw) formed a buffer zone between the rival lordships of East Bréifne, ruled by the Ó Raghallaigh, and West Bréifne, the kingdom of Ó Ruairc. The Ó Ruairc kingship of Uí Briuin Bréifne and Conmaicne had collapsed in 1173 following the death of Tigernán at the hands of de Lacy's forces.¹⁰⁴ Thereafter, Ó Raghallaigh asserted his lordship over East Bréifne and bitter hostility characterised the relationship between the two families well into the fifteenth century. The ancient kingdom of Uí Briuin Bréifne had embraced a sizeable area extending as far south as Lough Gowna and bounded on its east and west sides by Lough Erne, Lough Melvin and Lough MacNean respectively. The use of Cruachain ó Cupráin, not just as an inauguration place for the Uí Ruairc in the later Middle Ages, but as a mustering and rallying point for the Mhic Tighearnáin, Méig Shamhradháin and Uí Raghallaigh in that period, suggests that the hill was probably an Uí Briuin Bréifne assembly place of long standing.

From the thirteenth century onwards, Cruachain ó Cupráin features in several encounters between the rival lordships, with the Mac Tighearnáin actively supporting Ó Raghallaigh in each case. The site receives its earliest mention in the *Annals of Loch Cé* under the year 1256, in relation to a fracas between Ó Ruairc and Ó Raghallaigh. Conchobhar Ó Ruairc, in alliance with Gilla-na-naemh Mág Shamhradháin, came to Fidhnacha to a meeting with Domhnall Ó Raghallaigh after which they killed the son of the latter and 'carried off a

¹⁰³ AFM.,

¹⁰⁴ F.J. Byrne, 'The trembling sod: Ireland in 1169', in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1987), 36-7.

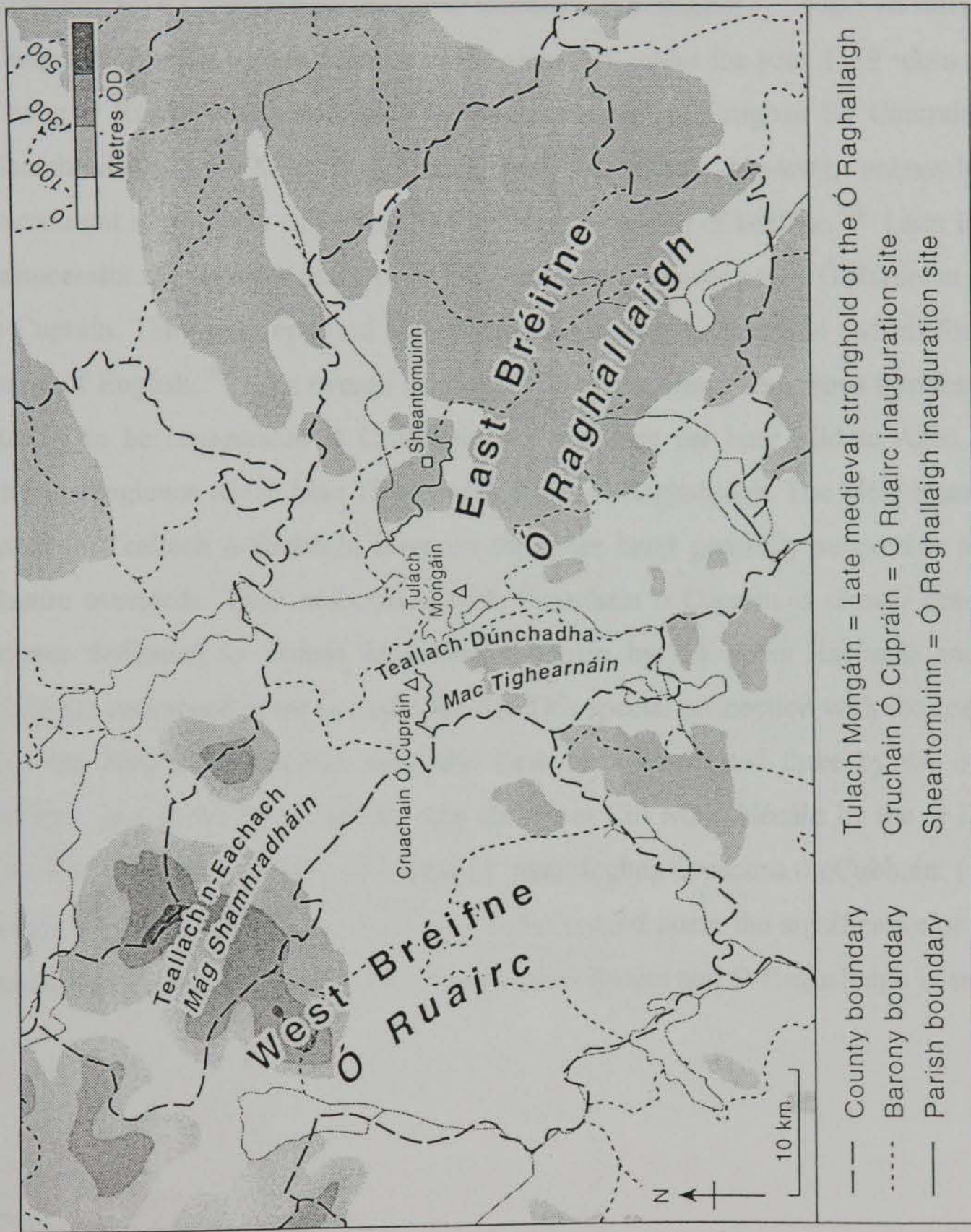


Fig. 44 Map of the territories of East and West Breifne showing Sheantomuinn and Cruachain ó Cupráin.

great prey from Cruachan ó Cúbhrán'.¹⁰⁵ Conchobhar had been made king of all Bréifne in 1256 after Cathal Ó Raghallaigh had been killed by the Uí Ruairc and Aodh Ó Conchobhair. An extract from the Registry of the House of O'Reilly 1161-1583, compiled in the eighteenth century, provides a further reference to the site in 1259 when Domhnall Ó Ruairc was slain there by the sept of Teallach Dúinchadha in revenge for the Battle of Beagh [Domhnall mac Tighearnain Uí Ruairc¹⁰⁶ do mharbhadh do Theallach nDonchadha a Ccruachain ó Ccumróin do dhioghail madhma na beithghe].¹⁰⁷ The first reference to an inauguration at this place features in the same MS under the year 1419 when Art son of Tadhg Ó Ruairc was 'established in the sovereignty of Croghan Hy Comrain' by Mág Shamhradháin and Mac Tighearnáin, both of whom, however, acknowledged the paramount sovereignty of Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh as king of Bréifne.¹⁰⁸ Later in 1470, an unsuccessful attempt was made by Ó Domhnaill to nominate a new Ó Ruairc at Cruachain ó Cupráin. They were opposed by Ó Raghallaigh, Mac Tighearnáin and his forces, and a party of English.¹⁰⁹ The overall impression is that it was a dangerous business for an Ó Ruairc to be inaugurated at Cruachain ó Cupráin in the later Middle Ages, given the strong allegiance which Mac Tighearnáin had to Ó Raghallaigh. The Méig Shamhradháin, lords of Teallach n-Eachach, were on the other hand generally supportive of their Uí Ruairc overlords. Their association with Cruachain ó Cupráin is closely drawn in two poems dedicated to Tomás Mág Shamhradháin by the poets Ragnall and Niall Ó hUiginn, composed in the period 1303-43. This special connection with the site intimates that the Mág Shamhradháin may also have been nominated there by the overlord of Bréifne, just as the Mac Suibhne was chosen at Cill Mhic Nénáin by the Ó Domhnaill. The first of the poems refers to Tomás as 'mac ríoghna Cruachna ó gCubhrán' ('son of the queen of Cruachain ó Cupráin')¹¹⁰ and in the second poem the significance of the site as an assembly place for his forces and those of Ó Ruairc and Ó Raghallaigh is emphasised.

¹⁰⁵ *ALC.*, vol.1, 416-7.

¹⁰⁶ This is an error on the compilers' part, as this Domhnall, king of Bréifne, was actually the son of Conchobhar d. 1257.

¹⁰⁷ *R.I.A.*, MS 23 F. 12, pp. 5-6.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 'Art mac Tadhg Uí Ruairc do ríoghadh a ccruachain o ccomráin', 11-14.

¹⁰⁹ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 1069.

¹¹⁰ L. McKenna (ed.), *Leabhar Méig Shamhradháin* (Dublin, 1947), 151 [2313]; This appears to refer to the mother of Tomás, who was Maoilmheadha, daughter of Giolla Íosa Mac Tighearnáin.

The poet Niall Ó hUiginn writes - 'Coming to fair Loch Uachtair, the Three Tuaths under the raider of Carn Curnán [Tomás] muster at Cruacha ó gCubhrán'.¹¹¹

2.9 Lios na Ríogh - Uí Echach Coba

Further northeast, in the kingdom of Uí Echach Coba, the Méig Aonghuis had their place of inauguration at Lios na Ríogh near Knockiveagh, Co. Down. Uí Echach Coba (Iveagh) was coterminous with the Diocese of Dromore, and during the twelfth century the kingship alternated between the Ua hAitéid and Mac Óengussa of Clann Aodha, with the Mac Artáin holding the sub-kingdom of Cenél Fagartaig.¹¹² It was not until after the death of Tomás Mac Artáin, king of Uí Echach, in 1347, however, that the lordship devolved irrevocably to Mag Aonghuis. Lios na Ríogh is documented for the first time in the late sixteenth century (see also the Mag Aonghuis inauguration *leac*, chapter III, pp. 120-22). In 1596 it was reported that Glaisne Mag Aonghuis had been inaugurated there.¹¹³ On his map of south-east Ulster, 1603, Richard Bartlett indicated the site with the legend 'Lise-ne Ree where McGenis is made' and he placed it on the immediate east side of Knockiveagh or 'Kno Euagh' (fig. 11).¹¹⁴ Hamilton, in his discussion of the site, and on the basis of the geography of that map (which he mistakenly took to be an escheated counties map of 1609), ruled out its identification with the traditionally cited rath in the townland of Lisnaree four miles southwest of Knockiveagh. Instead, he proposed 'a fort in the townland of Edenagarry, on the slope of Knockiveagh, which [satisfied] the conditions'.¹¹⁵ He did not elaborate on the exact location of this fort, and indeed there are at least six candidates in the immediate hinterland, east and southeast of Knockiveagh. The place-name Knockiveagh or Cnoc Uibh Echach itself commemorates Eochaid Coba son of Cruind ba drui, the progenitor of the sept.¹¹⁶ On the westernmost summit (788 OD) of the range of three peaks which constitute Knockiveagh, there is a hollowed-out round cairn of granite boulders retained by a border of much larger granite blocks. This once contained a central burial cist and a number of secondary burials.¹¹⁷ The root-word

¹¹¹ Ibid., 'Go loch n-aoibhinn n-Uachtair ag airgneach Cairn Churnán coinne ag na Trí Tuathaibh i gCruachain ó gCubhrán', 231 [3572-75], 377.

¹¹² F.J. Byrne, 'The trembling sod: Ireland in 1169', in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1987), 17-18.

¹¹³ *Cal. Carew MSS*, 1589-1600, 136.

¹¹⁴ PRO, London., MPF 36.

¹¹⁵ G.E. Hamilton, 'Two Ulster inauguration places', *JRSAI* 42, 1912, 65-66.

¹¹⁶ M.A. O'Brien (ed.), *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1976), 326, [162 b 34].

¹¹⁷ ASNI, *An archaeological survey of County Down* (Belfast, 1966), 84.

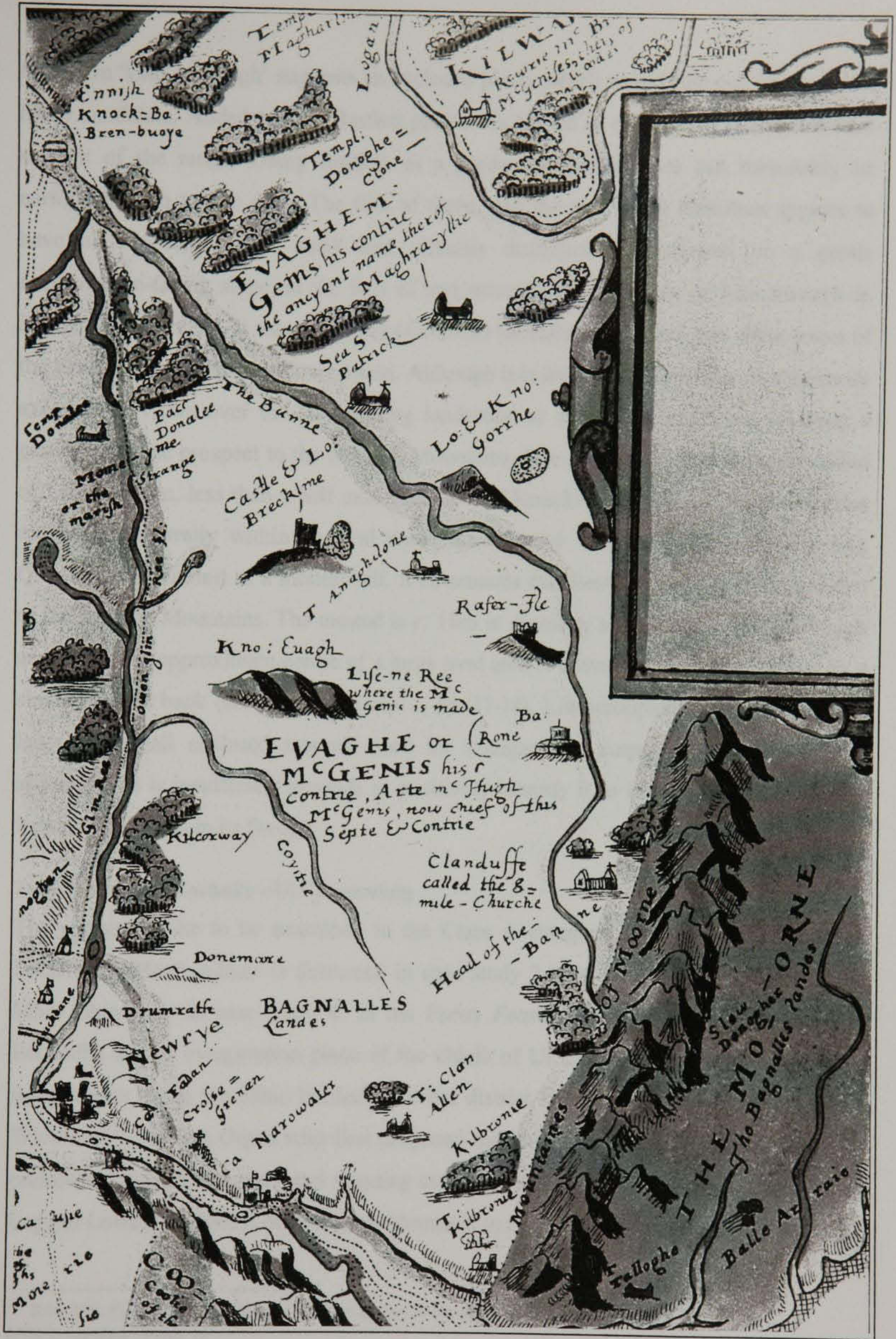


Fig. 11 The Mag Aonghuis inauguration site of Lios na Ríogh, recorded by Richard Bartlett in his map of Southeast Ulster 1603 [P.R.O., London, MPF 36].

lios/les in ‘Lios na Ríogh’ suggests an enclosed place, which would rule out the cairn as a likely candidate. Added to that, Bartlett placed his legend to one side of the easternmost summit of the range. Using Bartlett as a guide, the possibilities can reasonably be narrowed down to two sites. The first of these, and the one which Hamilton appears to have had in mind, is a small and virtually destroyed rath situated on a gentle northwestern-facing slope, at the foot of and immediately southeast of Knockiveagh in Edenagarry townland. It was originally of circular univallate form, and just slight traces of the bank at west-southwest now remain. Although it is an unremarkable site, it commands exceptional views over the surrounding landscape to south and southeast, enjoying a particularly fine prospect to the Mourne Mountains. The second site lies in the townland of Lisnacroppan, less than a half mile southeast of Knockiveagh. It is a circular earthen mound set centrally within an oval enclosure (see vol. 2, appendix 1, p. 18, fig. 54). Crowning the summit of a modest hill, it commands excellent views south and southeast to the Mourne Mountains. The mound is *c.* 18m in diameter at base and about 3.5m high and lies at the approximate centre of a large oval area *c.* 140m in diameter, enclosed by a single earthen bank (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 17-18). Lisnacroppan recalls the genre of large and small enclosed mounds used for inauguration purposes, cited above; and although this is insufficient grounds to positively identify it as Lios na Ríogh, it at least increases the odds in its favour.

2. 10 Leac Mhic Eochada - Uí Chennselaig

The remaining site to be examined in the Class A category of mounds is Leac Mhic Eochadha. Magh Adhair is discussed in case study 2, and Carn Fraích and Cruachain Mhic Dhiarmata in case study 4. In his *Foras Feasa*, Céitinn designated Leac Mhic Eochadha as the inauguration place of the chiefs of Uí Chennselaig,¹¹⁸ their hereditary inaugurators being the Mhic Eochadha of the district known as the Lagan in southeast Wicklow.¹¹⁹ It was Orpen who first proposed that this place could be identified with a prehistoric mound, cemetery and standing stone situated on a low hill in the townland of Loggan Lower, southwest of Croaghan Mountain in the northwest corner of Co. Wexford.

¹¹⁸ Rev. P.S. Dinneen (ed.), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn le Seathrún Céitinn*, vol.3 (ITS 9, London 1908), 15

¹¹⁹ P. Ó Macháin, ‘Bás File’, *Éigse*, 27, 1993, 101; In ‘Cetharnach Uí Dhomhnaill [O’Donnell’s Kern]’, S.H. O’Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, vol. 1, p. 282 and vol. 2, p. 318 (reprint New York, 1970), O’Donnell’s kern declares ‘do bíos aréir i lagan Laigen i dtig Mhic Eochaid [last night I was in the Lagan of Leinster, in M’Keogh’s House]’.

Although his identification is tenuous, and the recorded morphology of the site is controversial, its location on the inaugurator's lands in the Lagan of Leinster, merits consideration. The 'Moat of Loggan', or 'Croaghan' as it was known locally, has been totally quarried out. Three separate accounts of the archaeology of the site made by Kinahan, Westropp and Orpen differ in their interpretations (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 64-6). For Westropp it was undisputedly a motte and bailey,¹²⁰ while both Kinahan¹²¹ and Orpen¹²² provided sufficient evidence to bear out an interpretation as a burial and 'ritual' complex, incorporating a substantial (possibly enclosed) mound and an extensive area of Bronze Age burials which were uncovered to the south, southeast and west of the mound during farm improvements in the last century. Orpen noted a small pillar-stone at south which he conjectured to be the *leac* of Leac Mhic Eochadha. Since the pillar-stone was upright and not a recumbent flagstone, his interpretation of its function is unlikely.

2. 11 Throne Mounds - Caher an Iarla, Castlereagh, Cnoc Buadha

In addition to the larger enclosed and unenclosed mounds, there are loosely classified 'barrows' at Caher an Iarla, Castlereagh and Cnoc Buadha which are associated with inauguration practices. The first has not survived, the second has been excavated, and the third undisturbed example has all of the features of a classic bowl barrow. Both Caher an Iarla and Castlereagh are reputed to have supported stone inauguration chairs (see chapter III, pp. 141-5, 147-9, and vol. 2, appendix 2, pp. 86-9, 90-91) and in this respect it is more appropriate to classify them as possible throne mounds, at least in terms of their function in the medieval period. A small mound which supposedly acted as a platform for the Marquis of Clanrickard's Chair, was recorded by Redington within the northwest quadrant of the large enclosure at Caher an Iarla in the early part of this century.¹²³ Nothing survives at this site and no details of the mound were taken by Redington. Prior to its removal in the 1750s, the Clann Aodha Buidhe chair may have stood on or near a mound which remains *in situ* on the upper end of an east-facing slope just northeast of Castlereagh House. The mound in question is subcircular, slightly truncated and about 11m in diameter at base. It stands 3m high and the flat top has a diameter of *c.* 3.65m. The

¹²⁰ T.J. Westropp, 'On Irish motes and early Norman castles', *JRSAI* 34, 1904 -5, 320-21.

¹²¹ G.H. Kinahan, 'Sepulchral and other prehistoric relics, counties Wexford and Wicklow', *PRIA* 16C, 1886, 154-5.

¹²² G.H. Orpen, *op. cit.*, 270-71.

¹²³ M. Redington, 'Notes on the Ordnance Survey Letters relating to the barony of Dunkellin: Killeely parish', *JGAHS* 7, no. 2, 1911-12, 69-70.

southeast side of the mound has a stepped appearance which is attributed to its later use as a gazebo. Archaeological excavation in 1958 determined that it was constructed in two phases.¹²⁴ The primary mound was just a little over 1m in height, about 12m in diameter at base and surrounded by a small ditch with a counterscarp bank picked up at east. This modest primary mound incorporated a small spread of charcoal and bone at its base which, however, was not sufficient to represent a burial, but the monument was nonetheless interpreted as a possible barrow.¹²⁵ The secondary mound added about another 1.5m in height to the existing mound and was apparently thrown up to support a gazebo.¹²⁶ The excavation results suggest that the primary mound was probably no more than a platform and it is tempting to suggest that it may have been erected to accommodate the stone chair.

Unlike Caher an Iarla, there is no recorded inauguration furniture associated with the perfectly preserved bowl barrow which crowns the higher northern end of the esker ridge known as Cnoc Buadha in Rahugh, Co. Westmeath. This is the inauguration place of the Méig Eochagáin, recorded by Tadhg Ó Neachtain as late as 1704¹²⁷ and identified on the field by Liam Cox in the 1970s.¹²⁸ In the sixteenth century the townland of Rahugh pertained to the 'captainship' of Cenél Fhiachach and was parcel of the lands of Conall Mag Eochagáin, chief of his name, in 1583.¹²⁹ The monument on Cnoc Buadha is basically a compact, pudding-bowl shaped mound of earth, just 2m high with a summit diameter of 4.5m, enclosed at base by a shallow fosse. A short distance south of the foot of the ridge is the medieval church of Rahugh, reputedly founded by the late sixth-century bishop and saint, Áed mac Bric, and renowned as the venue for the high-king Máel Sechnaill's royal assembly of 859.¹³⁰ The close proximity of Cnoc Buadha to the church site raises the probability that this most perfectly appointed place of gathering may have had quite early associations with prestigious royal assembly and may itself have been the place where Máel Sechnaill's *rigdál* of 859 convened.

¹²⁴ Unpublished report on 'The excavation of a mound at Castlereagh, Co. Down' by B.K. Davison, MBR archives.

¹²⁵ Ibid., Davison suggested that the 'charcoal and bone must represent material incorporated either accidentally (as a result of occupation) or deliberately (for some ritual purpose)'.

¹²⁶ ASNI, *An archaeological survey of County Down* (Belfast, 1966), 197.

¹²⁷ NLI, MS G192, 306.

¹²⁸ L. Cox, 'Leic Mhichil and Cnoc Buadha identified', *Ríocht na Míde* 6, no. 2, 1976, 86-7.

¹²⁹ *Fiants*, vol. 2, 236 [1760] and 601 [4279].

¹³⁰ A. Gwynn and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses Ireland* (Dublin, 1988), 401.

2. 12 The Irish *Forad*: Some Conclusions on Enclosed and Unenclosed Mounds

The evidence afforded by the *Dindshenchas* and *Book of Lecan* regarding the true purpose of Carn Amhalgaidh leads to the hypothesis that some mounds may have been erected with assembly in mind. Significantly, early Irish literary and historical sources provide a word to define such a structure. That word is *forad* which translates as a mound or platform, generally earthen, used as a seat or stand for spectators and also as an observation post. It could vary in size, from the smallest intended for just one person, to the much larger which could hold a gathering or assembly of people.¹³¹ More recent commentary suggests that *forad* could be taken to mean a place of inauguration,¹³² foremost examples being *Forad na Ríg* at Temair¹³³ and *Foradh Mag Emna* mentioned in *Táin Bó Cuailnge*.¹³⁴ Doherty notes that *forad* is not peculiarly secular or otherworldly in nature, but also features in the ecclesiastical context at Armagh and he cites the example in *AU* where reference is made to the *forad* of the abbot in Armagh being struck by lightning in 822 - 'Fire from heaven struck the abbot's mansion [sic] in Ard macha and burned it [Tene di nim forsa foruth n-abbadh I nArdd Machae conid roloiscc]'.¹³⁵ The assumption is made by Doherty that this is a reference to a residence and he questions whether the abbot's house might have been built on the *forad*.¹³⁶ However, there is no reason to believe that the abbot's *forad* was a house platform; it could also have been the abbot's throne mound.

2. 13 Welsh Analogies

The close etymological relationship between the Irish *forad* and the Welsh *gorsedd* may help to further illuminate the function of the mound as platform.¹³⁷ The Welsh *gorsedd* has a slightly broader range of meanings than the Irish *forad*, being variously applied to a

¹³¹ *DIL*, 1957, 327.

¹³² C. Doherty, 'The monastic town in early medieval Ireland', in H.B. Clarke and A. Simms (eds.), *The comparative history of urban origins in Non-Roman Europe* (Oxford, 1985), 52; J.P. Mallory, 'A literary topography of Emain Macha', *Emania* 2, 1987, 15; N.B. Aitchison, *Armagh and the royal centres in early medieval Ireland* (Suffolk, 1994), 142.

¹³³ C. Newman, in *Tara: an archaeological survey* (Dublin, 1997), 77, 319, describes *An Forrad*, which lies on the west of *Tech Cormaic*, at the centre of *Ráith na Ríg*, as the '[inauguration] mound'. It is one of the more complex monuments at Temair and has been attributed three structural phases. It comprises a central raised, steep-sided and relatively flat-topped mound, surrounded by two concentric banks with an intervening fosse.

¹³⁴ C. O'Rahilly (ed.), *The Stowe version of Táin Bó Cúailgne* (Dublin, 1961), 27, 28, 39; *DIL*, 327, also lists Uisneach and Oenach Tailten in connection with *foraid*.

¹³⁵ S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (eds.), *The Annals of Ulster* (Dublin, 1983), 280-81.

¹³⁶ C. Doherty, op. cit., 52.

¹³⁷ T. Ó Cathasaigh, 'The semantics of Síd', *Éigse* 17, part 2, 1977-8, 150.

‘mound of earth, tump, knoll, hillock; barrow, tumulus and grave’, or more specifically to the ‘throne of an emperor or king; a bishop’s throne on ceremonial occasions; a chair; the throne of God; and Christ in glory’. A third category of meanings has *gorsedd* as ‘court, hall, dwelling, place; court of law, judicial assembly, tribunal, session, judge’s seat; assembly, gathering’.¹³⁸ A reading of c. 1700 describes *gorsedd* or *orsedd* as ‘commonly used in Anglesey for any rising ground from whence we have a prospect’ - a description more closely allied to the Irish *forad*.¹³⁹ In ‘The voice conventional of the bards of the Isle of Britain’ - a text supposedly extracted from Meyryg of Glamorgan’s book in the sixteenth century, the physical appearance of the *gorsedd* is described as follows - ‘the place of assembly shall be upon the grassy face of the earth, and chairs shall be placed there, namely stones, and when stones cannot be obtained, then in their stead turfs, and the Chair of assembly shall be in the middle of the Gorsedd’.¹⁴⁰ From this description, the form of the *gorsedd* could apparently be a stone circle or an earthen enclosure which defined the area of assembly at the centre of which a ‘chair’ was positioned, but there is no indication that the ‘chair’ was elevated on a mound within the enclosure, or whether indeed the ‘chair’ was in fact a mound. However, at least two possible *gorsedd* chairs have been identified in Wales, the first at a small stone circle in an elevated position on Clocaenog Moor in the county of Denbigh, and the second gracing the lawn of Pool Park in the parish of Llanfwrog in the same county. The Clocaenog Moor rudely-shaped chair is the largest stone on the southwest of the circumference of the stone circle, its back a little over 0.6m high and its seat hollowed out and facing the circle.¹⁴¹ The Pool Park chair, known as ‘Cader y Frenhines’, ‘the Queen’s chair’, is apparently a very similar large boulder somewhat resembling an armchair. It was originally positioned within a small earthen and stone enclosure called Llys y Frenhines, ‘the Queen’s court house’, located at a height of 1,354 OD in Gyffylliog parish and taken to nearby Pool Park in 1804 by Lord Bagot. The names of both the chair and the enclosure are later attributions applied in the 19th century after the chair had been removed from its enclosure.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ R.J. Thomas (ed.), *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru: a dictionary of the Welsh language*, vol. 22, 1968, 1496-7.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1495.

¹⁴⁰ J. Williams, ‘Druidic stones’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 1850, 552.

¹⁴¹ RCAHMS, *An inventory of the ancient monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire; iv. -County of Denbigh* (London, 1914), 37-8.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 66, 110.

2. 14 Assembly Mounds in Northern Europe

In northern Europe the assembly mound features in royal inaugurations only to the extent that it was there confirmation was given to royal elections. For instance, in medieval Sweden the king-elect was inaugurated on a large boulder at *Mora äng* and afterwards his kingship was confirmed during an assembly held at the *Tingshögen*, Uppsala.¹⁴³ The *Tingshögen* which lies between the 'east mound', church and Odinsborg at the royal centre of Uppsala, was primarily a judicial mound - a place where law was made and justice administered.¹⁴⁴ Confirmation of the election of the Hungarian king was conducted in a similar manner. Following his coronation, he ascended the *Köenigberg*, a small mound furnished with a double flight of steps on the Danube at Presburg, where he swore to maintain the Constitution inviolate.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps the most well known of the *ting* mounds is Tynwald Hill in the Isle of Man - the place where the court or Manx parliament sat and the laws of Man were by custom validated each year on St John's day or Midsummer day (fig. 12). These were its primary functions, but an eyewitness account of the first visit of the Duke of Athol (who inherited the Lordship of Man in 1736) to the island, indicates that he was inaugurated there on the same day.¹⁴⁶ The *tingvoll* (from *ting* meaning a court of justice or assembly of the people and *voll* meaning fenced) is a relatively low plateau aligned east-west and the *ting* itself is situated in the middle of the plateau's northern edge, supposedly marking the centre of the island and the junction of four ancient highways. The *ting* mound is a modestly sized artificial earthwork arranged in four terraces, about 25m in diameter at base and no more than 3m high.¹⁴⁷ A series of steps are cut into the south side for ascending to the summit; and it was here that the Lord of Man sat in his festively decked chair.¹⁴⁸ Gough in his edition of Camden's *Britannia* described the *tingvoll* as 'surrounded by a ditch and rampart of earth, including an area of the form of a right angled parallelogram, within which at the end facing the steps is a

¹⁴³ P.G. Foote and D.M. Wilson, *The Viking achievement* (London, 1970), 137.

¹⁴⁴ T. Littmarck (trans. R.G. Tanner), *Gamla Uppsala* (Uppsala, 1987), 5.

¹⁴⁵ C. B. Elliot, *Travels in the empires of Austria, Russia and Turkey*, vol.1 (London, 1835), 29.

¹⁴⁶ The full text of Manx Museum MS 1596A is reproduced in *The Journal of the Manx Museum* 5, no. 66, 1942, 171. This account of the 1736 Tynwald inauguration is addressed to Sir George Lee MP and in all particulars matches another contemporary account of that inauguration preserved in an MS formerly in the possession of the Stevensons of Balladoole.

¹⁴⁷ Anon, 'The Vikings in Man: a great Norse scholar's view', *The Journal of the Manx Museum* 3, 1935-7, 23.

¹⁴⁸ W. Harrison, 'Records of the Tynwald and Saint John's Chapels in the Isle of Man', *The Manx Society*, vol. 19, 1871, 30-31; R.D.K., 'The Vikings in Man: a great Norse scholar's view', *The Journal of the Manx Museum* 3, 1935-7, 23.

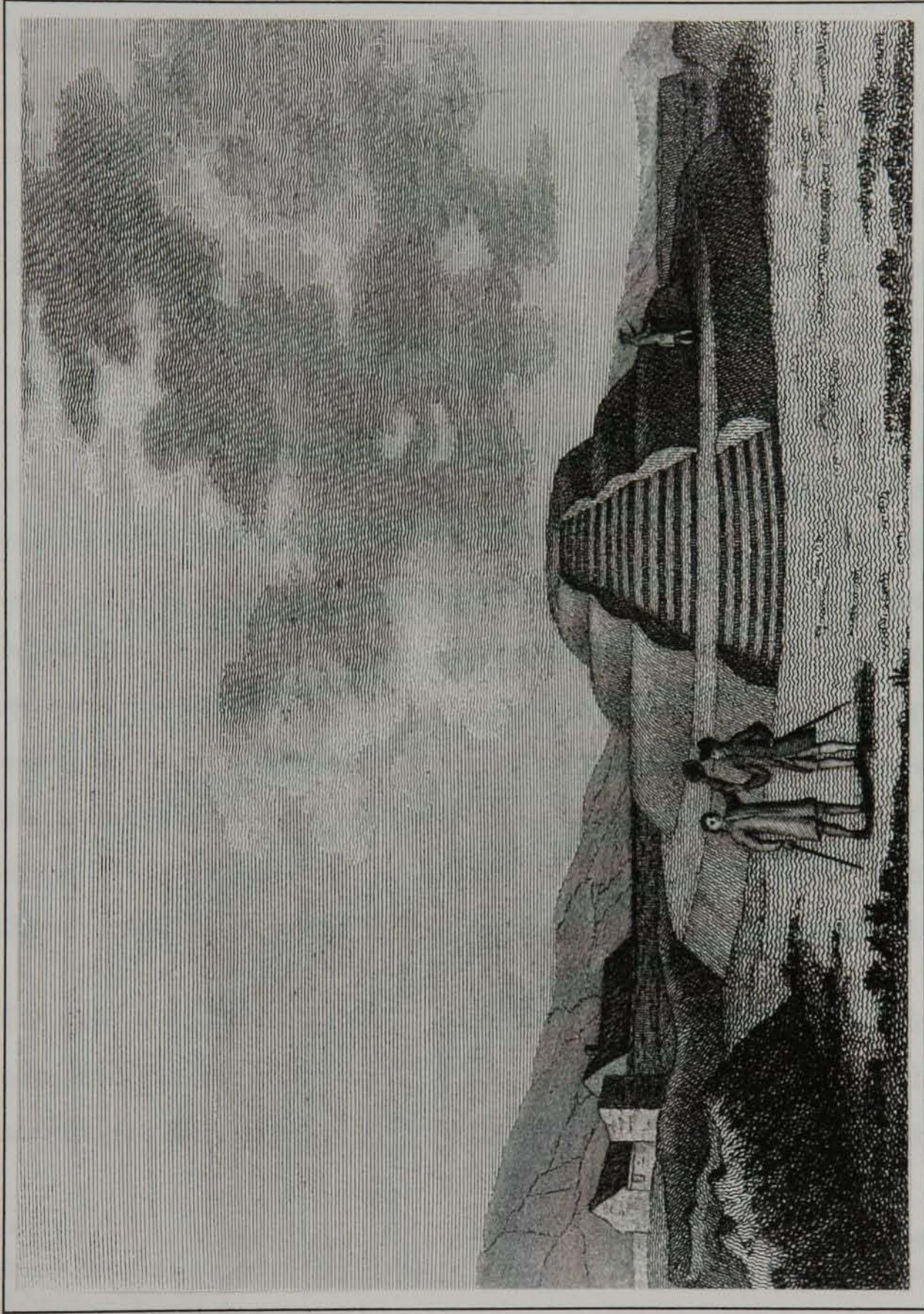


Fig. 12 Tynwald Hill, Isle of Man, Francis Grose, 1787.

small church [St John's Chapel]'. The entrance to this area, according to Camden, was through 'some upright stone jambs covered with transverse impostes', most of which by that time had been thrown down.¹⁴⁹

The Norse of Dublin had a comparable but significantly larger assembly mound known as the 'Hogges',¹⁵⁰ which was located on Hoggen Green, or to be more precise, at the junction of Church Lane and Suffolk Street opposite St Andrew's Church. An entry in the register of the Priory of All Hallows for the year 1241 refers to this district as 'Thengmotha, in parochia S. Andree de Thengmotha'.¹⁵¹ A drawing of the Hogges (but designated Thingmote by Haliday), included in a survey of the city dated 1682, shows it as a substantial conical mound of earth c. 12m high and about 75m in circumference with a stepped profile (recalling the Tynwald) and two converging paths leading up to the summit (fig. 13).¹⁵² FitzGerald, in his unpublished notes on Irish places of royal inauguration, quite plausibly suggested that Ruaidhrí Ó Conchobhair's inauguration ceremony at Dublin in 1166 may have been held at this site.¹⁵³ The great mound survived and was periodically used for musters and assemblies down to the year 1685.¹⁵⁴ City records for the fifteenth century indicate that the military forces of Dublin were regularly mustered on Hoggen Green during which occasions the mayor and principal citizens would sit under a pavilion or tent erected on the Hogges.¹⁵⁵ The elections for the Parliament held at Dublin in 1613 were also held there. On April 27 of that year the mayor of the city, Sir James Carroll, summoned 'a great assembly of the inhabitants' to the mound where he nominated Richard Bolton and Richard Barr for parliament.¹⁵⁶

The case of the Moot Hill of Scone and its Stone of Destiny (see chapter III, pp. 139-40) near the River Tay in Perthshire, is more complicated, but some parallels with the above are obvious, like the Moot Hill itself, which is a broad, flat-topped mound, the platform

¹⁴⁹ R. Gough (ed.), *Britannia: or a chorographical description of the flourishing kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland and the islands adjacent from the earliest antiquity* by William Camden, vol 3 (London, 1789), 701-2.

¹⁵⁰ I am grateful to Dr. Seán Duffy (TCD) for clarifying the name applied to the mound.

¹⁵¹ Rev. R. Butler, *Registrum prioratus omnium sanctorum juxta Dublin* (Irish Archaeological Society, Dublin, 1845), 26.

¹⁵² C. Haliday, *op. cit.*, facsimile of drawing facing p. 151, 163.

¹⁵³ W. FitzGerald, *Places of inauguration of Irish kings and chiefs with a description of that ceremony* (MS RSAI), 1.

¹⁵⁴ C. Haliday, *op. cit.*, 163.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁵⁶ *Cal. S.P. Ire., 1611-1614*, 441.

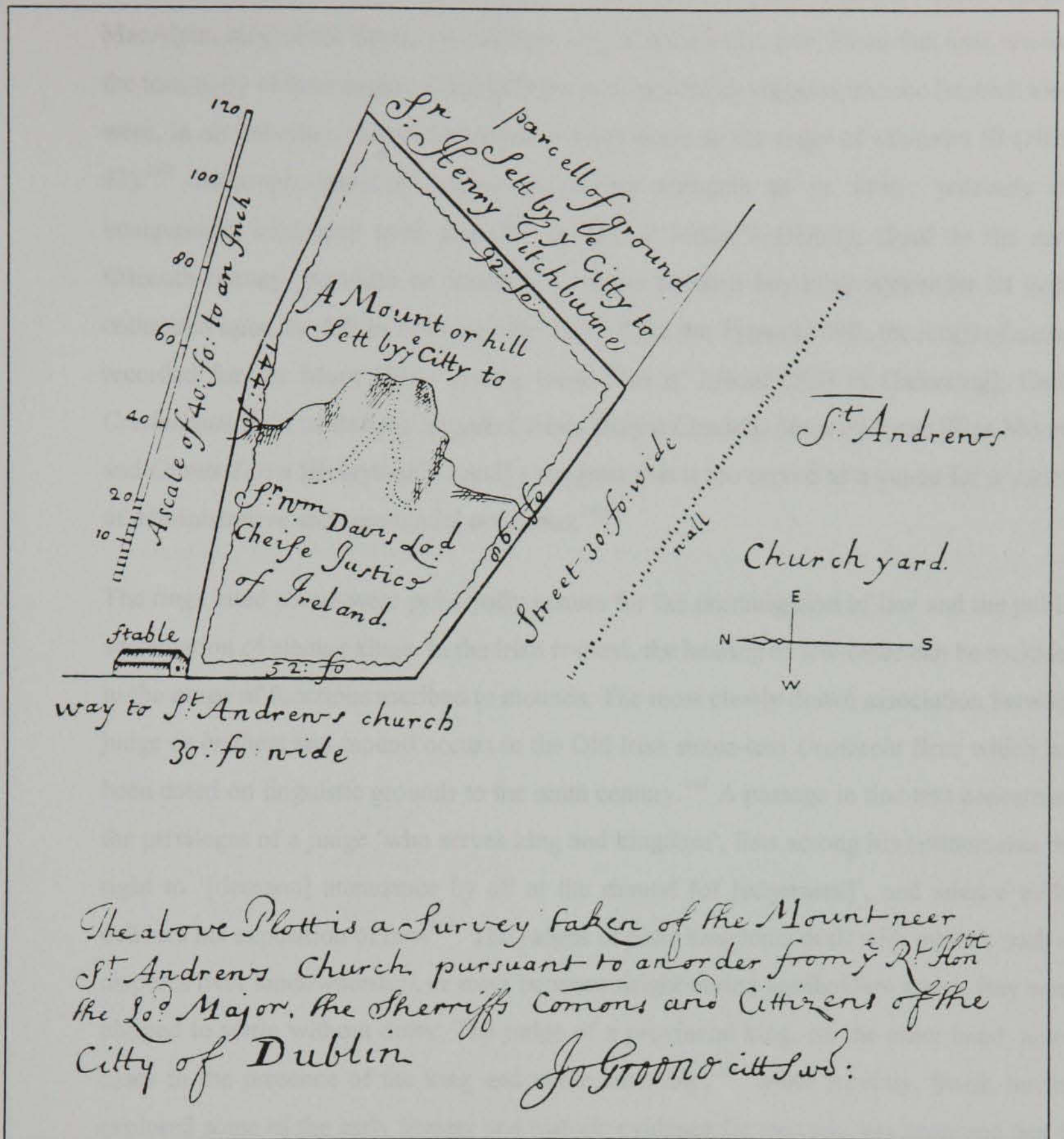


Fig. 13 The Thingmote, Dublin, from a drawing included in a survey of the city, 1682.

summit covering an area *c.* 92m by 55m. Scone was a Pictish royal capital when Kenneth MacAlpin, king of the Scots, also became king of the Picts *c.* 843. From that time onward, the testimony of later medieval chroniclers such as Fordun suggests that the Scottish kings were, in an unbroken record, inaugurated there down to the reign of Malcolm III (1058-93).¹⁵⁷ Although there are many conflicting accounts as to where precisely the inauguration ceremony took place,¹⁵⁸ an *MS* of Jordan's History, dated to the early fifteenth-century, provides an illustration of the Scottish boy-king Alexander III being enthroned upon the hill in 1249 (see fig. 2).¹⁵⁹ Like the Tynwald Hill, the range of names recorded for the Moot Hill - among them *Tom a' Mhoid* [Hill of Gathering], *Collis Credulitatis* [Hill of Belief], *Regalis Civitas* [Royal Citadel], *Mons Placitus* [Plea Mount] and *Omnis Terra* [Everyman's Land] - suggests that it too served as a venue for a variety of administrative and ceremonial occasions.¹⁶⁰

The *tings* cited above were principally venues for the promulgation of law and the public acclamation of elected kings. In the Irish context, the hearing of law-cases can be included in the range of functions ascribed to mounds. The most clearly drawn association between judge or *brithem* and mound occurs in the Old Irish status-text *Uraicecht Becc* which has been dated on linguistic grounds to the ninth century.¹⁶¹ A passage in that text concerning the privileges of a judge 'who serves king and kingdom', lists among his entitlements the right to '[demand] attendance by all at the mound [of judgement]', and silence as he delivers his exposition of law.¹⁶² The judges of petty kingdoms dealt with matters such as disputes over landownership, or rows between neighbouring landholders which they were obliged to settle without delay. The judge of a provincial king, on the other hand, heard cases in the presence of the king and noble assembly.¹⁶³ More recently, Swift, having explored some of the early literary and historic evidence for mounds, has proposed that in early historic Ireland they served as judgement seats, as places where poets would go to

¹⁵⁷ D. Breeze and G. Munro, *The Stone of Destiny: symbol of nationhood* (Historic Scotland, Edinburgh, 1997), 5.

¹⁵⁸ D. Breeze and G. Munro, p. 11, quoting both William Rishanger in his *Chronicles and Annals*, written about 1327, and Walter of Guisborough's description of the inauguration of John de Balliol, show that there was an opinion that the inauguration took place on the stone within the church of the canons regular at Scone.

¹⁵⁹ Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 171.

¹⁶⁰ G. Ritchie, *Stones of Destiny* (Scone, 1986), 8.

¹⁶¹ L. Breatnach, 'Lawyers in early Ireland', in D. Hogan and W.W. Osborough (eds.) *Brehons, serjeants and attorneys: studies in the history of the Irish legal profession* (Dublin, 1990), p. 7, footnote 36.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

satirise the enemies of the community, and possibly as venues for the performance of clerical ordinations.¹⁶⁴ The hearing of law cases in the open air at mounds, raths or enclosures on hillsides, continued well into the sixteenth century. As late as 1577 Richard Stanihurst observed that during a hearing, ‘the breighon sitteth on a banke, the lordes and gentlemen at variance round about him, and then they proceede’.¹⁶⁵ Whether such judgement mounds were reserved specifically for that purpose or were also used as centres of inauguration and *oireachtais* is unclear, but the evidence for sites such as Sheantomuinn and Carn Amhalgaidh, for instance, suggests that specific hills, usually crowned with a mound or enclosure, may have acted as administrative centres for Gaelic lordships, combining a broad range of functions. It seems increasingly unlikely that such important places served a single function.

In summary, the collective evidence suggests that the Irish *forad* was either a pre-existing sepulchral mound adapted for a range of assembly purposes including inauguration and the promulgation of law, or a mound which was deliberately erected to serve those purposes. In some of these respects the *forad* may be seen as analogous to the *moot* hill, the *ting voll*, the *köenigberg*, and possibly the *gorsedd*.

2. 15 Cairns as Inauguration Sites

In modern archaeological terminology, a cairn is a large or small heap of stones erected to cover a burial, or to mark a boundary. It is apparent from the archaeological record that the Irish *carn*¹⁶⁶ does not always approximate with the typical cairn identifiable on the landscape today. Carn Amhalgaidh and Carn inghine Bhriain, for instance, are earthen mounds, and Carn Fraích is a composite mixture of earth and stone. Early Irish literary texts propose a broader range of reasons for the erection of cairns. In the saga *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, the practice of piling stones is alluded to as a means of ascertaining how many men from Da Derga’s hostel had been lost during raiding and warring - ‘every one that would come safe from it would take his stone from the cairn: thus the stones of those that were slain would be left and thence they would know their losses’.¹⁶⁷ This practice goes beyond saga into local tradition and folk customs. In Offaly a wayside cairn

¹⁶⁴ C. Swift, ‘Pagan monuments and Christian legal centres in early Meath’, *Ríocht na Midhe*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1996, 1-21.

¹⁶⁵ L. Miller and E. Power (eds.), *Holinshed’s Irish chronicle 1577* (Dublin, 1979), 114-5.

¹⁶⁶ *DIL*, p. 101, reads *carn* as a heap of any material, a pile, a cairn.

¹⁶⁷ W. Stokes, ‘The destruction of Dá Derga’s Hostel’, *Revue Celtique*, vol. 22, 1901, 9-61.

near the village of Kinnitty was a regular stopping point for funeral processions. Those attending, would place a stone there in memory of the deceased.¹⁶⁸ The case for the use of archetypal cairns of angular stones as places of inauguration is not terribly convincing, either historically or practically. The cairn on Cuilcagh, which Coote suggested was frequented by Mag Uidhir claimants to the lordship of Fir Manach,¹⁶⁹ and Cahircanaway which Delap proposed as the 'parley hill' upon which Ó Suilleabháin Mór inaugurated Florence Mac Carthaigh in 1600,¹⁷⁰ are both situated on impracticable heights of 1000 feet OD and over (see vol. 2, appendix 2, pp. 73, 95-6). Significantly perhaps, no cairns fall within the Class (A) category of attested places of inauguration. The only possibilities within the Class (B) category lie with Carn Mhic Táil, near Kilshanny, Co. Clare, and Carn Tighearnaigh Mhic Dheaghaidh which lies at the northeast end of Nagle's Mountain, near Fermoy, Co. Cork. The assembly associations of the former have been discussed above (p. 51). Carn Tighearnaigh Mhic Dheaghaidh (created, so the legend of the district tells, by the hag of Labacally) lay in the ancient kingdom of Fir Maig Féine.¹⁷¹ Nineteenth century folklore collected by Charles Smith held that it was a place of judicial assembly and 'where they elected their chiefs'.¹⁷² This tradition stands as the sole record of the secondary function of the cairn. From a purely practical point of view it is difficult to envisage how an inauguration ceremony would actually have been conducted on the top of any of these cairns. The rolling surface of a typical well-heaped cairn of stones offers a very poor grip under foot, an indignity which a king or chief-elect would hardly have been likely to endure. If inaugurations did take place at Carn Mhic Táil and Carn Tighearnaigh Mhic Dheaghaidh, presumably proceedings would have been conducted around them rather than on them.

2. 16 Defensive Craggs and the Practice of Inauguration

Among the range of site types used for inauguration, there are three sites in particular which stand apart from the others in respect of access and morphology. The sites in question are Caisil, Co. Tipperary, Carraig an Dúin, Co. Donegal and Dunmull, Co. Antrim. All of these sites are formidable rocky crags, naturally defensive and difficult of

¹⁶⁸ C. O'Brien and P. David Sweetman, *Archaeological inventory of County Offaly* (OPW, Dublin, 1997), 112.

¹⁶⁹ C. Coote, *op. cit.*, 25-6.

¹⁷⁰ M.J. Delap. 'Ogham stone, Drung Hill', *Kerry Archaeological Magazine* 2, no. 11, 1913, 162.

¹⁷¹ T. Crofton Croker, *Fairy legends and traditions of the south of Ireland* (London, 1888), 313-6.

¹⁷² C. Smith, *The ancient and present state of the County and City of Cork*, vol. 1 (Cork, 1893), 147.

access - attributes which are uncommon to medieval inauguration places in general. The first two are also associated with pre-Norman kingship practices; Caisil is cited in this regard in literary and historical sources, and Carraig and Dúin in the folk legends of Tír Conaill.

In the tenth-century saga of Conall Corc (preserved in a fifteenth-century ms), St Patrick's angel, Victor, appears in a vision to Duidriu, swineherd of the king of Éile, and Cuirirán, swineherd of the king of Músgraige, and proclaims - 'he who shall first kindle fire here [Caisil], entrust the kingship of Munster to him'.¹⁷³ Conall Corc, champion of Munster, and possibly the first king of Caisil at the close of the fourth century, is the hero of the saga.¹⁷⁴ In effect, the tale equates taking possession of the Rock of Cashel with succession to the kingship of Munster. Caisil was the seat of the kings of Munster from perhaps as early as the late fourth century through to 1101 when king Muirchertach Ua Briain bestowed it upon the church.¹⁷⁵ In the mid eleventh-century compilation *Lebor na Cert*, the earlier name for Caisil is given as Síð Druim (fairy ridge or hill). Caisil itself is explained at the commencement of that text as deriving either from *cais* (hatred) and *ail* (rock) meaning a stone upon which hostages used to be placed, or *cís* (rent) and *ail* (law) from the legal rent or tribute paid to the king of Munster by the tribal kings.¹⁷⁶ The rights and dues of the king of Caisil from his subject tribes and their stipends from him are listed in detail.¹⁷⁷ We are left in no doubt that Caisil functioned as a provincial centre at which the king's tribute was collected. The group of church buildings on the Rock are the result of its gradual transformation into an ecclesiastical centre from the late twelfth century onward. If a secular inauguration rite for the kings of Munster had taken place on the Rock in the early historic period, it was apparently taken in hand by the church thereafter. A note in an Eóganacht genealogical tract dating from the period in which the Eóganacht dynasty enjoyed a revival under king Cormac Mac Carthaig, who patronised the building of Cormac's Chapel at Cashel (completed 1134), prescribes a two-part inauguration ceremony for the kings of Munster. The author of the tract writes:

¹⁷³ M. Dillon, 'The story of the finding of Cashel', *Ériu* 16, 1952, 71.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 62-3.

¹⁷⁵ D. Ó Corráin, *op. cit.*, 34, 149.

¹⁷⁶ M. Dillon (ed.), *Lebor na Cert* (ITS 46, Dublin, 1962), 2-3.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-43.

It is in this wise that the kings of Munster should be elected: the twenty-four best chief counsellors in the two Fifts of Munster should choose him, as the German emperor is chosen, and he should be brought to the Stone of Cothraige and to Cormac's great church and there proclaimed king, and be brought to Lis na nUrlann and proclaimed there also'.¹⁷⁸

It has been suggested that the pre-eminence given to the liturgical aspect of this ceremony may be more representative of the writer's ideal than any actual practice.¹⁷⁹

There is no visible trace of any defences or secular buildings on the Rock today and no record of any, but the precipitous nature of this impressive crag and its early historic profile as the premier seat of the Munster kingship and a centre at which tribute was collected, recalls a number of early historic rocky citadels in Scotland for which similar functions have been argued. The Scottish group of 'nuclear forts' of the sixth to ninth century are essentially imposing and highly defensive crags or promontories with enclosing walls or palisades varying in complexity. Classic examples of these are the documented Dalriada group of rocky citadels which include Dun Ollaigh (Dunollie); Dun Att (Dunadd); Aberte which has been suggested as Dunaverty at the tip of Kintyre; and finally the stronghold of Tairpirt Boittir, tentatively equated with Tarbert Lochfyne. Outside Dalriada additional examples of this type of rock fortress are the Pictish fort of Dun Durin (Dundurn) in Perthshire and Alcluith (Dumbarton Rock) in Dunbartonshire.¹⁸⁰ The arrangement of enclosing features is elaborate in the cases of Dunadd and Dundurn where an inner citadel or enclosed nucleus overlooks a complex of subordinate enclosures or outworks. Alcock has suggested that this type of nucleated plan might be hierarchical, with the innermost citadel reserved for a potentate. At both of the last places cited, the enclosed nuclei house inauguration furniture - a footprint stone and rock basin in the case of Dunadd, and a possible stone chair and basin on the summit bosse of Dun Duirn (see chapter III, p. 151).¹⁸¹ It has also been argued that the primary function of these enclosed places may have been as centres at which local tribute could be collected and at which the

¹⁷⁸ F.J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* (London, 1973), 191.

¹⁷⁹ D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), 34.

¹⁸⁰ L. Alcock, 'The activities of potentates in Celtic Britain, AD 500-800: a positivist approach', in S.T. Driscoll and M.R. Niece (eds.), *Power and politics in early medieval Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1988), 22-39; E. Alcock, appendix to same, p. 44; L. and J. Laing, *The Picts and the Scots* (Stroud, 1993), 85-99.

¹⁸¹ L. Alcock, *op. cit.*, 28-9.

various kings resided during their progresses.¹⁸² In the Irish context, recent archaeological excavation at the Rock of Dún Másc in Co. Laois, an impregnable stronghold topographically similar to Caisil and the Scottish crags, but with no known association with inauguration, has revealed three phases of early historic tiered or nucleated defences pre-dating the earliest castle fortifications of the 1180s.¹⁸³

In Donegal, long-established folk tradition of the last two centuries proposes that the Uí Dhomhnaill kings and chiefs of Tír Conaill were inaugurated on the summit of Carraig an Dúin (Doon Rock) which is an elongated and precipitous crag, rising up quite dramatically from surrounding moorland, west of Kilmacrenan village (see case study 3).¹⁸⁴ It is heavily clad with vegetation which precludes detailed examination, but a stretch of an enclosing drystone wall can be detected on the south downslope of the crag. Carraig an Dúin is historically unattested as an inauguration site and records are generally silent about its purpose and associations, but its prominent and defensive nature and the prevailing tradition which connects it with Uí Dhomhnaill inauguration ceremonies, suggests that possibly like Caisil and the Scottish enclosed crags, it was a high status site which combined the functions of defense, habitation, administration and ceremony (fig. 14).

The third enclosed crag associated with inauguration is Dunmull, which lies a little over three miles northeast of Coleraine, close to the county boundary between Antrim and Derry. It is a remarkable oval-shaped plateau of columnar basalt, the summit of which is enclosed by the remains of a stout earth and stone bank, up to 5m wide in places. A substantial settlement extends across the flat top, incorporating the grass-covered foundations of a series of what are likely to be rectangular and circular hut sites, a possible oratory, a number of linear banks and the sites of a well and souterrain (see vol. 2, appendix 2, pp. 67-71). Dunmull is not mentioned in the annals and received only the most fleeting attention in later sources such as Thomas Fagan's Ordnance Survey memoirs for the parish of Ballywillin compiled in 1838. Fagan, however, did note the presence of

¹⁸² M.R. Nieke and H.B. Duncan, 'Dalriada: the establishment and maintenance of an early historic kingdom in northern Britain', in S.T. Driscoll and M.R. Nieke (eds.), op. cit., 11-16.

¹⁸³ B. Hodkinson, 'The Rock of Dunamase', *Archaeology Ireland*, 9. no. 2, 1995, 18-21; B. Hodkinson, 'The Norman and pre-Norman defences of Dunamase', unpublished paper delivered at seminar on recent work on Irish stone castles, Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, February 26, 1996.

¹⁸⁴ J. O'Donovan, *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the County of Donegal collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1835*, 53.

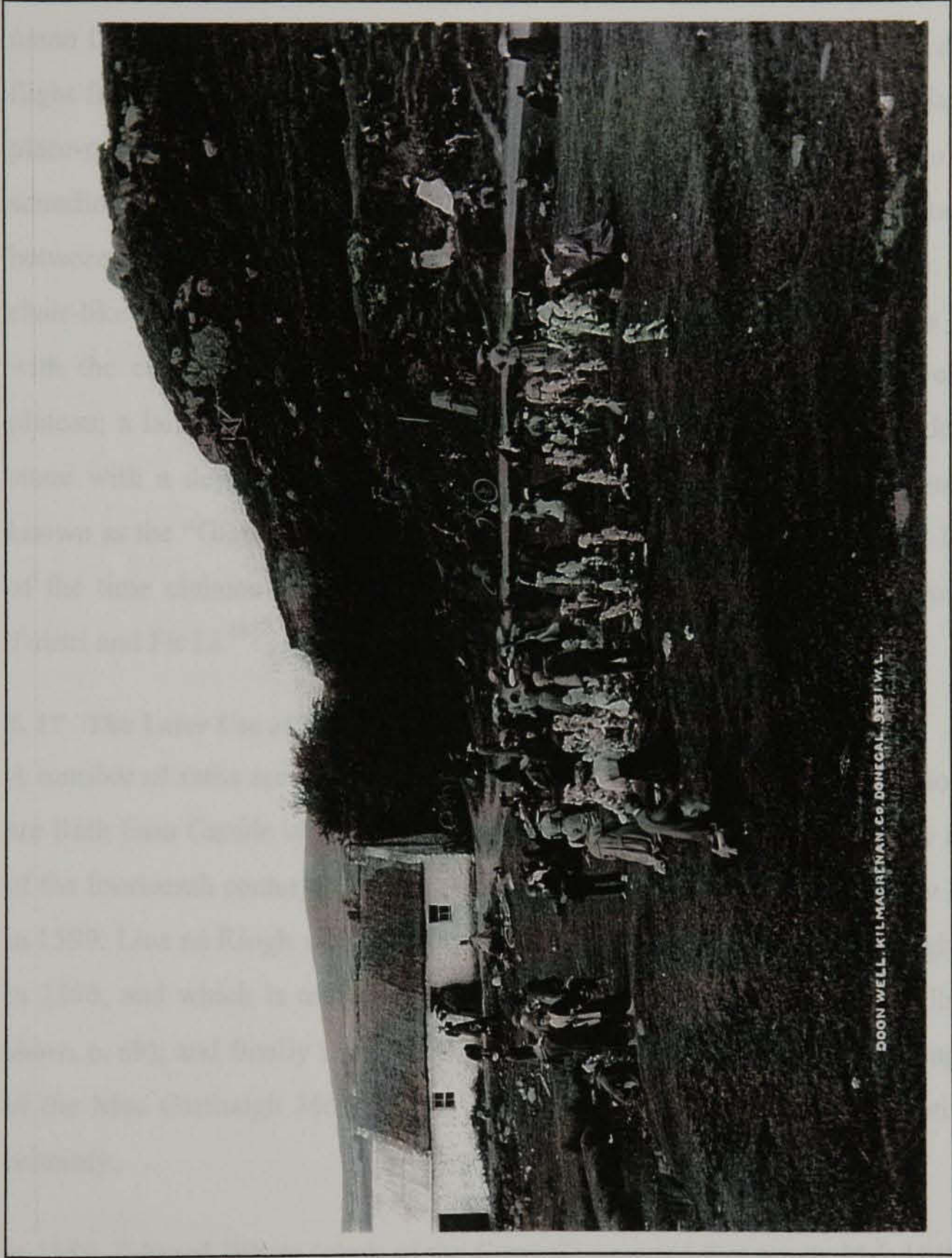


Fig. 14 Carrraig an Dúin at the turn of the century [NLI, 933 I. W.L.].

‘sundry enclosures of different shapes ... confined by stone and clay parapets’ on the surface of the plateau, and half a stone circle, all trace of which has now vanished, east of and within a few yards of it.¹⁸⁵ The well on the summit may be the one which gave its name to the townland of Toberdornan in which Dunmull lies and could conceivably be ‘the well most beautiful and cool, the fountain of Dún Máil [tiopra is aille ionnuaire, úarán Dhúine Máil] from which Suibhne Geilt, the king of Dál nAraide, drinks after his flight from the battle of Magh Rath, in the Middle-Irish romance, *Buile Suibhne*.¹⁸⁶ The place-name Dún Máil, cited in this tale, could however also refer to the similarly sounding Rock of Dunmaul which is an impressive hillfort situated in the same county between Glenarm and Cushendall. A survey conducted at Dunmull in c. 1940 noted ‘a chair-like rock said to have been an inaugural seat where local chieftains were installed with the customary ceremonies in their office’, on the slope of the west side of the plateau; a large bullaun stone at the foot of the rock on its southwest side; and ‘a large stone with a depression resembling the impression of a human foot some 2ins. deep, known as the “Giant’s Foot-track”, on the east side (see chapter III, p. 124). Local tradition of the time claimed that Dunmull was a seat of the Uí Floinn who were chiefs of Uí Tuirtri and Fir Lí.¹⁸⁷

2. 17 The Later Use of Rathes for Inauguration Ceremonies

A number of raths are recorded in the late sixteenth century as inauguration sites. These are Ráth Essa Caoide where MacUilliam Burc was made, possibly as early as second half of the fourteenth century; Gortacur where Ó Neill set up a number of new Midland lords in 1599; Lios na Ríogh which is documented as the place where Mag Aonghuis was made in 1596, and which is marked on Richard Bartlett’s map of south-east Ulster (discussed above, p. 69); and finally Lios Beannchair which Céitinn named as the inauguration place of the Mac Carthaigh Mór and the location of which has not been identified with any certainty.

In 1589, Edward Whyte (clerk of the Council) reported that a new Mac Uilliam Burc had been inaugurated at ‘Rahessekyre with all Irish ceremonies, contrary to the order set down

¹⁸⁵ A. Day and P. McWilliams (eds.), *Ordnance Survey memoirs of Ireland*, vol. 16 (Belfast, 1992), 33-4.

¹⁸⁶ J.G. O’Keefe, *Buile Suibhne* (ITS vol. 12, London, 1913), 80-81; I am grateful to Kay Muhr, Department of Celtic, QUB, for drawing my attention to this reference.

¹⁸⁷ D.A. Chart (ed.), *A preliminary survey of the ancient monuments of Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1940), 9.

in the composition'. On this occasion, Marcus MacDonald had also been made the MacDonald or 'chief of the Galloglasses of the sept of Clandonnels'.¹⁸⁸ According to Lughaidh Ó Cléirigh, in his *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill*, the same place was used for the inauguration of Teapoit mac Uateir Chiotaigh in 1595, and he implies that it had been in use for some time as the Mac Uilliam Burc place of inauguration.¹⁸⁹ When exactly Clann Uilliam Iochtar adopted Ráth Essa Caoide as their place of inauguration is unknown, but it is unlikely that they would have practised inauguration until at least the mid-fourteenth century, when they ceased to render obedience to the Earl of Ulster, whom they considered their nominal lord.¹⁹⁰

Ó Cléirigh described Ráth Essa Caoide in some detail, and later H.T. Knox identified it with a large bivallate rath in the townland of Rausakeera North, near the village of Kilmaine, Co. Mayo.¹⁹¹ This identification was made on the basis of the approximation of the Irish, Ráth Essa Caoide, with the similarly sounding Rausakeera; and the large rath within this townland, which the 1840 OS designated 'Raheenagoogh', seems the obvious location. Ráth Essa Caoide commands a low pasture ridge about one mile north of the village of Kilmaine. It is presently reached by a narrow track which runs west off the main Kilmaine-Claremorris road. Despite its relatively low-lying situation, the prospect from the site is wide-ranging. Within a half-mile radius of the rath there are a considerable number of additional raths, cashels, and three castles. The site of Kilquire Castle lies a short distance to the north, with the tower houses at Ellistronparks and Ballymartin to the west and southwest, respectively. Ráth Essa Caoide is an impressive monument which consists of a raised circular area, c. 40m in diameter, enclosed by two substantial earthen banks with an intervening fosse. The internal face of the innermost bank was once faced with very large boulders, a dozen or so of which still remain in place. The entrance to the rath at east north-east is flanked by two very large boulders which formed part of the revetment. A collapsed souterrain lies in the interior (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 30-32). The considerable detail of the orderly assembly of 1595 which Ó Cléirigh provides, enables a reconstruction of the choreography and protocol of the occasion. It had fallen to Aodh

¹⁸⁸ *Cal. S.P. Ire., 1589*, 251.

¹⁸⁹ Rev. P. Walsh (ed.), *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill* (ITS 42, London, 1948), 114-19.

¹⁹⁰ K. Simms, *Gaelic lordships in Ulster in the later middle ages*, vol.1 (Ph.D. thesis, 1976, TCD 410), 18.

¹⁹¹ H.T. Knox, *The history of the County Mayo to the close of the sixteenth century* (reprint Dublin, 1982), 281.

Ruadh Ó Domhnaill to select the new Mac Uilliam Burc from no less than eight contending candidates. In preparation for the parley, and the ensuing inauguration ceremony, Seán Óg Ó Dochartaigh formed four lines of troops back to back, encircling what Ó Clérigh terms ‘the liss and the warrior-fort [an lesa agus na laochratha]’. Liss or *les* can variously mean the space around a dwelling house enclosed by a bank or rampart, or the bank or rampart itself.¹⁹² It is probable that Ó Clérigh is referring in the first instance to the interior of the site [*les*], and in the second, to its stout rampart [*rath*].¹⁹³ The first ring of the assembly consisted of eighteen hundred soldiers; the infantry of Tír Conaill constituted the second ring; the third were the three Mhic Suibhnes with their galloglass; and outside of them, forming the fourth ring, were the men of Connacht with their muster. This large gathering stood around the ‘royal rath [rioghratha]’, while the Ó Domhnaill, together with his chiefs and nobles, stood in ‘a close circle on the rampart of the rath [for dua na ratha]’.¹⁹⁴ The word *dua* or *doé* generally means rampart or circumvallation.¹⁹⁵ Then, he conferred in turn with Mac Goisdelbaig, Mac Siurtain, Emann an Machaire and Mac Domhnaill the Galloglass, Marcus mac an Abbadh, Mac Muiris, and Ó Maille, as to who should become the Mac Uilliam Burc. Following due consultation, Teapoit Mac Uateir Chiotaigh was chosen and proclaimed, presumably within the platform area of the rath, by Mac Teapoit, to whom this duty was customary. Ó Clérigh explains that it was always in consultation with these chiefs, and by election, that the Mac Uilliam was inaugurated over his territory on the rath of Eas Caoide [i Raith Eassa Caoide].¹⁹⁶ That there was an established protocol in the arrangement and staging of the assembly at Ráth Essa Caoide, is perhaps borne out by the not dissimilar choreography of the assembly at the Tynwald Court. The details of the proceedings at Tynwald are documented in the Manx Commissioner’s Report of 1805, an account which is apparently a true reflection of the proceedings as prescribed by Sir John Stanley, king and lord of Man, on his first visit to the Island in 1417. The king of Man sat in a canopied chair, facing east on the summit of the *ting*. His barons sat beside him and his beneficed

¹⁹² *DIL.*, 429.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 501; an earthen rampart surrounding a chief’s residence; sometimes by extension used of the enclosed dwelling also.

¹⁹⁴ Rev. P. Walsh, *op. cit.*, 116-7.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁹⁶ Rev. P. Walsh, *op. cit.*, 114-5.

men and deemsters before him. Around them, the clerk, knights, esquires and yeomen assembled, and the commons stood 'without the circle of the hill'.¹⁹⁷

The practice of inauguration altered under the influence of Ó Domhnaill and Ó Néill in the late sixteenth century, and more particularly during the Nine Years War (1594-1603). In some instances this was characterised by the displacement of ceremonies from traditional inauguration sites. Among the most pointed examples of impromptu and expedient inaugurations in this period is that of Cúchonnacht Óg Mag Uidhir who was inaugurated by Ó Domhnaill in the course of a banquet hosted by Ó Néill at Dungenainn, in 1600. Traditionally, the Mag Uidhir was inaugurated at Sciath Ghabhra in Fir Manach, and the last recorded ceremony took place there in 1589.¹⁹⁸ At Dungenainn, Aodh Ruadh simply raised a cup over Cúchonnacht's head and called him by the title of Mag Uidhir.¹⁹⁹ In 1595, Ó Domhnaill had secured an ally in Teapoit Mac Uateir Chiotaigh by nominating him at Ráth Essa Caoide, and correspondingly, Ó Néill was actively appointing new lords in the Irish midlands in 1599. On February 6 of that year, the Tudor intelligence officer, Kinkey, had noted that Ó Néill had gone into Ferceall and had encamped at Gortacur near Ó Maolmuaidh's stronghold of Rathlihen. There, he had made a new Mac Cochláin, Ó Maoileachlainn, Ó Conchobhair Uí Failge, and Mag Eochagáin.²⁰⁰ Gortacur lies directly south of Rathlihen and a little over a mile southwest of Mullach Chruaich which was the inauguration place of the Uí Mhaolmuaidh.²⁰¹ The venue for the speedy nomination of all these lords by Ó Néill may have been a single-banked rath which lies on the summit of a gently sloping ridge at the northwestern end of the townland of Gortacur, or alternatively, a larger bivallate rath which is positioned close by, just below the brow of a north-facing slope in the adjoining townland of Rathmurragh. Neither of these sites are otherwise known to have had any special significance. On this occasion customary observance was by-passed by Ó Néill in deference to greater needs. He secured the aforementioned lords as allies, and those who refused to co-operate were dealt harsh treatment. Sir Toirdealbhach Ó Díomasaigh's priest, who came to procure safety for Clann Mhaol Ughra, was informed that Ó Díomasaigh would be 'prosecuted with fire and sword' if he

¹⁹⁷ W. Harrison, *op. cit.*, 15-16.

¹⁹⁸ *AFM.*, vol. 6, 1877.

¹⁹⁹ Rev. P. Walsh, *op. cit.*, 243-7; K. Simms, *From kings to warlords* (Suffolk, 1987), 33.

²⁰⁰ *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1599, 475.

²⁰¹ NLI MS G 192, 306.

did not come to Ó Néill in person.²⁰² Receiving a firm objection from Ó Cearbhaill, he sent out 1,200 light shot, and cavalry into Éile, with an order to ‘burn and spoil all they could, to kill all they found bearing or able to bear arms, and to bring the prey of that country to his camp’.²⁰³

2. 18 Enclosures as Ceremonial Rings

A total of 17.3% of known and suspected inauguration places are characterised by enclosures, ranging from the elaborate hilltop type crowning Tulach Óg, Co. Tyrone (discussed in case study 1) to the pair of conjoined enclosures at Leic Mhicil, Co. Westmeath (see chapter III, p. 108, and vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 60-61), and the simple rock-cut enclosure on Sheantomuinn Hill, Co. Cavan. The historical profile of Tulach Óg suggests that the hilltop enclosure combined different functions over a long period of use (fig. 15). The site has not been excavated, but a number of uncontexted stray finds of the Iron Age period were picked up in the vicinity of the enclosure.²⁰⁴ The site had its ultimate use as an ornamental feature of Ballymully Glebe in the eighteenth/nineteenth century. Tulach Óg was adopted by the Uí Néill as a royal centre and presumably their place of inauguration as early as the eleventh century.²⁰⁵ It is not known whether their king-making ceremonies in this early period were conducted within the enclosure, but an annalistic reference to the cutting down of the *biledha* Tulach Óg, a grove of sacred trees, in 1111, suggests that the enclosure may have defined a sanctuary.²⁰⁶ Still earlier, it may well have acted as the royal ceremonial centre of the kings of Airgialla who were firmly under the control of the Ailech dynasty by the early tenth century.²⁰⁷ The testimony of Tudor observers and the cartographer Richard Bartlett, clearly indicates that by the later medieval period at least, Uí Néill inaugurations were not held within the enclosure, but as Fynes Moryson recorded, at a stone chair ‘planted in the open field’.²⁰⁸ By that time, the

²⁰² The inauguration practices of the chiefs of Clann Mhaol Ughra are not documented, but a small barrow designated ‘O’Dempsey’s Ring’ by the first Ordnance Survey, is noteworthy. It is situated in the townland of Ballykean adjacent to a medieval church site and roadway. Further west there is a moated site and the ruins of an O’Dempsey castle (see OS 26, Co. Offaly).

²⁰³ *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1599, 475.

²⁰⁴ D.A. Chart (ed.), *A preliminary survey of the ancient monuments of Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1940), 240.

²⁰⁵ É. Ó Doibhlin, ‘O Neill’s “Own Country” and its families’, *Seanchas Ard Mhacha* 6, no. 1, 1971, 4.

²⁰⁶ *AFM*, vol. 2, 991; *AI*, 268-9; *AU*, 553.

²⁰⁷ J. Hogan, ‘The Ua Briain kingship in Telach Óc’, in Rev. J. Ryan (ed.), *Essays and studies presented to Professor Eoin MacNeill* (Dublin, 1940), 422-3.

²⁰⁸ F. Moryson, *Itinerary*, vol. 3, 205.

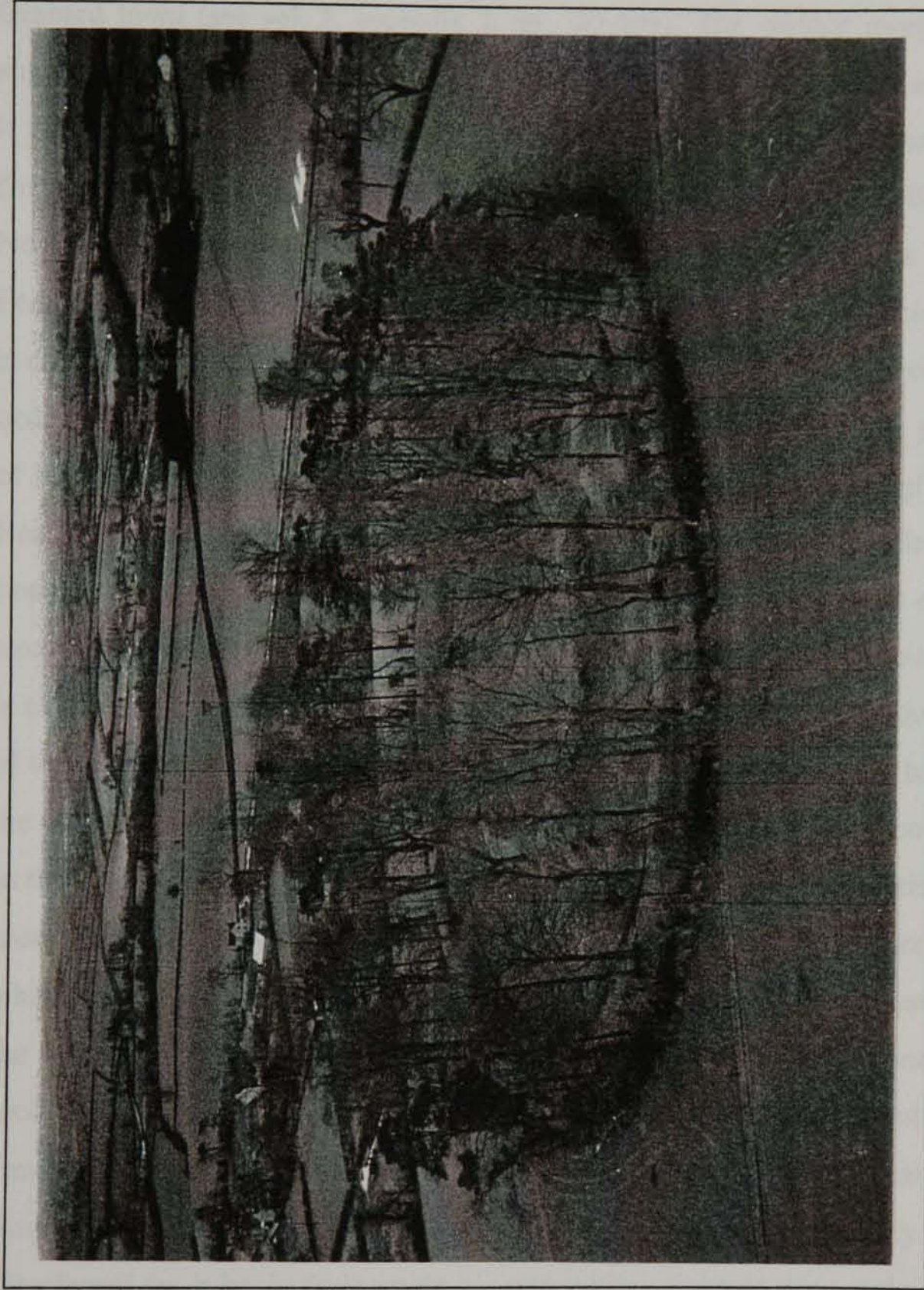


Fig. 15 An aerial view of the hilltop enclosure at Tulach Óg [courtesy of ASNI].

enclosure was also well and truly the residence of the Ó hÁgáin - *rechtaire* of Tulach Óg.²⁰⁹

Ráth Granarda, in the ancient kingdom of Teathba, is also an impressive hilltop monument, but from its morphology it appears to have been defensive rather than purely ceremonial in function (fig. 16). It is prominently appointed on a hill on the south side of Granard town (see vol. 2, appendix 2, pp. 107-109). The surface morphology of the site suggests that it may have started out as an impressive rock-cut, bivallate enclosure. Later it was adopted to serve as the defences for an Anglo-Norman earthwork castle, occupied first by the de Lacy's of Meath and afterwards by the de Verdons. By 1300 the Anglo-Norman settlement there, had been utterly destroyed and the site was regained by the Uí Fearghail of Anghaile. Their victory and re-possession of their ancient patrimony was eventually marred, however, by the emergence of a split in the chieftainship which occurred in the fifteenth century. In 1516 this factionalism led to the permanent division of Anghaile into two regions - northern Anghaile (north and east Longford), incorporating Ráth Granarda ruled by Ó Fearghail Bán, and southern Anghaile (south and west Longford), the lordship of Ó Fearghail Buidhe.²¹⁰ In local tradition of long standing, a small motte called the 'Moat of Farrell', situated about seven miles southwest of Granard, is held to have been the Uí Fhearghail place of inauguration prior to the internecine feuds of the fifteenth century.²¹¹ The very obvious motte and its attendant bailey is perched on the northern side of a ridge commanding a wide-ranging view of the countryside (fig. 17). In the 1970s, Manning, on examining the motte, noted traces of a possible revetment at its base which he conjectured could have been the remains of an earlier mound on top of which the motte was thrown up.²¹² The great enclosure at Ráth Granarda may have been the early historic residence of the Uí Fhearghail, while the suspected mound, perhaps later incorporated into a motte at Moatfarrell, may have been their inauguration site. With their descent into factionalism in the fifteenth-century, the separate chieftainships might have adopted distinct inauguration places, the southern Anghaile probably continuing to use Moatfarrell (as it lay in their newly formed territory), while the annals intimate that the Ó Fearghail Bán used the old royal settlement at Ráth Granarda. A notice in the annals for

²⁰⁹ AU, 493.

²¹⁰ K. Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1972), 153.

²¹¹ J.P. Farrell, *Historical notes and stories of the County Longford* (Dublin, 1886), 125.

²¹² C. Manning, *The royal inauguration sites of Ireland* (M.A. thesis, UCD, 1976).



Fig. 16 Ráth Granarda, at Granard, Co. Longford.



Fig. 17 Móta Uí Fhearghail, Moatfarrell, Co. Longford.

1474 reveals that Seán Ó Fearghail, died at Granard 'after the feast of his inauguration had been prepared, but before he had partaken thereof'.²¹³ As late as the seventeenth century the hilltop enclosure with its lofty motte was used as a place of assembly. In 1623 one Captain Arthur Forbes observed an assembly of priests and people totalling 2,000 at Granard, engaged in 'their solemn masses and public preaching, things heretofore never heard'.²¹⁴

For the most part, inauguration enclosures tend to be more simple affairs. The antiquity on the summit of Sheantomuinn - the attested inauguration place of the Uí Raghallaigh of East Bréifne - is represented by a D-shaped area (originally circular) 36m in diameter, defined by a denuded bank which is largely carved out of the underlying limestone bedrock, with no trace of an internal or external fosse (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 3-4). It is an extremely modest monument - a functional ring to host a gathering - but the view from there is dramatic, taking in Shantemon Lough and distant Slieve Glah. In its location, size and composition, it recalls the enclosure which is found in association with the so-called 'Brehon's Chair' on the summit of the old red sandstone ridge known as Kyle Hill on the Offaly-Laois border (see vol. 2, appendix 2, pp. 111-12). Quite early local tradition gathered in the eighteenth century suggested that this place had at one time been a judgement seat of the brehons to the Mac Giolla Phádraig of Osraighe.²¹⁵

In the discussion of Caisil (p. 80), attention was drawn to a text of possible late twelfth-century date describing the desired procedure for the inauguration of the kings of Munster. Apart from the church-based rite on the Rock, the king was also taken to a place called Lis na nUrlann and proclaimed there too. In citing this text, neither Byrne²¹⁶ or Ó Corráin²¹⁷ explain why the removal to Lis na nUrlann would have been necessary, or indeed where it is located. There are several ringforts and enclosures around Caisil, the most impressive of which is 'Rathnadrinna' south of the town, but there is no townland, locality, or site within the immediate area, bearing the name Lis na nUrlann. The nearest place incorporating the stem *urlann*, is Áth na nUrlainn or Urlingford on the Tipperary-Kilkenny border, just within the ancient kingdom of Osraige and nineteen miles northeast

²¹³ *AFM*, vol.4, 1091-93; *Ann.Conn*, 573.

²¹⁴ *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1623, 433.

²¹⁵ W.W. Seward, *Topographia Hibernica* (Dublin, 1795), n.p.

²¹⁶ F.J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings ...*, op. cit., 191.

²¹⁷ D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, op. cit., 34.

of Caisil. The root 'Lis' suggests that we are dealing with a ringfort or enclosure of some sort, while *urlann* translates as an open space in front of a fort. There is no record or trace of an enclosure around the modern Urlingford, but the townlands extending immediately southeast of the town hold some clues. The townland adjoining Urlingford on its south side has the promising name of Ardreagh (the king's height), next to which is Tincashel which contains a prominently appointed and somewhat unusual enclosure. It is situated on a hilltop at 469 feet OD and consists of a raised, circular platform, c. 35m in diameter, enclosed in turn by vestiges of what may have been an inner bank, a berm and an external bank. Both the rim of the platform and the bank are faced with stone. There are no wall-footings or traces of any structures in the interior. The closest parallel for Lis na nUrlann is the reputed inauguration place of the Mhic Amhalghaidh chiefs of Calraighe - an interesting earthwork crowning the summit of the outcrop knoll known as Tulach Mac Amhalghaidh, near Moat, Co. Westmeath.²¹⁸ Like the proposed Lis na nUrlann it consists of a raised platform surrounded by a degraded earthen bank which drops away to a broad berm. There is no outer bank, but the external face of the inner bank carries traces of a stone revetment. During his field research for *History and antiquities of the diocese of Ossory*, Rev. Carrigan gleaned from local tradition that the site here identified with Lis na nUrlann was believed to be the residence of a 'King paramount'.²¹⁹ Other than that, nothing else is known or recorded about the site. To base a positive identification of Lis na nUrlann on such flimsy evidence would be unwise, but there are historical circumstances in which a king of Munster might have considered it expedient to have had himself proclaimed in Osraige. In 1118 Toirrdelbach Ó Conchobair had presided over the partitioning of Munster, creating the Ua Briain kingdom of Tuadmuma (Thomond) with its caput at Limerick and the Mac Carthaig kingdom of Desmuma (Desmond) focused on Cork. The two houses were reunited briefly in 1127 when Cormac Mac Carthaig returned from exile with the support of Ó Conchobair and Ó Briain, and was declared king of all Munster, including the small kingdom of Osraige. He reigned until his assassination in 1138.²²⁰ The inauguration procedure cited in the Eóganacht genealogical tract may be referring back to the period when the en-kinging of Cormac, a representative of the old

²¹⁸ J.P. Dalton, 'Ancient boundaries of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise dioceses', *Ardagh and Clonmacnoise Antiquarian Society Journal*, 1, no. 1, 1926, 52.

²¹⁹ Rev. W. Carrigan, *The history and antiquities of the diocese of Ossory*, vol. 2 (1905; reprint Kilkenny, 1981), 365.

²²⁰ F.J. Byrne, 'The trembling sod', in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *op. cit.*, 30.

Eóganacht Caisil family of Mac Carthaig, brought about a temporary reunion of the province. Osraige was an important buffer kingdom between the provinces of Leinster and Munster, but in the late eighth and the first half of the ninth century it was generally regarded as a Munster kingdom, even though its kings usually acted independently of Caisil. This situation changed temporarily in 859 when Osraige came under the sovereignty of the Uí Néill kings of the province of Mide. Throughout the tenth century the kings of Osraige contended for the kingship of Leinster and finally succeeded with Donnchad Mac Gilla Pátraic who became king of that province in 1036. Throughout the early historic period, Osraige was neither fish nor fowl, its allegiances constantly changing. In order to try to harness this recalcitrant kingdom to the province of Munster and to reinforce their authority over it, the newly elected kings of Caisil in the late eighth and the first half of the ninth century, or perhaps just later with Cormac Mac Carthaig, may have considered it necessary to make the journey into Osraige and have themselves proclaimed at Lis na nUrlann.

2. 19 Natural Rock Platforms

Hallowed mounds, raths and enclosures were not always essential for the performance of inauguration ceremonies, a fact which is borne out by the use of humble rock terraces and rocky eminences on hillsides as the venues for the inauguration of the king of the Déisi, the Ó Dochartaigh and possibly the Ó Cearbhaill Éile. The entirely natural aspect of these ceremonial platforms does not preclude the possibility that some ritual furniture may have been employed in the course of the ceremony.

According to the *Life of St Declan of Ardmore*, which has been dated to the eighth or ninth century, it was at Indeoin that the kings of the Déisi were inaugurated.²²¹ The saint and king Ferghal, with his army and followers, assembled there and 'made still more strong on the people the bond of Christian obligation'. Together, they decreed Indeoin as the place where the king of the Déisi 'should be inaugurated for ever thenceforward, because it was there Patrick and Declan blessed the king, Ferghal'. While the christianising of Indeoin was a new departure, the author of the *Life* suggests that it was already an inauguration place of considerable antiquity - 'moreover tradition states that it was there the kings were crowned and ruled over the Déisi in pagan times'.²²² In *Lebor*

²²¹ Rev. P. Power, *Life of St. Declan of Ardmore* (London, 1914), xxv.

²²² *Ibid.*, 44-5.

na Cert, compiled in the mid-eleventh century, Indeoin is listed among the ‘strongholds’ of the kings of Caisil which suggests that there may have been a fortification of some description there at that time.²²³ There are the remains of a mortared stone building at the site, designated as a ‘castle’ on the current Ordnance Survey six-inch map, but no trace of an early fortification. The ‘Indeoin’ or ‘anvil’ is a lop-sided and precipitous knoll of rock outcrop which overhangs the east side of Mullaghoney hill (Mullach Inneona), north of Clonmel and a short distance west of the village of Newchapel in Co. Tipperary (see vol.2, appendix 1, pp. 51-2). The *Dindshenchas* poem on the origins of Loch Lein, tells how the blacksmith Len Linfiachlach son of Bolgach would fling his anvil from him to the anvil of the Déisi after he had ceased work each night:

Three showers would it fling forth-
the anvil with its sparkles:
a shower of water, unfailing, vigorous,
a shower of flaming fire:

The third shower of pure bright quality
was of lovely pure purple jewellery,
so that these, lovely in purity,
were the jewels of Loch lein’s clear waters.

Loch Lein of the hero endures
with multitude of lean-sided waves:
in the land of the Dese by Len’s will
endures his anvil after him.²²⁴

The importance of the site as a battle ground and assembly place is recorded in two instances in the annals. In 852 Maél Sechnaill, high-king of Ireland, enforced hostages and submissions from the Déisi at Indeoin²²⁵ and in 876 a battle was fought there between Cearbhall son of Dunghal and the Déisi against the men of Munster.²²⁶ The original territory of the Déisi extended in a broad belt from the sea at Waterford westwards through south Tipperary into Limerick. In the ninth century the sept split into two groups, Déisi Muman who occupied Waterford and south Tipperary and the western Déisi who

²²³ M. Dillon (ed.), *Lebor na Cert* (ITS 46, Dublin, 1962), 45 [622], 47 [662].

²²⁴ E. Gwynn (ed.), *The metrical dindshenchas*, part 3 (RIA Dublin 1913; reprint 1991), 263 [25-40].

²²⁵ *AFM.*, vol.1, 487.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 523.

assumed control of east Limerick.²²⁷ On the basis of the evidence supplied by the *Life*, Indeoin served as the inauguration place of the original group and probably thereafter for the newly formed Déisi Muman. Power, in his notes to the *Life of St Declan*, points out that while Mullaghoney hill now lies outside the Decies, a number of additional places cited in the text as being within that territory now also lie beyond it, suggesting that the northern and western borders of Déisi Muman contracted. The border location of the site between Leinster and Munster is suggested in a few fleeting references to it in the sagas, and in a poem from the Book of Leinster. In the *Colloquy*, Finn son of Faebarderg, chief of the Uí Chennselaig, queries Caeilte on the *giusach Finn*. Caeilte responds saying:

it was a hunting preserve that Finn had; and when from Indeoin of Magh Feimhin to Benn Eadair the Fianna could not in all Leinster's fierce province procure their sufficiency of game, they would get it in the *giusach*.²²⁸

In the Book of Leinster poem 'Roddet a hinis find Fail in hErind' the inference is again made that Indeoin marked the most southerly point of the province of Leinster:

There were yielded in Leinster to my pleasure
from Etar to Indeoin,
plenty of good enlivening food,
and repose, with music and ale-feasting²²⁹

It can be concluded then that Indeoin, which lay in the borderlands between Laigin and Mumhan, was an assembly ground, a battle site on at least one occasion, and the king-making place of the Déisi in the early historic period. If the author of the *Life of Declan* is to be believed, it was their inauguration site in the pre-Christian period too. The few documented episodes which connect the Déisi with Indeoin concern the eighth and ninth century, while *Lebor na Cert* makes claims for a 'stronghold' there in the mid-eleventh century which came under the jurisdiction of the kings of Caisil. There are no later references to assembly or inauguration activity at the site.

The second example of the use of a natural terrace or outcrop as an inauguration venue is the hillslope of Ard na dTaoiseach, the chief-making place of the Uí Dhochartaigh, which

²²⁷ D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), 8.

²²⁸ S.H. O'Grady (ed.), *Silva Gadelica* vol.2 (London 1892; reprint New York, 1970), 167.

²²⁹ Rev. P. Walsh, 'A poem on Ireland', *Ériu* 8, 1916, 72 [41-44], 'Roddet i Laignib dom deóin/ótá Etar co hIndeoin/fiala bid beoda bladaig/ciúni ceolda cormfledaig'.

lies a short distance northeast of Balleeghan Abbey and about a mile from Manor-Cunningham in the district known as the Lagan, Co. Donegal. In 1601 Seán Óg Ó Dochartaigh died, and Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill assembled the nobles of Inis Eóghain and conferred with them as to whom should be nominated the new Ó Dochartaigh. After due consideration he resolved to give the title to Seán's brother Felim Óg and the assembly adjourned to Ard na dTaoiseach in the townland of Aighedh Caoin, where Felim was inaugurated.²³⁰ Baile Aighedh Chaoín is the modern townland of Balleeghan which hugs the eastern shoreline of Lough Swilly.²³¹ Ard na dTaoiseach can be identified with the small townland of Ardnaditian (83 acres in all) which adjoins Balleeghan on its north side, and it is a break-away portion of the latter. Just off the brow of the north-west facing slope of the hill there is a natural, rounded terrace of rock outcrop which at first glance bears an uncanny likeness to a mound or cairn. A breath-taking view over Lough Swilly can be had from its summit. Further south along the slope, stands a large, upright, conglomerate boulder which is locally named the 'White-Cross Stone', a name which derives from a fortuitous cross-like seam of white quartz on its east face (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 9-10). That Ard na dTaoiseach may have been a long-standing Ó Dochartaigh place of inauguration is suggested by the fact that it lies in the territory of Cenél Enda and not Inis Eóghain. The former was a small territory incorporating approximately thirty quarters of land, lying south of Inis Eóghain between the arms of Lough Swilly and Lough Foyle, or in other words, between Lifford and Letterkenny.²³² As early as 1199 the Ó Dochartaigh was attributed the lordship of both Cenél Enda and its adjoining territory of Ard Miodhair.²³³ It was not until the fourteenth century that Inis Eóghain, a former Uí Néill enclave, became the main stronghold of the Uí Dhochartaigh sept.²³⁴

The third instance of the possible use of a natural terrace of rock outcrop as a venue for inauguration ceremonies takes us south into the lordship of Uí Chearbhaill Éile. Despite

²³⁰ Rev. P. Walsh, *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh*, op. cit., 286-9, 'Do garar íeromh a ghairm flatha don Fhelim fiadh na maithibh i nóighe imna tucattibh cédna i nArd na tTaoiseach I mBaile Aighedh Chaoín agus do bretha Úa Dochartaigh danmuim fair'.

²³¹ F.J. Bigger, 'Two Franciscan friaries in Tir-conaill', *UJA* 15, 1909, 175.

²³² J. O'Donovan, *The topographical poems of John O'Dubhagain and Giolla na naomh O'Huidhrin* (Dublin, 1862), xxxi, note 206.

²³³ *AFM.*, vol. 3, 119, 'Donnell O'Doherty, lord of Kinel Enda and Ard-Mire, died'.

²³⁴ D.B. Quinn 'Aristocratic autonomy, 1460-94', in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vol.2 (Oxford, 1987), 621.

the quite adequately documented history of the sept, there is no known record of their place of inauguration. In 1923 Rev. Patrick Woulfe wrote (without providing any supporting evidence) that the Ó Dubhlaoidh of western Sliabh Bladhma ‘had the privilege of inaugurating O’Carroll as king of Ely’.²³⁵ There is no recorded monument in Sliabh Bladhma with inauguration associations, but perhaps of some interest is Giolla-na-naomh Ó hUidhrín’s reference to a place with the promising name of Airdleac Oilealla, mentioned in his topographical poem ‘Tuilleadh feasa ar Éirinn óigh’ composed in the late-fourteenth or early fifteenth century.²³⁶ This place was situated somewhere in Ó Flannagáin’s tuath of Cenél Fhearga, in the greater Kinnitty area, but it has not been identified on the landscape. The place-name suggests a flagstone of some significance attributed to Oilioll Olum, an early Munster king from whom the Uí Chearbhaill claimed their descent. The combination of flagstone and the name of the eponymous ancestor of the sept is at least suggestive of kingship associations. Further east in the borderlands of Tipperary and Offaly there is a hill called Knockshigowna which although just 699 feet OD, is particularly noticeable on the skyline and was sufficient a landmark to merit the attention of Tudor cartographers like John Goghe²³⁷ and Baptista Boazio.²³⁸ It now lies in Co. Tipperary in what would once have been considered Ó Cinnéidigh country, in Lower Ormond, but on his map of 1599, Boazio clearly indicates that the hill was then included in Ó Cearbhaill’s Éile. There is also plentiful evidence to indicate that the Uí Chearbhaill held lands in this area in the sixteenth century, and indeed one of the main strongholds of Maolruanaidh chief of Éile (1491-1532) was Modreeny Castle southwest of Knockshigowna.²³⁹ The nineteenth-century travel-writer Crofton Croker provides an inviting description of Knockshigowna as ‘one of the most singularly shaped hills in the world ... with a peak at the top like a conical nightcap thrown carelessly over your head as you awake in the morning’.²⁴⁰ Its name has been variously read as Cnoc Sídhé Úna derived from Úna ‘the banshé of the O’Carrolls’,²⁴¹ or alternatively as Cnoc Sídhé Eabhna, which is a more authoritative version provided by Mac Firbis in his pedigree of

²³⁵ Rev. P. Woulfe, *Sloinne Gaedheal is Gall* (Dublin, 1923; reprint 1993) 512.

²³⁶ J. Carney, *Topographical poems by Seán Mór Ó Dubhagáin and Giolla na naomh Ó hUidhrín* (Dublin, 1943), 61 [1656].

²³⁷ PRO London, MPF 68, map of Ireland by John Goghe, 1567.

²³⁸ Baptista Boazio’s printed map of Ireland, 1599.

²³⁹ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*, 1538, xiii, part 1, 542.

²⁴⁰ T. Crofton Croker, *Fairy legends* op. cit., 3-8.

²⁴¹ J. O’Donovan (ed.), ‘Elegy on the death of the Rev. Edmond Kavanagh’, *JRSAI* 1, 1856-7, 123.

the tribe of Erna of Muscraighe Thire.²⁴² The hill is celebrated in folk tradition as a 'fairy abode',²⁴³ and in folk custom as a Lughnasa festive height.²⁴⁴ From the summit, which can be approached with relative ease, there are spectacular views east to Sliabh Bladhma and south and southwest to Bearnan Éile and the Silvermines. All of these attributes combined suggest that the hill was held in special regard and that it was probably an assembly place of some note, a tradition perhaps embraced in the survival of Lughnasa celebrations there into the 1960s. Apart from a ruined nineteenth-century folly, there is no early antiquity on the hill. The only obvious feature on its grassy slopes is a projecting terrace of rock outcrop which faces the view east across Éile.

2. 20 The Territorial location of Inauguration Sites

There has been little commentary on the territorial location of inauguration sites. The boundary theory proposed by Ó Riain may be tenable in a few cases, but his sweeping statement that 'all important types of assembly, including synods, patterns, fairs, and inaugural ceremonies, were regularly convened to boundary areas',²⁴⁵ places undue stress on the significance of boundaries relative to inauguration places, and it does not take into account that kingdoms and lordships, of their very nature, tended to expand and contract. Citing the examples of Indeoin, Cluain Tuascirt na Sinna and Cill Mhic Nénáin, Ó Riain pointed out that the kings of the Déssi were proclaimed at Indeoin which was the point of contact between their territory and that of the Laigin; the Mac Suibhne was inaugurated at Cill Mhic Nénáin which was on the border with Fanad; and the kings of Uí Maine were made at Cluain Tuascirt na Sinna which was 'one of the four delimiting points of the territory'.²⁴⁶ By way of contrast, it can be demonstrated that Mullach Leic is actually located in the interior of Mac Mathghamhna's Oirghialla, as is Mag Uidhir's inauguration place of Sciath Ghabhra. Tulach Óg, although close to the west side of Lough Neagh, could not be considered a boundary site of Tír Eógain, and neither could Magh Adhair in the context of the territorial limits of medieval Tuadmumha. A point overlooked by Ó Riain in relation to the location of Cill Mhic Nénáin is the more important fact that the Mic Shuibhne were vassals of the Uí Dhomhnaill, and that their chiefs were nominated by

²⁴² M. MacNeill, *op. cit.*, 568.

²⁴³ T. Crofton Croker, *op. cit.*, 3-8.

²⁴⁴ M. MacNeill, *op. cit.*, 216-7.

²⁴⁵ P. Ó Riain, 'Boundary association in early Irish society', *Studia Celtica* vol.7, 1972, 25; P. Ó Riain, 'Battle-site and territorial extent in early Ireland', *ZCP* 33, 1974, 67.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

the Ó Domhnaill at Cill Mhic Nénáin and inaugurated there from 1399 onwards by the *coarb* Ó Firghil, on whose churchlands the site was situated.²⁴⁷

A more revealing matrix in which to examine the location of inauguration places is the Gaelic land-holding system itself. The evidence presented here indicates that a number of inauguration places in use in the medieval period were situated within land generally occupied by the inaugurator, adjacent to the *lucht tighe* or mensal lands of the lordship. The corollary follows that wherever it is possible to identify mensal lands, the inauguration place of the lordship ought to be found close by. Conversely, in cases where the geographical location of an attested inauguration site is secured beyond doubt, the possibility of identifying the mensal lands of the lordship concerned, becomes greater. Furthermore, in some of the cases explored below, it will be seen that the inaugurator occupied the lands in which the inauguration site was located. This also opens an avenue to finding inauguration places, because in cases where the inaugurator is documented and where it is possible to identify his freehold, the place of inauguration should lie within those lands. Of interest too is the fact that some of the names of the ballybetaghs of land in which inauguration places lie are borrowed from the inaugurator, as in Bally O'Hagan, or more commonly from the place-names of the sites themselves, such as 'Bally shantomyne' (Sheantomuinn);²⁴⁸ Ballilecke (Mullach Leic); and possibly Carrowneshee (Sciath Ghabhra at Cornashee) which are discussed below. In Cavan, the smallest unit of land was the poll which found its counterparts in the baile bo (cowland) in Armagh, Derry, Down and Tyrone, and the tate in Fermanagh and Monaghan. All of these represented a similar denomination of land, sixteen of each constituting a ballybetagh.²⁴⁹

In the examples under discussion, it is clear that in some cases the inauguration places and the mensal lands lie in separate civil parishes. For instance, it has been demonstrated that *lucht tighe* Uí Néill was coterminous with the parish of Donaghmore, an area lying between Tulach Óg to the north and the Torrent River to the south, while Tulach Óg itself lay in the parish of Disertcreaght which was coextensive with the ballybetagh of the traditional inaugurator Ó hÁgáin.²⁵⁰ Likewise, as will be shown in what follows, Mullach

²⁴⁷ Rev. P. Walsh (ed.), *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne* (Dublin, 1920), 51.

²⁴⁸ Anon, 'Ms. Rawlinson A. 237., the Bodleian Library, Oxford', *Anal. Hib.*, 3, 1931, 204.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 151 and footnote 2.

²⁵⁰ É. Ó Doibhlin, *Domhnach Mór: an outline of parish history* (Omagh, 1969), 46-7.

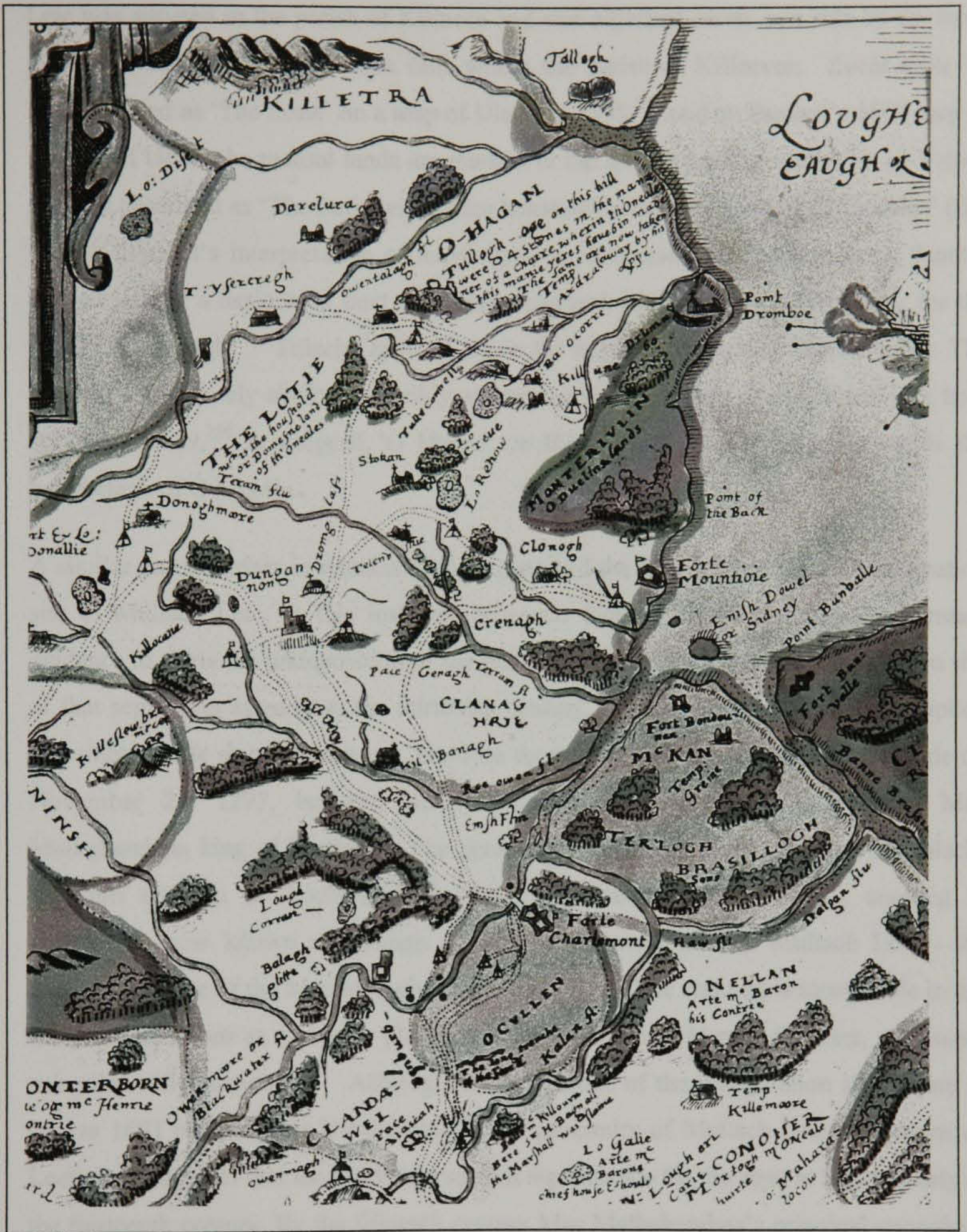


Fig. 18 Tulach Óg and Lucht Tighe Uí Néill shown on Bartlett's map of Southeast Ulster

[PRO, London MPF 36].

Leic was situated in the parish of Kilmore and was adjoined on its east side by the *lucht tige* Mic Mhathghamhna, which falls within the parish of Killeeven. *Lucht tige* Uí Néill is noted as 'The Lotie' on a map of Ulster of 1598,²⁵¹ and on Bartlett's 1603 map of south-east Ulster the mensal lands are marked in the area extending southwest of Tulach Óg, and described as 'The Lotie wich is the houshold or demesneland of th' Oneales' (fig. 18).²⁵² Bartlett's interpretation of *lucht tige* as 'demesneland' is incorrect. It denotes mensal land - a designated tract of territory charged with the duty of providing for the chief's household.²⁵³ Tulach Óg itself lay in the adjoining parish of Disertcreaght. The territory immediately about it, possibly amounting to 1,000 acres as mentioned in a later survey of 1619,²⁵⁴ is assigned 'O Hagan' on Bartlett's 1603 map, in other words the ballybetagh of Ó hÁgáin..

A similar pattern arises in relation to the location of the Mac Mathghamhna inauguration site of Mullach Leic. In this instance, however, there is also additional documentary evidence to show the juxtaposition of the principal chiefry castles to the inauguration site of that sept, from as early as the thirteenth century. The *Register of Clogher*, compiled piecemeal in the sixteenth century, provides the text of an important agreement made on November 27, 1297, between Bishop Matthew MacCathassaigh and Brian Mac Mathghamhna, king of Oirghialla. The agreement was made 'at the castle of Lochnlach' [castrum nostram de Lochnlach],²⁵⁵ which has been identified with a crannóg in Loughleck, now known as Ballagh Lough, on the west side of Mullach Leic - the inauguration site of the Mac Mathghamhna (fig. 19).²⁵⁶ The crannóg is identifiable in dry summer conditions as a circular platform or cairn of stones, 14m in diameter, with some oak piles still remaining.²⁵⁷ Although the first notice of the inauguration site occurs as late as 1603 on Bartlett's Ulster maps,²⁵⁸ the proximity of Mullach Leic to castrum de Lochnlach suggests that the hill held a special significance for the sept, at least as early as the thirteenth century. By the fifteenth century Mac Mathghamhna's principal stronghold

²⁵¹ P.R.O., London, MPF 312, 2.

²⁵² P.R.O., London., MPF 36.

²⁵³ K. Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1972), 36-7.

²⁵⁴ G. Hill, *An historical account of the Plantation in Ulster at the commencement of the seventeenth century, 1608-1620* (Belfast 1877; reprint Shannon, 1970), 549.

²⁵⁵ K.W. Nicholls, 'The Register of Clogher', *Clogher Record* 7, no. 3, 1971-2, 422-23.

²⁵⁶ Rev. J. Smyth, 'Crannogs in North Monaghan', *Clogher Record* 1, no. 2, 1954, 3-4.

²⁵⁷ A.L. Brindley, *Archaeological inventory of County Monaghan* (Dublin, 1986), 13 [78].

²⁵⁸ PRO, London, MPF 35/36.

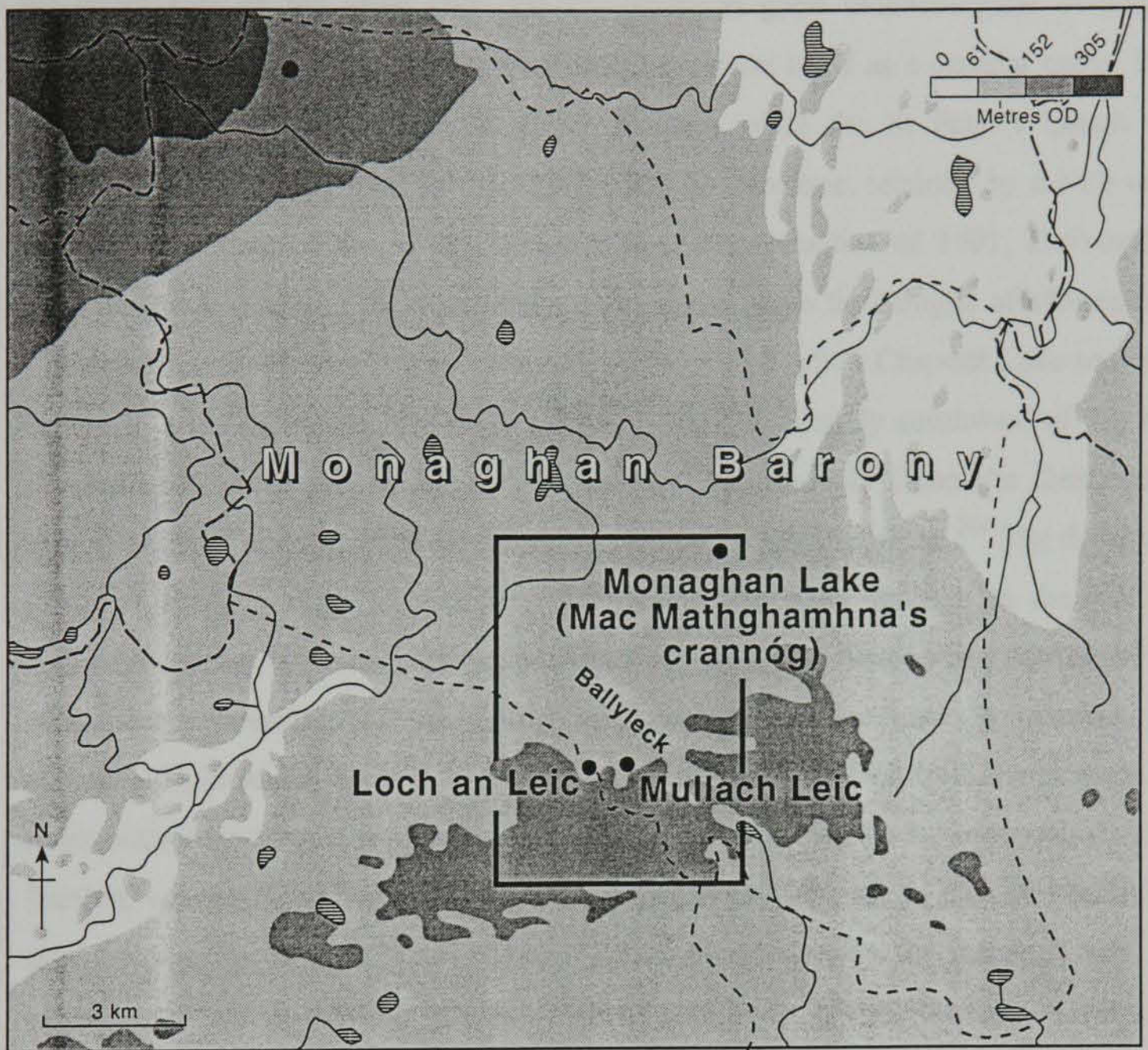


Fig. 19 The relationship of Mullach Leic to the crannóige at Loch an Leic and Monaghan or Covent Lake.

was the crannóg of Rath Tully at Monaghan town. Livingstone has suggested that in the intervening period, Mac Mathghamhna's headquarters were at Tullybryan north of Leck Hill and east of the modern town of Monaghan.²⁵⁹ Rath Tully was situated either in St Peter's Lough on the north side of the present Monaghan town, or on Convent Lake on the south side of the town (fig. 19).²⁶⁰ There is good archaeological evidence for crannógs in both lakes; that in Convent Lake manifests itself as a circular cairn, 16m by 14m in diameter, with some oak piles showing, while the St Peter's Lough site is represented by a larger oval cairn, 22m by 18m in diameter, retained by a kerb of large stones.²⁶¹ A map of the town and the surrounding counties of 1591, attributed to J. Browne and J. Baptiste, illustrates 'Macmahouns house in the Lough of Mounachin'.²⁶² The debate as to whether it was located in St Peter's Lough or Convent Lake seems to be solved by the illustration of a prominent crannóg immediately southwest of the Fort of Monaghan on both Bartlett's south-east Ulster map and his *Generalle Description of Ulster*, 1603,²⁶³ and this identification is supported by local tradition.²⁶⁴ The documentary evidence strongly suggests that from the thirteenth century through to the end of the sixteenth century, the inauguration site of the sept was fixed, its position unaffected by the successive movements of the chiefly stronghold from one place to another. Those strongholds, however, were always within easy reach of Mullach Leic. Early maps which mark both routeways and inauguration sites are rare, but the Tudor cartographer Richard Bartlett, who paid particular attention to the lordships of the north, provides some insight into the position of Mullach Leic and Tulach Óg relative to the infra-structure of the lordships in which they lay. On his map of south-east Ulster, Bartlett shows a major roadway running east-west immediately north of Mullach Leic and south of the Fort of Monaghan (see fig. 26).²⁶⁵ He also indicates a network of roadways in the hinterland of Tulach Óg, one of which runs between the inauguration site and Ó Néill's castle at Dungannon (see fig. 18).

²⁵⁹ P. Livingstone, *The Monaghan story: a documented history of the County Monaghan from the earliest times to 1976* (Enniskillen, 1980), 47.

²⁶⁰ G.A. Hayes-McCoy, *Ulster and other Irish maps, c. 1600* (Dublin, 1964), 16-17.

²⁶¹ A. L. Brindley, *op. cit.*, 14 [99], 16 [134].

²⁶² PRO, London, MPF 81.

²⁶³ PRO, London, MPF 35.

²⁶⁴ Rev. J. Smyth, *op. cit.*, 4; P. Livingstone, *op. cit.*, 47.

²⁶⁵ PRO, London, MPF 36.

Duffy, in his study of landownership in Monaghan, has reconstructed the pattern of Gaelic land-holding in the county after the abolition of the ‘MacMahonship’ in 1591. Following the termination of the chieftainship, the land-holding structure was re-organised in accordance with English law and so the pattern indicated in the 1591 survey of County Monaghan cannot be taken to be an exact reflection of the situation prior to 1591. The townland or tate of Leck, in which Mullach Leic was situated, lay within the ballybetagh of Ballilecke which formed part of the freehold lands of Ross Bán Mac Mathghamhna who was lord of the territory of Monaghan in 1591 (fig. 20).²⁶⁶ Ballilecke, according to a statement of grants, dated November 1591, comprised up to fourteen tates,²⁶⁷ but a further grant to Sir Edward Blany, seneschal of Monaghan County, dated July 1611, lists sixteen tates.²⁶⁸ The grant of 1591 names Brian MacCaba Mac Domhnaill as Mac Mathghamhna’s freeholder of the tate of Leck.²⁶⁹ Ballilecke which lay in the parish of Kilmore was just one of twenty-eight ballybetaghs which Mac Mathghamhna held in demesne. Duffy has identified the *lucht tige* or mensal lands of the Mac Mathghamhna as the ballybetaghs of Ballylatlurkan, Ballymechan and Ballenra (parish of Killeevan) which adjoin Ballilecke on its east side and which were occupied by a sept not named in the survey of 1591 who had a similar socio-economic status to the freeholders.²⁷⁰ In 1591 then, the inauguration site was situated within lands held in freehold by Brian MacCaba Mac Domhnaill, close to, but not within the *lucht tige* as defined at that time.

Sciath Ghabhra, the Mag Uidhir place of inauguration, was situated within the ballybetagh of ‘Carrowneshee’, which is listed in a survey of the province of Ulster conducted in 1608.²⁷¹ The place-name ‘Carrowneshee’ [*ceathramhadh na sídh*], which translates as the ‘quarter of land of the *sídh*’, is now represented by Cornashee, a townland within the old ballybetagh which contains the inauguration mound of Sciath Ghabhra. The townland of Sheebeg which lies south of Cornashee also retains the auspicious *sídh* element in its place-name. According to the details of a land grant to Michael Balfour, Lord Burghley, in 1610, the ballybetagh of Carrowneshee comprised almost sixteen tates, including

²⁶⁶ P.J. Duffy, ‘The territorial organisation of gaelic landownership and its transformation in County Monaghan, 1591-1640’, *Irish Geography* 14, 1981, 9 [fig. 2].

²⁶⁷ *Fiants*, vol. 3, 1586-1603, 174 [5663].

²⁶⁸ *Cal. pat. rolls Ire., Jas. I*, 169.

²⁶⁹ P.J. Duffy, *op. cit.*, 6, 11 [fig. 3].

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷¹ Ms. Rawlinson A. 237, *op. cit.*, 201.

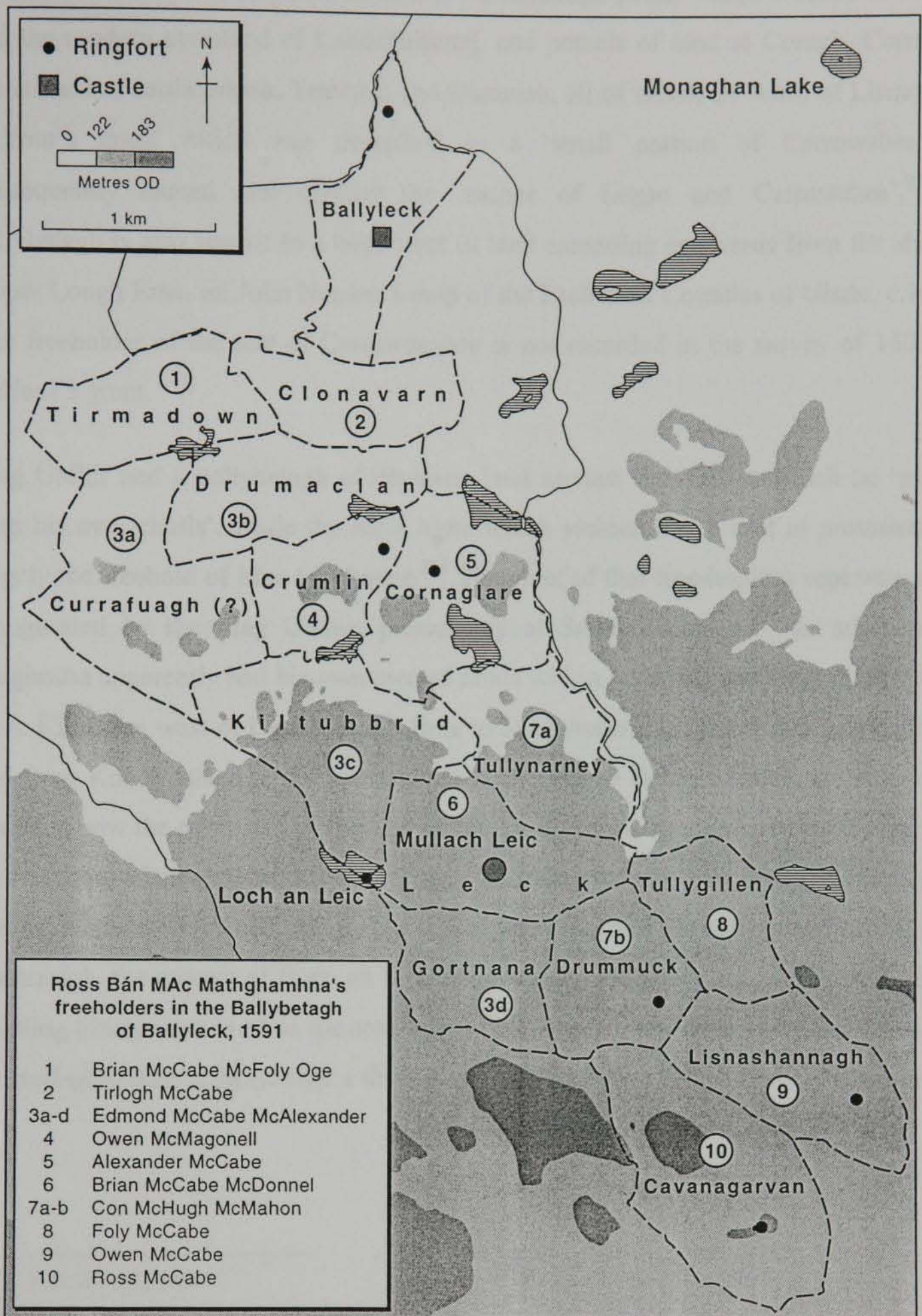


Fig. 20 Map of the Ballybetagh of Ballyleck (compiled from the *Fiants*, 1591).

Mullach Leic is shown in the freehold of Brian McCabe McDonnell (6).

Ballinicaffer, Carrowneshee [Cornashee], Castleskeagh [Mag Uidhir's castle at Lisnakea and the modern townland of Castlebalfour], and parcels of land at Coragh, Corradovar, the islands of Inishcorkish, Trannish and Dirrinish, all of which lie south of Lisnaskea.²⁷² Balfour's grant which was described as a 'small portion of Carrowshee', was subsequently named and created the 'manor of Legan and Carrowshee'.²⁷³ The ballybetagh is also shown as a large tract of land extending eastwards from the shores of Upper Lough Erne, on John Norden's map of the Escheated Counties of Ulster, c.1610.²⁷⁴ The freeholder of the tate of Carrowneshee is not recorded in the survey of 1608 or in Balfour's grant.

Mag Uidhir had a ballybetagh of demesne land around Enniskillen which he 'manured with his own churls', while the *lucht tighe* which yielded him a rent in provisions, was largely the freehold of Mac Maghnusa.²⁷⁵ The chief of that free-holding sept was actually inaugurated by the Mag Uidhir, presumably at Sciath Ghabhra.²⁷⁶ In addition, Mac Maghnusa apparently had his own mensal lands within his small territory which stretched from Kinawley west of Upper Lough Erne to Maguiresbridge on the east side of the lake and from Knock Island in the north of the lake south to Dernish Island. BallymacManus which is now the peninsula of Bellisle on the far northeastern shore of Upper Lough Erne was the seat of that sept and lay at the approximate centre of their lakeland country. The mensal lands to which Mac Maghnusa laid claim comprised the ballybetagh of Baile Mhic Shearraigh, the quarter of Baile an Mhóintigh and the tates of Cam and Doire Bhraghun, totalling ninety tates in all in the area west of the lake.²⁷⁷ Mulligan identified these places as Mullaghmakervy, Moyntagh a district west of Inishmore which embraces a number of

²⁷² G. Hill, *op. cit.*, 300.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ Ms. Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, map between pp. 297 and 298.

²⁷⁵ K. Nicholls, *op. cit.*, 36-7

²⁷⁶ *AU*, vol. 3, 332[1488], 434 [1498].

²⁷⁷ P.S. Dinneen (ed.), *Me Guidir Fhearmanach* (Baile Ath Cliath, 1917), 58, 94 [section 92]. This story purports to deal with the emergence of the Meig Uidhir as lords of Fir Manach at the beginning of the fourteenth century; However, C. Mac Murchaidh, in 'Some notes on Mag Uidhir Fhear Manach', *Clogher Record* 13, no. 3, 1990, 92-99, points out that the two kings who are the central characters of the tale, never ruled Fir Manach as kings. Although the author of the tale makes claims for it being of great antiquity, Mac Murchaidh suggests that the historical inaccuracies and the style of the language used, point to its composition in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries. The description of the Mac Magnuis mensal lands must therefore be viewed in this late context.

townlands, and the townlands of Cam and Derryvrane which lie along the south bank of the Swanlinbar River.²⁷⁸

In the case of Sheantomuinn (the inauguration place of the Uí Raghallaigh) two pardons, dated 1586 and 1601, reveal that the poll of Sheantomuinn was held by members of the Mac Bradaigh family.²⁷⁹ The ballybetagh of Sheantomuinn or 'Bally shantomyne' as it is referred to in the Ulster survey of 1608, comprised fifteen polls.²⁸⁰ The Mhic Bradaigh (a family of freeholders and clerics) were chiefs of the territories of Cuil Brighde and Teallach Cearbhaill. Together, these territories were coterminous with the later barony of Upper Loughtee in which the Uí Raghallaigh inauguration site lay.²⁸¹ There is no known record of the Mhic Bradaigh officiating at the inauguration ceremonies of the Uí Raghallaigh chiefs of East Bréifne, but their clerical connections and the fact that members of the family successively held the lands at Sheantomuinn in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, may suggest that they acted as inaugurators to their overlords.

2. 21 Conclusions

In medieval Gaelic Ireland, the institution of the outdoor assembly or hilltop gathering, celebrated in bardic poetry and later admonished and banned by Tudor administrators, enjoyed a long established tradition. Specially appointed, plain, grassy hills and rocky eminences, generally as low as 100 feet OD and no higher than 800 feet OD, served as customary venues for inauguration ceremonies, judicial procedure, parleys and a variety of conventions. Although unexceptional landmarks in themselves, their place-names, the antiquities to be found on their summits or slopes, and the historically and traditionally recorded events held there, set them apart as places of special significance for the lordships in which they lay. From a purely practical point of view, places which were regularly used for ceremony and assembly had to be accessible and welcoming. Consequently, the majority are often little more than low-lying gentle slopes, but obviously well chosen because, with very rare exceptions, they offer remarkable views of the territory at hand. This immediate involvement of the king or chief-elect in the view of

²⁷⁸ Rev. P. Mulligan, *op. cit.*, 34.

²⁷⁹ *Fiants*, vol. 2, 742 [4892] and vol. 3, 503 [6559].

²⁸⁰ *Anal. Hib* 3, *op. cit.*, 204.

²⁸¹ *AFM*, vol. 3, 593, 'Donogh MacBrady, chief of Cuil Brighde, died'; *AFM*, vol. 4, 671, 'Donnell MacBrady, chief of Cuil-Brighdin, and of Teallach Cearbhall, a general scholar ... died'; see also footnote vol. 4, pp. 671-2.

his regal territory satisfied a condition of the *banais ríge* or king's wedding feast, in which the royal candidate was literally betrothed to the sept lands.

The spatial relationship of inauguration sites to the geography of the modern landscape is disconcerting, as in general they are now located on minor, isolated routes and in out of the way places. It is difficult to imagine that any of them (apart perhaps from the Rock of Cashel), acted as the concourse of a respective early historic kingdom or later medieval Gaelic lordship. Why and when such places were chosen to host royal, judicial and administrative proceedings is a question more difficult to answer, but the few authoritative historical records for Carn Amhalghaidh, Tulach Óg, Magh Adhair, Indeoin and Caisil, suggest that the practice of holding inaugurations and assemblies in this manner, dates back at least to the early historic period, and possibly much earlier. It would be wrong to assume that the factors governing the choice of any given hill as a place of inauguration and assembly were uniform. Some may have been chosen for the practical reasons of easy access and excellent prospect, while the pre-existence of a hallowed mound, commemorating an eponymous ancestor of the sept, may have provided the initial impetus in other instances. The *Dindshenchas* and *Book of Lecan* accounts of the origins of Carn Amhalgaidh offer an insight into the reasons why the mound was erected and why a spot overlooking Killala Bay was appointed for its location. According to those sources, Amalgaid's enclosed mound was first built to serve as a viewing platform from which the entire bay could be surveyed. It was also intended as a place of assembly and inauguration, and it was only used latterly as a burial place. The possibility is consequently offered that some mounds may have initially been created to facilitate the business of assembly.

On the other hand, obviously defensive sites, such as the great rocky crags of Caisil, Carraig an Dúin and Dunmull, and the bivallate rock-cut enclosure at Ráth Granarda, tell a different story. These clearly must have been designed as fortified habitations or centres of tribute, or both, which either simultaneously, or perhaps later in their history, combined ceremonial functions. Platform enclosures such as Tulach Mac Amhalgaidh and simple, single-banked, rock-cut enclosures like those on Sheantomuinn and Kyle Hill could not be considered defensive and may from the outset have been intended as ceremonial rings, perhaps in the manner of the Welsh *gorsedd*. While the majority of inauguration sites

appear to have been used over a long period of time, the handful of true ringforts attested as inauguration places in historical sources were adopted to serve ceremonial purposes at quite a later period. Ráth Essa Caoide, for instance, could not have been used by the Clann Mac Uilliam Burc until at least the mid-fourteenth century, while the rath at Gortacur near Ó Maolmuaidh's Mullach Chruaich seems to have been the stage for Aodh Ó Néill's impromptu and coercive inaugurations of several Midland lords in 1599.

In looking at the territorial location of inauguration sites in four medieval lordships of the north, a reasonably consistent pattern emerges. In Tír Eóghain and Oirghialla, and very probably in the cases of Fir Manach and East Bréifne, the lands upon which the inauguration sites were located, were occupied by the inaugurator. The respective royal hills of the Uí Néill, the Mhic Mathghamhna, the Méig Uidhir and the Uí Raghallaigh were each positioned adjacent to the mensal lands and demesne lands of the lordships, and proximate to the main chiefry strongholds. An examination of the location of Mac Mathghamhna's inauguration site in Oirghialla, reveals in particular, that over a period of three centuries, the principal chiefry strongholds were consistently sited within easy reach of Mullach Leic. In this instance, it was essentially the fixed point or *caput regionis* of the lordship.

CHAPTER III. INAUGURATION FURNITURE

Leaca, footprint stones, rock-cut basins, chairs.

At twenty of the fifty-five inauguration sites investigated in this study, *leaca*, footprint stones, stone chairs, and to a lesser extent rock-cut basins, constitute what could be described as inauguration furniture. One, or more often a combination of these pieces had an essential role in the ritual of the ceremony. This chapter explores the landscape, documentary and folk evidence for the presence of ritual furniture at eleven of the twenty-nine attested inauguration places and at eight of the twenty-six conjectured ones. By analogy with ceremonial furniture at other celebrated royal sites in Western and Northern Europe, it seeks to explain the symbolism involved and the period of usage to which the various pieces might be assigned.

3.1 *Leaca*

One of the more common root words used in the place-names of Irish inauguration sites is *lecc*, *leac* or *leic*, the primary meaning of which is a flat slab of rock or stone, a flagstone, or a paving-stone.¹ The Irish sagas, *Lives*, and bardic poetry, among other sources, refer to *leaca* at the renowned royal centres of Temair (*Leac Luighdhech*, *Leac na nGiall*, *Leac na Ríogh*)², Ailech (*lecc Pátraic*),³ Emain (*licc na ngiall*)⁴ and Cashel (*Lec Patraic* and *Lec Cathraigi*),⁵ and to the *Cloich oir* of Clogher.⁶ Some of these, like the *Lia Fáil* at Temair, and *Lec Cathraigi* or *Lec na gcéad* at Caisil na Ríg where the kings of Munster were inaugurated, receive more notice than others in the sources. The attribution of 'flagstone' in the case of the latter is slightly problematic, as the *leac* of its name may be the Rock itself⁷ and not necessarily a separate stone. However, an account of *Lec na gcéad* in *The Colloquy of the Ancients* (see pp. 108-9) intimates that this may have been so.

¹ Royal Irish Academy, *Dictionary of the Irish language* (compact edition, Dublin, 1990), 423.

² T. Ó Donnchadha, *Leabhar Cloinne Aodha Buidhe* (Dublin, 1931), 71.4 'Aodh Eanghach ag Leic Luighdhech', 89.76 'cóir neamhghuth ar leic Luighdhech', 198.51 'ar leic Lughaidh a labhra'; L. McKenna (ed.), *Aithdioghluim Dána*, vol.1 (ITS 37, Dublin, 1939), 38.27 'Do bhuain labhra a Leic na nGiall'; P.S. Dinneen (ed.), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn le Seathrún Céitinn*, vol. 3 (ITS 9, London, 1908), 12-13.

³ K. Mulchrone (ed.), *Bethu Phátraic* (Dublin, 1939), 93 'Luid Pátraic co Ailech na Ríg, coro bendachastar in dún agus co farcaib a leicc and, co tairchet rígu agus oirdnidíu fer Héirenn a Ailiuch'.

⁴ Windisch, *Die altirische Heldensage Táin Bó Cúalnge nach dem Buch von Leinster* (1905), 4725.

⁵ E. Hogan, *Latin lives of the saints* (Todd Lect. v, 1894), 55.8.

⁶ K. W. Nicholls, 'The Register of Clogher', *Clogher Record*, vol.7, no.3, 1971-2, 401.

⁷ Seathrún Céitinn, in D. Comyn (ed.), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, vol.1 (ITS 4, London, 1902), 123 writes 'Siothdhruim was the name for the place which to-day is called the Rock of Cashel. The same place used also to be called Leac na gcéad and Druim Fiodhbuidhe'.

A text of possible late twelfth-century date describes the king-elect of Cashel being 'brought to the Stone of Cothraige and to Cormac's great church and there proclaimed king'. There is no further elaboration on the 'Stone of Cothraige'; and we are told that the king with his assembly then removed to Lis na nUrlann to be proclaimed publicly.⁸ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries claims were made for the base of St Patrick's Cross on the Rock being the stone upon which the kings of Munster were traditionally inaugurated. John Harden in his *Tour* of 1797⁹ and John O'Donovan in his *Letters*¹⁰ both allude to this tradition, but more recent commentary debunks it as 'a ridiculous suggestion'.¹¹ The practice of naming kings or chiefs upon sacred stones is not peculiar to the Gael, but is also to be found, for example, in both medieval Scandinavia, and Carinthia in southern Austria. In Sweden, the new king was first accepted at the assembly of *Mora äng*, ten miles southeast of Gamla Uppsala; and the focus of the ceremony there was a large boulder onto which he was lifted and proclaimed.¹² The king and his assembly then removed to the *Tingshögen* at Uppsala where confirmation was subsequently given to his royal election.¹³ A slightly more sophisticated podium was used in the inauguration ceremony of the princes of the medieval duchy of Carinthia (fig. 21). The *Fürstenstein* or 'Prince's Stone' consists of the broken-off base of an Ionian pillar taken from the ruined masonry of the Roman town of Virunum (now housed in the Carinthia Museum at Klagenfurt). The Carinthian emblem was engraved on the seat of the pillar in medieval times. Its precise original location is unknown but it apparently stood in an open field somewhere near the small Romanesque church of St Peter-am-Bichl, at Karnburg. The earliest account of the use of this impromptu 'throne' as a place of inauguration for the early dukes of Carinthia, is that of Johann, Abbot of Viktring. In his Latin chronicle *Liber certarum historiarum*, Johann described the investiture ceremony of Duke Meinhard II, in 1286, at a stone lying in an open field near Zoll [Porro sub monte Karinthiano prope ecclesiam sancti Petri lapis est...].¹⁴ In the course of the ceremony the Freisasse or

⁸ D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), 34.

⁹ M. Quane, 'Tour in Ireland by John Harden in 1797', *JCHAS* 58, 30-3.

¹⁰ J. O'Donovan, *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the County Tipperary collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1840*, 136.

¹¹ Lord Killanin and M.V. Duignan, *The Shell Guide to Ireland* (London, 1961).

¹² P.G. Foote and D.M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement* (London, 1970), 137.

¹³ T. Littmarck (trans. R.G. Tanner), *Gamla Uppsala* (Uppsala, 1987), 5.

¹⁴ F. Schneider (ed.), *Johannis Abbatis Victoriensis, Liber Certarum Historiarum* (MGH Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum Scholarum, Hannover, 1909) vol. 1, 290-93;



Fig. 21 A view of the inauguration of a Carinthian prince on the Fürstenstein,
by J. B. Zauchenberg, 1718.

peasant inaugurator, clad in peasant dress, sat on the pillar, holding in one hand a speckled bull and in the other a mare. Following a series of rites which included the robing of the duke-elect in peasant dress and the placing of a stick in his hand, the inaugurator questioned the assembly as to the fitness of the royal candidate to rule. Finally the inaugurator struck the prince on the cheek and commanded him to be a good judge. He then rose, took away the animals and made room for the prince who in turn stepped onto the stone. Standing upon it with a drawn sword in his hand, he turned to the four cardinal points showing that he intended to be a fair judge. In his account of the events after the ceremony at the *Fürstenstein*, Johann von Viktring relates that Duke Meinhard then went to the church of Maria Saal and from there to the Zollfeld where he dispensed justice and granted lands and privileges at the judicial seat known as the *Herzogstuhl*.¹⁵ The last inauguration ceremony held at the *Fürstenstein* was that of Duke Ernst der Eiserne in April 1414. Thereafter the *Herzogstuhl* fulfilled the functions of both a ceremonial throne and a judicial seat (see pp. 140-41).¹⁶

To the list of Irish *leaca* may be added the more credible later medieval examples of Leac na Ríogh - the Uí Néill kingship stone at Tulach Óg, first mentioned in 1432,¹⁷ Leac Mhic Eochadha which was recorded by Keating as the inauguration place of the Uí Chennselaig,¹⁸ Mullach Leic the chief-making site of the Mac Mathghamhna,¹⁹ and Leic Mhichil upon which, according to Tadhg Ó Neachtain, the Sionach or Ó Catharnaigh was named.²⁰ But these too have their ambiguities - Leac na Ríogh is at once a stone and a chair (pp.138-9), while Orpen proposed that the *lecc* of Leac Mic Eochadha could be identified with a pillar stone associated with a large mound in the townland of Loggan Lower in Co. Wexford,²¹ presenting us with the same problems of interpretation as the apparently upright *Lia Fáil*.

Apart from the ambiguous *Lia Fáil* at Temair, none of the named Irish *leaca* have survived and with the exception of the reputed flagstone at Mullach Leic (see p. 124),

¹⁵ Ibid, 290-93; F. W. Leitner, 'Fürstenstein', in *Landesmuseum für Kärnten Klagenfurt* (Klagenfurt, 1987), 12-16.

¹⁶ F.W. Leitner, op. cit., 12-16.

¹⁷ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 887 and *AU* iii, 118-9.

¹⁸ P.S. Dinneen, op.cit., 14-15.

¹⁹ PRO, London, MPF 35.

²⁰ NLI MS G192, 306.

²¹ G.H. Orpen, 'Croghans and Norman mottes', *JRSAI* 41, 1911, 270-71.

their records do not suggest that they were distinguished by any inscriptions, or in particular, by the mark of a single footprint. However, the carved footprint tends to be given some emphasis in later descriptions of inauguration furniture, both in Ireland and Scotland, which prompts a question as to whether it was an essential concomitant of the inauguration flagstone *per se*, or whether unmarked *leaca* were also used. One such instance may occur in the case of the Mac Murchada place of inauguration at Cnoc an Bhogha,²² the site of which has been tentatively identified with a low and almost imperceptible hill in the townland of Knockavocka, overlooking the Slaney Valley south of Ferns in Co. Wexford. Here, a plain shale boulder, partly embedded in the ground just below the summit of the hill is ascribed 'the place where kings were made' in local tradition.²³ In a similar case, an unmarked boulder at Ballydoogan, Co. Westmeath, has been conjecturally cited as the *leac* of Leic Mhichil. Traditionally, the Ó Catharnaigh was held to be inaugurated at Cloch an tSionnaigh in the townland to which it gave its name (Cloghatanny) in the Offaly parish of Kilmanaghan, but Tadhg Ó Neachtain's 1704 MS of Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Eirinn* named the site as Leic Mhichil,²⁴ and further place-name investigation by Cox pinned it down to a hill in Ballydoogan.²⁵ The boulder is now lying in a ditch on a low hill which was once crowned with two conjoined enclosures, and since the stone is no longer in context it is impossible to authenticate it as the Leic Mhichil.

The act of standing upon a *leac* was part of the procedure of legitimising the authority of a king or chief-elect and as the inauguration stone seems to have played an integral role in the candidate's empowerment, it cannot be viewed simply as a functional platform for the ceremony. It was at times attributed a particular potency, something of which may lie in the taboo of the king not being permitted to touch the mortal earth in his royal condition. As shown in chapter I, this is given analogous expression in the early Irish literary theme of the Otherworld warrior-visitor whose feet, shod in one or two magical shoes, are never seen to touch the ground. The nature of the kingship stone's potency, however, seems to lie in the first instance in the fiction of it being oracular. In *The Colloquy of the Ancients*, Patrick confers the virtue of counsel upon *Leac na gCéad* at Cashel,²⁶ while the *Register*

²² P.S. Dinneen, *op.cit.*, 14-15.

²³ From local folklore of the 1950s related by the present landowner, Mr. Redmond, July 1994.

²⁴ NLI, MS G192, 306

²⁵ L. Cox, 'Leic Mhichil and Cnoc Buadha identified', *Ríocht na Mídhe*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1976, 84-5.

²⁶ S.H. O'Grady (ed.), *Silva Gadelica*, vol.2 (London, 1892; reprint New York, 1970), 232-3.

of *Clogher* records a 'golden stone existing in the city of Clogher' from which Patrick 'ejected the demon which gave prophetic responses'.²⁷ The fabled act of the *Lia Fáil* at Temair crying out in recognition of the true king is described both in the saga *De Shíl Chonairi Móir* and in the introduction to the list of kings known as *Baile in Scáil* (part of which may date to the ninth century). In the former, the *Lia Fáil* is described as the 'stone penis' at the head of the chariot course which screeches against the chariot axle confirming the king-elect's right to the kingship of Temair. Nearby are two flagstones, 'Bloc' and 'Bluigne' which, in acknowledgement of the rightful ruler, part to allow the chariot through.²⁸ When Conaire drives in his chariot towards the two flagstones, they open before him. He goes to the Fál and it cries out.²⁹ A conflicting twelfth-century account, apparently with reference to contemporary practice, in the *Life of Cólman son of Lúachain*, sees the king-elect standing at the foot of the Pillar-stone of the Hostages 'and the man of Hui Forannan [the inaugurator] upon the flag-stone below, an open horsewhip in his hand so as to save himself as best he can from the cast [of a spear] provided that he do not step from the flag-stone'.³⁰ De Pontfarcy has suggested that in this instance the juxtaposition of the pillar-stone to the flagstone is one of male to female, the flat and horizontal flagstone having a 'female symbolic potential' opposite the vertical, 'perhaps phallic' Pillar-stone of the Hostages.³¹ Ultimately, she proposes that the flag-stone 'could signify the petrified land which the newly proclaimed king fertilises through the intermediary of the Chief [sic] of the Uí Fhorannáin'.³² Proposing a case for the *Lia Fáil* as a flagstone, Ó Broin, although making selective use of documentary sources and not accommodating the above accounts to his thesis, has gone so far as to suggest that it represents the goddess of sovereignty in one of her many guises. He concludes that it is in the simple act of standing upon the stone, that the king forms his union with the goddess and consequently has authority conferred upon him.³³ The concept of the *Lia Fáil* being recumbent rather than upright, and oracular or prophetic, is also to be found in *Baile an Scáil*. In that text, Conn Cétchathach, while walking over the hill of Temair with his

²⁷ K.W. Nicholls, op. cit., 401; J. Stuart, in his *Historical memoirs of the City of Armagh* (Newry, 1819), 634-5 writes 'We learn from Charles Maguire, canon of Armagh who, about the year 1490, wrote comments on the Registry of Clogher, that "this stone was preserved there on the right of the entrance into the church, and that it had been formerly covered with gold by the worshipers of an idol called Kermand Kelstach".'

²⁸ L. Gwynn, 'De Síil Chonairi Móir' *Ériu* 6, 1912, 138-9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 140.

³⁰ K. Meyer (ed.), *Betha Colmáin Lúacháin* (Dublin, 1911), par. 70.

³¹ Y. De Pontfarcy, 'Two late inaugurations of Irish kings', *Études Celtiques* 24, 1987, 207-7.

³² *Ibid.*, 208.

druids, suddenly finds a stone under his feet which when he stands upon it, resounds with a great cry across Bregmag. The stone tells Conn that it is called Fál [*foail .i. ail fo rig*, ‘a stone under a king’]³⁴ and every cry uttered by it denotes the reign of a king of the Uí Néill dynasty.³⁵ There are other instances in which Fál is seen to be recumbent, like the verse attributed to the tenth-century poet Cináed úa hArtacáin which refers to it as the ‘stone upon which my heels stand [*in cloch fors'táit mo dí sháil*].³⁶ Bhreathnach has pointed out, however, that Fál’s recumbent state, in these references, may not reflect its original position, but that at the time of their composition,³⁷ which leaves us none the wiser as to the true nature of the *Lia Fáil*. Significantly, the calling out of *lecc Luighdhech* (Fál) in recognition of the rightful candidate occurs as a motif in a praise-poem to Ragnall King of Man, composed between 1187 and 1208, and in a number of instances in later medieval bardic poetry. In the poem to Ragnall he is portrayed as a handsome Viking warrior destined, perhaps, to become king of Ireland, and the poet appropriately writes - ‘thou wilt obtain, O noble son of Sadhbh, speech from the flagstone on the side of Temair [*labra on leic a taeib Themra*].’³⁸ The poet’s reference to the *leac* being on the side of the hill is curious and considering that the original location of the *Lia Fáil* was Dumha na nGiall, which lies within the summit enclosure of Ráith na Rí, one wonders if he had in mind a true flagstone which was at one time actually positioned on the hillside. In the poembook of Cú Chonnacht Mág Uidhir, lord of Fermanagh 1566-89, the poet Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaire, in a eulogy to the Cú, writes of *lecc Luighdhech* having ‘found out her [Ireland’s] lover; he is not a hidden lover to her.....the Leac will speak, proclaiming him after her sorrow’;³⁹ and in like manner Muirheartach Ó Cobhthaigh, in his poem to Toirdhealbhadh Luinneach, writes of a ‘speech-lock on the stone of kingly Lughaidh until the Eoghanach’s name is called out’.⁴⁰ Although in the context of these late poems such allusions to the *banais rige* are merely poetic devices, and by the sixteenth century, lordship could be conferred by the mere calling aloud of the name by an

³³ T. Ó Broin, ‘Lia Fáil: fact and fiction in the tradition’, *Celtica* 21 1990, 393-401.

³⁴ E. Bhreathnach, ‘The topography of Temair: the documentary evidence’ in, *Discovery Programme Reports* 2 (Dublin, 1995), 75.

³⁵ K. Meyer, ‘Baile in Scáil’, *ZCP* 3, 458-9.

³⁶ R.A.S. Macalister (ed.), *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, vol.4 (Dublin, 1941), 244.

³⁷ E. Bhreathnach, *op. cit.*, 75.

³⁸ B. Ó Cuiv, ‘A poem in praise of Ragnall, King of Man’, *Éigse* 8, 1956-7, 289.

³⁹ D. Greene (ed.), *Duanaire Mhéig Uidhir* (Dublin, 1972), 35.

⁴⁰ D. Ó Cróinín., *op.cit.* 58.

overlord, or by 'an authorised person in the presence of witnesses',⁴¹ their reiteration of the legitimising power of the *leac*, is nonetheless noteworthy.

3.2 Footprint Stones: Contexts and Symbolism

The survival of footprint stones at known and suspected inauguration sites is poor and passing references to them are scant, but the combined evidence of Spenser's sixteenth-century observations on the Irish rite of inauguration, comparable commentary from Hugh Macdonald regarding the inauguration stone of the MacDonald Lords of the Isles, and antiquarian and folk references to the former presence of footprint stones at a small number of attested Irish and Scottish inauguration sites, confirms the place of this particular piece of inauguration furniture, at least in the ceremony as practised in later medieval times. In a preliminary countrywide survey of the evidence for former and extant footprint impressions, both single and pairs, a conservative estimate of twenty-three examples were identified. Of these, just six are found in the context of established and suspected inauguration sites, another six are found in or adjacent to medieval church sites and graveyards, four occur at holy wells and a further two appear with a range of other motifs on prehistoric rock-art. A single print has been recorded on a boulder adjacent to a megalithic tomb, and the remaining four are found in isolated contexts, some of which may possibly have been removed from their original locations. In attempting to establish the true measure of the instance of inaugural footprint stones, and their possible symbolism, it is necessary to examine the contexts in which the other categories of footprint stones occur.

3.3 Category I: Footprint Stones at Church Sites

In six cases, 'footprint' stones have been recorded within or adjacent to church sites, (excluding Cill Mhic Nénáin) perhaps the most impressive of which is to be found within the graveyard on Knockpatrick Hill, east of Castledermot, Co. Kildare. A pair of perfectly formed and apparently shod footprints, locally attributed to St Patrick,⁴² are carved into a large, flat granite slab which is enclosed within the remains of a low drystone wall on the south slope of the graveyard (fig. 22). Just below and between the footprints there is an incised Latin cross with slightly rounded, expanded terminals, and to the right of the shaft, a small circular depression which is reputed to be the impression of the butt of St

⁴¹ K. Simms, *op. cit.*, 32-3.

⁴² W. Fitzgerald, 'Knockpatrick', *JKAS* 2, 1898, 324-5.



Fig. 22 (left) Pair of shod footprints; Fig. 23 (right) inscribed Latin cross,

Knockpatrick, Co. Kildare.

Patrick's staff (fig. 23). A similar feature with the same local significance occurs on the St Adamnan's footprint stone at Gortnamoyagh, Co. Derry.

Local tradition of the last century related that the prints had been made by St Patrick when he stood and preached at Knockpatrick while on his way from Meath to Uí Chennselaig.⁴³ The Knockpatrick stone cannot be dated with any certainty, its crude Latin cross no firm indicator of an early date as this type of cross continued in use well into the nineteenth century. A pair of footprints do occur in conjunction with a much larger and more datable Latin cross with expanded terminals on an Early Christian graveslab from Inis Cealtra, Co. Clare, which bears an inscription to Cosgrach Laignech.⁴⁴ In this instance the footprints are not placed together, but are a stride apart, the left one carved above the sinister arm of the cross with the right one placed beneath the same arm. The considerable depth of the Knockpatrick slab below the present ground surface of the graveyard, and the construction and form of the drystone enclosure with its threshold entrance, may suggest an early medieval date for the slab. It is possibly contemporary with the former church of St Patrick which is reputed to have stood at the highest point of the graveyard. This, of course, does not preclude the possibility that the footprints and cross were carved at a later date. If the carvings are contemporary with the conjecturally early placing and enclosing of the slab, this particular footprint stone is unique in its setting, the enclosure about it designed to house it and the clearly defined stone threshold on its southeast side marking its entrance point. Knockpatrick Hill, which commands extensive views, is situated within the territory of Uí Muiredaig, just four miles southeast of Mullach Raeirinne, the traditionally cited inauguration place of the Ó Tuathail (see vol. 2, appendix 2, pp. 99-100, fig. 92). While it is tempting to suggest that Knockpatrick Hill, unsupported by documentary evidence as it is, may have been an Uí Muiredaig place of inauguration, the presence of a cross in association with the footprints is out of character with known inauguration footprint stones. It is possible that it had a parallel function in the ecclesiastical context, perhaps having been used in the installation ceremony of the *coarb* at this church site.

⁴³ Ibid., 325.

⁴⁴ P. Lionard, 'Early Irish grave-slabs', *PRIA* 61C, 1960-61, 123, fig. 18.

Of the remaining five footprint stones at church sites, three are attributed in local tradition to St Patrick, another to St Adamnan, and the fifth to St Columcille. Those associated with Patrick are all single prints, one of which occurs on exposed outcrop east of St Patrick's church on the Rock of Skerry, Co. Down, and another last recorded in the nineteenth century outside Templepatrick churchyard, Co. Westmeath. The example at the Rock of Skerry, which is variously known as 'St Patrick's Foot-mark' and 'Knee-stone', is an artificial modification of two natural fissures in the rock.⁴⁵ It is associated with the tradition relating to St Patrick's enslavement at Sliabh Mis, in which he saw the angel Victoricus 'ascend to heaven in his sight, leaving his footprint impressed on the rock'.⁴⁶ The Templepatrick stone, of which there is no surviving local knowledge, was apparently situated outside the graveyard which surrounds the medieval church on Templepatrick Hill, south of Moyvore.⁴⁷ This quite unassuming hill, with its church dedicated to Patrick, commands panoramic views from east through to southwest. There are several areas of exposed and fissured rock outcrop off the summit, and a number of large outcrop boulders strewn about, but in a recent search no footprint was revealed on examination of any rock surface visible above ground level.⁴⁸

The footprint stone at Gortnamoyagh, Co. Derry, which is variously called 'St Adamnan's Stone', 'Giant's Track' and 'Shane's Leap', is situated on the edge of a plateau west of Errigal old church. A pair of rudimentary and apparently shod footprints (as no toes are indicated), quite similar in size and form to those at Knockpatrick, are carved on a large flat rock and accompanied by a small circular depression which again is a feature of the Knockpatrick stone. The site was recorded by Thomas Fagan for the Ordnance Survey in 1835, and in his account he refers to its varying local folklore. According to one folk tale, the footprints were created when a giant leaped from the stone to Errigal church, and the small depression was said to be 'the print of the top of the giant's staff'.⁴⁹ Another version of their origin attributes the prints to St Adamnan, patron saint of Errigal church.⁵⁰ Although the footprints are of human size, the local lore recalls other folklore references

⁴⁵ Rev. A. Dawson, 'St Patrick's view of the Braid Valley, and the burning of Milchu's homestead', *UJA* 3, 1897, 118-9.

⁴⁶ W. Stokes, *Tripartite Life of Patrick*, part ii (1887), 275.

⁴⁷ Rev. A. Cogan, *The Diocese of Meath ancient and modern*, vol. 2, (Dublin, 1867; reprint 1992), 449.

⁴⁸ A perfectly preserved ring-barrow on the south-southeast slope of the hill suggests that this place was a centre of prehistoric activity.

⁴⁹ *Ordnance Survey Memoirs, County Londonderry*, 1835, 3.

⁵⁰ DOENI, MBR, note on 'Inauguration stone at Gortnamoyagh'.

to supernatural beings of extraordinary and magical proportions, leaving their mark on the landscape. In North Yell, Shetland, a stone on a hillside above the hill-dyke of Bracon, bearing a cavity shaped like an enormous human foot, was formerly known as the 'Giant's Step'. Tradition claimed that a giant had planted one foot here and the other at the Westing of Unst where a second footprint stone occurs.⁵¹ A corresponding tale accounts for the fortuitous footprint-like impression (a natural mark) on Rudall Hill, and that at Dunadd in Argyll (see pp. 126-7). Local tradition of the last century relates that Ossian, while on a day's hunting at Lochfyneside, was charged by dogs and fled, and on leaping to the top of Rudal Hill, he left one footprint there, and in a second bounding leap, landed at Dunadd.⁵² Although held to be an inauguration *leac*,⁵³ it cannot be ruled out that the Gortnamoyagh stone, like the remarkably similar Knockpatrick stone, may have served an ecclesiastical function in the election of the *coarb* of Errigal church.

The last footprint stone in this category is situated on Churchill in the townland of Drumcavany, Co. Donegal. A pair of slightly staggered and very roughly formed shod prints are carved into a flat rock adjacent to the old church of Drumcavany, which itself has reputed Columban associations. Like the Gortnamoyagh stone, local tradition attributes the footprints to a fantastic leap, this time performed by St Columcille who, while being pursued, leaped from Tobar na Súil at Cnoc a' Toighe in Stackarnagh and landed a mile away at Churchill, leaving his footprints impressed on this rock.⁵⁴

3.4 Category II: Footprint stones and holy wells

The presence of footprints at holy wells appears from the survey results to be predominantly but not exclusively a west of Ireland phenomenon, with a particularly dense concentration in west Galway and its offshore islands.⁵⁵ In each of these instances the footprints are attributed to the local saint, and several of them are fortuitous and roughly foot-shaped natural crevices and solution holes. However, this is not to detract from the obvious devotional and talismanic significance of the saint's footprint which as has already been shown in chapter 1, finds its parallel in the saint's shoe.

⁵¹ RCAMS, vol. 2, *Inventory of Orkney* (Edinburgh, 1946), 168; F.W.L. Thomas, 'Dunadd, Glassary, Argyllshire; the place of inauguration of the Dalriadic kings', *PSAS* 13, 1878-9, 40.

⁵² F.W.L. Thomas, *op.cit.*, 36.

⁵³ HMBR Archive, *op.cit.*

⁵⁴ Rev. P. Ó Gallachair, 'Columban Donegal', *Donegal Annual* 5, 1963, 264-5.

⁵⁵ P. Gosling, *Archaeological Inventory of County Galway, vol. 1, West Galway* (Dublin, 1993), 116-132.

3.5 Category III: Rock art and Footprints

The occurrence of footprint impressions in association with prehistoric rock art is rare in Ireland, but paralleled elsewhere in Britain, Continental and Northern Europe. Both Forde-Johnston and Simpson have catalogued a number of cases in which footprints occur either alone, on cist graves, or as part of a range of motifs on prehistoric rock art within Britain. Unlike the Irish footprints, the majority of these are unshod prints with individual toes clearly pecked out in most instances, as on the Liverpool Calderstones A, B and E,⁵⁶ or the pair which occur in combination with cup-and-ring marks on a large boulder at Carnasserie in the Kilmartin Valley, Argyll.⁵⁷ Single unshod prints have also been recorded on the slabs of cist graves like that at Harbottle Peels, Northumberland, another in Mendip,⁵⁸ and one at Pool Farm.⁵⁹ Unshod footprint-engraved rocks are also known from the Continent where they occur in large numbers in Scandinavia and to a lesser extent in Brittany, North Germany and in the Italian Maritime Alps.⁶⁰ In Ireland, just two examples of footprints found in rock-art contexts have been identified to date, one of which has been dismissed as a natural solution hole, while the authenticity and significance of the other is a matter of some debate. The very small footprint found in association with a large, incised annular ring on a split boulder at Srugreana, on the Iveragh Peninsula, has been recorded as a natural depression, and holds no particular significance in local tradition. The rock itself is a reputed Mass-rock, locally known as Maum-an Aifrinn.⁶¹ In a second instance of a 'sandalled' footprint impression found in conjunction with other scribings on a large, flat, recumbent glacial erratic at Clonfinlough, Co. Offaly, the footprint has again been dismissed as at best a relatively modern doodle or at worst a natural solution hole (fig. 24).⁶² However, in this case the conclusions drawn are very much open to debate. The Clonfinlough Stone is situated on the eastern downslope of Esker Hill about three miles east of Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly, and in the

⁵⁶ J.L. Forde-Johnston, 'Megalithic art in the north-west of Britain; The Calderstones, Liverpool', PPS 2, 1957, 22-31.

⁵⁷ D.D.A. Simpson and J.E. Thawley, 'Single grave art in Britain', *Scottish Archaeological Forum* 4, 1972, 95.

⁵⁸ J.L. Forde-Johnston, *op.cit.*, 35.

⁵⁹ D.D.A. Simpson and J.E. Thawley, *op.cit.*, 95.

⁶⁰ J.L. Forde-Johnston, *op.cit.*, 37.

⁶¹ A. O'Sullivan and J. Sheehan, *The Iveragh Peninsula: an archaeological survey of south Kerry* (Cork, 1996), 106-7.

⁶² J. S. Jackson, 'The Clonfinlough Stone: a geological assessment', in E. Rynne (ed.), *North Munster Studies* (Limerick, 1967), 11-19; D.D.A. Simpson and J.E. Thawley, 'Single grave art in Britain', *Scottish Archaeological Forum* 4, 1972, 95.

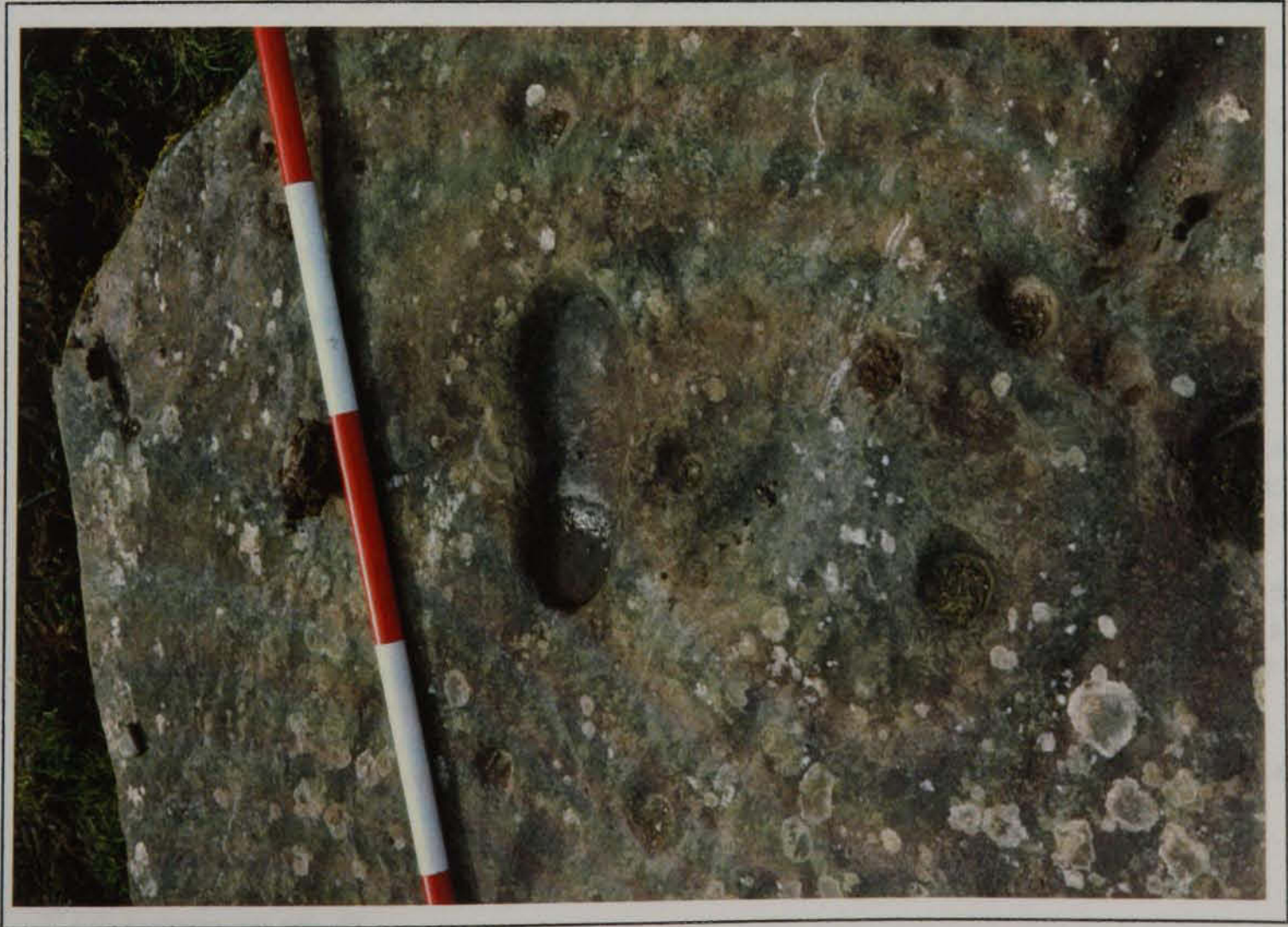


Fig. 24 Shod right footprint carved in the Clonfinlough Stone, Co. Offaly.

last century it was known locally as the 'Fairy's Stone' and 'Horseman's Stone', the latter attribution deriving from a tale that a horseman galloped around the stone at certain times.⁶³ The tradition of the Clonfinlough 'horseman' riding round the stone, recalls a version of the Carinthian ceremony which in popular belief involved the royal candidate riding three times round the *Fürstenstein* as one of the principal rites in his 'taking possession'.⁶⁴ Rev. James Graves, who first drew attention to it, was of the opinion that the footprint at Clonfinlough might indicate that it 'served as an inauguration stone at some remote period'.⁶⁵ The footprint in question occurs on the upper northwest end of the surface of the slab with a series of cruciform and related figures which, on the basis of comparison with Neolithic wall-paintings in Spain, Macalister and l'Abbé Breuil tentatively dated to the late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age.⁶⁶ MacWhite referred the stone to his group of Irish Bronze Age rock-scribings comparable to Galician carvings of the same period.⁶⁷ The footprint is not in keeping with the largely cruciform scheme of these figures and is in all likelihood a later addition to the stone. Forde-Johnston in his work on the Calderstones, Liverpool, established that seven shod footprints, found in association with three prehistoric cup-and-ring-marks on Calderstone D, were the 'outlines of boots' executed in the nineteenth century.⁶⁸ Bearing this example in mind, it is perhaps important to use caution in assigning significance to the footprint at Clonfinlough. Nonetheless, while the Calderstone D prints are unmistakably modern boot marks, no such definite form can be applied to the sandalled Clonfinlough print. Jackson in his geological assessment of the stone, while proposing that many of the figures, including the footprint, may well be the result of dip and strike joints modified and deepened by solution, does concede that 'certain solution pits, including the footprint', may have been retouched or deepened artificially.⁶⁹ The Clonfinlough print (0.26m in length) is most

⁶³ Rev. J. Graves, 'On a boulder with presumed pagan carvings at Clonfinlough, King's County', *JRSAI* 5, 1865, 360-61. Graves noted two 'remarkable earthworks ... consisting each of a deep fosse and rampart drawn across the esker, not far from this stone ... termed the "Witch's Hollows" [identified as a short stretch of a double linear earthwork in the adjoining townland of Tullaghbeg]; F.W.L. Thomas, *op.cit.*, 44.

⁶⁴ S. Musulin, *Austria: people and landscape* (London, 1971), 124. This element is not referred to in the historically documented installation of Duke Meinhard II in 1286, or Albrecht II in 1335 and may be a popular corruption of the medieval rite in which, after taking possession of the inauguration stone, the duke turned round on it while swinging the sword to the four cardinal points.

⁶⁵ Rev. J. Graves, *op. cit.*, footnote 2.

⁶⁶ Breuil and R.A.S. Macalister, 'A study of the chronology of Bronze-Age sculpture in Ireland', *PRIA* 36C, 1921, 6-7.

⁶⁷ E. MacWhite, 'A new view on Irish Bronze Age rock-scribings', *JRSAI* 76, 1946, 59.

⁶⁸ J.L. Forde-Johnston, *op.cit.*, 28.

⁶⁹ J.S. Jackson, *op. cit.*, 18.

credible as a shod footprint and compares well with the size of acknowledged footprints like that at Dunadd in Argyll (0.27m in length). Notwithstanding the uncertainty which surrounds the footprint, there are a number of circumstantial factors which may merit the entertainment of the Clonfinlough Stone as a possible place of inauguration. The local names applied to the stone itself are encouraging, and as an inaugural *leac* it would have been very suitable for standing upon. Of more significance perhaps, is its characteristic inauguration site location. It lies on a low but commanding height, in the territory of Dealbhna Eathra, offering a clear prospect into the neighbouring territories of Ferceall and Cenél Fiachach. The proximity of the site to the important ecclesiastical centre of Clonmacnoise may also be significant.

3. 6 Category IV: Footprint Stones at Burial Sites

The only recorded instance of a footprint impression found near a megalithic tomb, occurs in the townland of Drumandoora in north Clare. Here, the carved impression of what has been described as a 'sandalled foot', about 0.25m in length, features on a rock with a relatively smooth surface, close to a megalithic tomb.⁷⁰ Westropp made the highly unconvincing suggestion that this rock may have originated at Magh Adhair, the Uí Bhriain inauguration site at Toonagh, which lies almost twelve miles northeast of Drumandoora.⁷¹ Although nothing further is known about the Drumandoora footprint, and neither its contemporaneity or otherwise with the megalithic tomb, has been determined, it is comparable in size and form to the Clonfinlough print, and Forde-Johnston has drawn a parallel between it and the form of both the Dunadd print and the carved prints on the Ladykirk Stone at Burwick, South Ronaldshay.⁷²

3. 7 Category V: Isolated Footprint Stones

The isolated examples, all of which are single prints, are more difficult to assess, but place-name evidence and local tradition point in some cases to their possible use as inauguration stones. Among the four footprint stones in this group are two examples from Donegal, one of which is called St Conall's footprint, and the other Mallán na mBráthar.

⁷⁰ M. Brogan, 'On ancient sepulchral monuments found in the County Galway [recte Clare]', *PRIA* 10, 1870, 441. Brogan noted another carving which he described as 'somewhat resembling the caduceus of mercury' on a rock in the adjoining townland of Corbeagh, but this analogy is fanciful.

⁷¹ T.J. Westropp, 'Magh Adhair, Co. Clare: the place of inauguration of the Dalcassian kings', *PRIA* 4, 1896-8, 57-8.

⁷² J.L. Forde-Johnston, *op. cit.*, 35.

Both are found in hillslope locations and appear to be natural solution holes.⁷³ Local memory recalls another isolated footprint stone on the roadside at Killeen, Co. Tipperary, just under two miles west of Birr, which was buried in the 1950s during the course of a local authority housing scheme. A motte and bailey is situated nearby, but no connection between the two sites is made locally. The roadside position of the stone suggests that it was possibly removed from its original location. A 'well-formed, man-size, single shod footprint' was apparently carved into the surface of a large limestone/quartz conglomerate boulder, and traditionally referred to as 'Finn McCool's Footprint'.⁷⁴ Perhaps the most promising of this group, although now lost, is the 'King's Stone', last recorded in 1953⁷⁵ at Kilbaylet Upper, north of Donard in southwest Co. Wicklow. It was formerly situated in a field on high ground, about a half a mile west of Church Mountain. According to its last full description, it was a large recumbent stone containing a 'foot-shaped hollow' which local tradition claimed as the mark of St Kevin's foot, made when he stepped from Church Mountain on his journey to Mullica.⁷⁶ Although the footprint is attributed to St Kevin, the local name for this stone, 'The King's Stone' is interesting, suggesting a royal association or possible use as an inauguration stone. The monument designation, 'King's Stone', is not uncommon however, and does occur in other parts of the country (three standing stones in the townlands of Esker and Laughil in north Co. Offaly are given this name in local tradition). There is no recorded account or surviving lore to explain how the recumbent 'King's Stone' at Kilbaylet derived its name, or whether it was always at that location, or removed from elsewhere. Isolated prints are also common in Scotland, one of the more notable examples occurring at the west end of the summit of the hill of Port-an-eilein in the parish of Halkirk, Caithness. Like the juxtaposition of the Kilbaylet stone to Church Mountain, the Port-an-eilein print is situated about a half mile northeast of Shurrery church. It is carved on a flat exposed rock surface measuring 10 inches square, called 'Clach na luirg' (the rock of the mark or print), and has been described as that of a left foot, artificial, regularly shaped and exactly 12 inches in length.⁷⁷ The function of this footprint stone is unknown, but its proximity to a church site may suggest some association between the two.

⁷³ L. McGill, *In Conall's footsteps* (Dingle, 1992), 309.

⁷⁴ Oral tradition related by Mr. Joe Shortt of Birr and Mr. Liam Ryan of Killeen 19/3/94.

⁷⁵ L. Price, *The Place-names of Co. Wicklow*, vol. 4, 1953, 192.

⁷⁶ P.T. Walshe, 'The antiquities of the Dunlavin - Donard district', *JRSAI* 61, 138.

⁷⁷ RCAHMS, *Third report and inventory of monuments and constructions in the County of Caithness* (London, 1911), 44.

The recurring folk theme of footprints having been created by the fantastic leaps of mythological heroes and saints, is common in both the Irish and Scottish traditions. It is perhaps also noteworthy that several Irish local place-names incorporate the word 'leap',⁷⁸ - such as Léim Uí Bhanáin, the name ascribed to Leap Castle, an Ó Cearbhaill stronghold in Co. Offaly. Some of the single footprints in all of the aforementioned groups, may in some way be related to the 'monstrous physique', tying in with fanciful knee, hand, and finger impressions,⁷⁹ in stones which occur countrywide in the same tradition, and which are generally attributed to giants, fairies, heroes (usually Finn McCool), sorcerers⁸⁰ or more commonly to saints.⁸¹ Mac Cana refers to the potent symbolism of the 'monstrous physique, marked by possession of a single eye, arm, leg, and so on, which is ascribed in many parts of the world to certain mythological beings'. He suggests that the single sandal could perhaps be a comparable example.⁸² On this basis the single shod footprint might in certain contexts also hold the same significance (see chapter I, 1.10 -1.14).

3. 8 Category VI: Footprint Stones at Established Inauguration Sites:

The Irish Evidence

In his late sixteenth-century account of the Irish inauguration ceremony, Spenser explained that during the ceremony of the election of a chief, the candidate stood upon a stone 'always reserved for that purpose and placed commonly upon a hill', and in 'many of which' he had 'seen the foot of a man formed and graven which they say was the measure of their first captain's foot'.⁸³ He also mentioned that the tanist set 'but one foot upon the stone' and received the 'like oath the captain did'.⁸⁴ This distinction between the relationship of the chief-elect and the tanist to the inauguration stone, was also observed in Gaelic Scotland where the tanist stood beside the stone, with one foot upon it,

⁷⁸ I am grateful to Con Manning for pointing out this association.

⁷⁹ Solution holes in the 'Brehon's Chair' at Kyle Hill, Co. Laois are said to be the marks of St Thomas' fingers.

⁸⁰ Mr. Tommy Clarke relates a local tradition which refers to the 'Witches Slide' in Myshall graveyard, Co. Carlow - a bullaun stone containing two depressions which are said to be the marks of a witch's knees, created when she fell from the top of Mt. Leinster.

⁸¹ T. Robinson, in *Setting foot on the shores of Connemara* (Dublin, 1984), 17, describes his search for curious marks in rocks in Aran and the Burren finding among them 'St Benan's foot, St Bridget's knees, St Isleaman's hands, St Columkill's fingers and even his ribs...'

⁸² P. Mac Cana, 'The *topos* of the single sandal in Irish tradition', *Celtica* 10, 1973, 165-6. See also, K. McCone, 'The Cyclops in Celtic, Germanic and Indo-European myth', *Studia Celtica* 30, 1996, 89-111.

⁸³ W.L. Renwick, *A view of the present state of Ireland by Edmund Spenser* (Oxford, 1970), 7.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

while the chief-elect stood fully upon it, with his foot placed in the carved print.⁸⁵ Spenser's remark, that he had seen 'many' such inauguration footprint *leaca*, if a credible remark, suggests that the use of footprint stones in inauguration ceremonies of this period at least, was quite common. The survival of footprint stones at attested inauguration sites is however, very poor, with just one questionable stone from Carn Fraích now extant. Nonetheless there are historical, antiquarian and local folk records regarding former footprint stones at Mullach Leic and Cill Mhic Nénáin, and to a 'stone' at Lios na Ríogh - the Mag Aonghuis inauguration place (Class A sites). There are also two extant footprint stones to be considered at the suspected inauguration site of Dunmull, Co. Antrim and at Shantallow, Co. Derry (Class B sites). It may also be possible to rehabilitate some of the footprint stones in the aforementioned categories, as inauguration *leaca*, namely the Clonfinlough Stone, those on the Rock of Skerry and at Drumandoora, and with some reservation, the 'King's Stone'. Apart from St Columb's Stone at Shantallow, it is significant that of those that survive and those recorded, all are single shod prints which is in keeping with Spenser's account and comparable Scottish accounts. The identification of the single shod print as peculiar, but not necessarily exclusive, to the inauguration *leac*, is an important one. In the first instance, if this pattern is consistent, it may find a mirrored symbolism in the rite of the single shoe. This assertion might also rule out the use of stones bearing pairs of footprints in the inauguration ceremony, and opens a distinct but analogous area of enquiry as to the function of this variant.

On two maps made by the Tudor cartographer Richard Bartlett in 1603, the first entitled 'a Generale Description of Ulster'⁸⁶ and the second untitled but referred to as a map of south-east Ulster,⁸⁷ a hill called 'Mullough Lect' and 'Mullagh = Lest' is shown in the Barony of Monaghan, immediately south of the 'Forte of Monaghan'. In the first of these maps, two small adjoining structures, one rectangular and the other smaller and roughly square, crown the hilltop (fig. 25). The second map does not show this structure but adds a legend beside the hill which reads 'so caled of a stone there, on which McMahan is made' (fig. 26). Mullach Leic has been identified as Leck - a low, gently sloping hill in the townland of that name, four miles south of Monaghan town, in the parish of Kilmore.

⁸⁵ F. Adam, *The clans, septs and regiments of the Scottish Highlands* (Stirling 1908; reprint 1984), 116-7.

⁸⁶ PRO, London., MPF 35. Reproduced in facsimile with the Escheated Counties maps of 1609 (Southampton, 1861), map 1.

⁸⁷ PRO, London., MPF 36. Reproduced in facsimile as above, map 2.

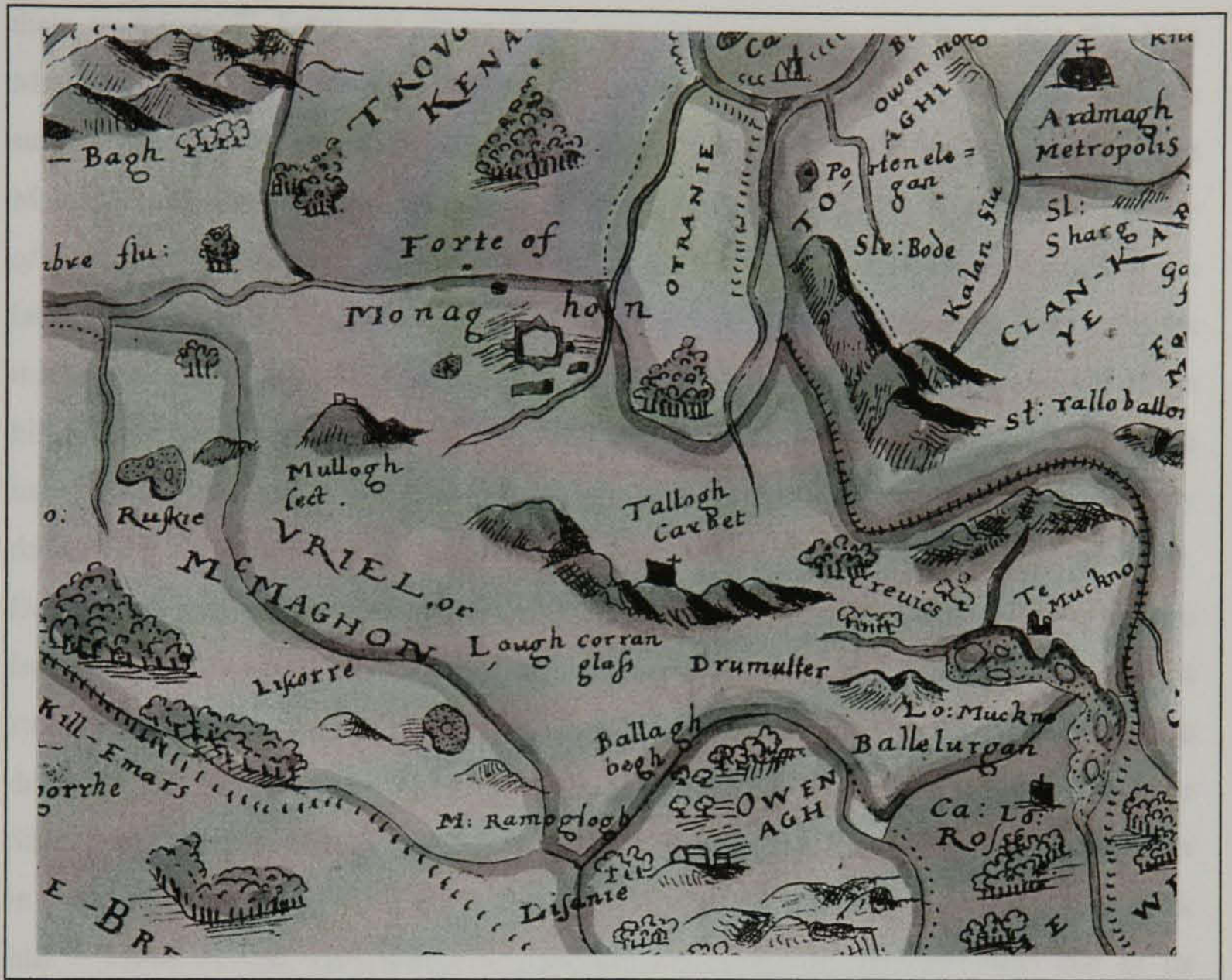


Fig. 25 A chair-shaped structure on the summit of Mullach Leic, shown on Bartlett's 'Generalle Description of Ulster', 1603 [PRO, London, MPF 35].

During the progress of the first Ordnance Survey of Co. Monaghan 1835, O'Donovan in his letters drew attention to Norden's map of c. 1610⁸⁸ which marked 'Mulloghlact so called of a stone on which Mac Mahon is made'. He was unable to place its location, however, and lamented that 'the people around the Town of Monaghan have forgotten all their traditions'.⁸⁹ Later, he conjectured without supporting evidence, that the Mac Mathghamhna was made at Tullyvea.⁹⁰ J.B. Doyle, one of the Monaghan Ordnance Survey sappers, had recorded a flagstone on Leck Hill in 1835, but the link between it and Mac Mathghamhna's Mullach Leic was not made until E.P. Shirley published his *History of the County Monaghan* in 1879,⁹¹ and the identification was further confirmed by the later work of G.E. Hamilton.⁹² Subsequent Ordnance Survey six-inch map editions marked the site of 'The McMahons Stone' at the approximate centre of the summit of the hill. According to an account given to Shirley in 1876 by the Dean of Clogher, the inauguration *leac* had at one time borne the 'impression of a foot' which was apparently defaced by the landowner in c. 1809. The *leac* itself was broken into flags by a Mr. Bephel and used in the construction of a stable c. 1856.⁹³ J.B. Doyle had recorded the *leac* prior to its destruction and described it as a large, roughly triangular, recumbent stone, about 1.95m x 1.32m.⁹⁴ Curiously, no archaeological evidence for the structure drawn on the hilltop, in 'A General Description of Ulster', was alluded to by Doyle or Shirley and there is nothing on the ground today to indicate what it might have been, nor is there any historical evidence for a Mac Mathghamhna castle or tower house on Leck hill.⁹⁵ There is one other possible interpretation, however. On this map and in its companion south-east Ulster map, Bartlett uses the same L-shaped symbol to designate the inauguration chair on the hill of Tulach Óg, and while it may be far-fetched on such flimsy evidence to suggest that what is represented on the summit of Mullach Leic is in fact a chair, the alternative evidence for a footprint stone is also somewhat tentative. As

⁸⁸ J. Norden, 'The plott of Irelande with the confines', in *A discription of Ireland*, PRO MPF 67 and reproduced in *SP Hen. VIII*, vol. 2, pt. 3.

⁸⁹ J. O'Donovan, *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the counties of Armagh and Monaghan collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1835*, 22.

⁹⁰ J. O'Donovan, *The genealogies*, op.cit., 434.

⁹¹ E.P. Shirley, *The history of the County Monaghan* (London, 1879), 71.

⁹² G.E. Hamilton, 'Two Ulster inauguration places', *JRSAI* 42, 1912, 64-5. Hamilton mistakenly assumed that the source which he used as his evidence was an Escheated Counties map because it was bound in with that volume.

⁹³ E.P. Shirley, op. cit., 71; IFC 954, 76.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ There is the site of a castle about two and a half miles north of Mullach Leic, in the townland of Ballyleck.



Fig. 26 Mullach Leic indicated as 'Mullagh=Lest' on Bartlett's map of Southeast Ulster, 1603 [PRO, London, MPF 36].

will be discussed in the case study of Tulach Óg, the word 'stone' is frequently used in Tudor maps for the Tulach Óg chair, so logically the reference to the stone at Mullach Leic does not necessarily preclude the possibility that it too was a chair. Oral tradition regarding the Mac Mathghamhna site and ceremony, collected in the Leck area, proposes that when the chief-elect had reached the summit of the hill on his inauguration day, 'he took his seat on the stone', a tale which, if reflecting a true memory of the object, suggests that it was a chair, or at least a large stone suitable for sitting upon.⁹⁶ Bartlett was a superlative cartographer and by the time he produced these maps, his knowledge of Ulster terrain, its principal strongholds and places of note would have been detailed and exact, and it is therefore unlikely that he would have indicated a structure on the hill unless it was there.⁹⁷ Doyle described just one stone on the hill and it is tempting to suggest that like Leac na Ríogh, the *leac* of Mullach Leic had at one time formed part of a Mac Mathghamhna chair, and that just one portion of it, perhaps the 'Leac' itself, remained to be seen on the hill at the time of Doyle's survey in 1835.

The evidence for the former presence of a footprint stone at Cill Mhic Nénáin (see case study 3) derives solely from an account provided by a local *seanchaí*, Manus O'Donnell, preserved in the records of the Ordnance Survey of County Donegal, 1835. O'Donnell recalled that as a boy, he had seen a stone beneath the northeast window of Kilmacrenan church, which bore 'the impression of a foot and other ornaments', and that it was upon this stone that the Ó Domhnaill stood during his inauguration ceremony.⁹⁸ According to the same source, the stone was apparently broken up in a malicious act by a Mr. Mac Swine. Conwell in his reference to it, suggested that the destruction or possible theft of the stone occurred in the 1820s.⁹⁹ The origin of the Kilmacrenan stone is not recorded and there is no extant description of the other 'ornaments' on it referred to by O'Donnell. O'Donovan conjectured that it may have been taken from nearby Carraig an Dúin, which in local tradition is long held to have been the Uí Dhomhnaill place of inauguration.¹⁰⁰ Kinahan, however, in his later account of that site, described a large flagstone, then extant on the summit of Carraig an Dúin which, while not bearing any footprint, was the source

⁹⁶ P. Livingstone, *The Monaghan Story* (Enniskillen, 1980), 46.

⁹⁷ G.A. Hayes-McCoy, *Ulster and other Irish maps, c. 1600* (Dublin, 1964), xi-xiv.

⁹⁸ J. O'Donovan, *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the County of Donegal collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1835*, 53.

⁹⁹ E.A. Conwell, *Discovery of the tomb of Ollamh Fodhla* (Dublin, 1873), 26-7.

¹⁰⁰ J. O'Donovan, *op. cit.*, 53.

of a local tale which claimed that anyone who could lift it would find beneath it the crowns of former kings.¹⁰¹ This tale bears an uncanny likeness to the classical tale of Theseus lifting the stone in the Temple of Poseidon, and his discovery of the sword of Cecrops and a pair of golden sandals, underneath. Cill Mhic Nénáin was in use as the Mhic Suibhne inauguration place as early as 1399¹⁰² and it is first mentioned as the Uí Dhomhnaill site in 1461,¹⁰³ although it is presumed that it became their place of inauguration sometime after the poetically recorded inauguration of Domhnall Óg at Ráth Both in 1258.¹⁰⁴ The stone with its single footprint, may have been created in this period to serve as the inauguration *leac* and is more likely to have been positioned on the churchyard ridge at Cill Mhic Nénáin, rather than within the church itself.

A dubious *leac* reputedly from Carn Fraích, and a late sixteenth-century reference to a 'stone' at the Mag Aonghuis site of Lios na Ríogh, also merit some consideration. At Clonalis House, Castlerea, Co. Roscommon, a relatively small block of heavily fissured and weathered limestone lies in a flower bed at the entrance to the house (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 45-6). According to Jones' account of the stone written in 1922, it was removed *c.* 1840 from the mound of Carn Fraích, near Tulsk, to the avenue of Cargins House for safe-keeping.¹⁰⁵ It was subsequently taken *c.* 1970 to Clonalis. The stone which measures 0.9m by 0.6m, and stands to a height of 0.57m, is considerably smaller than the quoted dimensions of other known footprint *leaca*. However, a portion of it was apparently broken off before it was removed to Cargins and this is somewhat borne out by indications of fracturing on its east side. Jones described the stone after it had been broken and he claimed that there were the 'tracks of two human feet' in its upper surface, but a recent examination of it revealed what could be reservedly described as just a single shod footprint (length *c.* 0.30m) with an oddly pointed heel at the narrower end of the stone near its fractured side. The deformity of the shape of the single print may have been exaggerated by the obvious chemical solution which has deepened the impression. On the fractured east side of the stone, there is also half of what was conceivably an artificially hollowed-out basin, but there is no evidence at all of a second footprint impression.

¹⁰¹ G.H. Kinahan, 'Additional list of megalithic and other ancient structures, barony of Kilmacrenan, County Donegal', *JRSAI* 9, 1889, 284.

¹⁰² Rev. P. Walsh (ed.), *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne* (Dublin, 1920), 51.

¹⁰³ *AFM.*, vol.5, 1011-13.

¹⁰⁴ N.J.A. Williams (ed.), *op. cit.*, 107.

¹⁰⁵ W.A. Jones, 'The proclamation stone of the Connaught kings', *JGAHS* 12, 1922-3, 46.

The precise location of the Mag Aonghuis inauguration site of Lios na Ríogh has eluded positive identification, but that there was an inauguration *leac* there, is indisputable (see chapter II, pp. 69-70 for a discussion of the location of Lios na Ríogh). In January 16 1596, Lord Deputy Russell was told of the death of Aodh Mag Aonghuis and the subsequent inauguration of Glaisne Mag Aonghuis as chief of the name in opposition to Aodh's son, Art. The commissioners stated that - 'Glasney McCawley, pretending title by the tawnist custom, came to the stone whereon the Magnisses were wont to receive their ceremony, and hath called himself Magnise'.¹⁰⁶ There is no mention of a footprint impression in this fleeting reference, but it is possible that like the Mac Mathghamhna *leac*, and in keeping with Spenser's observation, the Mag Aonghuis stone was of single shod footprint type.

Among the sites which lack historical evidence for use as inauguration centres, but are proposed as such in local tradition, are Dunmull, Co. Antrim and St Columb's Mount and Stone at Shantallow, Co. Derry. Dunmull which lies in the townland of Toberdornan immediately northwest of Beardville, Co. Antrim, is a flat-topped volcanic outcrop, the summit of which is partially enclosed by the remains of an earthen bank. The site with its 'chair', bullaun stone and footprint stone, which lie off the summit on the west, southwest and east sides of the rock, is locally known as a seat and inauguration place of the Uí Floinn of Uí Tuirtri.¹⁰⁷ The single footprint, traditionally called the 'Giant's Foot-track', was apparently carved into a large flat stone which is now lost. The chaotic position of this suite of probable inauguration furniture, relative to the platform summit of the rock, is unusual, and it has been suggested that each piece may have been cast over the edge at some time.¹⁰⁸ The second stone, called St Columb's Stone, which is marked on Neville's map of the Siege of Derry, lies in what is now an orchard and vegetable garden of the Roleston Estate, Belmont. It is a flat, almost square block of coarse schist and gneiss with the impressions of two shod feet (length c.0.3m) carved off-centre at the slightly broader end of the stone (fig. 27).¹⁰⁹ According to Colonel Colby's OS memoirs, an artificial earthwork called St Columb's Mount, of which there is now no trace, was situated nearby, and was 'probably the platform on which the stone formerly stood'. Colby also

¹⁰⁶ *Cal. Carew MSS*, 1589-1600, 136.

¹⁰⁷ AMACNI, *A preliminary survey of the ancient monuments of Northern Ireland*(Belfast, 1940), 9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ DOENI, MBR B1281/73

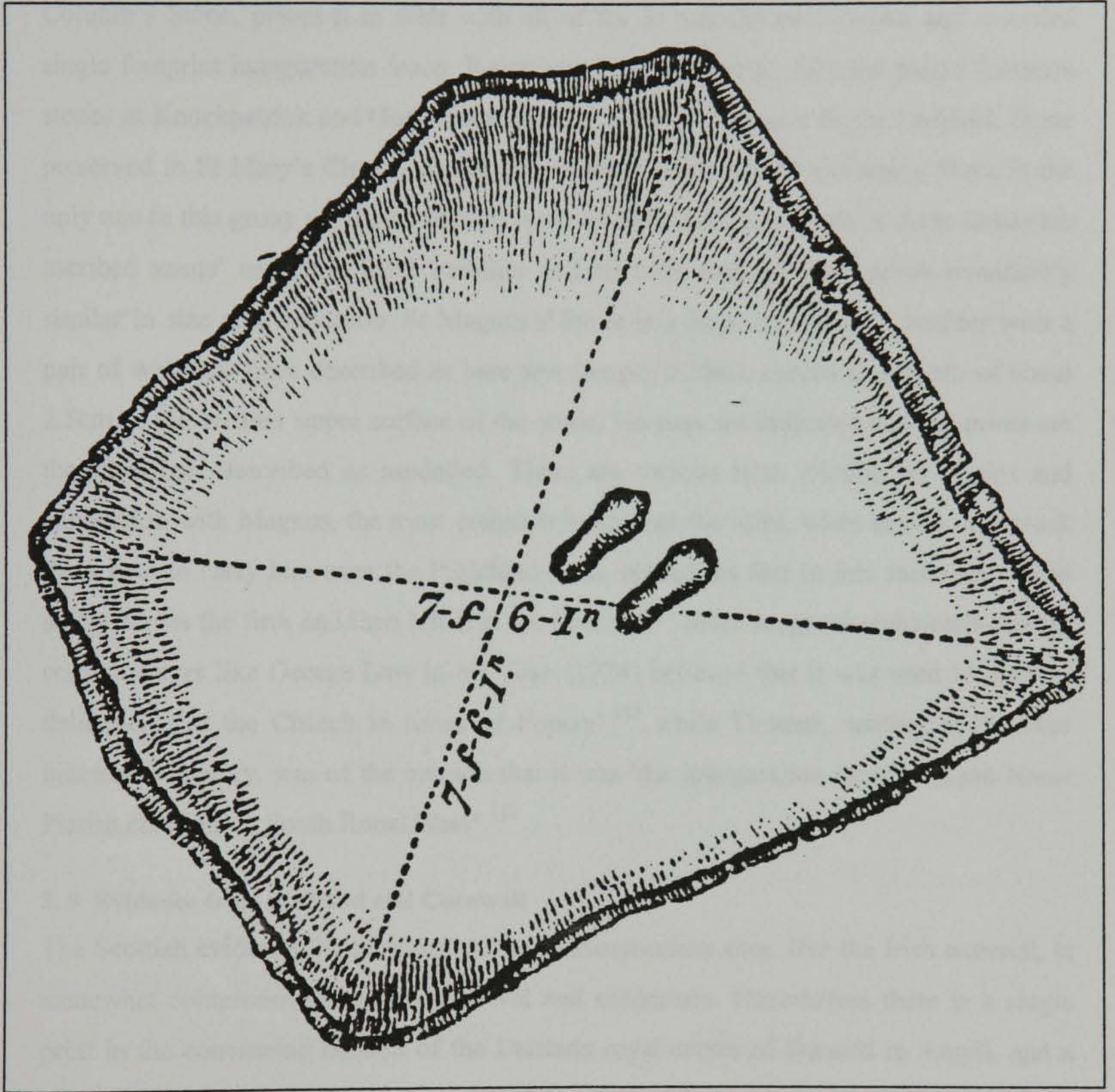


Fig. 27 Pair of shod footprints in St Columb's Stone, Belmont, Co. Derry [engraving from Norden's map of the Seige of Derry].

conjectured that the stone was brought here from the Grianan of Aileach and subsequently consecrated by St. Columb.¹¹⁰ However, in view of its large size (1.95m x 1.65m) and the fact that the inauguration place of the kings of Aileach removed from Grianan to Tulach Óg at least as early as the eleventh century, this seems unlikely. Although proposed in local tradition as an inauguration stone, the presence of a pair of shod prints in St Columb's Stone, places it at odds with all of the aforementioned known and recorded single footprint inauguration *leaca*. It compares well, however, with the paired footprint stones at Knockpatrick and Gortnamoyagh, and with St Magnus's or the Ladykirk Stone preserved in St Mary's Church, South Ronaldshay, albeit that St Columb's Stone is the only one in this group which is not associated with a church site. Each of these stones are ascribed saints' names in local tradition and all bear pairs of shod prints remarkably similar in size and execution. St Magnus's Stone is a large boat-shaped boulder with a pair of what has been described as bare feet (length 0.26m), carved to a depth of about 2.5cm in the broader upper surface of the stone. No toes are indicated and the prints are therefore best described as sandalled. There are various tales relating its origins and connection with Magnus, the most common being that the saint, when at one time stuck for a boat to carry him over the Pightland Firth, placed his feet in this stone and sailed safely across the firth and then left it at the church.¹¹¹ More sceptical eighteenth-century commentators like George Low in his *Tour* (1774) believed that it was used to 'expose delinquents at the Church in times of Popery',¹¹² while Thomas, writing in the later nineteenth century, was of the opinion that it was 'the inauguration stone of a pre-Norse Pictish chieftain in South Ronaldshay'.¹¹³

3.9 Evidence from Scotland and Cornwall

The Scottish evidence for footprint stones at inauguration sites, like the Irish material, is somewhat compromised by poor survival and conjecture. Nonetheless there is a single print in the convincing context of the Dalriada royal centre of Dunadd in Argyll, and a good description of the Finlaggan stone, Isle of Islay, from the acceptable record of the seventeenth-century Skye *seannachie*, Hugh Macdonald.

¹¹⁰ *Ordnance Survey of the County of Londonderry*, vol. 1 (Dublin, 1837), 233-4.

¹¹¹ J.P. Windwick, 'The Ladykirk Stone', *POAS* 6, 1927-8, 55-56.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 56.

¹¹³ F.W.L. Thomas, *op. cit.*, 39.

Recent thinking, based on an analysis of the material assemblage from the royal fortified site of Dunadd, suggests that it was 'one of a number of major defended centres at which local tribute could be collected and consumed by the kings, who probably resided there during their progresses'. Dunadd attained its highest status as a settlement in the period from the seventh to the ninth century. In addition to its tribute and residential functions, it has been proposed that its central location between the two most important groups within Dalriada - the Cenél nGabráin and the Cenél Loairn, would have made an ideal place of inauguration for the kings drawn from either group after the late seventh century.¹¹⁴ The presence of a footprint at the site adds further support to this theory. On the middle table of the three-tiered crag, a group of carvings are featured on an exposed rock surface, with a rock-cut basin hollowed out at a short distance to the southwest (fig. 28). The group includes an incised boar, for which Scottic and Pictish origins have variously been argued,¹¹⁵ an equally debated ogham inscription, more recently dated to the seventh century,¹¹⁶ and at its south end, a sunken shod right footprint 0.27m long, 0.1m in maximum width and 25mm in depth. About 2m south of this print, and in the same alignment, there is the lightly pecked outline of another shod right print of similar dimensions, with further peck marks within the outline suggesting that it was intended to be a sunken print, but was not completed. The heel is rather pointed, a deformity which probably caused its carver to try again further along the stone.¹¹⁷ The function of Dunadd as a place of inauguration may have ceased about the mid-ninth century when in 843, following King Cinaed Mac Ailpín's establishment of a union between Dalriada and Pictland, the royal centre shifted eastward into the land of the Picts and possibly to Forteviot in Strathearn, initially.¹¹⁸ The footprint is not datable of itself, but contextual and circumstantial evidence might indicate a relative date for it sometime between the sixth century, when the Dalriada first took possession of Dunadd, and the mid-ninth century when their royal centre transferred into Pictland during the kingship of Mac

¹¹⁴ M.R. Nieke and H.B. Duncan, 'Dalriada: the establishment and maintenance of an Early Historic kingdom in northern Britain', in S.T. Driscoll and M.R. Nieke (eds.), *Power and politics in Early Medieval Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1988), 17.

¹¹⁵ The more popular explanation is that both boar and ogham were carved by the Picts possibly when they captured the site in 736, but L. and J. Laing in, *The Picts and the Scots* (Gloucestershire, 1993), 95-6, argue against an exclusively Pictish attribution for these carvings, suggesting that they could just as easily be Scottic, or if the boar is Pictish it could have been carved in the fifth century prior to the Scottic settlement there.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹¹⁷ RCAHMS, *Argyll - an inventory of the monuments: vol.6, Mid Argyll and Cowal* (Edinburgh, 1988), 157-8.

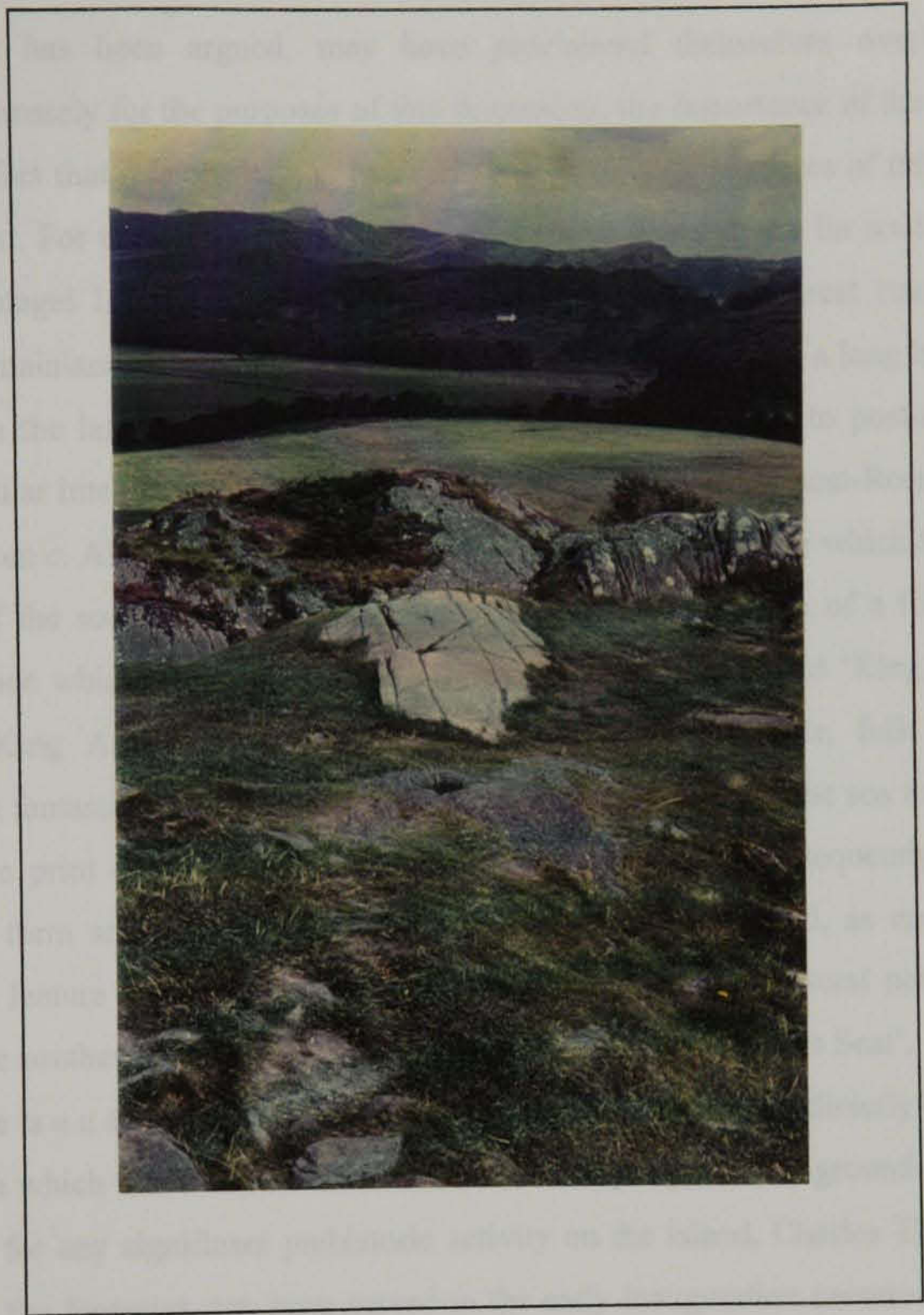


Fig. 28 The inauguration apparatus on the middle plateau at Dunadd.

Ailpín. The occurrence of the boar, although not necessarily contemporary with the print, does raise the possibility that the print may have been carved in the fifth century before Dalriadic occupation.¹¹⁹ Alternatively, and this is highly disputed, it may have been created during the Pictish incursions of the early eighth century when the Picts captured Dunadd, and it has been argued, may have proclaimed themselves overlords of Dalriada.¹²⁰ Ultimately for the purposes of this discussion, the importance of the Dunadd print lies in the fact that it is one of just two relatively datable occurrences of this feature in a royal context. For the second example, we must move down to the far southwest of England, to Tintagel Island on the north coast of Cornwall. This great round crag, adjoined to the mainland by a narrow neck of land, is a place which has a long history of occupation from the late Roman period (third/fourth century) through to post-medieval times. Of particular interest is the fact that it was the stronghold of the post-Roman kings of Dumnonia from *c.* AD 475 to at least AD 550.¹²¹ On a flat slate ridge which forms the highest point of the southern side of the island, there is an impression of a foot in the worn slate surface which, since at least the last century, has been called 'King Arthur's Footstep' or 'King Arthur's Footprint'. Like the Dunadd example, folk tradition attributes it to a fantastic leap by King Arthur when he stepped across the sea to Tintagel Church.¹²² The print originated as a natural hollow which was subsequently roughly worked to the form and size of a large human foot, apparently shod, as no toes are indicated. This feature lies midway between Tintagel church and a natural notch in the slate cliff on the southernmost edge of the island, known as 'King Arthur's Seat'. From the slate ridge there is a superb view of Cornwall to east and west, and it directly overlooks Tintagel church which itself may lie on the site of an early royal burial ground. As there is no evidence for any significant prehistoric activity on the island, Charles Thomas has speculated that the footprint may have served in the early inauguration ceremonies of the Roman or post-Roman Celtic peoples of the Cornovii or Dumnonii, correlating with either his designated Period I (3rd-4th century) or Period II (5th - 7th century) occupation of the island.¹²³ It may have originated then, sometime between the third century and *c.*

¹¹⁸ M.R. Nieke and H.B. Duncan, *op. cit.*, 19.

¹¹⁹ J. and L. Laing, *op. cit.*, 96.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ C. Thomas, *Book of Tintagel: Arthur and archaeology* (London, 1993), 87.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 49.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 96-99.

600, but reasonable conjecture points to the period 475-550 when the island became the centre for the post-Roman kings of Dumnonia.

Returning to Scotland, Nieke and Duncan in their work on the early historic kingdom of Dalriada, also make reference to a footprint stone at St Columba's Church, in Southend, southern Kintyre, and propose an association between it and the nearby possible royal fortification at Dunaverty. This relationship recalls the juxtaposition of the essentially pagan Cenél Conaill inauguration site of Carraig an Dúin, to the church site of Cill Mhic Nénáin and its inauguration stone (see case study III). St Columba's Church is referred to for the first time in the fourteenth century, but surviving architectural details of the church fabric suggest that the original structure may be as early as the late twelfth/early thirteenth century.¹²⁴ The name ascribed to the church may also indicate an Early Christian foundation date. The footprint stone cited by Nieke and Duncan is situated outside the northwest angle of an unidentified building west of the church. It is found in association with a cross-socket which lies nearby on the summit of a rocky knoll. Two footprints, known locally as 'St Columba's Footsteps' and only one of which appears to be early, are carved into the level surface of a natural rock outcrop. The northern footprint was cut by a local stonemason in 1856, but the second impression - a shod right footprint (length 0.29m) which is positioned at right angles to the first, could be quite early, if not possibly contemporary with the free-standing cross of probable early medieval date which once stood on the knoll, or the medieval church. A date of 564 in Arabic numerals, is carved into the outcrop between the two footprints, its execution unlikely to be earlier than the sixteenth century.¹²⁵ Nieke and Duncan have suggested that this footprint stone, if early, may reflect the later involvement of the Church in the king-making ritual of the Cenél nGabraín, their inauguration ceremony possibly originally having been held at the nearby fort of Dunaverty until the late seventh century.¹²⁶

Beyond Jura to the west, lies Finlaggan, Isle of Islay, which was the inauguration place and administrative centre of the MacDonalids until their forfeiture c. 1493. It comprises two islands, Eilean Mór which is natural, and Eilean na Comhairle or Council Island, a smaller artificial island which is attached to the former by an inundated causeway. Both

¹²⁴ RCAHMS, *Argyll - an inventory of the ancient monuments: vol. 1, Kintyre* (Edinburgh, 1971), 147.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 150-51.

¹²⁶ M.R. Nieke and H.B. Duncan, *op. cit.*, 16.

islands are referred to in Archdeacon Donald Monro's *Description of the Occidental or Western Isles of Scotland*, through which he travelled in 1549. He described a 'palace-wark according to thair auld fassoun' and a 'fair chapell' on the larger island and he noted that fourteen of the 'Iles best Barons' regularly convened on Council Island to administer justice.¹²⁷ A survey of both islands published in 1984, identified three rudimentary buildings set within an embankment on Eilean na Comhairle. On Eilean Mór, a complex of large and small rectangular and subrectangular buildings, the largest of which is a great hall and the best preserved a chapel, together with a burial ground, was recorded. A very large enclosure (with adjoining smaller enclosure) encompasses the greater part of the northeast half of that island.¹²⁸ Recent seasons of excavation on both islands by D.H. Caldwell have revealed that the three buildings on Eilean na Comhairle are clay-bonded, stone-walled structures constituting a castle. Timberwork defences were identified on Eilean Mór enclosing over twenty buildings, together with the great hall and chapel. The finds from the two islands suggest that occupation took place over the period from the thirteenth century through to the sixteenth century.¹²⁹ In the second 1990 season of excavation on Eilean Mór, a system of paved causeways was discovered, one of which extended from a jetty on the north side of the island and skirted the great hall to reach the chapel.¹³⁰ Although there is no reliable record of its destruction, the Finlaggan Stone, upon which the MacDonald Lords of the Isles were inaugurated, was apparently broken up in 1615 by the Earl of Argyll¹³¹ - an act which recalls Mountjoy's symbolic destruction of the Tulach Óg chair in 1602. In c. 1963 a gravestone of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, with a left footprint carved on its reverse, was found on the northeast side of Eilean Mór. Suggestions were made that this, while clearly not the MacDonald inauguration stone, might represent that of the chiefs of Clann Iain Mhoir Ile (Dunyveg) who claimed the title of the Lord of the Isles in 1545.¹³² The very large size of the print (0.46m long) and the fact that it is a left bare foot with toes showing, makes

¹²⁷ R.W. Munro, *Monro's Western Isles of Scotland and genealogies of the clans, 1549* (Edinburgh, 1961), 56-7.

¹²⁸ RCAHMS, *Argyll - an inventory of the monuments: vol. 5. Islay, Jura* (Edinburgh, 1984), 275-81.

¹²⁹ B.S. Nenk, S. Margeson and M. Hurley, 'Medieval Britain and Ireland in 1993', *Medieval Archaeology* 38, 1994, 284-5.

¹³⁰ B.S. Nenk, S. Margeson and M. Hurley, 'Medieval Britain and Ireland in 1990', *Medieval Archaeology* 35, 1991, 226.

¹³¹ D. Gruamach, 'Finlaggan "footprint stone" found', *Clan Donald Magazine*, No. 3, 1965, 5; G.A. Hayes-McCoy, 'The making of an O'Neill: a view of the ceremony at Tullaghoge, Co. Tyrone', *UJA* 33, 1970, f.n. 26.

¹³² D. Gruamach, op. cit., 5-9.

RITUAL FURNITURE AT INAUGURATION PLACES

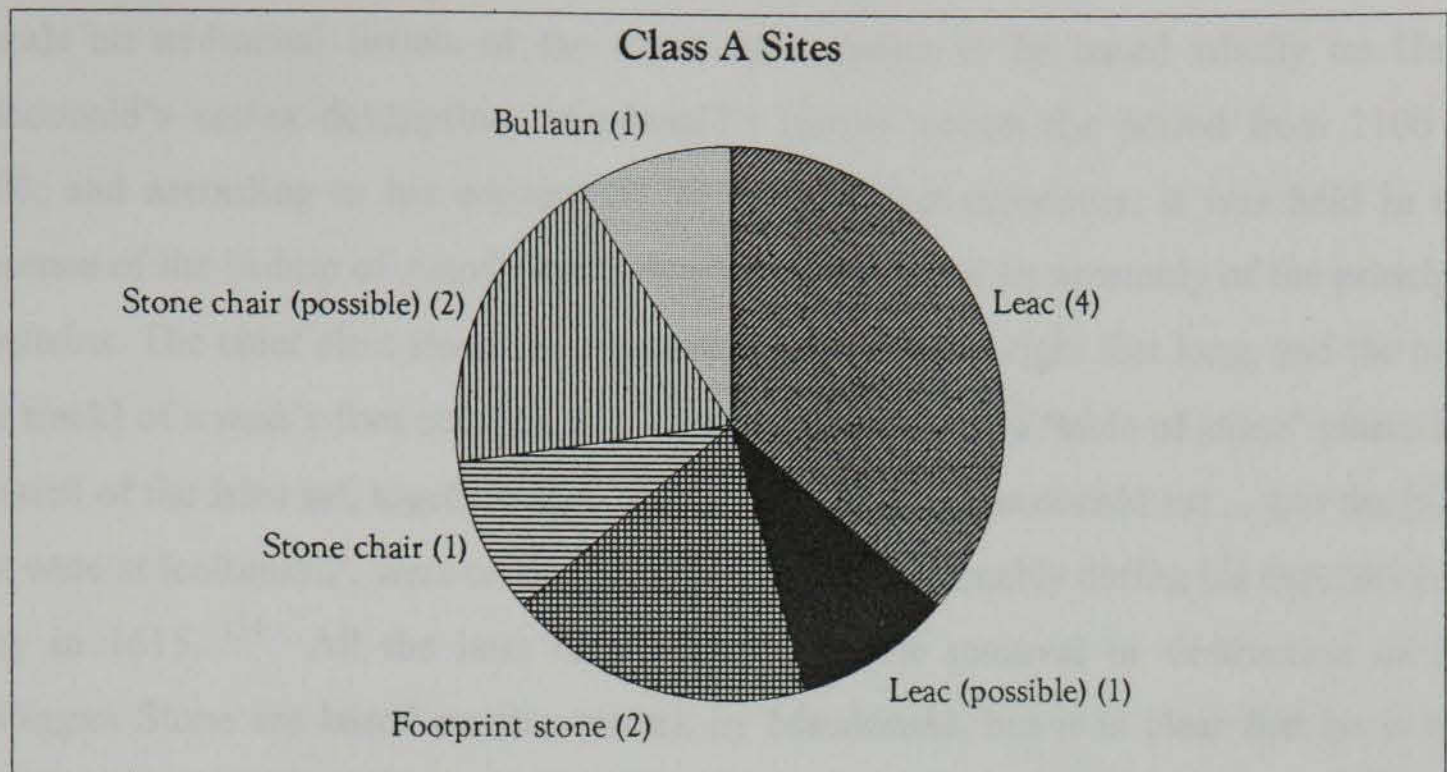


Fig. 29 Breakdown of furniture at attested inauguration sites

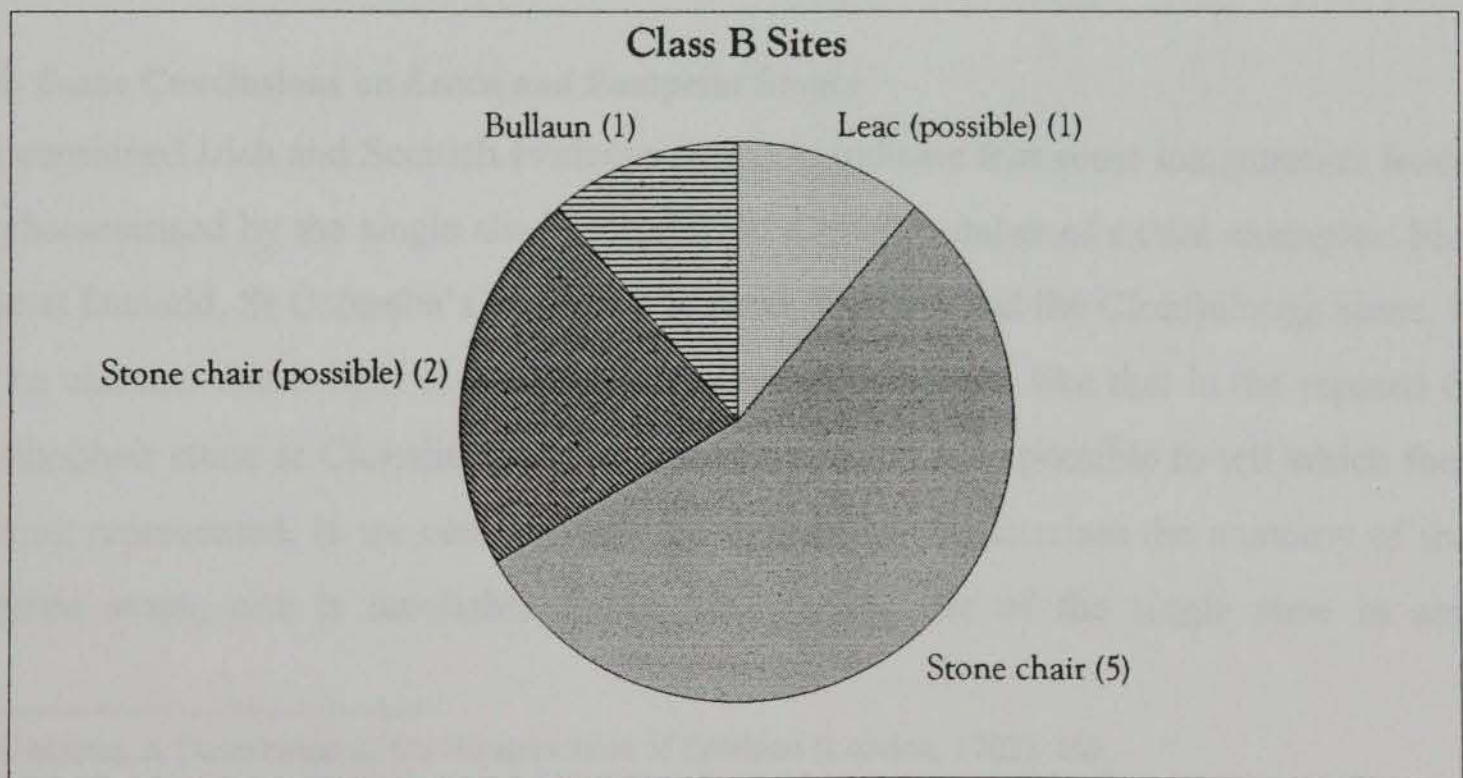


Fig. 30 Breakdown of furniture at conjectured inauguration sites

this a very unlikely inauguration stone. There are just two late descriptions of the original Finlaggan Stone. The first and earliest record of it occurs in Hugh Macdonald's (a Skye seannachie) seventeenth-century *History of the MacDonalDs*, and the second features in Martin's *Western Isles of Scotland*, published in 1703.¹³³ Martin's passing reference reveals no additional details of the stone and appears to be based wholly on Hugh Macdonald's earlier description. Macdonald's history covers the period from 1100 to 1500, and according to his account of the inauguration ceremony, it was held in the presence of the bishop of Argyll, the bishop of the Isles and an assembly of the principal chieftains. The chief elect stood on a 'square stone, seven or eight feet long, and the tract [*sic* track] of a man's foot cut thereon'. He also claimed that a 'table of stone' where the Council of the Isles sat, together with 'the stone on which Macdonald sat ... and the bells that were at Icolumkill', were carried away by Argyll, presumably during his expedition to Islay in 1615.¹³⁴ All the later commentaries on the removal or destruction of the Finlaggan Stone are based on this remark by Macdonald, but it is clear that he is not referring to a footprint stone, but to a stone chair or seat in which the MacDonald sat during the proceedings of the Council.¹³⁵ Traditionally, it is believed that the inauguration stone was kept on Eilean na Comhairle,¹³⁶ but it has also been suggested that the ceremony was held at Lismanor house on Eilean Mór.¹³⁷

3. 10 Some Conclusions on *Leaca* and Footprint Stones

The combined Irish and Scottish evidence seems to indicate that some inauguration *leaca* are characterised by the single shod footprint. In a small number of extant examples, like those at Dunadd, St Columba's stone at Southend, Kintyre, and the Clonfinlough stone, it can be claimed that a right footprint is intended, while others, like that in the reputed Ó Conchobhair stone at Clonalis, are so rudimentary that it is impossible to tell which foot is being represented. If we concede that the right print characterises the anatomy of the footprint stone, one is inevitably drawn back to the rite of the single shoe in any

¹³³ M. Martin, *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland* (London, 1703), 102.

¹³⁴ J.R.N. Macphail (ed.), *Highland Papers*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1914), 23-4. Macphail in his introductory note to the MacDonald History stresses that it 'does not have the authority of a contemporary record, and in many places it is inaccurate in detail. But it is of great value as embodying and preserving the traditional beliefs current some three hundred years ago among the Skye Macdonalds with regard to the history of their race'.

¹³⁵ R.W. Munro in his edition of *Monro's Western Isles of Scotland*, 110, in addition to Gruamach and Hayes-McCoy cited above, all claim that Argyll either broke up, or carried off the inauguration stone.

¹³⁶ D. Gruamach, *op. cit.*, 5.

¹³⁷ R. Nicholson, *Scotland: the later middle ages* (Edinburgh, 1974), 208.

speculation as to what the mark of the right foot might symbolise. Although there is no evidence to indicate whether the shoe cast over the Ó Néill's head, during his ceremony of inauguration, was a right or left one, in the apparently talismanic act of classical and medieval Welsh and Irish soldiery appearing with one foot shod and one foot bare, it is generally (but not consistently) the right foot which is bare and the left shod. The question follows whether the rite of the single shoe was practised in conjunction with the placing of the foot in the stone, or that the one was used instead of the other. The evidence such as it is, does not suggest that these acts were conducted in tandem, but perhaps that the one was a variant of the other. In the documented accounts of the rite of the shoe relating to the Ó Néill ceremony, that ritual was performed while the Ó Néill was seated in his stone chair. There is no evidence to suggest that *Leac na Ríogh*, perhaps later incorporated into the chair, bore a footprint impression. Likewise, in the reference to the placing of a shoe at the Mag Uidhir inauguration place of Sciath Gabhra, by the rival claimant Conchobhar Mag Uidhir in 1589, there is no archaeological evidence for a *leac* or footprint stone at that site. The only possible instance in which a correlation of the two could be proposed concerns Carn Fraích, which is reputedly the site of an extant but dubious footprint stone, and where Mac Diarmada performed the rite of placing the shoe on the Ó Conchobhair's foot in the inauguration ceremonies of 1461 and 1488.

This documentary and landscape survey has shown that footprint stones may have been integral to the performance of inauguration ceremonies at Mullach Leic, Cill Mhic Nénáin, Carn Fraích and Dun Mull, and that those extant on the Rock of Skerry, on the Clonfinlough Stone and at Drumandoora may conceivably have been carved for inauguration purposes. The function of the now lost single footprint stones at Templepatrick, Killeen and Kilbaylet Upper must, however, remain uncertain. Set apart from the small catalogue of single footprint inauguration *leaca* by virtue of their paired prints, a case can perhaps be made for Gortnamoyagh and Shantallow, together with the Knockpatrick Stone, St Columcille's Stone at Drumcavany, Co. Donegal, the grave-slab at Inis Cealtra, Co. Donegal, and St Magnus's Stone in South Ronaldshay, having had a devotional or ceremonial significance in a purely ecclesiastical context. It has already been demonstrated that the single print is not exclusive to the inauguration *leac*. Somewhat like the motif of the single shoe, it too seems to take on devotional or talismanic properties, perhaps most clearly attested in relation to the almost ubiquitous

presence of saint's prints at holy wells in the west of Ireland. The early historic contexts of the respective footprints at Dunadd and Tintagel possibly offer the earliest date for the use of the footprint *per se* in the rite of inauguration as practised in these islands, while Hugh Macdonald's commentary on the Finlaggan stone, and its survival up to 1615, suggests that this practice continued well into later medieval times in the Gaelic world.

3. 11 Rock-cut Basins as Inauguration Furniture

Bullauns or rock-cut basins are found at Magh Adhair - the Uí Bhriain inauguration site at Toonagh, Co. Clare and at the Scottish inauguration sites of Dunadd in Argyll and Dun Duirn in Perthshire. They also feature at the less certain sites of Dunmull, Co. Antrim and at Dunino in Fife,¹³⁸ where, like the Dunadd basin, they are found in association with footprint stones. The rudimentary depression accompanying the spurious footprint in the stone at Clonalis, could also have served as a basin. Unlike the Dunadd basin, which is cut out of flat bedrock and associated with a footprint and other carvings, the Magh Adhair bullaun stone is free-standing. It is situated on the northeast side of the large mound at the site and it may not be in its original location (see vol. 2, appendix, 1, p. 7). Of interest too is the presence of a small stone (0.4m x 0.3m) containing an oval depression, at the site named 'Caran Fort' which lies a little over a half mile north of Rathcroghan mound. At this site, there are a group of monuments including a D-shaped enclosure, a burial mound, an extensive field system and a possible souterrain. The bullaun is situated outside the D-shaped enclosure on its south side.¹³⁹ Bullaun stones, which are variously large or small loose boulders or earthfast erratics containing one or more artificial hollows or basins, are a common feature of early church sites. They are generally held to have functioned as mortars which, with a pestle, would have been used for crushing and grinding, but in later and current tradition they are attributed curative properties.¹⁴⁰ It is unlikely that the purely domestic function ascribed to bullauns at early church sites, translates to the small rock-cut single basins and free-standing bullauns at attested and suspected inauguration sites. In these contexts, where they may be viewed as inauguration

¹³⁸ M.O. Anderson, *Kings and kingship in early Scotland* (Totowa, 1973), 132; The Dunino rock basin lies beside a footprint which is at least partly artificial, and situated above the right bank of Dunino burn below the churchyard.

¹³⁹ J. Waddell, 'Rathcroghan :a royal site in Connacht', *JIA* 1, 1983, 37.

¹⁴⁰ K. Hughes and A. Hamlin, *Celtic monasticism: the modern traveler to the early Irish church* (New York, 1981), 99-100.

furniture, it is worth considering that they may have been used as vessels for holding oil in an anointing ritual.¹⁴¹

3. 12 Inauguration Chairs

The enthroned king is a commonplace image of sovereignty. In medieval Europe, enthronement was one of five rites which constituted the king-making process. Coming at the end of the sequence, it was preceded by coronation, investiture with insignia and royal anointing. Both the investiture rite and enthronement are acknowledged as having secular origins.¹⁴² Thrones and their occupants appear with great regularity in the illustrated manuscripts, book covers, metalwork and ivories associated with the Carolingian and Ottonian Emperors of the eight to tenth centuries, particularly in the works produced by the Palace School at Aachen under Charlemagne, and later at the court schools of Lothair I and Charles the Bald. Charlemagne himself had his *Marmorne Stuhl* - a plain heavy seat of white marble on five steps, at the palace chapel Aachen (now in the west gallery). It has been argued that it may originally have been located in the courtyard outside the chapel.¹⁴³ In the Frankish world, the most typecast image of kingship was that of the enthroned King David, wearing the typical David crown and generally playing his harp - a model for, or reflection of the Frankish kings who had themselves depicted in like manner seated on elaborate thrones. Among the finest examples of the *Novus David* imagery are the illustrations of Emperor Lothair I (840-55) in the Gospels of Lothair, produced at Tours between 849-51, and Charles the Bald in Count Vivian's Bible, also compiled at Tours and dated sometime between 843 and 851. The early medieval emperors of Byzantium had a lavish throne-room known as the *Chrysotriklinos*, which lay within the palace at Constantinople. It is a feature of much commentary in the *Book of Ceremonies* which was compiled by Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (A.D. 913-59).¹⁴⁴ By way of contrast, on the Atlantic fringe of Europe, both the written and illustrated records of early

¹⁴¹ Evidence for the ordaining of Irish kings is scant and there are no direct references to anointing as such, but Adomnán referred to Diarmait mac Cerbaill, the sixth-century Uí Néill king of Temair, as *totius Scotiae regnatorem deo auctore ordinatum* - see A.O. and M.O. Anderson (eds. and trans.), *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (London, 1961), 280; The *Annals of Ulster* announce the ordination of Artri mac Cathail as king of Munster under the year 793, and Aed mac Néill who died in 819 is described as 'the ordained king of Ireland'.

¹⁴² P.E. Schramm, *A history of the English coronation* (Oxford, 1937), 22.

¹⁴³ J.L. Nelson, 'The Lord's anointed and the people's choice: Carolingian royal ritual', in D. Cannadine and S. Price (eds.), *op. cit.*, 154-6.

¹⁴⁴ A. Cameron, 'The construction of court ritual: the Byzantine Book of Ceremonies', in D. Cannadine and S. Price (eds.), *op. cit.*, 116.

medieval Ireland tend to show the chair or throne, where it occurs, as an object more closely associated with saints and ecclesiastics than kings. In the Book of Kells c. AD 800, the Evangelists John and Mark, and the Virgin and Child, are shown seated in ornamental short-backed chairs or thrones, not unlike the Hexham 'frith stool', a Northumbrian monolithic throne for an abbot, imitating a Byzantine model, dated to the last quarter of the seventh century.¹⁴⁵ This type of short-backed throne continues to be depicted in later metalwork and is identifiable in the images of St Patrick, the Virgin and Child, and Christ, on the shrine known as the *Domhnach Airgid*. The Irish high crosses of the ninth and tenth centuries, however, do offer several representations of the seated or enthroned David playing his harp, like those on the crosses at Castledermot, Co. Kildare, Durrow and Kinnitty, Co. Offaly, and at Ullard, Co. Kilkenny. Seats or thrones are also depicted in two panels on the east face of Muiredach's Cross at Monasterboice - the Adoration of the Magi and David smiting Goliath. A figure, probably Christ, is shown seated on a more elaborate chair, performing the miracle of the loaves and fishes, on a cross at Clonca, Co. Donegal. Most of these, with the exception of the latter, are very primitive representations, some with high backs, others with no backs, but the Clonca chair with its open sides, legs, and high back terminating in some sort of ornament, is clearly wooden and compares well with the two chairs carved on a pillar stone at Dunfallandy in Atholl, Scotland. The Scottish antiquary, John Stuart, suggested that the image of the two figures on the Dunfallandy stone, both sitting on chairs, flanking either side of what appears to be a hill, and one of whom bears a rod, might be a portrayal of the inauguration of a Pictish chief of Atholl.¹⁴⁶

The only documented instance of the use of a chair in an Irish inauguration ceremony concerns the Ó Neill chair at Tulach Óg. Beyond that, there are a small handful of references to chairs or seats of authority, variously ascribed to kings and young handsome warriors in early Irish sagas, to saints in the *Lives*, and to *ollamhain* and bishops in the annals. In none of these cases is the chair associated with the ceremony of inauguration. Correspondingly the archaeological record attests a conservative estimate of seventeen stone 'chairs', either previously recorded or extant on the Irish landscape. Some of these are free-standing, while others are fortuitous or partly exploited rock formations. Just

¹⁴⁵ C. Thomas, *Britain and Ireland in Early Christian times AD 400-800* (London, 1971), 103.

¹⁴⁶ J. Stuart, 'Note on the coronation stone', *PSAS* 8, 1868-9, 102-3.

seven can be entertained as inauguration furniture. Chairs in folk tradition and mythology often assume magical proportions, portrayed as the places of heroes and giants. Cadair Idris in Wales, for instance, is a mountain called after Idris, the legendary giant and astronomer, while Seefin Mountain (*suidhe Finn*) in Co. Sligo is celebrated as the place in which 'Finn was wont to have his seat' and the sight of which caused Caeilte to weep, in the *Colloquy with the Ancients*.¹⁴⁷ More frequently, 'chairs' sited on heights and varying from the convincing to mere slabs of rock, are ascribed to saints, druids, fairies and brehons. A typical example of a so-called 'brehon's chair' occurs in association with a small enclosure on a ridge at Kyle Hill, on the Offaly/Laois border and about two miles west of Clonfert-Molua. In his *Topographia Hibernica* compiled in 1795, William Wenman Seward observed a seat-like formation of sandstone outcrop at the northern end of the ridge, which 'the common people [called] the fairy chair' and where 'the Brehon of the Fitzpatrick's held his Court'(fig. 31).¹⁴⁸ There are numerous examples of 'saints' chairs, perhaps the most impressive of which are 'St Mogs Chair', Co. Wexford and St Patrick's Chair, Co. Antrim. The former is a natural projection of rock, sculpted into the shape of a small chair, on the edge of the summit of the impressive volcanic Rock of Toberanierin.¹⁴⁹ 'St Patrick's Chair' at Struell, is mentioned as early as 1602-3 by Josiah Bodley.¹⁵⁰ It is essentially a recess formed by three large rocks, situated on the brow of a hill overlooking the renowned Struell wells. Struell is a place of pilgrimage, and according to O'Laverty, penitents to the site sat facing east in the chair and turned three times 'being careful to turn from left to right' - in effect, performing the *deiseal* or ceremonial turn.¹⁵¹ The incidence of stone chairs is not peculiar to Ireland, but extends to Scotland, Wales and Cornwall, where a small number are associated with sites designated as tribute centres and places of inauguration and assembly. Like many of the Irish examples, several of the Scottish 'chairs' bear the names of saints, among them 'St Fillan's Chair' at Glendochart, Perthshire, 'St Marnan's Chair' on the banks of the

¹⁴⁷ S.H. O'Grady (ed.), *Silva Gadelica* (London, 1892; reprint New York, 1970) 244-5.

¹⁴⁸ W.W. Seward, *Topographia Hibernica or the Topography of Ireland Antient and Modern* (Dublin, 1795), n.p.

¹⁴⁹ This feature has never been recorded. Its oral tradition has been maintained by the landowner, Mr. Oliver Murray, now in his late eighties.

¹⁵⁰ Anon, 'Bodley's Visit to Lecale, County of Down, A.D. 1602-3', *UJA* 2, 1854, 89.

¹⁵¹ J. O'Laverty, *An historical account of the diocese of Down and Connor, ancient and modern*, vol.1 (Dublin, 1878), 33-5.

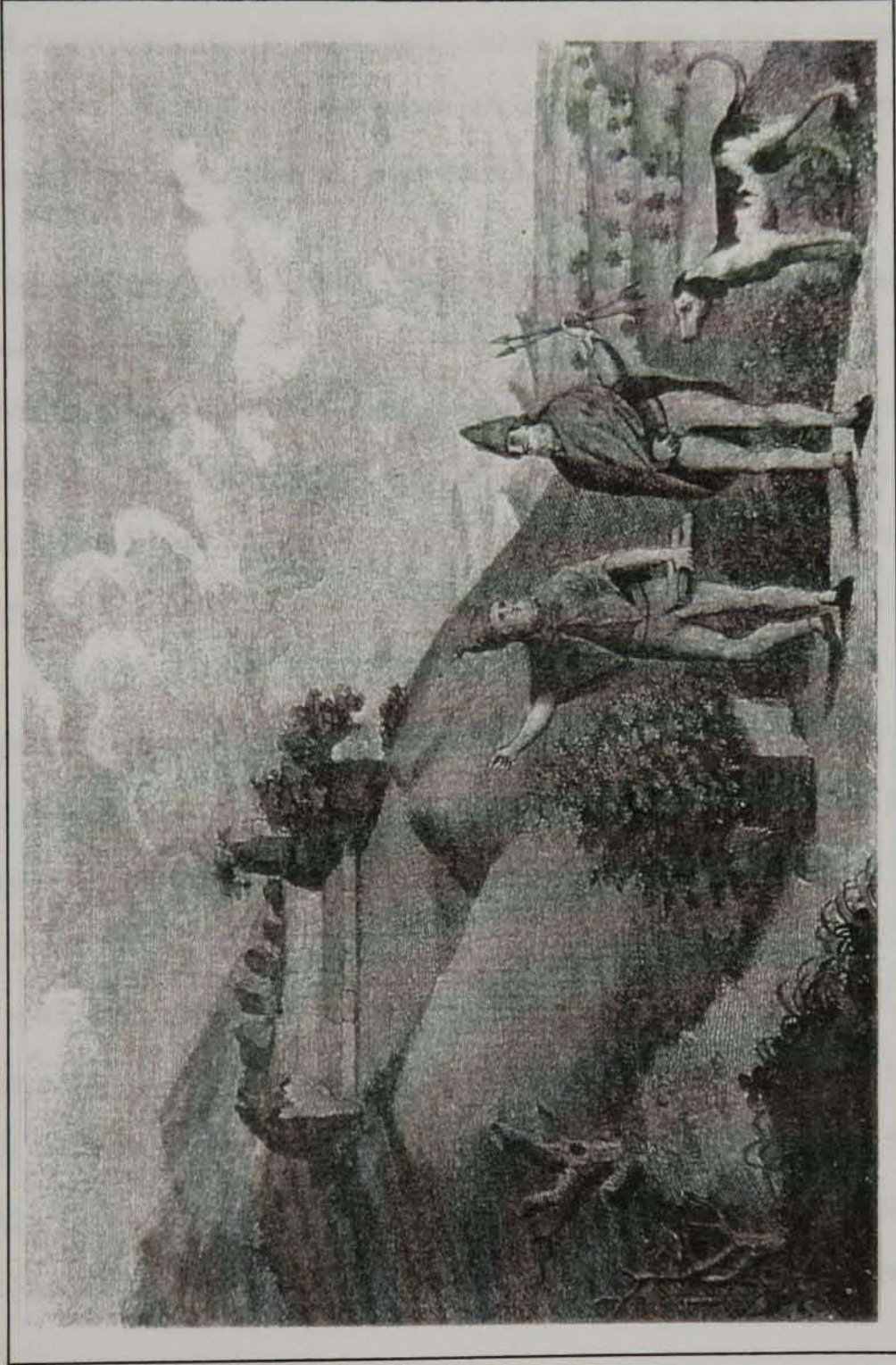


Fig. 31 Beauford's eighteenth-century fanciful drawing of the 'Brehon's Chair' on Kyle Hill.

Deveron River in Aberdeenshire¹⁵² and ‘Suidhe Donnan’ or ‘St Donnan’s Chair’ in the parish of Kildonan in Sutherland.¹⁵³

The primary concern here is to consider whether the chairs of the two branches of the Uí Néill at Tulach Óg and Castlereagh are exceptional, or whether a case can actually be made from the combined countrywide landscape and documentary material to suggest that stone chairs generally had their place in the inauguration ceremony. There are also the related questions as to how early some of these stone chairs might be; whether the respective Uí Néill chairs are quite late innovations; and if chairs were used instead of or in conjunction with *leaca* at some sites.

3. 13 Some Early Irish Literary and Historical References to Chairs of Authority and Sovereignty

To look first at the rather frugal and circumstantial documentary evidence; in the few instances in which a chair of authority is mentioned it is generally referred to as *cathair* and occasionally as *ríg-shuide*, although the latter is also used of a royal seat, as in palace or stronghold.¹⁵⁴ The more reliable indicator of an actual chair then, is *cathair*. A crystal chair, *cathair gloinighe*, features in the tale *Echtra Airt* and is mentioned in that text alongside another symbol of sovereignty, the warrior’s wand or *flesc miledh* (see chapter I, p. 20). In the course of his quest to remedy the curse on the kingship of Temair, Conn arrives at an island of wonders, or ‘land of promise’, inhabited by the Túatha Dé Danann. Within the great hostel he sees Ségdæ Sáerlabraid (‘Propitious Noble-speaker’), ‘a young man with excellence of shape and form, in a chair of crystal’.¹⁵⁵ The *cathair gloinighe* however, appears to be a biblical allegory and also features in *Betha Colaim Chille* in which St Baithin in a vision beholds a chair of gold, a chair of silver and a chair of crystal [*cathair oir, cathair airgid, cathair gloine*].¹⁵⁶ It is not unusual to find it in *Echtra Airt*, since the first half of that work has been suggested as an ‘entirely Christian invention’,¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Ibid., 103-4.

¹⁵³ RCAHMS, *Second report and inventory of monuments and constructions in the county of Sutherland* (Edinburgh 1911), 133-4.

¹⁵⁴ *DIL* (Dublin, 1968), 416.

¹⁵⁵ R.I. Best, ‘The adventures of Art son of Conn, and the courtship of Delbchaem’ *Ériu* 3, 1907, 156-7

¹⁵⁶ A. O’Kelleher and G. Schoepperle (eds.), *Betha Colaim Chille* (1994), 121.

¹⁵⁷ B. O’Hehir, ‘The Christian version of eachtra Airt meic Cuind ocus Tochmarc Delbchaime ingine Morgain’, in P.K. Ford (ed.), *Celtic folklore and Christianity: studies in memory of William W. Heist*, (1983), 179.

its message interpreted as one of Christian redemption.¹⁵⁸ Boswell suggested that in *Echtra Airt* the image of the Dé Danann chieftains seated on their crystal thrones, is a native version of the 'Hebraic imagery of the Throne and its Occupant'.¹⁵⁹ The *Fís Adomnán* describes the throne of God in elaborate detail, fashioned like a canopied chair, with four columns of precious stone beneath it, and 'over the head of the Glorious One that sitteth upon the royal throne [*ina chatháir rigdai*] is a great arch, like unto a wrought helmet, or a regal diadem'.¹⁶⁰ Many of these images of crystal, gold, silver and canopied thrones seem to have been derived from biblical sources and are therefore of little consequence in the search for literary or historical references to the inauguration chair. A more useful source is *Baile an Scáil*, the prophetic Temair king-list, in which Conn meets with yet another handsome warrior who again is royally seated. The *scál* is found in a splendid house, presiding in his king's seat [*ina rig-shuide*].¹⁶¹ He is accompanied by an enthroned woman who is the personification of the sovereignty of Ireland [*flaith Éirenn*]. As she pours a draught of liquor from a vat into a cup, the *scál* names the king to whom it will be given.¹⁶² The concept of a throne, as a symbol of authority and power, was at least understood when these works were compiled, but if and when this idea was realised as an actual trapping of early Irish kingship is indeterminable. In the remaining documented references to chairs, their occupants are *ollamhs*, bishops and brehons. In *Agallamh an dá Shuagh*, Adhna, chief poet of Ulster dies, and Athairne is installed in his place. Adhna's son, Néidhe, returns to the palace of Emania, enters the royal court and makes directly for the chief poet's chair [*cathair ollaman*] which at that moment he finds vacant. The arch-poet's official gown [*tuighen*] is draped on the back of it. He puts on the gown and sits in the chair.¹⁶³ The concept of a *cathair ollaman*, put forward in this tale, becomes credible with the record of Tanaide Mór Ó Maoil Chonaire, son of Duinnin, son of Nede, taking his seat in the 'Ollav's Chair of the province of Connacht [*cathair ollamnachta Coicid Connacht*]' in the year 1270.¹⁶⁴ It may be assumed then, that there was an installation

¹⁵⁸ K. McCone, *Pagan past and Christian present in early Irish literature* (Maynooth, 1991), 153.

¹⁵⁹ C.S. Boswell, *An Irish precursor of Dante* (London, 1908), 144-5.

¹⁶⁰ R.I. Best and O. Bergin (eds.), *Lebor na Huidre* (Dublin, 1929; reprint Galway 1970), 69, line 2014; C.S. Boswell, *op. cit.*, 135.

¹⁶¹ E. O'Curry, *Lectures on the manuscript materials of ancient Irish history* (Dublin, 1861; reprint 1995), 621.

¹⁶² K. McCone, *op. cit.*, 109.

¹⁶³ R.I. Best and M.A. O'Brien (eds.), *Book of Leinster IV*, 816, line 7(50) [*luid condessid i cathair ollaman; 817 [is melra Nede don tsuide i ndessid .i. suide cathair ind ollaman]*]; E. O'Curry, *Lectures on the manuscript materials of ancient Irish history* (Dublin, 1861; reprint 1995), 383.

¹⁶⁴ *Ann. Conn.*, 156-7.

ceremony for an *ollamh*, the focus of which was an actual chair. There are also documentary references to ecclesiastical thrones in the Irish context. For instance, in the *Annals of Tigernach*, it is stated that in 1134, Mael m'Aedoic 'ascended S. Patrick's throne [cathair Padraic]',¹⁶⁵ and in 1135, Cu mara Mór was 'killed through a miracle of S. Iarlaithe's throne [cathaire Iarlaithe], which had been desecrated'. Presumably 'St Iarlaithe's throne' was the throne of the archbishopric instituted at the Synod of Kells in 1152.¹⁶⁶ Mention is also made of a bishop's chair or throne in the *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, dated by Jackson¹⁶⁷ to the last quarter of the eleventh century - 'a veteran in a bishop's chair [ba h-athlaech i catháir n-espuic]'.¹⁶⁸ Documentary sources also suggest a third category of chair occupant - the judge or brehon and his *cathaoir bhreitheamhnais* or judgement seat which is mentioned, for instance, in texts like *Trí bior-ghaoithe an bháis*.¹⁶⁹

3. 14 The Two Ó Néill Chairs

If *ollamhs* and bishops were installed in chairs, and brehons apparently sat in judgement seats, which were the symbol of their position and authority, it would seem logical to assume that kings too were enthroned. However, there is not a shred of direct documentary evidence to suggest that this was so in early medieval Ireland, or indeed in later medieval Ireland, until we first meet with the Ó Néill chair at Tulach Óg, in Sir John Perrott's *Chronicle of Ireland 1584-1603*,¹⁷⁰ and on both Francis Jobson's map of 1590,¹⁷¹ and Richard Bartlett's map of 1602.¹⁷² Turning to the landscape evidence, a survey of 'chairs' either attested or traditionally cited as inauguration furniture, reveals that they vary from the free-standing to the partly worked, and the more fortuitous chair-like rock formation. In addition to the recorded Tulach Óg chair and what is believed to be the surviving Clann Aodha Buidhe chair, there are the now lost and reputed 'Marquis of Clanrickard's Chair' at Caher on Iarla, Co. Galway; the 'Nurse's Seat' at Ard na

¹⁶⁵ *Ann. Tig.*, (1896/97; reprint, Llanerch, 1993), 366.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 367. Although this object is referred to as 'cathaire Iarlaithe' in this entry, under the year 1134 (p. 366) there is also reference to the 'Cathach of S. Iarlaithe' having been desecrated by the Dalcassians, implying some confusion created here by Stokes between 'cathaire' and 'cathach'.

¹⁶⁷ K. Hurlstone Jackson (ed.), *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* (Dublin, 1990), 28.

¹⁶⁸ K. Meyer (ed.), *Aislinge Meic Conglinne* (London 1892; reprint New York 1974), 72-3.

¹⁶⁹ O. Bergin (ed.), *Trí bior-ghaoithe an Bháis* (Dublin, 1931), 213-4, line 6792, 'an tan fuair an rí deimhin air sin, rug breith bháis ar an mbreitheamh agus fós tug fádeara a chroiceann do bhuain de, agus a chur mar chumhdach ar an gcathaoir bhreitheamhnais'.

¹⁷⁰ H. Wood (ed.), *The Chronicle of Ireland, 1584-1608* (Dublin, 1933), 106.

¹⁷¹ TCD, MS 1209/15.

¹⁷² NLI, MS 2656.

Ríoghraide or Knocksouna, Co. Limerick; the 'Witch's Cradle' (also now lost) at Dunmull; and the doubtful 'Wishing Chair' on Crew Hill, Co. Antrim. There is a record of a former 'chair' at MacArt's Fort on Cave Hill, Belfast, and an extant hollowed-out limestone boulder called 'Magawley's Chair', overlooking Carn Castle, Co. Westmeath. It has also been suggested above, that a drawing of Mullach Leic on Bartlett's 'Generalle Description of Ulster' 1603,¹⁷³ may possibly represent a stone chair crowning the Mac Mathghamhna inauguration site at Leck, Co. Monaghan. In building a case for a more widespread use of stone inauguration chairs, it is necessary to examine how all of these compare with the two Uí Néill chairs, in terms of their structure and siting and to attempt to determine when and by whom they might have been used.

The most workable evidence is that provided by the two Uí Néill chairs. The context, possible source and period of origin of the Ó Néill chair at Tulach Óg is discussed in detail in the case study of that site (see case study I), but just to recall its appearance for comparative purposes, it is clear from both Bartlett's 1602 drawing of the chair and his brief written description of it on a map of south-east Ulster of 1603,¹⁷⁴ that it was a free-standing structure comprising four separate stones, situated on the eastern downslope of the hill (fig. 32). A large rough boulder, possibly *Leac na Ríogh* itself, formed the seat or base, while a narrow, square stone slab formed the short upright back. Two thin slabs acted as the sides. The right and left arms of the chair differed, the right having a stepped profile and the left a more sloping appearance. The concept of a composite throne incorporating earlier and more illustrious stone parts, is not unusual. A fine example of the incorporation of stone into chair, or perhaps in this instance the interchangeable nature of chair and stone, arises in the case of the much disputed throne on which the Scottish boy-king Alexander III was inaugurated in 1249 and John de Balliol, later in 1292. What is now commonly called the 'Stone of Scone' or the 'Stone of Destiny', was described by the medieval Yorkshire chronicler, Walter of Guisborough, as large and concave and made to the shape of a round chair;¹⁷⁵ as 'lapis fatalis cathedrae instar' or fatal stone, in the form of a chair, by Hector Boece in his history of 1527;¹⁷⁶ while Fordun referred to it

¹⁷³ PRO, London, MPF 35.

¹⁷⁴ PRO, London, MPF 36.

¹⁷⁵ A.A.M. Duncan, *Scotland: the making of the kingdom* (Edinburgh, 1975), 555.

¹⁷⁶ W.F. Skene 'The Coronation Stone', *PSAS* 8, 1868-9, 75-6.



Fig. 32 Leac na Ríogh at Tulach Óg, drawn by Richard Bartlett in 1602 [NLI, MS 2656].

as both a stone and ‘a regal chair, decked with silk cloths embroidered with gold’.¹⁷⁷ Still more confusion arises from a medieval seal of Scone Abbey which depicts a royal inauguration taking place on a conventional throne without a back. The many ambiguous descriptions of the Scone ‘sedes regalis’ leaves a question mark over whether it was indeed a chair-shaped stone, or the present block of coarse-grained, pinkish-buff sandstone which was enclosed in the wooden chair at Westminster Abbey until its recent return to Scotland (fig. 33).¹⁷⁸ The stone measures 670mm by 420mm by 265mm and weighs 152 kg. Either end is fitted with an iron staple connected to an iron ring by a figure-of-eight link. Since the stone was apparently housed beside the high altar in the abbey church of Scone, it has been suggested that the rings may have been put on to move the stone out of the church onto the hill for inauguration ceremonies.¹⁷⁹ If it was simply a stone which was placed into a coronation chair, it finds certain echoes in the possible incorporation of *Leac na Ríogh* into the Ó Néill chair. It is of interest too that following their coronation in the church at Kingston upon Thames, the English kings of the West Saxon dynasty from 900 to 1016, were apparently publicly proclaimed seated on a very crude block of stone outside the church. The large sandstone block, not unlike the Stone of Scone, now stands in the market-place at Kingston.¹⁸⁰

Further afield, one of the more definite examples of a composite stone throne is the medieval *Herzogstuhl* or ‘Duke’s Throne’, which stands on the Zollfeld plain in the Klagenfurt district of Carinthia, in southern Austria (fig. 34). This curious construction is a double throne consisting of two back-to-back seats made of marble slabs from the Roman town of Virunum which lies about one mile to the north, in the old Roman province of Noricum. The throne is actually positioned on the site of one of the earliest Roman milestones set up on the Norican main highway, under the Emperor Claudius.¹⁸¹ In 1745, the traveller and antiquary, Pococke, recorded it (then known as the ‘Kaisarstuhl’) as a ‘large stone six feet long and five broad, set up on end; on the west side a stone is put up against it; between this and the great stone there is some part of a Roman inscription. The seat on the other side is a stone laid on an old Gothic capital, with

¹⁷⁷ *Chron. Fordun*, vol. iii, 757.

¹⁷⁸ A.A.M. Duncan, *op. cit.*, 555.

¹⁷⁹ D. Breeze and G. Munro, *The Stone of Destiny: symbol of nationhood* (Historic Scotland, Edinburgh, 1997), 42-6.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸¹ A. Géza, *Noricum* (London, 1974), 103.

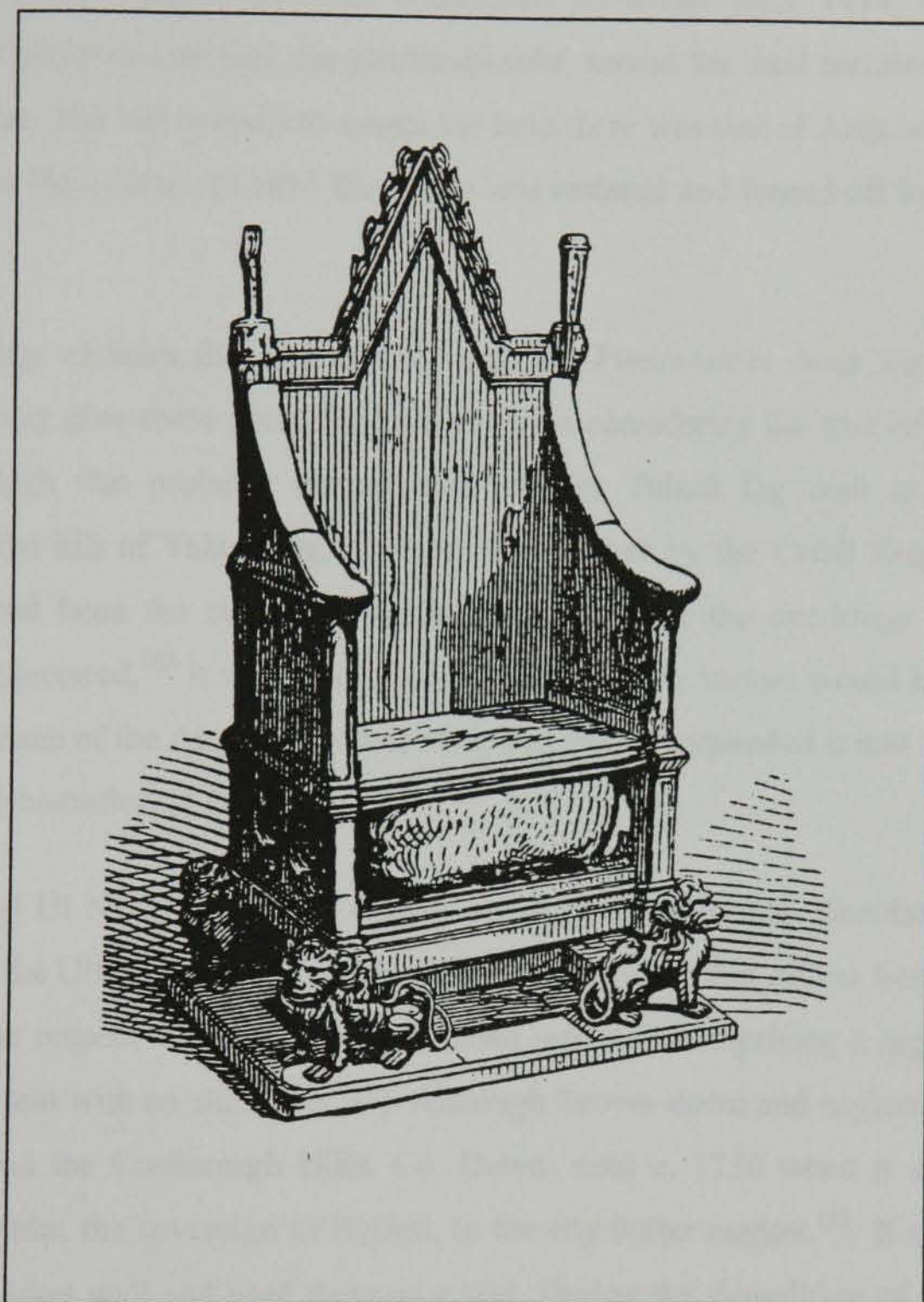


Fig. 33 The stone of Destiny in the Coronation Chair, Westminster.

a stone on each side of it for the arms to rest on; towards the top of the great stone on that side is cut RUDOLPHVS DVX'.¹⁸² The seat looking westward is called the *pfalzgrafensitz* and is believed to be the older of the two, possibly having been used in legal ceremonies by the *missi dominici* of the Carolingian kings. The *Herzogstuhl*, probably erected by Charlemagne or his son Arnulf of Carinthia, is the name given to the seat which faces east. When the *Fürstenstein* was abandoned sometime after 1414, the *Herzogstuhl* together with its counterpart, the *pfalzgrafensitz*, served the dual functions of throne and judicial seat. The last investiture ceremony held there was that of Archduke Ferdinand IV in October 1651. Later, in 1834 the throne was restored and fenced off by Emperor Franz I.¹⁸³

The making of both the *Herzogstuhl* and the *Fürstenstein* from abandoned Roman masonry may give some pause for thought when considering the true origins of *Leac na Ríogh*, which was probably incorporated into the Tulach Óg chair as its base. If for instance, the hill of Tulach Óg, prior to its take-over by the Cenél Eogain in the tenth century, had been the customary inauguration place of the overkings of Airgialla, as Hogan conjectured,¹⁸⁴ it would seem appropriate that the victors would have adopted the kingship stone of the Airgialla as their own, and later incorporated it into the chair seen in Bartlett's illustration of 1602.

The second Uí Néill chair is the crudely wrought Clann Aodha Bhuidhe example (now housed in the Ulster Museum) which is also free-standing, but differs from the Tulach Óg chair in the respect that it is a roughly hewn monolith comprising a high, narrow back, and a low seat with no sides (fig. 35). Although thrown down and neglected, it apparently remained on the Castlereagh Hills, Co. Down, until c. 1750 when it was removed by Stewart Banks, the sovereign of Belfast, to the city butter market.¹⁸⁵ It was incorporated into the market wall and used there as a seat. During the demolition of the market in c. 1829, it was rescued by Thomas Fitzmorris and displayed in the front garden of his house at Lancaster Street. It was purchased by R.C. Walker of Rathcarrick, Co. Sligo in 1832,

¹⁸² R. Pococke, *A description of the East and some other countries*, vol. 2, part 2 (London 1745), 255-6.

¹⁸³ F.W. Leitner, *op. cit.*, 14-16.

¹⁸⁴ J. Hogan, 'The Ua Briain kingship in Telach Óc, in Rev. J. Ryan (ed.), *Essays and studies presented to Professor Eoin MacNeill* (Dublin, 1940), 422-3.

¹⁸⁵ G. Benn, in his *History of the town of Belfast*, vol. 1 (Belfast, 1877), p. 57, states that the chair was found 'about the year 1755 among the ruins of Castlereagh'.



Fig. 34 A nineteenth-century sketch of the Herzogstuhl by M. Pernharts.

and remained there until it was acquired for the Belfast Museum in 1897.¹⁸⁶ The circumstances of its removal are not known, but it was situated on the Castlereagh lands at the north-east edge of the Marquis of Downshire's estate. It is possible that both the Marquis and the sovereign of Belfast may have deemed it necessary to remove it to a less conspicuous place. A curious aspect of the chair, and one which raises the question as to where it actually originated, is the rock type from which it was hewn. It is made from a solid block of calcareous sandstone, a rock type which is not native to the Castlereagh district, but large deposits of which characterise the geology of the area stretching west of Lough Neagh.¹⁸⁷ Significantly, perhaps, there is a large deposit of calcareous sandstone in the southeast Derry area, which is coterminous with the Clann Aodh Buidhe patrimony of Coill Ichtarach. Consequently, the possibility arises that this area was the source of the chair. It could be the case that it was either already in existence before the establishment of Castlereagh as the presumed inauguration centre of that branch (possibly sometime in the fifteenth century), or that they saw it as appropriate to make an inauguration chair from the rock of their native settlement when they established themselves in north Co. Down. They may then have duly transported either the source material, or the finished chair, from Coill Ichtarach to Caislén Riabhach. The creation of the chair and the establishment of the inauguration site at Caislén Riabhach, need not be seen as necessarily contemporaneous events.

A look at the expansion of the Clann Aodha Buidhe into the Castlereagh area, reveals some possibilities as to the period of the chair's origin. By 1345 the annals indicate that the Clann Aodha Buidhe had firmly settled in new territory, coextensive with the more ancient Trian Conghail, east of the River Bann and Lough Neagh. It has been suggested that, from their original dominion of Coill Ichtarach in Gleann Con Cadhain (southeast Derry), they extended their authority over the Trian Conghail region between 1315 and 1344, during the disruptive period of the Bruce invasion, and that their new capital and royal inauguration site at Caislén Riabhach, was established in this period.¹⁸⁸ Both Hogan and Simms have argued that the newly formed Clann Aodha Buidhe, although an

¹⁸⁶ G. Petrie, 'Coronation chair of the O'Neils, of Castlereagh', *The Dublin Penny Journal*, vol.1. no. 26, 1832, 208; S.F. Milligan, 'Inauguration stone chair of the O'Neills of Clan-na-boye', *UJA* 4, 1898, 86-9.

¹⁸⁷ Informations courtesy of the Ulster Museum; Geological map of Ireland, 3rd ed., 1962.

¹⁸⁸ J. Hogan, 'The Irish law of kingship, with special reference to Ailech and Cenél Eoghain', *PRIA*, 40, 1931-2, 226-7. The author, however, provides no supporting evidence for Castlereagh being the Clann Aodha Buidhe headquarters as early as c. 1344.

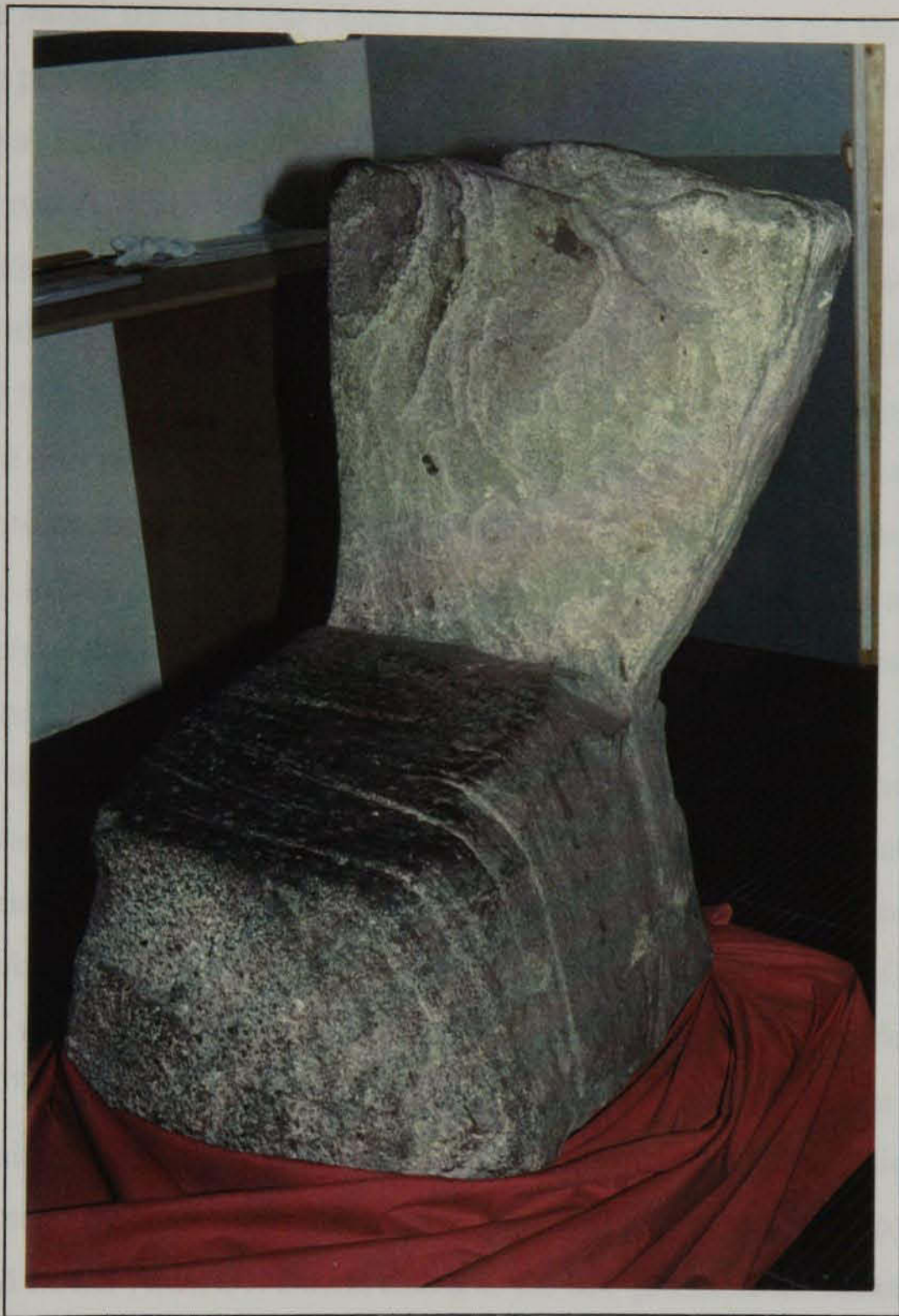


Fig. 35 The Clann Aodha Buidhe stone chair [Ulster Museum]

autonomous kingdom, was not an independent one. Ultimately, it was a dependency of Tír Eoghain,¹⁸⁹ and the Clann Aodha Buidhe accepted the overlordship of Niall Mór Ó Néill up to the death of their chief, Muirchertach Ó Néill, in 1395.¹⁹⁰ It is a moot point as to whether the vassal status of the Clann Aodha Buidhe throughout the fourteenth century, would have precluded their having a royal inauguration chair, or indeed whether Caislén Riabhach was actually their inauguration site as early as the first half of the fourteenth century. Certainly, there is no supporting documentary evidence to confirm this. The period which truly witnessed their emergence as a political power, was the fifteenth century. With the assistance of Scottish mercenary forces, largely recruited from the MacDonald lordship of the Isles, they continued to expand the borders of their territory, pushing well into what is now southern Co. Antrim and northern Co. Down (fig. 36).¹⁹¹ It may therefore be more appropriate to seek the establishment of their inauguration site at Castlereagh, in this period. To place the chair in its territorial context, it apparently stood near the *Caislén Riabhach* or grey castle,¹⁹² east of the Lagan. Castlereagh lay close to Savage's small dominion of Ards, and White's territory of Dufferin, which together constituted the greatly diminished Earldom of Ulster, at that time. The first recorded owner of the castle of Castlereagh was Aodh, son of Niall Óg. Cusack writing to Northumberland in 1553 explained that at that time, Aodh had two principal strongholds - the then broken Belfast Castle 'standing upon a ford out from Arde to Clanneboy', and Castlereagh which stood 'upon a plain in the midst of the woods besides the Dooffrye [Dufferin]'.¹⁹³ Castlereagh and the Dufferin woods are also marked on a map of Belfast and its vicinity, of about 1574, with the castle designated as 'Castell Raie or graie'. The occupant is named as 'Sr. Brian Mach Felim [Ó Néill]'.¹⁹⁴ A second map of the baronies of Upper and Lower Ards, Co. Down, dating to the last quarter of the sixteenth century, or the beginning of the seventeenth century, shows the hill of Castlereagh and 'Ca Revghe'

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 227.

¹⁹⁰ K. Simms, *Gaelic lordships in Ulster in the later middle ages*, Ph.d thesis, University of Dublin, 1976, 217-8.

¹⁹¹ D.B. Quinn, 'Irish' Ireland and 'English' Ireland', in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vol. 2, (Oxford, 1987), 621-22.

¹⁹² According to a note in 'Answers to queries', *UJA* 3, 1855, 83, the castle was mistakenly destroyed sometime just before 1855. The occupying tenant was requested by the landlord - the Marquis of Downshire - to build a wall round the ruins to preserve them, but unfortunately the tenant built the said wall from the ruined masonry of the castle.

¹⁹³ *Cal. Carew MSS, 1515-74*, 243; T.E. McNeill, 'The castle of Castlereagh, Co. Down', *UJA* 50, 1987, 123-7.

¹⁹⁴ G. Benn, *A history of the town of Belfast from the earliest times to the close of the 18th century*, vol. 1 (London and Belfast, 1877), 272-5.

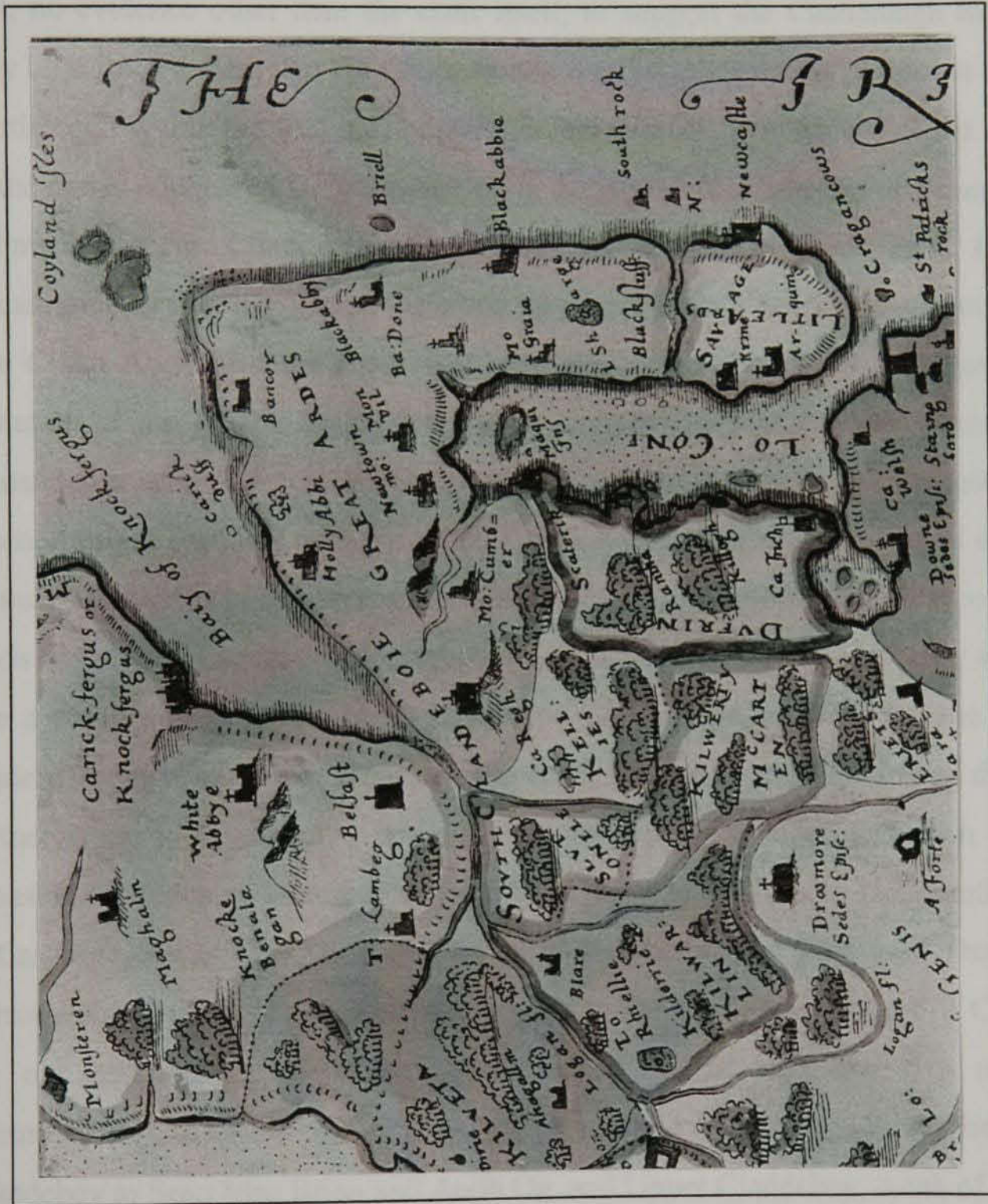


Fig. 36 Castlereagh and South Clann Aodha Buidhe shown on Richard Bartlett's map of Southeast Ulster, 1603 [PRO, London MPF 36].

itself on the summit, but no indication of the chair.¹⁹⁵ A mis-read reference to a remark made by Sir Henry Sidney in March 1568, has been used by a number of commentators to confirm Castlereagh as the Clann Aodha Buidhe inauguration site - 'a large band of Scots intending to create a new Lord of Clandeboy, not farre from Knockfergus, went, under that pretence, to enter a wood near Castell Reagh'.¹⁹⁶ However, this remark addressed to the Earl of Lincoln, actually reads - 'A number of Scots, 400 and odd, entered a wood near Castle Reagh, not far from Knockfergus, to take away the prey hence'.¹⁹⁷ There is in fact, no evidence other than the chair itself, to support the Castlereagh location. It can only be surmised then, that the Clann Aodha Buidhe inauguration place was established at Castlereagh within the first half of the fifteenth century, as a symbol of the consolidation of the newly conquered lands, and possibly during the chieftainship of Brian Ballach who did much to secure Clann Aodha Buidhe domination in this part of Ulster. It is suggested in case study I that the Tulach Óg chair may have been a fourteenth-century innovation. The Clann Aodha Buidhe chair may have also come about as a propaganda effect, in imitation of the Tulach Óg model, and in circumstances of territorial expansion which demanded a symbol of claim and consolidation. But it must also be considered that its creation might correlate with the initial Clann Aodha Buidhe expansion of the fourteenth century and that it is not necessarily attributable to the fifteenth-century conquest of the lands east of the Lagan. As already observed, the two chairs are markedly different - the one a composite structure, possibly incorporating an earlier *leac*, and the other a very crudely wrought monolith. However, the crude, almost fanciful quality of the latter, may further argue in favour of it being a poor copy of its relative at Tulach Óg. The last occasion on which an attempt may have been made to perform an inauguration ceremony at Castlereagh was 1584, as in a letter of 20 October of that year, Lord Deputy Sir John Perrot claimed that 'Con mcNele oge aspired to the whole government of Clanduboie by the old bad custom of Tanist'. As a result, Perrot took the step of appointing commissioners to divide the territory of Clann Aodha Buidhe, assigning Nether or Lower Clandeboy to Seán Mac Brian and Aodh Óg, and Upper Clandeboy, south of the Lagan, to

¹⁹⁵ G.A. Hayes-McCoy, *Ulster and other Irish maps c. 1600* (Dublin, 1964), 31, plate xx.

¹⁹⁶ H.F. Hore, 'Inauguration of Irish Chiefs', *UJA* 5, 1857, 231; S.F. Milligan, *op. cit.*, 88.

¹⁹⁷ *Report on the manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle and Dudley presented at Penhurst Place*, vol.2 (London, 1934) 4, .

Conn Mac Niall Óg,¹⁹⁸ a division which left the Caislén Riabhach and inauguration site just within Conn's territory.

Before leaving the kingdom of Clann Aodha Buidhe, attention must be drawn to a second 'chair' recorded at MacArt's Fort on Cave Hill, which lies diametrically opposite Castlereagh, west of the Lagan and on the northwest side of the modern Belfast. MacArt's Fort crowns the summit of a promontory protruding from the east side of the hill (fig. 37). In 1880, O'Laverty noted a 'rude chair, formed by three huge rocks' within the fort. He suggested that it was either a 'judgement seat or a coronation chair'.¹⁹⁹ By the turn of the century the 'chair' had apparently been removed or destroyed, as an account of an excursion by the Royal Society of Antiquaries to the hill and district in 1905, referred to it as having once graced the summit. The author of that account surmised that this was 'used by the O'Neills, of whom MacArt was one, as a place of coronation'.²⁰⁰

It is hardly reasonable to seek models for the Tulach Óg chair and its Clann Aodha Buidhe counterpart, when the former was apparently a crude assemblage of old and new parts, and the latter merely a large block of stone roughly cut to a chair shape; but we have already seen that equally basic constructions were used in the Carinthian and perhaps in the Scottish ceremony. It is also worth glancing at medieval episcopal stone thrones which may have provided some inspiration for the two Ó Néill chairs. There is no extant Irish early medieval bishop or archbishop's stone throne, but there is a later example - 'St Kieran's Chair', a partly thirteenth-century polished limestone composite structure in which the Bishops of Ossory are still enthroned. It presently lies in the north transept of St Canice's Cathedral, Co. Kilkenny. Tradition holds that the noticeably cruder stone base of this throne came from a more ancient bishop's seat at Aghaboe. It was subsequently moved to Seirkieran and thence to Kilkenny, where the sides were added to it in the thirteenth century, and the seat proper at a later date.²⁰¹ In England there are still earlier examples of stone episcopal thrones, like the seventh-century, free-standing 'frith stool' at

¹⁹⁸ C. McNeill, 'The Perrot Papers: the letter-book of Lord Deputy Sir John Perrot between 9 July 1584 and 26 May 1586', *Anal. Hib.* 12, 1943, 10.

¹⁹⁹ Rev. J. O'Laverty, *An historical account of the Diocese of Down and Connor*, vol.2 (Dublin, 1880), 454-5.

²⁰⁰ Anon, 'Drive to Templepatrick and Antrim, visiting Molusk, Carn-Greine, Donegore, and Rathmore', *JRSAI* 35, 1905, 288.

²⁰¹ *St Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny* (The Society of the Friends of St Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny, n.d.), 11.

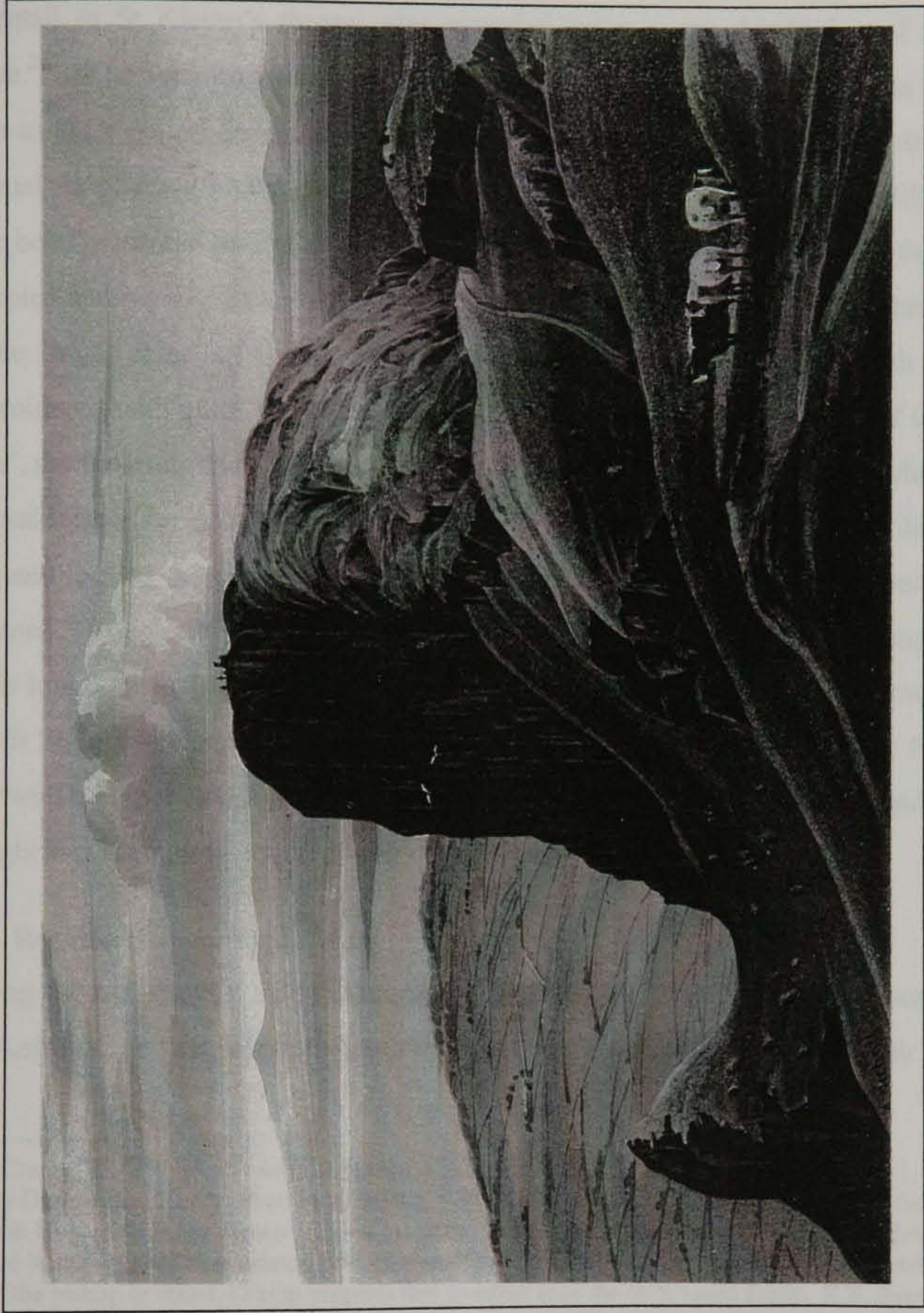


Fig. 37 'McArt's Fort from the mountain to between the fort and the caves',
by Andrew Nicholl 1804-1866 [Ulster Museum].

Hexham Abbey and the comparable ‘frith stool’ from Beverley Minster.²⁰² Both of these are monoliths with short rounded backs, imitating Byzantine models (strikingly similar models feature in the Book of Kells). At the church of St. Vigors, there is an eleventh-century free-standing throne of red marble, again a monolith, but with a higher back and sloping arms. In Durham Cathedral, a small throne set against a wall and quite similar in its detail to St Kieran’s throne, was recorded prior to the demolition of the chapter-house.²⁰³ The well-established custom of installing abbots and bishops in such chairs, from an early period, indicates that at least there were ample prototypes to draw upon for the makers of royal inauguration chairs. In considering how the two Ó Néill chairs may have been presented during respective inauguration ceremonies, it is likely that they were canopied and royally decked to fit the occasion. As stated above, Fordun in his description of the ‘regal chair’ of Scone, referred to it as having been dressed with ‘silk cloths embroidered with gold’.²⁰⁴ There are also a number of detailed accounts of the ‘Chair of State’, surmounting the Tynwald in the Isle of Man, in which the Kings of Man sat during Tynwald Day. An account of the proceedings at Tynwald written by Sir John Stanley, king and lord of the island, in 1417, describes a ‘chaire covered with a royall cloath and cushions’²⁰⁵ upon the hill. Later accounts of James Duke of Atholl first taking possession of his kingdom in 1736, refer to an even more elaborate structure on the mound, facing east to St John’s Chapel. It apparently comprised ‘a square pedestal of six feet, covered over with a carpet’, on top of which there was ‘a throne or chair of state, under a canopy of eight feet high, both covered with crimson damask’.²⁰⁶

3. 15 Reputed Inauguration Chairs

Among the traditionally cited inauguration ‘chairs’ are two free-standing examples from Co. Antrim. The first, a somewhat doubtful example called the ‘wishing chair’, lies near a

²⁰² R. Cramp, *The British Academy corpus of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture in England*, vol. 1, part 1, County Durham and Northumberland (Oxford, 1984), 192-3; The term *frith-stol* is used for the seat of Christ in Heaven. It is not known whether the name ‘frith stool’, applied to the Hexham model, came about because it was originally associated with the rite of sanctuary, or whether it was originally intended as the seat of the bishop or abbot. Cramp suggests that in either case the term could apply; R.B. Brash, ‘On ancient chairs and stones of inauguration’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Review*, vol.1, 1865, 557.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 556-7.

²⁰⁴ *Chron. Fordun*, op. cit., 757.

²⁰⁵ W. Harrison, ‘Records of the Tynwald and Saint John’s Chapels in the Isle of Man’, *The Manx Society*, vol. 19, 1871, 15-16..

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 106; An eyewitness account of the ceremony of 1736 addressed to Sir George Lee MP, Manx Museum MS 1596.

field boundary on the southeast slope of Crew Hill or Cráeb Telcha - the site of a *bile* and reputed inauguration place of the Ulaid in the old patrimony of Dál nAraide.²⁰⁷ The second 'chair', which is now lost, was claimed to have been used in the inauguration ceremony of the Ó Floinn of Uí Tuirtri at Dunmull. The Uí Tuirtri, having dominated the kingship of the northern part of the kingdom of Airgialla, fell under the control of the Cenél Eógain in the tenth century.²⁰⁸ As noted above, they also suffered the incursions of the Clann Aodha Buidhe in the mid-fourteenth century. Dunmull, which lies in the boundary area between Tír Eógain and the northernmost part of Uí Tuirtri, may in the circumstances of their contraction to this part of Antrim, have been used as an inauguration place by the Uí Floinn in the later medieval period. A group of three objects which were locally believed to be associated with inauguration, were last recorded at Dunmull in 1940. These included a footprint stone called the 'Giant's Foot-track' (see footprints above), a stone chair known as the 'Witch's Cradle' and a large bullaun named the 'Giant's head Track'. The footprint stone and chair are no longer at the site, but Lawlor described the 'Witch's Cradle' as a 'chair-like rock' positioned on the slope of the west side of the plateau.²⁰⁹ It was apparently a free-standing structure, and not just a formation in the exposed rock outcrop on this side.

Of particular interest among this group, is the lost or destroyed, so-called 'Marquis of Clanricarde's Chair', which apparently graced Caher an Iarla, overlooking the Dunkellin River, near Kilcolgan, Co. Galway. There is little in the way of early commentary on the site, but in his OS letters of 1840, O'Donovan remarked that the local people had told him of 'a rude stone chair' here, which unusually he did not follow up with a visit, or at least took no detailed record of it.²¹⁰ By the time Caher an Iarla was finally recorded by Ms. Redington in 1911,²¹¹ the so-called chair which was attributed to Burke of Clanricarde, was already destroyed. One tradition claimed that its fragments had been used in the

²⁰⁷ D. Flanagan, 'Cráeb Telcha: Crew, Co. Antrim', *Dinnseanchas* vol. 4, no. 2, 1970, 31; DOENI, MBR report May 1978, describes a 'chair-shaped stone' lying south of the road between Eden Lodge and Killultagh corner in Lurganteneil townland.

²⁰⁸ J. Hogan, 'The Ua Briain kingship in Telach Óc', in Rev. J. Ryan (ed.), *Essays and studies presented to Professor Eoin MacNeill* (Dublin, 1940), 409.

²⁰⁹ H.C. Lawlor, *A preliminary survey of the ancient monuments of Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1940), 9.

²¹⁰ J. O'Donovan, *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of County Galway collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1838*, vol. 1, 367.

²¹¹ M. Redington, 'Notes on the Ordnance Survey Letters relating to the barony of Dunkellin; Killeely Parish', *JGAHS* 7, no. 2, 1911-2, 69-70.

building of local cottages, while another suggested that the entrance to a souterrain at the site had been blocked up with its shattered pieces. The *caher* of that name was apparently an impressively large stone enclosure on a bluff above the Dunkellin River, one side of which was naturally defended by the sheer drop to the river. The chair itself is believed to have surmounted a mound, which Ms. Redington noted in the northwest quadrant of the enclosure, and which by 1919 had been removed along with the enclosing bank.²¹² If it stood on a mound, presumably it was a free-standing structure, and in that respect it was possibly not unlike the rough Castlereagh example. The certainty of a chair at this site, is however, very problematic, as the place-names 'Caheranearl', 'Carrick an Earla' and 'Earl's Chair', are not uncommon attributions for heights, mounds and megalithic anomalies on the Irish landscape. Walter Fitzgerald in his investigation of the origin of the place-name 'Chair of Kildare' (given to a large mound on a rocky eminence between Dunmurry and Grange Hill in that county), discovered that it had been called 'Carrick an Earla' or 'the Rock of the Earl' in the late sixteenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century it had become known as 'the Earl's Chair' and 'the Earl of Kildare's Chair', and it was eventually shortened to 'the Chair of Kildare' by the Ordnance Survey of 1840.²¹³ There is no evidence or tradition of an actual chair at this site, and it may be taken that the 'Chair' of that title is actually the mound (see vol. 2, appendix 2, pp. 97-8). In another instance of the occurrence of the place-name 'Caheranearl', we find that it is applied to a height about ten miles due southeast of Dunkellin at Coppanagh in the Slieve Aughty Mountains. Here, however, it is found in conjunction with a crude stone structure, marked immediately northeast of the height and designated the 'Earl's Chair' on both the first and current Ordnance Survey maps. The structure in question has been dismantled and now consists of a cluster of large flat stones just one of which remains upright and could by a stretch of the imagination be interpreted as the back of a chair. Although situated at 1000 OD, the climb to this point is gentle and gradual, and the view afforded to the east is commanding. One of its more curious features is that it occurs at the end of a substantial stone boundary which runs downhill from west to east for 72m. In local tradition it is claimed that the 'chair' marks the conjunction of five different landholdings, that the Earls of Clanrickard collected rent from their people while seated here, and that one of its

²¹² T.J. Westropp, 'Notes on several forts in Dunkellin and other parts of southern Co. Galway', *JRSAI* 49, 1919, 179.

²¹³ W. FitzGerald, 'The Chair of Kildare', *JKAS* 7, no. 5, 1914, 327-8.

stone parts bore an inscription.²¹⁴ O'Donovan was informed that a 'rude stone chair' used in the inauguration ceremony of Burke of Clanrickard existed at Dunkellin. The tradition of that chair persisted into the twentieth century. But the aforementioned examples of the range of meanings which can apply to 'chair', demonstrate the difficulties in accepting the folk tradition of 'the Marquis of Clanrickard's Chair' at face value.

Moving into the Irish Midlands, there are two stone 'chairs' traditionally connected with the respective inauguration ceremonies of the Mac Amhalghaidh and the Mag Eochagáin. The Mag Eochagáin specimen, which lies within the demesneland of Ballybrennan House near Castletown in south Westmeath, is a prominent but clumsy rock outcrop. It is not remotely chair-like and may well have received its name in the modern period, having been used as recently as 1992, in a tawdry revival of the inauguration ceremony of that sept.²¹⁵ It was Brewer in his *Beauties of Ireland* who first drew attention to the 'chair', referring to it as 'the place of inauguration for the antient dynasts of Moycashell, locally termed Mac Geoghegan's Chair'.²¹⁶ This suggests that in the early 19th century there was some folk tradition surrounding this unimpressive site, but when and why it originated is not known. The occurrence of an 'inaugural stone' on a nineteenth-century estate, however, may point to more fanciful origins. It may simply be a product of the romantic sentiments of the landlords of the Ballybrennan estate, just as appears to be the case with 'Fox's Stone', found in a similar context in the garden of Cloghatanny House, Co. Offaly. There are other instances of late folly chairs such as the charming example at Tollymore, Co. Down - a townland which was initially Magennis property and passed successively to the Hamilton Earls of Clanbrassil in c. 1685, and through intermarriage to the Rodens in 1798. Its cut, smooth stone dressing and the four lines of verse in nineteenth-century hand,²¹⁷ inscribed on the broad and high back, confirm its relatively recent origin and its ornamental purpose. Cox in his search for the Mag Eochagáin site, dismissed the outcrop 'chair' in favour of Cnoc Buadha,²¹⁸ a prominent esker running due north, just west of the road through the old village of Rahugh in the northern part of Cenél Fiachach. Tadhg Ó Neachtain, in his 1704 manuscript copy of Céitinn's *Foras Feasa ar Erin*, described

²¹⁴ Lore related by Mr. Larry Byrnes of the Black Road, Derrybrien, 12/7/96.

²¹⁵ J. Sheehan, *Inauguration ceremony of Jack Gargan McGeoghegan* (Moate, 1992).

²¹⁶ J.N. Brewer, *The Beauties of Ireland*, vol.2 (London 1826), 257.

²¹⁷ The verse reads 'here, in full light, the russet plains extend/There, wrapped in clouds, the bluish hills ascend/Even the wild heath displays her purple dyes/And, midst the desert, fruitful fields arise'.

²¹⁸ L. Cox, 'Leic Mhichil and Cnoc Buadha identified', *Ríocht na Míde*, vol. 6. no. 2, 1976, 86.

Cnoc Buadha as the place where Mag Eochagáin was made.²¹⁹ The curiously named and unconventionally shaped 'Magawley's Chair', in the neighbouring kingdom of Calraighe and in the westernmost part of Co. Westmeath, merits some closer attention. The 'chair', which overlooks the ruined remains of Mac Amhalghaidh's Carn Castle (a former tower house of which just the bawn wall and flanking towers remain and the seat of Uilliam Mac Amhalghaidh in 1596),²²⁰ is a rough, rectangular, tilted block of limestone, hollowed out on its north face (see vol. 2, appendix 2, pp. 120-21). It has been suggested that this is no more than an old fodder trough,²²¹ but its shallow recess would have made it a rather impractical receptacle. Like 'Mac Geoghegan's Chair', and 'Fox's Stone', it too occurs on a nineteenth-century estate and it is possible that it had its origins as a miniature folly of Carn Park House. However, a comment made by the historian J.P. Dalton in 1926, may serve to redeem it as a piece of inauguration furniture. Dalton stated but did not substantiate that the 'inauguration chair of the Magawley chiefs stood on the hillock now called Tullymagawley'.²²² Tulach Mac Amhalghaidh is a low but commanding outcrop hill, crowned by a circular enclosure, in the townland of Ballymurry which adjoins Carn Park on its south side. It is this site which is specified in local tradition as the Mac Amhalghaidh place of inauguration, an attribution which is perhaps borne out by the place-name. If Dalton was correct, some chair once stood on this hill (unless he was referring to the earthwork itself) and it is tempting to speculate that the problematic 'Magawley's Chair' which overlooks Carn Castle, might have been later removed from the enclosure at Tulach Mac Amhalghaidh to ornament the demesne of Carn Park House.

Lower down the scale of attestable sites, but worthy of inclusion on the basis of folk tradition, contextual evidence and structural remains, is a 'chair' at Ard na Ríoghraide. More commonly known as Knocksouna, it is a notable hill of rock outcrop which lies south-southeast of Brugh Rí and west of Kilmallock. At this place there is a partly exploited deep cleft in an exposed seam of outcrop, on the southern decline of the hill, which is traditionally referred to as the 'Nurses's Seat'.²²³ It does not require a great leap of faith to see it as a chair, on the contrary, with its high back and low seat, big enough to

²¹⁹ NLI, MS G 192, 306.

²²⁰ *Cal. Carew MSS, 1589-1600*, 193. The chief of the name resided at Ballyloughloe Castle in 1596.

²²¹ L. Cox., *op. cit.*, 86.

²²² J.P. Dalton, 'Ancient boundaries of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise dioceses', *Ardagh and Clonmacnoise Antiquarian Society Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1926, 52.

²²³ M. Joyce, *Bruree; the history of the Bruree district* (Bruree, 1973), 17-19.

accommodate a small man, it is quite convincing (see vol. 2, appendix 2, pp. 103-104). Added to that, the seated person would have commanded an impressive view out over the broad plain which stretches from the Loobagh far south to the Ballyhoura Hills. Cited in local tradition as a place of inauguration,²²⁴ Ard na Ríoghraide, Cnoc Samhna, or Cnoc na Ríoghraidhe as it is also known, is not specifically mentioned as an inauguration site in historical sources, but that it was a royal site is implied both by its place-name and by the details of a fanciful encounter between the king of Ulaid and the king of Munster, in the *Life of Findchua of Brí-Gobann*. Urged on by his consort Moingfhinn, the king of Ulaid resolved to make war on Munster, in order to secure the kingship of that province for her sons Cas, Cian and Cingid. Marching into Munster, he set up camp on Ard na Ríoghraide. The king of Munster in his dwelling at Dún Eochairmaige, arose to the sight of ‘flags on Cnoc Na Ríghraidhe ... the splendid banners floating in the air and the tents of royal speckled satin pitched on the hill’.²²⁵ In the outcome, the king of Ulaid was defeated and according to the *Life*, he and his consort with their three sons fell in battle, ‘and their graves and their beds are on the hill after them’.²²⁶ It is not inconceivable that the stone ‘chair’ on Ard na Ríoghraide may have been used in the installation ceremony of the kings of the Uí Fidhgente, in whose ancient patrimony the hill lies. It is not a free-standing structure, but was partly sculpted out from a thick band of exposed outcrop, a fact which but for some comparable Irish and Scottish examples might argue against its acceptance as a true chair. Alcock, for instance, in his work on ‘enclosed places’ in ‘Celtic Britain’ likewise conjectured that a natural projection, sculpted into the form of a seat at the western end of the summit of Dun Duirn nuclear fort, may have been intended for inauguration rituals.²²⁷

3. 16 Conclusions

Given that the majority of the stone chairs, either still extant or recorded at attested and suspected inauguration sites, are more or less undatable, and that their crudity is no indicator at all of an early origin, it is difficult to propose a commencement date for the use of the stone chair *per se* in the Irish inauguration ceremony. Indeed, in the final

²²⁴ Ibid., 19.

²²⁵ W. Stokes, *Lives of saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford, 1890), 239.

²²⁶ Ibid. 240.

²²⁷ L. Alcock, ‘The activities of potentates in Celtic Britain, AD 500-800: a positivist approach’, in S.T. Driscoll and M.R. Níeke (eds.), *Power and Politics in early medieval Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1988), 26, 29.

analysis, it may simply be a phenomenon of the two branches of the Uí Néill. While thrones were common to both kings and ecclesiastics in early medieval Europe, the Irish evidence such as it is, emphasises their association with the latter rather than the former, and more ambiguously with saints, brehons, fairies and mythological heroes. There are the exceptions of a small number of depictions of the enthroned King David on high crosses, but these are more likely to be allegorical, rather than a realistic borrowing from the true image of the Irish king. In reviewing the landscape evidence, the 'chair' on Ard na Ríoghraide at Knocksouna and the lost Dunmull example, may be quite early, possibly early medieval on the basis of comparison with the datable Scottish Dun Duirn example. Using the two authenticated Uí Néill stone chairs as a more reliable yardstick, it can only be speculated that the advent of the Irish stone inauguration chair may have been a later medieval event. Political circumstances suggest that the most sophisticated and only composite chair, that of the Uí Néill at Tulach Óg, may have emerged in the fourteenth century. The Castlereagh chair was possibly modelled on the former and it either made its appearance in the same period, or as a direct result of the Clann Aodha Buidhe expansion of the fifteenth century. The chair-like structure which Richard Bartlett drew, crowning the summit of Mullach Leic, Co. Monaghan, suggests, if rather tenuously, that the Mac Mathghamhna may have also imitated the Ó Néill at Tulach Óg, and that the chief of that sept was inaugurated in a stone chair and not upon the traditionally claimed footprint stone at Leck. Tradition, context and reasonable conjecture go some way towards making a case for De Búrca of Clann Uilliam Uachtar and the Mac Amhalghaidh of Calraighe, having had chairs, and again these are probably, but with no certainty, late medieval in origin.

CHAPTER IV, CASE STUDY 1. TULACH ÓG: A ROYAL KINGDOM

The unassuming hill of Tulach Óg which lies within the fertile valley of the Ballinderry River, west of Lough Neagh, was a pre-eminent royal centre and the focus of Uí Néill inauguration ceremonies from the early medieval period through to the close of the sixteenth century. Its early history clearly demonstrates an unbroken continuity as a royal seat of crucial political significance. In effect, the kingdom of Tulach Óg became a royal capital with its auspicious hill as the focus and source of the Ailech kingship. Although the hill is not specifically mentioned as an inauguration site in historical sources until 1432,¹ it can be reasonably proposed (see below pp. 154-6) that it did serve that function for the Ailech dynasty at least from the eleventh century, if not earlier, and possibly for the Airgialla in the period before their eclipse by Ailech. The hill itself gave its name, which has been freely translated as ‘the hill of assembly of warriors’² [*tulach* = hill/mound, hill/mound of assembly; *n-Óc* = of youths, of warriors] to the ancient kingdom of Tulach Óg, which according to the testimony of the *Book of Rights* was already in existence at the time of the compilation of that work in the middle of the eleventh century.³ The importance of Tulach Óg in the early political geography of the territories of the North is reflected in the intensive contest for its possession between the overkingdoms of Airgialla and Ailech in the course of the tenth century and between the Uí Néill and Clann Domnaill branches of the Ailech dynasty in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. More significantly, it assumed an importance during the Ailech dynasty’s attempts to deter the high-king, Toirdelbach Ua Briain, from encroaching on their territory in furtherance of his centralising policy during the late eleventh century.

4.1 The Ascendancy of Ailech

Originally part of the kingdom of Airgialla, the kingship of the northern part of which was largely dominated by the Uí Tuirtri dynasty, Tulach Óg was colonised by the Cenél mBinnig, a branch of the Ailech dynasty, between 900 and 1000.⁴ Provenanced as ‘Tilcha

¹ *AU*, vol. 3, 118-9, ‘Eogan, son of Niall Ua Neill junior, was made king of Ulster in the Province unanimously. And he went to Tulach-oc and was crowned on the flag-stone of the Kings there by the will of God and men, bishops and ollams [ocus a dola co Tulach-og agus a rigadh ar leic na Righ ann]; *AFM.*, vol. 4, 887.

² É. Ó Doibhlin, ‘O Neill’s “Own Country” and its families’, *Seanchas Ard Mhacha* 6, no.1, 1971, 3.

³ M. Dillon ed., *Lebor na Cert (ITS 46)*, Dublin, 1962), 5, 9, 63, 65, 67, 71.

⁴ J. Hogan, ‘The Ua Briain kingship in Telach Óc’, in Rev. J. Ryan (ed.), *Essays and studies presented to Professor Eoin MacNeill* (Dublin, 1940), 409.

Óc' in their genealogies in the twelfth-century MS. Rawl. B. 502, it has been suggested on that basis, that the Cenél Binnig can be associated with Tulach Óg between the expulsion of the Uí Tuirtri and the arrival of the ruling branch of the Cenél Eógain and their establishment of their headquarters there c. 1000.⁵

As early as the ninth century the kings of Ailech had apparently set their sights on the kingdom of Airgialla, the first successful blow having been struck in 827 when Niall Caille defeated the combined forces of the Airgialla and Ulaid at the battle of Leth Cam.⁶ Hogan refers to a statement in *Cóir Anmann* which dates the tribute of Airgialla to Cenél Eógain from this battle,⁷ and in the aftermath of Leth Cam, the annals for this period reflect the hold which the victors had over Airgialla. Certainly, by the early tenth century, Ailech had drawn Airgialla into its net, as in 914 the Uí Tuirtri featured among the allies of Niall Glúndubh in his war against Mide and again in 919 against the Norse of Dublin.⁸ The pursuit of Tulach Óg by the kings of Ailech has been explained as an effective attempt to gain control of the heart of Airgialla. The great importance attached to Tulach Óg in the eleventh century is clearly reflected in the several references to it in the *Book of Rights* and more particularly in the lines 'No tax is due from Tulach Óg to the king of Febal of the swards, for kingship over the Men of Ireland may come from their strong country'.⁹ Hogan has very plausibly suggested that the attraction of Tulach Óg for the kings of Ailech lay in the probability that it was the traditional inauguration site of the kings of Airgialla and that to gain control of that site was in effect to strike at the very core and source of the kingship of Airgialla. That Tulach Óg was chosen as the pre-eminent inauguration place of the Cenél Eógain in preference to Ailech or Armagh is evidence enough of the political importance attached to it.¹⁰ The first king of Ailech to be inaugurated there and in a ceremony presided over by an ecclesiastic, was possibly Aedh Ua Néill, who was installed as king of Cenél Eógain by Muirecán, *coarb* of Patrick, 'in the presence of Patrick's community' while Muirecán was on visitation in Cenél Eogain in 993.¹¹

⁵ É. Ó Doibhlin, *op. cit.*, 4.

⁶ *AU.*, 285.

⁷ J. Hogan, *op. cit.*, 420.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 420-21.

⁹ M. Dillon (ed.), *op. cit.*, 65.

¹⁰ J. Hogan, *op. cit.*, 422-3.

¹¹ *AU.*, 425.

The kingdom of Tulach Óg was probably coterminous with the greater part of the former territory of Ui Tuirtri, the northern boundary of which may be conjectured as the Moyola River,¹² anciently known as the Bior, with Lough Neagh forming its eastern limit and the Blackwater or Abhainn Mór marking its southern boundary.¹³ The traditional extent of the kingdom of Ui Tuirtri 'ó Bhior go hAbhainn Mhóir' was still remembered as late as the twelfth century and cited as such at the Synod of Raith Breasail in regard to the limits of certain boundaries of the Archdiocese of Armagh.¹⁴ As the flagship of Ailech, Tulach Óg became increasingly vulnerable to attack from external aggressors, particularly from the Ulaid, who attempted to besiege the site in 1031. On that occasion, according to the annals, they 'achieved nothing' but losses, with Aedh Ua Néill taking away 'three thousand of their cows' and 'twelve hundred captives'.¹⁵

There is some evidence to suggest that from the early eleventh century the hill was the site of a royal residence. Hogan conjectures that when in 1031 it was attacked by the Ulaid, Aedh Athlam Ua Néill who was then acting as deputy to his father, Flaithbertach, king of Ailech, may have actually been residing there.¹⁶ Further evidence for its residential function at this time, may be gleaned from the role ascribed to the subsept of Ui Ócáin. The appearance at Tulach Óg in the early eleventh century of the Ui Ócáin (Ui Ágáin) of Clann Fergusa, coincides with the establishment of that site as the principal seat of the Cenél Eogain. Clann Fergusa were a subsept of the Cenél Eogain and would later assume the prestigious position of hereditary guardians of the inauguration site. The earliest reference connecting the Ui Ócáin with the Cenél Eogain concerns Gilla Mura, son of Ócán, who in 1024 killed Domnall son of Aedh, 'heir designate of Ailech'.¹⁷ The first intimation of their having assumed an official role at the royal centre of Tulach Óg is provided in *AU* for 1056, where, in his death notice, Gilla Mura is described as *rechtaire* or steward.¹⁸ In its broadest sense the term *rechtaire* means 'director or 'overseer',¹⁹ but

¹² S. Ó Ceallaigh, *Gleanings from Ulster History* (Oxford, 1951), 21. Ó Ceallaigh states that the Moyola or Bior was the southern boundary of Uí Maccu Uais; that it was the northern limit of Uí Tuirtri is only a deduction from that.

¹³ Rev. T.J. Fee, *The kingdom of Airgialla and its sub-kingdoms*, unpublished M.A. thesis, no. 820, University College Dublin, September 1950, 168-9; J. Hogan, *op. cit.*, 407.

¹⁴ J. Mac Erlean, 'Synod of Raith Breasail'; boundaries of the dioceses of Ireland', *Archivium Hibernicum* 3, 1914,

¹⁵ *AU.*, 469.

¹⁶ J. Hogan, *op. cit.*, 427.

¹⁷ *AU.*, 463.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 493.

¹⁹ K. Simms., *From kings to warlords* (Suffolk, 1987), 177.

in origin this office was associated with that of *ronnadóir*, which involved ‘carving’, ‘sharing out’, serving at the king’s table.²⁰ The office of *rechtaire* of Tulach Óg provides some evidence of an established Cenél Eogain royal household at the site in the early eleventh century. It has been suggested that prior to 1024, members of Clann Fergusa may have held the position of *rechtaire* at Ailech and that the slaying of Domnall son of Aedh by Gilla Mura may have been the very catalyst which led to the transfer of the Cenél Eógain headquarters from Ailech to Tulach Óg. This also carries the implication that the ‘Chair of Inauguration’, the guardianship of which was the preserve of the Clann Fergusa, may have been relocated to the new royal capital at this time.²¹

4.2 The MacLochlainn Kingship of Tulach Óg

Despite the firm reign of Flaithbertach, the hold of the Uí Néill on the kingship of Tulach Óg was never secure and after his death in 1036 it frequently alternated between the Uí Néill and the Mac Lochlainn sept of the Clann Domnaill. By the mid-eleventh century the power of the Uí Néill had weakened considerably under the strain of increasing hostilities between them and the Clann Domnaill. Shortly after 1036 Ardgar Mac Lochlainn seized the kingship of Tulach Óg and retained it until he was expelled by Aedh Ua Néill in 1051.²² By 1061 Ardgar, having reclaimed the overkingship of Ailech, secured Tulach Óg once again for the Clann Domnaill. Following his death in 1064, the Ailech dynasty declined into protracted succession disputes, a struggle which reached its climax in 1078 when Conchobar Ua Briain, a member of a rival branch of the Dál Cais was installed as king of Tulach Óg, by the Clann Domnaill according to Hogan.²³ It has been suggested that this move by the Clann Domnaill had a twofold purpose. In the first instance it might have been designed to unnerve if not permanently exclude the Uí Néill from the kingdom of Tulach Óg. Secondly, the Clann Domnaill may have considered that if they courted as allies those Ua Briain scions hostile to the high-king’s designs, and invested them with delegated authority, it just might at some point prove beneficial to the king of Ailech’s desire to maintain the autonomy of Cenél Eógain.²⁴ Conchobar, together with his wife, was slain by the Cenél Binnig of Glenn shortly after he assumed the kingship²⁵ and was

²⁰ Ibid., 81-2.

²¹ É. Ó Doibhlin, *op. cit.*, 8.

²² *AFM.*, vol. 2, 859.

²³ J.Hogan, *op. cit.*, 424-5.

²⁴ Ibid., 432-4.

²⁵ *AI.*, 235.

succeeded by his brother Cennétich who met his death in 1084 against the forces of Muirchertach Ua Briain, the son of Toirdelbach, the high king, at Móin Chruinneóige.²⁶ Ailech became virtually incapacitated by these events until the accession of Ardgar's son, Domnall Mac Lochlainn, in 1083. With his reign the supremacy of the Mac Lochlainn branch of the Clann Domnaill was secured and the Ui Néill were effectively excluded from the kingship of Ailech and the royal centre of Tulach Óg until the accession of Áed Ua Néill in 1176.

Specific references to the actual hill of Tulach Óg and the nature of the residential/ceremonial site are scarce for this early period. However, it is during Domnall Mac Lochlainn's kingship that we first hear of the venerable 'trees' or *biledha* of Tulach Óg. In this instance they were cut down by the Ulaid during the course of their hosting into Cenél Eogain in 1111.²⁷ This injury to the royal inauguration site of the Cenél Eogain was apparently carried out in revenge for Domnall's uprooting of Cráeb Telcha at the presumed inauguration site of the Ulaid, twelve years previously in 1099.²⁸

4.3 The Ascendancy of Uí Néill Tíre Eógain

With the death of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn in 1166, the high-king Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair marched to Armagh and called a truce between the warring Uí Néill and Mac Lochlainn factions of the Cenél Eógain. He divided Tír Eógain into two parts granting the area north of Slieve Gallion to Niall Mac Lochlainn and that to the south to Áed Ua Néill.²⁹ The peace afforded by this partition was temporary and the enmity between the groups remained unabated until the Uí Néill annihilated their rivals at the battle of Caiméirge in 1241. Nonetheless Ó Doibhlin argues that this interregnum was significant in the respect that it did provide Áed Ua Néill with an opportunity to carve out his own chiefly lands and to apportion new lands or confirm existing lands to his tributary chiefs.³⁰ The Uí Ágáin who had been associated with the stewardship of Tulach Óg as early as 1024 and were thereby *rechtaire* to both the Ua Néill and Mac Lochlainn kings of Ailech, are likely to have been confirmed in their holdings at Tulach Óg and its environs

²⁶ *AI.*, 239.

²⁷ *AI.*, 269; *AU.*, 553.

²⁸ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 963.

²⁹ F.J. Byrne, 'The trembling sod: Ireland in 1169', in *A new history of Ireland*, vol. 2, 1169-1534 (Oxford, 1987), 15.

³⁰ É. Ó Doibhlin, *op. cit.*, 6.

at this time, their territory later being designated Baile Uí Ágáin. In this respect it is interesting to note that the poet Seaán Mór Ó Dubhagáin's fourteenth-century account of the territories of the northern half of Ireland describes Ó Ágáin as 'Taoiseach teann ós Tulaigh óg' ('Firm chieftain over Tulach Óg').³¹ With the Ó Ágáin firmly in residence at Tulach Óg by the end of the twelfth century and the *lucht tige* (see chapter II, pp. 97-8) situated in the adjoining parish of Donaghmore, the question arises as to where the principal Uí Néill stronghold was before the removal to Dungannon. While it has been frequently stated that the transfer to Dungannon took place between 1295 and 1325 during the reign of Domnall Ua Néill,³² the earliest documentary evidence for the association of the Uí Néill with that site is actually for the year 1430.³³ It has been suggested that Cros Caibhdeanach, which approximates with the modern townland of Crosskavanagh, may have been the location of the earlier stronghold.³⁴ It is mentioned along with Dungannon in 1498 as a place where Domhnall Ó Néill and his allies spent the night before being attacked there the following morning by Felim and Niall Ó Néill.³⁵ However, there is earlier evidence to suggest that during the reign of Niall Óg (1397-1403) the royal residence of the king of Tír Eóghain may have been situated in a district called Seanmhagh which was located north of Dungannon and towards the west shore of Lough Neagh. In *An Leabhar Eoghanach* reference is made to the death of Niall Óg at this place in 1403 - 'Agus do chaith deich mbliadhna i ríge nUladh, go bhfuair bás i Seanmhuigh'.³⁶

The role of the Uí Ágáin as stewards of Tulach Óg and guardians of the inauguration site from as early as 1024 placed them in a special position within the Cenél Eógain royal household. That their holding of the office of *rechtaire* was hereditary within their collateral line is suggested by the fact that Ragnall Ó Ágáin, the probable great-grandson of Gilla Mura, held that position until his death at the hands of the Fir Maighe Ítha in 1103.³⁷ Their stewardship role is reiterated in the late fifteenth/early sixteenth-century composition - *Ceart Uí Néill*, in which it is stated that Uí Ágáin were officials to Ó Néill

³¹ J. Carney (ed.), *Topographical poems by Seaán Mór Ó Dubhagáin and Giolla-na-naomh Ó hUidhrín* (Dublin, 1943), 8.

³² J. Hogan, op. cit., 419; É. Ó Doibhlin, op. cit., 46.

³³ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 879.

³⁴ É. Ó Doibhlin, op. cit. (1969), 47-8.

³⁵ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 1243.

³⁶ T. Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *Leabhar Cloinne Aodha Buidhe* (Dublin, 1931), 34.

³⁷ É. Ó Doibhlin, op. cit. (1971), 8-9.

'in every country into which he goes'.³⁸ Of interest too is the fact that the share of revenue to which Muintir Uí Ágáin were entitled was based on their earlier contribution to the victory of the Uí Néill over Domnall Mac Lochlainn at the Battle of Caméirge in 1241 - 'Two-thirds of the revenue go to Muintir Chuinne, because there were two of them at the killing of Mág Lochlainn in the battle; and one-third to Muintir Ágáin because only one of them was there present'.³⁹ Their position was one of privilege but it was not one of power, and while claims were made as late as the closing years of the sixteenth century to their traditional right of casting the shoe over the Ó Néill's head during the inauguration ceremony,⁴⁰ there is ample sixteenth-century evidence to indicate that in reality the privilege of inaugurator had passed to Ó Catháin.

The Uí Chatháin emerged from the Clann Chonchobhair branch of the Fir Maighe Ítha who were in themselves a sub-segment of the Uí Néill and were established in the north central Derry area as early as the first half of the twelfth century.⁴¹ Their rise to prominence as the most powerful vassals of the Uí Néill was related to their considerable territorial holdings and their involvement in the politics of the Uí Néill particularly in the fifteenth century. In 1432 the slaying of Domnall Ó Néill by Aibne and Domnall Ó Catháin paved the way for the succession of Eogan Ó Néill and his inauguration at Tulach Óg in that year.⁴² By the sixteenth century the importance of the Ó Catháin to the Ó Néill was realised by the Tudor government and attempts were made by them to exploit Ó Catháin's power. The Archbishop of Cashel writing to Elizabeth I, in 1592, claimed that 'O'Cahan also by custom has power to name and confirm out of the principal house, O'Neill, when O'Neill is dead, in such sort that if any will take upon him to be O'Neill, being not named or chosen by O'Cahan, he is not to be obeyed nor taken for O'Neill'.⁴³ Such was the potency of Ó Catháin's role in the election of an Ó Néill that the Archbishop suggested that if he be restrained in his role, it might have the desired effect of destabilising the autonomy of Ó Néill - 'for if any should undertake the name O'Neill not appointed by O'Cahan, the people will think themselves not bound in conscience to obey

³⁸ M. Dillon, Ceart Uí Néill, *Studia Celtica* 1, 1966, 5.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ H. Wood (ed.), *The Chronicle of Ireland, 1584-1608* (Dublin, 1933), 106.

⁴¹ D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), 16.

⁴² *AFM.*, vol. 4, 887.

⁴³ *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1592, 499-500.

him'.⁴⁴ The privilege of casting the shoe is attributed to Ó Catháin in an administrative statement of 1576;⁴⁵ it was reiterated by Dymmok;⁴⁶ and a letter of June 1, 1607, from Sir Oliver St John to Salisbury stated that Ó Catháin claimed as an honour in the 'barbarous savage inauguration of O'Neale to make him O'Neale by casting a shoe over his head'.⁴⁷

4. 4 The Enclosure at Tulach Óg

The morphology of the earthen enclosure crowning Tulach Óg at 300 feet above sea level has not been debated to any great extent and no earthen enclosures comparable to it have been proposed. The key question is whether the site, in its original form, was a residential rath or essentially a ceremonial hilltop enclosure which as documentary evidence suggests, combined a residential function as early as the eleventh century.

In its present degraded form the site comprises a relatively small inner area *c.* 30m in diameter, enclosed by a substantial tree-planted bank with a rounded profile, outside of which there is a broad space or berm surrounded by an external, tree-planted bank. A causewayed entrance is positioned at north-northwest and there is no discernible evidence of an external fosse (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 53-5). The overall diameter of the area enclosed by the external bank is *c.* 80m. The site was recorded in some detail by the Archaeological Survey of Northern Ireland in 1940 at which time its enclosing features were in a better state of preservation and more clearly identifiable. It was then described as comprising a slightly elliptical inner area 32m in diameter, surrounded by a bank 4m wide, rising to 1.85m above the interior and 3m over the exterior, and set slightly eccentrically in a broad ditch 17m wide. This ditch was broken in places by what appeared to be the remains of a second bank. The outermost enclosing bank was described as 3.65m wide rising 1.85m above the interior and 2.45m over surrounding field level. A causewayed entrance was recognised at north with 'what seems to have been a guardhouse, outside which a narrow ditch was dug across the entrance'. Two finds from the site were also recorded - a late Bronze Age/early Iron Age socketed axehead and an

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1576, 102, 'O'Can's office to confirm the election of the O'Neill by casting a shoe over his head'.

⁴⁶ J. Dymmok, 'A treatise of Ireland', *Tracts relating to Ireland*, Irish Archaeological Society, vol. 2.

⁴⁷ *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1607, 155-6.

Iron Age enamelled fibula.⁴⁸ A hammerstone and stone axe were also found within the surrounding townland of Ballymully Glebe.⁴⁹

This description of the site somewhat reflects the details of its first plan prepared by Arthur Quigley in 1849 with accompanying fieldnotes compiled by Rev. Thomas H. Porter and the landowner, Mr. Getty. Quigley's plan shows a hexagonal inner bank, the form of which was revealed when Dr. Porter cleared the undergrowth which covered it (fig. 38). A chain of small earthen mounds are also shown on the plan representing what may have been the remains of an intermediate bank, which had been dug out in the time of Dr. Porter's predecessor and further destroyed by tenants of Ballymully Glebe who removed its greater part to spread on the land. The external bank had also suffered damage and its trees had been cut down. According to Porter the hexagonal form of the innermost bank was also applied to the external bank where it could be discerned at corresponding points, a configuration which is not visible in the external bank as it appears at present. He added that projections could be distinguished at some of its angles and particularly at south. Of interest is Porter's observation that the ramparts are not quite concentric and rise in 'regular gradation' from the exterior to the interior of the site.⁵⁰ Two fosses are also shown on Quigley's plan, one lying outside the innermost bank with the second positioned between the intermediate and external banks. Additional features recorded by Quigley and Porter include a series of three terraces aligned east-west on the south downslope of the hill, which may have been the remnants of cultivation terraces of a former orchard remembered by locals at that time. The remains of a roadway then locally known as the 'cow-loaning' ran across the line of the uppermost of the terraces in an east-west direction. This particular road was not believed to be of any great antiquity and was suggested as the route by which 'the rector's cattle went out to the fields east of the orchard'. A second road aligned at a right angle to the last, was recorded running from the village of Tullaghoge to the south, up to the causewayed entrance to the enclosure at north-northwest.⁵¹

⁴⁸ D.A. Chart (ed.), *A preliminary survey of the ancient monuments of Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1940), 240.

⁴⁹ Ulster Museum, cat. nos. (48-1 & 3845).

⁵⁰ H.F. Hore, 'Inauguration of Irish chiefs', *UJA* 5, 1857, 239

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 236.

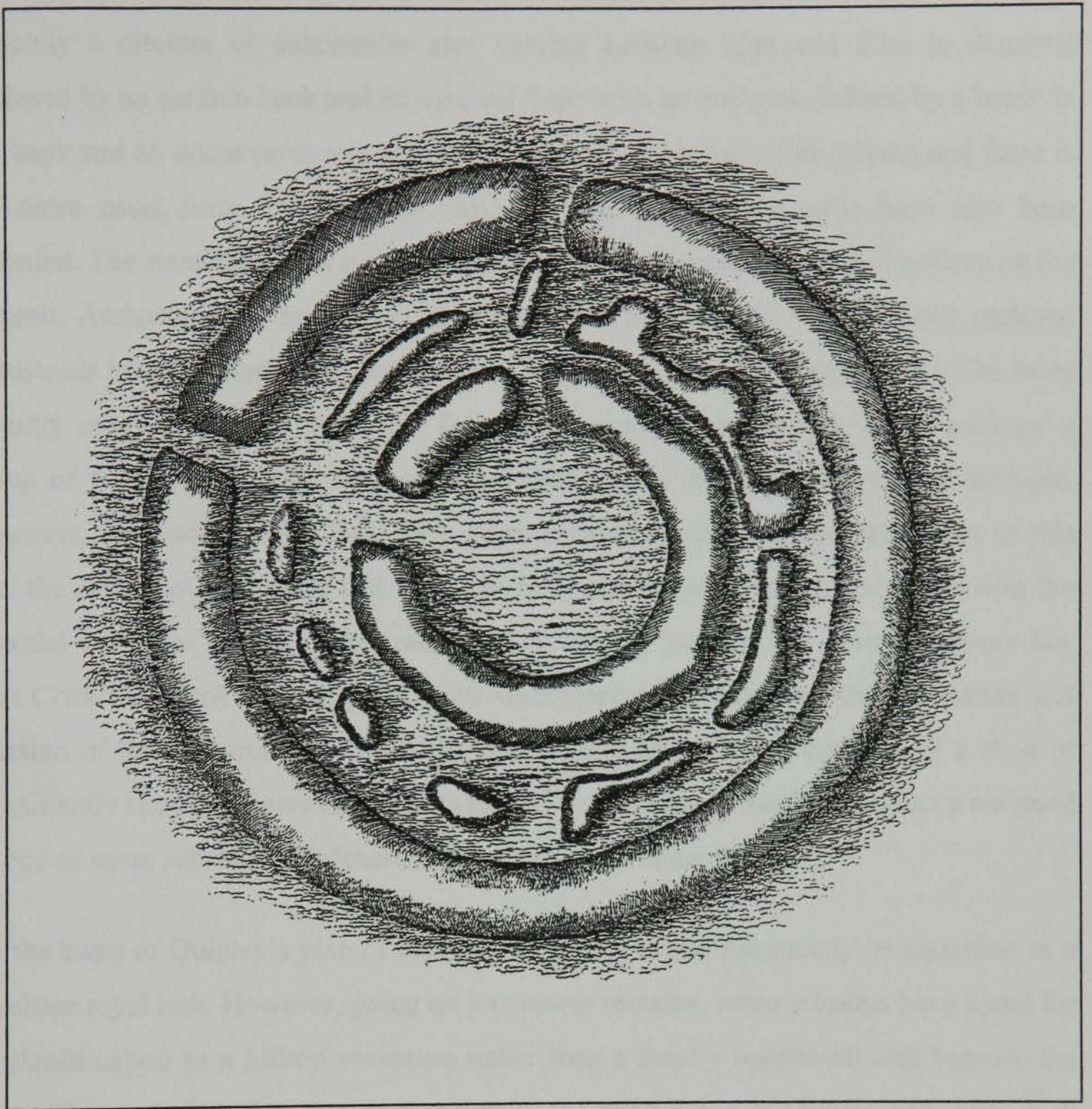


Fig. 38 Plan of the hilltop enclosure at Tulach Óg by Getty and Quigley, 1849.

Historians have tended to stress the residential function of the enclosure at Tulach Óg, Nicholls for instance describing it as a 'circular ringfort ...still inhabited in 1600'.⁵² From a purely functional point of view this interpretation is correct in terms of the use it was put to from the eleventh century through to the seventeenth century. A conventional rath is basically a circular or subcircular area varying between 25m and 50m in diameter enclosed by an earthen bank and an external fosse with an entrance defined by a break in the bank and an uncut causeway across the fosse. A single bank (univallate) and fosse is the more usual form, but bivallate, trivallate and multivallate raths have also been recorded. The standard rath is invariably situated on the downslope of a hill and not on the summit. Archaeological excavation has shown that the majority of them were enclosed farmsteads largely constructed and occupied during the Early Christian period. The more recently excavated rath at Deer Park farms, Glenarm, County Antrim, which enclosed a group of five contemporary wicker houses dating to c. 700 AD, is a typical example. However, the results of the Deer Park Farm excavation revealed that the layout of this site, the design of its houses and the types of artefacts used 'conform in detail with the material attributes of the lower grades of landowners listed in the seventh-century law tract *Crith Gabhlach*'.⁵³ Perhaps of more significance in determining the true nature and function of the enclosure at Tulach Óg is the relatively recent recognition of a class of prominently sited defensive raths characterised by a relatively small central area enclosed by one or more substantial defensive banks with intervening fosses.⁵⁴

On the basis of Quigley's plan of the site, Tulach Óg could reasonably be classified as a trivallate royal rath. However, going on its present remains, some scholars have opted for its classification as a hilltop enclosure rather than a strictly residential rath because the plan of its enclosing elements do not present the appearance of 'classic rath form'.⁵⁵ A hilltop enclosure is simply the enclosed summit of a hill defined by one or more banks and fosses. The evidence from several recorded modest examples indicate that the enclosed area is usually 60m to 200 metres in diameter, a sizeable space which may have

⁵² K. Nicholls, 'Gaelic society and economy in the high middle ages', in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1987), 405.

⁵³ C. Lynn, 'Early Medieval Houses', in M. Ryan (ed.), *The Illustrated Archaeology of Ireland* (Dublin, 1991), 127-131.

⁵⁴ D. Power, *Archaeological inventory of County Cork., vol. 2: East and South Cork* (Dublin, 1994), 77.

⁵⁵ D.O.E.N.I., *Historic Monuments of Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1987), 142-3.

combined a variety of functions, including habitation, ritual and ceremony.⁵⁶ Significantly, at least eleven of the recognised single-banked sites have burial mounds within their enclosures.⁵⁷ The hilltop enclosure at Glasbolie, Co. Donegal, which Raftery suggests may have been the inauguration site of the northern Ui Néill, is approximately representative of this class.⁵⁸ However, it must be pointed out that present archaeological scholarship proposes that within the genre of hilltop enclosures there is a particular class of site which was constructed purely for ritual purposes, the principal diagnostic feature of hilltop ritual sites being the presence of an internal fosse. The great royal centres of Tara, Emain, Dún Ailinne and the more recently excavated site at Raffin, Co. Meath are classic examples of internally ditched ritual sites. The central enclosed area at Tulach Óg is just a little over 30m in diameter, falling considerably short of the characteristically large diameter of a typical hilltop enclosure. On the other hand, if one excludes the inner hexagonal bank and the intermediate bank and considers the area enclosed by the more substantial outer bank, we get a diameter of 80m which fits comfortably into hilltop enclosure category.

There is some early seventeenth-century evidence to suggest that the inner defences as recorded in Quigley and Porter's survey of 1849 may not be original to the site and are possibly later additions. For instance, in Richard Bartlett's 1602 map of the site and its environs,⁵⁹ his stylised drawing of the enclosure shows a single tree-planted bank with a causewayed gate entrance positioned approximately at northwest and a second entrance situated opposite it at east or southeast (see fig. 32). Equipped with gate entrances, this would appear to be a representation of the outermost bank of the enclosure. The opposed gate entrances are deserving of comment as this is a feature which is unusual in ringforts but present at a number of attested prehistoric enclosures like that encircling 'Dathi's Mound' at Rathcroghan,⁶⁰ at Dowth Q in the Boyne Valley, and recent survey at Tara has revealed that Ráith na Rí has entrances in the northwest, south and east quadrants.⁶¹

⁵⁶ D. Power, *op. cit.*, 66; P. F. O'Donovan, *Archaeological inventory of County Cavan* (Dublin, 1995), 173-4.

⁵⁷ B. Raftery, *Pagan Celtic Ireland: the enigma of the Irish Iron Age* (London, 1994), 41.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵⁹ NLI, MS 2656.

⁶⁰ J. Waddell, 'Excavation at "Dathi's Mound", Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon', *The Journal of Irish Archaeology* 4, 1987-8, 23.

⁶¹ C. Newman, 'Tara project: the Tara survey' in, *Discovery Programme Reports 2* (Dublin, 1995), 65-7.

Bartlett also depicts a small mound surmounted by trees lying in the northeast quadrant of the interior, and a house and cabin in the southwest quadrant. The area immediately about the enclosure is wooded and a small path leads from the entrance at east/southeast, downslope to a clearing in which the stone coronation chair is situated. A roadway is clearly shown running downhill from the northwest gate entrance. While granting that this illustration of Tulach Óg is stylised, Bartlett's attention to the smallest details of the site makes it a rather convincing depiction. If the inner and intermediate banks of the enclosure were extant in 1602, it seems plausible to suggest that Bartlett would have shown them in his drawing. More pertinently, the houses which occupy the southwest quadrant in his illustration could not have been accommodated within the enclosure as it presents itself in Quigley's plan of 1849, or the survey description of 1940, unless they were located within the small area defined by the innermost bank. However, the gate entrances shown in Bartlett's drawing suggest that here we are dealing with a depiction of the external bank and not the innermost bank.

Some further evidence for the Tulach Óg enclosure being single-banked may be derived from two early seventeenth-century surveys of the site. In Pynnar's Survey of 1619, a Mrs Lindsey is described as having '1,000 acres, called Tullaghoge' upon which there was 'a good strong Bawne of Earth, with a Quick-set Hedge upon it, and a Ditch about it. There is a Timber House within it, in which she and her Family dwell'.⁶² This information is reiterated in the *Carew MSS.* for the same year with additional details stating that there were 'in toto, 22 tenants, making 30 men at arms'.⁶³ From a subsequent survey of Tyrone carried out by Sir Dudley Digges and Sir Nathaniel Rich in 1622, it appears that Mrs Lindsey and her family had moved to a new habitation at the foot of the hill. The survey entry describes a 'Bawne of Sodds on the topp of the hill where the Great O'Neal was wont to be chosen, but noe gate to it, nor inhabitants neerer than the foot of the hill, being half a quarter of a mile from thence. Onely there is a smale frame of timber erected within the Bawne for a little dwelling house, but without Walls or covering and no use made, either of that or of this Bawne. Mrs Lynsey herself dwells at the foot of the said hill in a

⁶² G. Hill, *An historical account of the Plantation in Ulster at the commencement of the seventeenth century, 1608-1620* (Belfast, 1877; reprint Shannon, 1970), 549.

⁶³ J.S. Brewer and M.A. Bullen (eds.), *Cal. Carew MSS, 1603-24* (London, 1873), 413.

little thatched house...'⁶⁴ Significantly neither entry suggests that the site had three ramparts.

In conclusion, it is proposed that in its original form the site crowning the hill of Tulach Óg was a single-banked hilltop enclosure, possibly erected for ceremonial purposes during the Iron Age period, the uncontexted finds from the site noted in the survey of 1940 affording some evidence of occupation or activity there in that period. The presence of an internal fosse as an integral feature of the original structure cannot be confirmed. Pynnar's Survey of 1619 states that at that time it had an external fosse, but whether it was contemporary with the bank or a later addition is not known. Initially the site may have served a purely ceremonial function, the *biledha* of Tulach Óg possibly having been enclosed within it. The very tentative suggestion may be made on the basis of evidence in Bartlett's drawing that there was a small mound situated in the northeast quadrant. There is no evidence to suggest that *Leac na Ríogh* (the Uí Néill inauguration stone) was at any time accommodated within the enclosure. The presence of a *rechtaire* at the site as early as the eleventh century suggests that it served a residential function, the Cenél Eogain having moved their headquarters to the site at that time. Members of the Ui Ágáin continue to be cited as *reachtaire* of Tulach Óg in the twelfth century and they appear to have consistently occupied the site until the early seventeenth century. Edmond Oge O'Hagan, for instance, was cited as being of 'Tullioge' in a general pardon granted to him by James I in 1608.⁶⁵

At some point after its last full description of 1622, the site was altered with the addition of an inner bank with a surrounding ditch and an intermediate bank set eccentrically within the outer enclosure. It is possible that it was re-fortified as a military defense. This could have occurred during the period of the 1641 rebellion as *Cín Lae Ó Mealláin* refers to a gathering of military there in April 1642, among them the captains Feidlim, Seán mac Cormac and Sean mac Eoghain Ó hÁgáin.⁶⁶ The hexagonal form of the innermost bank as drawn by Porter and Quigley is not now apparent, but if it was hexagonal it could conceivably have accommodated gun mounts, the angles affording flanking fire. The gradation of these banks, as described by Porter, would also have facilitated safe fire from the inner bank over the intermediate and outer banks. On the other hand, these later

⁶⁴ V. Treadwell, 'The Survey of Armagh and Tyrone, 1622', *UJA* 27, 1964, 148.

⁶⁵ *Cal. Pat. Rolls Jas. I*, 23 Feb. 1608.

⁶⁶ T. Ó Donnchadha, 'Cín Lae Ó Mealláin', *Anal. Hib.* 3, 1931, 9-10.

features may represent no more than a fanciful eighteenth century landscaping of the enclosure by the rector of Ballymully Glebe.

The enclosure at Tulach Óg may be referred to as a rath, at least from the eleventh century onward, in the respect that it served the function of a residential rath, but in terms of its morphology and original purpose, it is best described as a hilltop enclosure. A sequence of functions may now be proposed for the hilltop enclosure commencing with its probable use as (1) a ceremonial enclosure in the late prehistoric period; (2) a ceremonial site combining a residential function for the Airgialla and used for the first time as a residence by the kings of Ailech in the early eleventh century; (3) purely residential as 'O'Hagan's Rath' in the medieval and later medieval periods; (4) re-occupied in 1610 during the Plantation of Ulster;⁶⁷ (5) abandoned shortly after 1613; (6) and either re-fortified for military purposes or landscaped as a folly sometime after 1622.

4.5 Inauguration Furniture at Tulach Óg and some Conclusions on its Origins

The first direct insight into the nature of the ritual apparatus at Tulach Óg is the reference in both *AU* and *AI* to the cutting down of the 'cráeba' or *biledha* of Tulach Óg by the Ulaid during the kingship of Domnall Mac Lochlainn in 1111. The location of the sacred trees relative to the hilltop enclosure is not known, but evidence from comparable sites may suggest that the grove was situated within it. Lucas suggested, for instance, that the *Ruadh-bheitheach*, sacred to the Uí Fiachrach Aidhne, cut down by the Munstermen in 1129, may have stood within a *caiseal* which was also demolished during that attack. Furthermore, he proposed that the *caiseal* may have been specially constructed around it, or it perhaps represented the defensive wall of an earlier habitation site re-used for ceremonial purposes.⁶⁸ Cráeb Telcha, a sacred tree at the presumed inauguration place of the Ulaid (cut down by the Uí Neill in 1099),⁶⁹ may also have been accommodated within an enclosure. On the south side of Crew Hill a circular area defined by a bank, within which a small mound was formerly situated, was identified through aerial photography some years ago.⁷⁰ The *biledha* Tulach Óg are not mentioned after 1111 and indeed this is the ultimate annalistic reference to sacred trees specifically associated with an inauguration site.

⁶⁷ G. Hill, *op.cit.*, 288.

⁶⁸ A.T. Lucas, 'The sacred trees of Ireland', *CHAS* 68, 1963, 25-6.

⁶⁹ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 963.

⁷⁰ Identified from Ordnance Survey Air Photo (H 46A:29926/27). Site was destroyed *c.* 1981.

garden of Belmont House near Derry (see chapter III, pp. 124-5).⁷⁷ It is tempting and perhaps of more consequence to suggest that if such an inauguration *leac* existed at Ailech it may have been removed as a matter of course to Tulach Óg in the eleventh century and continued to serve as a kingship stone there. Alternatively, the Uí Néill may have simply chosen a new stone, or if Tulach Óg had been in use as the inauguration place of the Airgialla in the pre eleventh-century period, there may already have been an inauguration stone on the hill which they [the Uí Néill] could have adopted as their *Leac na Ríogh*.

The interchangeable and ambiguous use of the terms stone and chair to describe *Leac na Ríogh* (a quandary reminiscent of the Stone of Scone debate), is evident in documentation as late as the close of the sixteenth century. Bartlett's 1602 enlarged drawing of the chair⁷⁸ shows a rough uncut stone which is possibly the *leac* acting as the base of the chair, with thin stone slabs forming the back and sides. A caption to his map of South-east Ulster made in 1603 describes '4 stones in the manner of a chaire, wherin the Oneales this manie yeres have bin made'.⁷⁹ There are additional late sixteenth-century written descriptions and passing references to the inauguration furniture, most notably from Sir John Perrott who, in his comment on the inauguration of Aodh Ó Néill three months after the ceremony was performed in May 1595, mentioned that 'Tyrone created hymselfe Oneale ... whilst he sate in his stoane chayer upon the hyll'.⁸⁰ The last reference to the chair concerns its destruction in the winter of 1602 by Mountjoy. According to Fynes Moryson, Mountjoy 'brake downe the chaire wherein the Oneales were wont to be created, being of stone, planted in the open field'.⁸¹ A remark made by Lord Deputy Perrot in 1595⁸² and Bartlett's illustration and comment of 1602/3 proves beyond doubt that the focus of inauguration ceremonies at Tulach Óg was a chair which had been in use for a considerable time. On the other hand Lythe in his *Survey of Ulster* 1571, refers only to 'Ye stone where O Nele is made', and Sir Henry Bagenal reporting on the rebellious activities of Aodh Mór Ó Néill in 1595, declared 'the Traitor [is] gone to the Stone to receave that name', no reference being made to a chair as such in either comment. The

⁷⁷ Colonel Colby, *Ordnance Survey of the County of Londonderry*, vol. 1 (Dublin, 1837), 233-4.

⁷⁸ NLI, MS 2656.

⁷⁹ PRO, London, MPF 36.

⁸⁰ H. Wood (ed.), *op.cit.*, 106.

⁸¹ F. Moryson, *Itinerary*, vol. 3, 205ff.

⁸² *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1592-6, 386.

difficulty in deciding if and when a chair was created around the flagstone is further compounded by three maps of Ulster made by Francis Jobson, the first in 1590/91 and the other two in 1598, which present the outline of a chair on the eastern downslope of the hill, but in their respective legends mention only 'the stone where Oneale is named',⁸³ 'the stone where Onele is made',⁸⁴ and 'the stone whereon they make ye onels',⁸⁵ This is also the case in an Ulster map made by an anonymous cartographer in 1598 which designates the inauguration site as 'Onele his stone' but indicates the object as a stepped block suggestive of the outline of a chair on the side of the hill.⁸⁶ Teasing out these references it can be said with some conviction that the earliest representation of the chair appears on Jobson's map of 1590/91.⁸⁷ Although a chair, at least by about 1590, it continued to be referred to as the 'stone'. This term of reference may simply relate to the crudity of its construction, or it could more meaningfully refer to *Leac Na Ríogh* which perhaps formed its most ancient and illustrious part. The earlier reference made by Lythe to a 'stone' in 1571 obviously cannot be taken at face value, as 'stone' may actually mean chair. Notwithstanding the difficulties posed by the semantics of 'chair', it remains to speculate on when and why the actual transition from flagstone to chair might have been made.

Sydney's often-quoted description of a typical inauguration of an Irish lord upon a footprint engraven stone,⁸⁸ and passing references to stones at inauguration sites such as Cill Mhic Nénáin⁸⁹ and the Mag Aonghuis stone at Lios na Ríogh mentioned in a dispatch to Lord Deputy Russell in 1596,⁹⁰ suggests that the *leac* continued to be the essential focus of at least some lordship inaugurations well into the sixteenth century. However, in chapter III it was demonstrated that both the Mac Mathghamhna of Oirghialla and the Ó Néill Clann Aodha Buidhe may well have used monolithic stone chairs rather than simple flagstones in their respective rites. In this regard the Tulach Óg chair cannot be considered

⁸³ TCD MS 1209/15

⁸⁴ TCD MS 1209/16.

⁸⁵ TCD MS 1209/17.

⁸⁶ PRO, London, MPF 312,2; G.A. Hayes-McCoy, 'The making of an O'Neill: a view of the ceremony at Tullaghoge, Co. Tyrone', *UJA* 33, 1970, 90.

⁸⁷ J.H. Andrews in his notes on selected maps in TCD MS 1209 suggests that this map may well be the one which Jobson delivered to Lord Burghley in 1591 and for which he was paid £50.

⁸⁸ W.L. Renwick (ed.), *A view of the present state of Ireland* (Oxford, 1970), 7.

⁸⁹ J. O'Donovan, *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the County of Donegal collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1835*, 53.

⁹⁰ *Cal. Carew MSS, 1589-1600*, 136.

a novel departure. If however, *Leac na Ríogh* was once a mere flagstone, the question arises as to why and when the Ó Néill might have decided to break with the tradition of being inaugurated upon a *leac* and adopt a chair of which the *leac* may have become part. A 'throne' befits a king and there are two particular periods in the Uí Néill history in which we can identify attempts by them to reassert a sovereignty over Ulster. There is considerable evidence to suggest that in the late sixteenth century the ambitions of both Seán and Aodh Ó Néill lay in establishing themselves as sovereigns of Ulster. However, any attribution of the chair to Aodh can be dismissed as he was inaugurated in May 1595 and the evidence from Jobson's map proves that the chair was already in existence in 1590/91. This leaves Seán as the possible originator of the chair. His kingly pretensions are not in doubt, with his determination in this regard voiced in his statement 'My ancestors were kings of Ulster and Ulster is mine and shall be mine'.⁹¹ His view of himself as a king is also expressed in his dealings with his neighbouring Gaelic lords. In 1565 it was reported that he had demanded 'the tribute due in old time to kings, and would have it paid yearly' of Ó Ruairc, Ó Conchobhair Sligeach and Mac Diarmada.⁹² The Tudor administration, deeply concerned with his ambitions and determined to end his sovereign rule, passed an Act for his attainder through the Irish parliament in 1569 which stated that 'the same name of O'Neill with the manner and ceremonies of his creation...shall henceforth cease, end, determine and be utterly abolished and extinct forever'.⁹³ In the circumstances, it is conceivable that as the summary expression of a resurgent Ulster kingship, Seán Ó Néill had a chair created around *Leac na Ríogh* for his inauguration at Tulach Óg.

Its origins may also credibly lie in the fourteenth century. Following the surrender of his hereditary claim to the high-kingship of Ireland in 1315, in deference to Edward Bruce, Domhnall Ó Néill styled himself *Rex Hibernicorum Ultonie*, a title also assumed by his son Aodh Reamhar. Implicit in the assertion of this title by Domhnall was a claim to an Ulster not just confined to the Antrim-Down area, but coterminous with the province as once ruled by Conchobhair mac Nessa, or more pertinent to Ó Néill's ambitions, that area as defined by the Earldom of Ulster.⁹⁴ Significantly, on his death in 1325, the Connacht

⁹¹ *Cal. S.P. Ire., 1509-73*, 312.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 1565, 276.

⁹³ *Irish Statutes, II Eliz., c.1* (1786), I, 335.

⁹⁴ K. Simms, 'Propaganda use of the *Táin* in the later middle ages', *Celtica* 15, 1983, 145-6.

annals also record him as Rí Uladh.⁹⁵ It has been demonstrated that throughout the fourteenth century the ruling branch of the Uí Néill, including Domhnall and his son Aodh Reamhar, and particularly Niall Mór and his eldest son and heir Niall Óg, employed a subtle but impressive array of propaganda devices in furtherance of their claim on the province of Ulster. These included the adoption of the Red Hand badge, the title *Rex Ultonie*, their self-identification with the Ulster Heroes and in particular with Conchobhair mac Nessa and his abode of Eamhain Macha.⁹⁶ The addition of an inauguration chair to this catalogue of propaganda effects would not have been out of place. Any proposal as to what the model for such a chair might have been is highly speculative but the Scottish coronation chair/stone (taken to Westminster by Edward I in 1296) could be entertained. Close links between Ulster and Scotland were well established from at least the thirteenth century when the first of the galloglass arrived, and this relationship was played upon and heightened during the period of the Bruce invasion with Edward Bruce stressing this shared 'national ancestry ...common language and custom', and Domhnall Ó Néill, who welcomed Edward Bruce to Ireland in 1315, claiming 'besides the kings of lesser Scotia, who all drew the source of their blood from our greater Scotia...a hundred and ninety-seven kings of our blood have reigned over the whole island of Ireland'.⁹⁷ Alternatively the source of inspiration for the chair may have derived from ecclesiastical models. While the idea of a free-standing stone throne may have been relatively novel as an item of Irish inauguration furniture, more sophisticated stone thrones or chairs were in use in the Irish ecclesiastical context from quite an early period (see chapter III, p. 145).

⁹⁵ *Ann. Conn.* 260-61.

⁹⁶ K. Simms, *op. cit.*, 142-9.

⁹⁷ J. Lydon, 'The impact of the Bruce invasion, 1315-27', in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1987), 283-4; S. Duffy, 'The Bruce brothers and the Irish Sea world, 1306-29', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, no. 21 (1991), 55-86.

CASE STUDY 2. MAGH ADHAIR: THE UÍ BHRIAIN INAUGURATION SITE

Magh Adhair, the inauguration site of the Dál gCais at Toonagh, in southeast Co. Clare, is first mentioned in 981 when Máel Sechnaill, king of Mide and high-king of Ireland plundered Dál gCais, then ruled by Brian Bórainmhe (d. 1014). In the course of that raid a sacred tree called the *bile* of 'Aenach-Maighe-Adhair' was cut, after being dug from the earth with its roots.¹ Its destruction is also mentioned in the *Annals of Inisfallen* under the same year.² While these sources claim that the tree was actually uprooted, both *Chronicum Scotorum* and the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* imply that it was merely cut down - 'Dalgaisse was preyed altogether by king Moyleseachlin and he hewed down the great tree of Moyeayre in spight of them'.³ The annalists' use of the word *aenach* or *óenach* in the full title of Magh Adhair is significant, as it is a direct reference to the site as a place of popular assembly or gathering,⁴ which was distinguished by the presence of a hallowed meeting tree.

Almost seventy years later, during the reign of Donnchad mac Briain (d.1064), the *bile* Magh Adhair was prostrated once again, from which we may deduce that either it had not been fully destroyed in the attack of 982 or it had been replaced by another tree which was flourishing by 1051. Donnchad mac Briain's power was under siege from three different sources in the mid-eleventh century. Earlier, in 1023, Donnchad had slain his brother Tadc during an internecine dispute and had consequently incurred the wrath of his nephew, Toirdelbach, who now challenged him for the kingship of Munster. In addition he was under threat from Diarmait, king of Leinster, and by 1051 Áed Ua Conchobhair, king of Connacht, was actively attacking Munster.⁵ It was during one of these raids that Ua Conchobhair felled the *bile* of Magh Adhair.⁶

Both of these events indicate the significance of the *bile* of Magh Adhair to both the Dál gCais kings and their enemies. Its uprooting was manifestly the greatest insult which either the king of Mide or Connacht could pay to the king of Dál gCais. Although the

¹ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 715.

² *A.I.*, 164-5, 'The Tree of Mag Adar was broken by Leth Cuinn'.

³ W.M. Hennessy (ed.) *Chronicum Scotorum* (London, 1866), 229.

⁴ *DIL*, 485.

⁵ D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), 134.

⁶ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 861.

The place-name Magh Adhair in its broadest sense means 'Adar's plain'. The Adar in question was reputedly of the hÚa nDoborchon, the son of Fergusa, son of Luthchobuir.¹⁴ In the *Rennes Dindshenchas* account of the legend of Carn Conaill it is stated that Magh Adhair was named after Adar.¹⁵ The *Metrical Dindshenchas* adds that following the battle of Carn Conaill, the hero Adar 'built his house southward'.¹⁶ The word *magh* or *mag* is generally used of a plain or an open stretch of land and was sometimes applied to a territory or country, as in the poetic name 'Mag Fáil' for Ireland. In its restricted sense it means a field or green attached to a fort or dwelling, used for a special purpose.¹⁷ O'Donovan was of the opinion that Magh Adhair 'was not the name of a small field as is now generally supposed by the natives, but of a plain of very considerable extent, and the lordship of the Chieftain Eyre, which in the eleventh century became the Principality of O'Hehir'.¹⁸ The *magh* in question may therefore refer not only to the existing core archaeological complex of Magh Adhair, but also embrace its hinterland incorporating the many cashels and raths in the present-day townlands of Toonagh, Cahercalla, Creevagh More and Creevagh Beg.

The mound of Magh Adhair is also called 'Cregnakeeroge Fort' on both the first edition (1839) and current edition Ordnance Survey six-inch maps (fig. 39). O'Donovan interpreted this place-name as *Craig na Ciaróge*, the 'rock of the clock or chafer' and claimed that it applied to the mound.¹⁹ This appellation is not used in any known historical references to the site and appears to be purely local in origin. It may pertain to the crag which encloses the area of the archaeological complex from northwest clockwise through to southeast, rather than the mound specifically. As late as 1896, T.J. Westropp recorded a local tradition which claimed that while 'the mound was a king's grave...Cragnakeeroge was not its name, but that of the crags to the north-east',²⁰ which somewhat supports this interpretation.

¹⁴ M.A. O'Brien (ed.), *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1976), (153 b 11), 243.

¹⁵ W.H. Stokes (ed.), 'The prose tales in the *Rennes Dindshenchas*', *Revue Celtique* 15, 1894, 481, 'Carn Conaill in Aidne from Conall; Mag nAdair from Adar'.

¹⁶ E. Gwynn (ed.), *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, part 3 (Dublin, 1991), 443 [43].

¹⁷ *DIL*, 25.

¹⁸ *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the County Clare*, vol.ii, 1839,234.

¹⁹ J. O'Donovan, *Ordnance Survey Name Books, County Clare*, Parish of Clooney, 64-5.

²⁰ T.J. Westropp, 'Magh Adhair, Co. Clare. The place of inauguration of the Dalcassian kings', *PRIA* 4, 1896-8, 60.

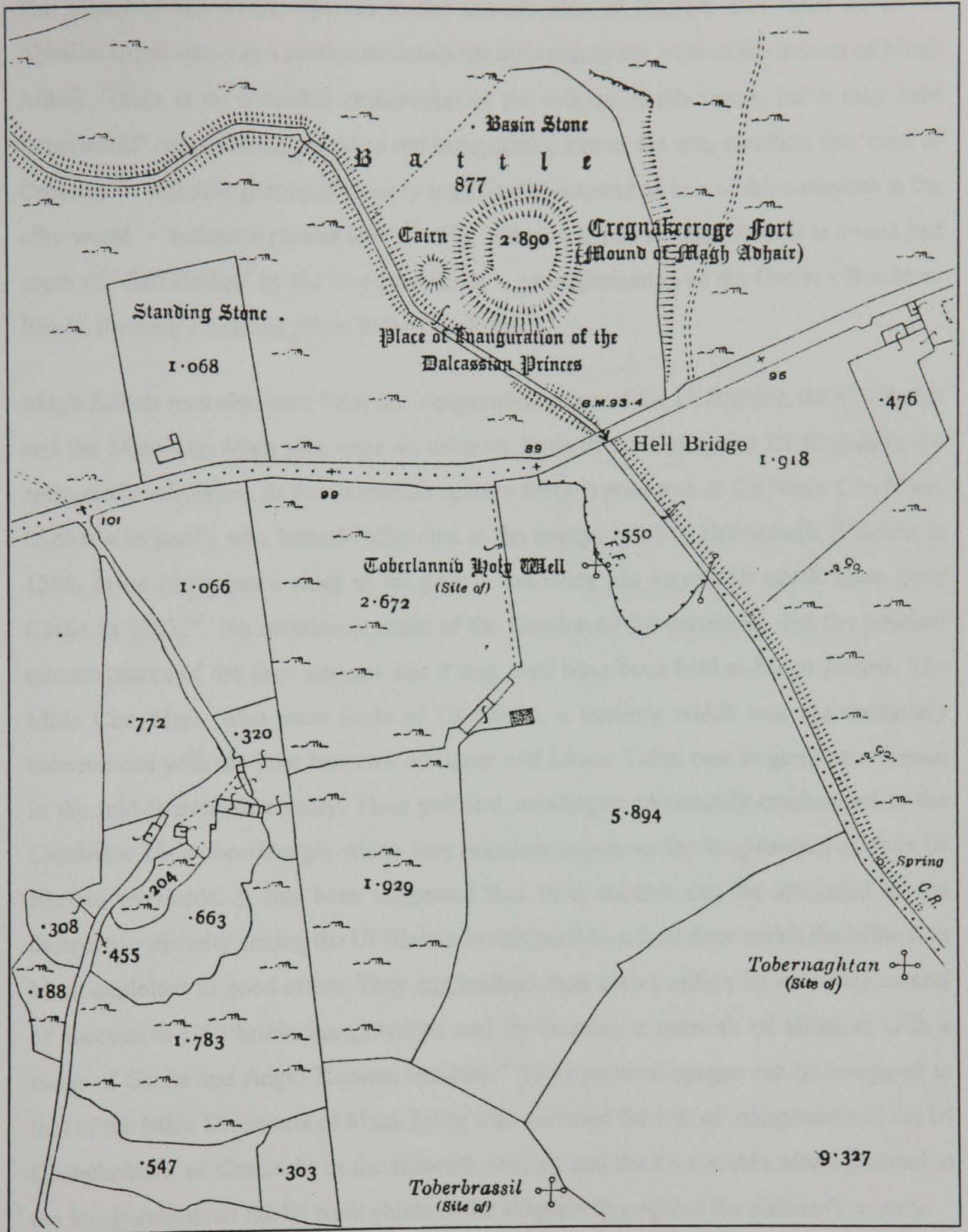


Fig. 39 Magh Adhair [OS Co. Clare, 1:2500; sheet XXXIV. 12, 1918].

The names of the rivers adjacent to the site are also of interest. The 'Hell River' or Abhainn Ifrinn flows in a northwest-southeast direction to the west of the mound of Magh Adhair. There is no available explanation of the origins of this name, but it may hold 'otherworld' connotations linked to the inauguration rite at the site, recalling the 'cave of Cruachu'²¹ which is portrayed in early Irish literary sources as one of the entrances to the otherworld - 'Ireland's gate of Hell'.²² The Abhainn Ifrinn at Magh Adhair is joined just south of 'Hell Bridge' by the Boolyree River - an anglicisation of the Gaelic - Buaile an Ríogh, the king's milking place, fold or enclosure.

Magh Adhair may also have been the inauguration place of the Uí hAichir, the Uí Ghráda and the Mhic Con Mara who were all tributary lords of the Dalcassian Uí Bhriain in the early medieval period. In the fourteenth century there is reference to Cú Meda Con Mara, 'Adhar's leopard', who himself officiated at the inauguration of Donnchadh Ó Briain in 1306, being inaugurated chief of his people following his successful attack upon Quin Castle in 1305.²³ No mention is made of the location of the ceremony, but the political circumstances of the time suggest that it may well have been held at Magh Adhair. The Mhic Con Mara, who were lords of Uí Caisin, a territory which was approximately coterminous with the later baronies of Upper and Lower Tulla, rose to great prominence in the mid-fourteenth century. Their political standing is particularly emphasised in the *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*, where they regularly appear as the king-makers of their Uí Bhriain overlords. It has been suggested that their success can be attributed to the destructive disunity among the Uí Bhriain in this period - a fatal flaw which the Mhic Con Mara exploited to good effect. They aggrandised their own position by assuming control of successive Uí Bhriain inaugurations and by courting a network of alliances with a range of Gaelic and Anglo-Norman families.²⁴ Their political apogee can be compared to that of the Mhic Dhiarmata of Magh Luirg who assumed the role of inaugurators of the Uí Chonchobhair of Connacht in the fifteenth century and the Uí Catháin who officiated at the inaugurations of the Uí Néill chiefs of Tír Eóghain throughout the sixteenth century.

²¹ E. Gwynn, *op. cit.*, part 4, 201.

²² W. Stokes, 'The Battle of Mag Mucrime', *Révue Celtique* 13, 449.

²³ S.H. O'Grady (ed.), *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*, vol. 2 (*ITS* 27, London, 1929), 135.

²⁴ A. Nic Ghiollamhaith, 'Kings and vassals in later medieval Ireland: the Uí Bhriain and the MicConmara in the fourteenth century', in T. Barry, R. Frame and K. Simms (eds.), *Colony and frontier in medieval Ireland* (London, 1995), 201-216.

4.7 Observations on the Archaeology of Magh Adhair

The earliest descriptive account of the mound of Magh Adhair comes from O'Donovan who recorded it as 'a moat of irregular shape...surrounded with a fosse adapted to its outline, and about twenty feet in its greatest height'.²⁵ In a schematic drawing of the site he noted the position of the large mound relative to a smaller mound or cairn lying on the east bank of the Abhainn Ifrinn, and the standing stone in the field west of the river. He made no mention of the stone basin situated in the open field on the north side of the larger mound (fig. 40), or the flagstone positioned on the summit of the large mound which was later noted by Westropp. O'Donovan also remarked on what he believed to be a striking resemblance between the mound of Magh Adhair and Carn Amhalgaidh and Carn Fraích. He consequently suggested that the great mound may have been erected as the burial monument of Adar, just as the latter are believed to commemorate the warriors Amalgaid and Fraích.²⁶ In purely archaeological terms, the resemblance between Carn Fraích and the mound of Magh Adhair would be better described as analogous, as Carn Fraích is unenclosed and of much more moderate proportions (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 5-8).

In the early twentieth century a debate arose among the antiquarians Westropp, Knox and Orpen as to the definition and function of raths, mottes and *cruachans*. Magh Adhair featured in what became a protracted argument between these scholars. Westropp defined the mound of Magh Adhair as a 'characteristic simple mote' and asserted that it was 'an undoubted residential rath'.²⁷ He defined a motte as a conical mound with a flat or rounded summit with one or more enclosing banks and fosses, not confined to an Anglo-Norman construction. He argued in favour of a class of prehistoric motte, a defensive residential structure which could be distinguished from the 'sepulchral tumulus' by the presence of enclosing fortifications such as banks and fosses.²⁸ To further support his case that Magh Adhair was a residential site he drew attention to 'a trace of a stone wall of fairly large blocks' encompassing the top of the mound which he suggested rendered it somewhat comparable in morphology to the defensive cashel genre.²⁹ He also proposed

²⁵ *OSL op.cit.*, 230-31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 232-3.

²⁷ T.J. Westropp, 'On Irish motes and early Norman castles', *JRSAI* 14, 1904, 321,325.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 322.

²⁹ T.J. Westropp, 'Types of the ring-forts and similar structures remaining in eastern Clare', *PRIA* 27, 1907-9, 381-2.

that the fact that it is overlooked by a ridge could not be used as a case against it being a defensive residential monument. In support of his argument he pointed out that the neighbouring 'evidently residential stone forts of Caherlisaniska, Cahernamweela, Caherduff, a small one near Cahercommaun, and in a lesser degree Cahermore in Glenquin, are all commanded by high rock-ridges, close at hand or overhanging them, on top of which they could have been built as easily as on their present sites'.³⁰ Knox was also of the opinion that the mound of Magh Adhair was residential, stating that with the 'stone wall round the top, this mound seems to be an ordinary Irish fort, unremarkable except that it is about twenty feet high, whereas the majority of the forts in the west are not raised much above ground level, except where use has been made of a spur projecting from a hill'.³¹ However, he disagreed with Westropp that the summit of this 'residential rath' was the location of the Dalcassian inauguration ceremony, preferring the smaller mound on the east bank of the river as the likely location, where he believed the king-elect could be better seen by the whole of the assembly.³² Orpen refuted the residential fortress theory and proposed that Magh Adhair, having some archaeological affinity with what he classified as *cruachans* or ceremonial mounds, and being the known site of a sacred tree and the probable location of an *oenach*, could be regarded as a 'ceremonial or as an assembly mound rather than as a fortress'.³³

Almost a century later, no further understanding of the true nature and function of the mound of Magh Adhair has emerged. Recently, the archaeological classification of this mound has been reviewed and it has been proposed as a prehistoric 'royal site' on the basis of its 'historical, literary and archaeological evidence', comparable to four other 'unusual and impressive mounds' namely Dún Dealgan (Louth); Duma Sláine (Meath); Drumfinghin (Limerick); and Dinn Ríg (Carlow).³⁴ However, the grouping of Magh Adhair with these monuments presents a number of problems. In the first instance there is no retrospective literary or historical evidence for Magh Adhair functioning as a 'royal site' in the prehistoric period. Nor is there any historical evidence that Dún Dealgan, Duma Sláine, Drumfinghin, or Dinn Ríg were ever used as inauguration sites. In the

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ H.T. Knox, 'The croghans and some Connacht raths and motes', *JRSAI* 41, 1911, 104.

³² *Ibid.*, 107.

³³ G.H. Orpen, 'Croghans and Norman Motes', *JRSAI* 41, 1911, 275.

³⁴ M. Herity, 'Motes and mounds at royal sites in Ireland' *JRSAI* 123, 1993, 144-6.



Fig. 40 The mound of Magh Adhair with basin stone in foreground (photo: John Scarry)

second instance, the last group of monuments are much more complex earthworks than the mound of Magh Adhair. Dún Dealgan is a higher, more steep-sided mound enclosed by a massive defensive fosse and an equally substantial external bank. There is a souterrain in the south of the mound, and in the eighteenth century a 'square bailey' was noted to the south.³⁵ Duma Sláine is also a steep-sided high mound, surrounded in this case by a deep rock-cut fosse and external bank. An oval earthwork interpreted as a possible ring-barrow, and a second very low circular earthwork, are associated with the mound.³⁶ Drumfinghin (Kilfinnan) is still more complex, the central mound being enclosed by three impressive banks; while Dinn Ríg (Ballyknockan) has been interpreted as 'a typical example of an Anglo-Norman motte', notwithstanding that it may have been erected on a pre-existing mound.³⁷ The mound of Magh Adhair has some affinity with the large flat-topped mounds at Temhair, Emhain Macha, Ráth Cruachain, Sciath Gabhra, and possibly the former site at Leac Mic Eochadha, but unlike them there is no field evidence for an outer 'ritual enclosure' encompassing the mound of Magh Adhair and its associated monuments. The topographical setting of the mound, with the river on its west side and rising ground enclosing it on the eastern side, may have negated the need for a delimiting artificial embankment.

As already noted, Knox proposed that the smaller mound situated close to the east bank of the Abhainn Ifrinn may have been the spot where the ceremony was performed,³⁸ while the first edition Ordnance Survey map of the site designates the standing stone to the west of the river as the 'Place of inauguration of the Dalcassian princes'. But all of this conjecture overlooks the fundamental fact that the great mound of Magh Adhair would have been an ideal *forad* or platform for the performance of a ceremony, just as Carn Fraích and Carn Amhalgaidh were deemed suitable eminences for respective Uí Chonchobhair and Uí Dhubhda ceremonies. In defence of the mound as the venue for the ceremony, Westropp noted 'a worn slab of limestone' on the north side of the summit of the mound (no longer visible) which could have served as an inauguration *leac*.³⁹ The function of the stone basin which lies to the north of the large mound is not known but as

³⁵ T. Wright, *Louthiana*, plate viii (London, 1748).

³⁶ M. Herity, *op. cit.*, 145.

³⁷ C. Manning, 'A note on Dinn Ríg', *Old Kilkenny Review* 3, no. 2, 1985, 187.

³⁸ H.T. Knox, *op. cit.*, 107.

³⁹ T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, *PRIA* 4, 1896-8, 55, 57.

already noted in chapter II, (p. 132) a stone basin is found in association with a rock-cut chair and foot-track stone at Dunmull,⁴⁰ a second basin, hollowed out on a seam of rock outcrop, is found on the middle plateau at Dunadd, the Dalriada inauguration site in Argyll, and a third is known from Dun Duirn in Perthshire.

The currently fashionable term 'royal site' does little to further the debate on the true nature of the mound of Magh Adhair. While the outward appearance of the large mound and its associated smaller mound suggest that they may be prehistoric monuments, the first intimation of this complex being a 'royal site' and place of inauguration occurs in the annals for the tenth century. The limited evidence considered, inauguration appears to have been a later and secondary ceremonial function of the site. It may well be the burial place of Adar, but the mound could also have been enhanced in the early historic period in order to host the inauguration ceremonies of the Dál gCais and the *óenaigh* which are commemorated in the annalistic place-name for the site. Clearly, the comparative analysis of the upstanding archaeological features of such designated 'royal sites' has been taken to its limit in almost a century of debate and at this juncture a programme of archaeogeophysical survey (recently carried out at Cruachu and Carn Fraích) or informed excavation of a select number of sites is required to determine their true nature.

4. 8 Medieval Magh Adhair

By the thirteenth century Magh Adhair was well established as the inauguration site of the Uí Bhriain. The *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* provides evidence for seven Uí Bhriain inaugurations at the site between 1242 and 1313, with the Mac Con Mara officiating at the ceremony in each case. Regrettably none of these references record the details or exact location of the ceremony within the Magh Adhair complex. According to the author of the *Caithréim*, the Uí Bhriain medieval kingdom of Tuadhmunhain extended from the most northern part of the Burren southwest to Loop Head, and from there south-eastward to Knockany (Co.Limerick) and Cashel, with Birr as its most north-easterly point.⁴¹ In reality, by the mid-thirteenth century the lordship of the Uí Bhriain had been greatly diminished as a result of various land grants to Anglo-Norman lords, among them Robert de Muscegros. The actual extent of the lordship at this time was roughly coterminous

⁴⁰ D.A. Chart (ed.), *A preliminary survey of the ancient monuments of Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1940), 9.

⁴¹ S.H. O'Grady (ed.), *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*, vol. 2 (London, 1929), 1.

with the modern Co. Clare. Within this reduced territory, the Uí Bhriain established a new capital at Clonroad, approximately eight miles west of Magh Adhair.⁴²

Following the death of his father, Donnchad, in 1242, Conchobhar Ó Briain was inaugurated at Magh Adhair. The *Caithréim* explains that he was first proclaimed by Sída Mac Con Mara - 'Sída do ghairm ar dtús é' - after which he was acknowledged by the general assembly of tributary chieftains.⁴³ Following his death in 1268, Conchobhar Ó Briain was succeeded by his son Brian Rua who was, according to the *Caithréim*, inaugurated without opposition at Magh Adhair by Sída Mac Con Mara.⁴⁴ Despite his auspicious succession, Brian's reign was marked by internecine war among the Uí Bhriain themselves and by numerous attacks on the Anglo-Norman settlements north of the Shannon. The dispute between the adherents of Brian Rua and those who supported his nephew Toirrdelbach, weakened the power of the Uí Bhriain and ultimately led to the granting of the whole of Tuadmumhain to Thomas de Clare in 1276 as a solution to restoring the peace to that war-torn kingdom.⁴⁵ The situation was further complicated by the involvement of de Clare in an alliance with Brian Rua, while his rival Toirrdelbach enlisted the assistance of de Burgh.

Brian Rua's son Donnchad did not succeed him, but rather, the chieftainship was seized by Toirrdelbach son of Tadhg Ó Briain, who was subsequently inaugurated at Magh Adhair.⁴⁶ In 1281, following protracted warring between the sons of Brian Rua and Toirrdelbach, the government intervened and instigated a partition of Tuadmumhain between Toirrdelbach and Donnchad, the son of Brian Rua, and with that came the acceptance by both parties of the lordship of de Clare.⁴⁷ Despite the partition, Magh Adhair continued to be used as the inauguration site of both factions.

Toirrdelbach reigned until 1306 and was duly succeeded by his son Donnchad who was proclaimed at Magh Adhair in that year by Cú Meda Con Mara. His subsequent four-year reign was appraised by the author of the *Caithréim* as 'a period during which benignant moisture caused all fruits to come, the winds were dumb and ceased from cruel mischief,

⁴² J. Lydon, 'A land of war', in A. Cosgrove (ed.) *A new history of Ireland*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1987), 252.

⁴³ S.H. O'Grady op. cit., 2.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 5-6.

⁴⁵ J. Lydon op. cit., 253.

⁴⁶ S.H. O'Grady, op. cit., 10.

⁴⁷ G.H. Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans, 1169-1333*, vol. iv (Oxford, 1911-20; reprint, 1968), 72-3.

all things went by rule, petty indigence there was none'.⁴⁸ This poetic description of his chieftainship belies the harsh realities of the renewed civil war among the Uí Bhriain which arose almost immediately upon his accession. Donnchad was backed by the de Burghs and his opponent Diarmait Cléirech was supported by de Clare. The climax of that particular war was a battle near Bunratty in 1311, in which Donnchad was put to flight and slain shortly afterwards near Corcomroe.⁴⁹

Diarmait, de Clare's candidate, was subsequently elevated to the chieftainship. With considerable opposition and general resentment, he was proclaimed at Magh Adhair by Lochlainn, son of Cú Meada Mac Con Mara.⁵⁰ Predictably he was immediately assailed by his enemies, among them the de Burghs, backed by the Earl of Ulster, who sought to restore the chieftainship to Toirrdelbach's second son, Muirheartach Ó Briain. Following the routing of Diarmait's people by the combined forces of Muirheartach, Lochlainn riabhach Ó Deaghaidh, de Burgh and the Earl of Ulster, the *Caithréim* records that 'eagerly Thomond's Gael made their way to Moyare to invest their natural chief, Murtough, at sight of whom all leaders felt their souls elated; Lochlainn mac Cumea Mac Conmara hastened to perform his ceremony'.⁵¹

The last documented Uí Bhriain inauguration in the *Caithréim*, which makes reference to Magh Adhair, is that of Donnchad mac Domhnaill mac Brian Ruaidh who was elected in opposition to Muirchertach in 1313.⁵²

While the annals note a number of Uí Bhriain inaugurations after that of Donnchad Ó Briain in 1313, and throughout the fifteenth century, the place of inauguration is not mentioned in any of those entries. However, as we have no evidence to the contrary, it may reasonably be assumed that Magh Adhair continued to be the Uí Bhriain inauguration site. In the circumstances, it must have been used quite frequently, if not with alarming rapidity, by both factions during the internecine struggles which characterised the fourteenth and early fifteenth-century Uí Bhriain dynasty. Perhaps too, in this period when the Uí Bhriain chieftainship was constantly and bitterly contested, Magh Adhair may have

⁴⁸ S.H. O'Grady, *op. cit.*, 32-3.

⁴⁹ J. Lydon, *op. cit.*, 254.

⁵⁰ S.H. O'Grady, *op. cit.*, 46-7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 69.

acquired a more potent symbolism, inauguration ceremonies held there, endowing rival claimants with their inviolable right to the chieftainship.

During Donnchad's short-lived chieftainship the internal strife which dogged the Uí Bhriain continued, and was compounded by the Bruce invasion. Richard de Clare, Donnchad's ally, angered at Donnchad's support for the Scots, quickly switched his alliance to Donnchad's rival, Muirchertach Ó Briain. Exiled to Connacht in 1316, Donnchad was slain in the course of a battle against the forces of Muirchertach near Corcomroe Abbey in 1317. This defeat effectively ended the power of the house of Mac Brian Rua and thereafter the line of Muirchertach largely dominated the chieftainship, but not without intermittent challenges.⁵³ One such challenge occurred in 1328 when Brian Bán Ó Briain imposed a crushing defeat on the combined forces of Muirchertach Ó Briain, the Earl of Ulster and Toirrdelbach Ó Conchobhair.⁵⁴ However, Muirchertach retained the chieftainship until his death in 1343. In that year his brother Diarmaid assumed the lordship of Tuadmumhain but was almost immediately banished from his chieftainship by his rival Brian Bán Ó Briain after which 'the chieftains of Thomond then submitted to Brian'.⁵⁵ In the following year, however, Diarmaid recovered power until deposed in 1360 by 'his own brother's son' (Mathgamain Maenmag son of Muirchertach). The chieftainship remained in the hands of this faction with Brian Óg Ó Bhriain assuming the chieftainship on the death of his father Mathgamain Maenmag Ó Briain, in 1369.⁵⁶ For a time, Toirrdelbach Maol, son of Muirchertach Ó Briain challenged Brian's chieftainship, and bolstered by de Burgh, ousted him in 1376.⁵⁷ With the deaths of both Brian Ó Briain in 1399 and Toirrdelbach Maol in 1398, the Uí Bhriain were once again hurled into chaos.⁵⁸ In 1409 'a great war' broke out between the Ó Briain [Conchobhar] and his sons and the sons of Brian Ó Briain. In the fracas the son of the Earl of Kildare was taken prisoner. The victors in this instance were the sons of Brian Ó Briain.⁵⁹

⁵³ J. Lydon, *op. cit.*, 255.

⁵⁴ *AFM.*, vol. 3, 541.

⁵⁵ *AFM.*, vol. 3, 581.

⁵⁶ *AFM.*, vol. 3, 617, 647.

⁵⁷ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 665.

⁵⁸ *Ann.Conn.*, 371, 373.

⁵⁹ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 801.

With the inauguration of Tadhg Ó Briain, son of Brian Ó Briain, as chief in 1426, Tuadhmunhain entered upon a refreshing period of stability and relative peace.⁶⁰ It has been pointed out that the strength and political coherency of the lordship of Tuadhmunhain in the later medieval period can be attributed to the fact that succession to the chieftaincy became restricted to a small and closely connected kin group.⁶¹ After this date the annals refer to just four Uí Bhriain inaugurations. In 1466 Conchobhair Mór Ó Briain was inaugurated⁶² and although repeatedly challenged by his nephew, Toirrdelbach Donn, he retained the chieftainship until his death in 1496. Following his death, he was succeeded by his own brother Toirrdelbach Óg (Giolla dubh) Ó Briain.⁶³ In 1499 Toirrdelbach Óg died and the chieftainship was taken by his rival, Toirrdelbach son of Tadhg Ó Briain.⁶⁴ The last inauguration noted by the annals was that of Murchadh Ó Briain in 1539.⁶⁵

4.9 Inauguration in Opposition: the Earls of Thomond and the Demise of the Traditional Uí Bhriain Inauguration in the Sixteenth Century

On Sunday, 1 July 1543, Murchadh Ó Briain, who had been previously inaugurated chief of Tuadhmunhain in the traditional manner in 1539, was created Earl of Thomond by Henry VIII at Greenwich. On the same day Ulick na gCeann Burke was made Earl of Clanrickard and Donnchadh Ó Briain was created Baron of Ibrickan.⁶⁶ The record of that elaborate ceremony describes Murchadh Ó Briain being led between 'the Earl of Derby and the Earl of Ormond, the Viscount Lisle bearing before him his sword, the hilt upwards, Garter before him bearing his letters patents.' The Garter proclaimed his style 'Du treshault et puissant Seigneur Moroghe O'Brien, Conte de Thomond, Seigr. d'Insecoyne, du Royaulme d'Irlande', and finally the King gave him his robe of estate 'and all things belonging thereunto, and paid all manner of duties belonging to the same'.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 869.

⁶¹ K. Nicholls, 'Gaelic society and economy in the high middle ages', in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland.*, op. cit., 425.

⁶² *AFM.*, vol. 4, 1045 and *Ann. Conn* 533.

⁶³ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 1225.

⁶⁴ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 1249.

⁶⁵ *AFM.*, vol. 5, 1451 and *Ann Conn.*, 711.

⁶⁶ *Cal. Carew Mss*, 1515-74, 203.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 203-4.

Ó Briain's embracing of the policy of surrender and regrant and creation as Earl changed the nature of the chieftainship of Tuadhmunhain and effectively established the process of the gradual anglicisation of the ruling dynasty. Murchadh was the last of the Uí Bhriain of his particular line to be inaugurated without opposition in the traditional manner. With this change, we may assume that the almost unbroken tradition of going to Magh Adhair was abandoned. From this point onwards, it was only opponents of the respective Earls who chose to be inaugurated as the Ó Briain.

When Murchadh died in 1551, the annals claim that his nephew Donnchadh was inaugurated in his place.⁶⁸ However, in real terms Donnchadh succeeded to the Earldom, his title and right to which was confirmed by Edward VI in 1552 and which he and his heirs were to hold in perpetuity. Nonetheless, fearing resentment from his brother Domhnall, Donnchadh named him tanist according to Gaelic custom. The Lord Deputy immediately sent for Donnchadh and sought his renunciation of this creation 'it being repugnant to the King's grant' and requested Domhnall 'and the rest of the gentlemen to stand to the King's Majesty's orders, and to refuse their Irish custom'.⁶⁹ Ultimately Donnchadh's acceptance of Edward VI's grant and his brow-beating by the Lord Deputy aroused bitter hostility among the collateral Uí Bhriain who now saw themselves cheated of their ancestral rights. In 1553, in response to this indignity, Domhnall and Toirrdelbach, sons of Conchobhar Ó Bhriain, engaged upon a nocturnal raid on Clonroad, the seat of Donnchadh, Earl of Thomond. The town was razed to the ground and the Earl was forced to retreat to safety. Shortly afterwards he died, and seizing his opportunity, Domhnall Ó Briain had himself installed as the Ó Briain.⁷⁰ There is no evidence that he was inaugurated at Magh Adhair, but it is likely that in order to emphasise this restoration of the traditional title of Ó Briain, that the opponents of the Earl would have assembled at their time-honoured king-making site which was just east of the smouldering remains of Clonroad, *caput* of the crown's Earl.

Domhnall successfully retained his title until 1558 when Lord Deputy Sussex, in a renewed attempt to bring the Uí Bhriain to heel, invaded Tuadhmunhain and expelled him. The Earldom was subsequently conferred on Conchobhar, son of Donnchadh, at

⁶⁸ *AFM.*, vol. 5, 1519.

⁶⁹ *Cal. Carew Mss*, 1515-1574, 237.

⁷⁰ *AFM.*, vol. 5, 1529.

Ráith Luimnigh (Limerick). The conferring ceremony is commemorated in a poem by Domhnall Mac Bruaideadha, hereditary bard of the Uí Bhriain. He vividly describes the assembling of the troops of Conchobhair Ó Briain and Sussex, accompanied by those of the Earl of Ormond, the Earl of Clanrickard and the Earl of Desmond for the 'appointing at Luimneach's fort of the rightful one of the race of Brian as King over the plain of Tuadhmhuma'.⁷¹ It is noteworthy that the poet does not refer to Conchobhair as the Ó Briain and in the following lines he appears to blame his opponents for the demise of that title - 'Were it not for the discontent of Dál gCais 'twere not long till this tree from fair Cliu of Gabhrán, this grand-son of Piaras, would be called again Ó Briain'.⁷² The making of the Earl of Thomond at Limerick, probably at King John's Castle, in the presence of the Earls of Clanrickard, Desmond, and Ormond was a symbolic victory for the Crown, marking the end of the traditional Uí Bhriain inauguration ceremony and the discarding of the title - the Ó Briain.

However, throughout the second half of the sixteenth century there were several attempts made by Uí Bhriain opponents of the Earl to assert the title of the Ó Briain and reclaim their patrimony of Tuadhmuin. In 1562, Domhnall Ó Briain, who deemed himself to be the Ó Briain and had been ousted by Sussex in 1558, returned from Ulster 'to his own patrimony, after his expulsion, exile, and banishment. In the same week Teige, the son of Murrough, made his escape from Dublin'.⁷³ United in opposition to the Earl of Thomond, they made a 'nocturnal assault' upon Baile-Meg-Riagain. They were defeated at Cathair-Meg-Gormain, but rallied at Cnoc-an-scamlail and slew a large number of the Earl's forces, taking Tadhg Óg Ó Briain and Brian dubh Ó Briain as hostages. Brian dubh was released after Tadhg son of Murchadh Ó Briain had been granted Shallee in the barony of Inchiquin, as ransom.⁷⁴ The Tudor government kept a watchful eye over the dissident Uí Bhriain, and on March 1, 1563 a dispatch to the Lord Deputy noted the 'disposition of the whole country to keep up an O'Neill and set up a new O'Brien'.⁷⁵ Again on December 23, 1573, it was reported that there was a 'determination to erect a great O'Brien of Sir Donnell'.⁷⁶ The friction between the Earl and the sons of Toirrdelbach and Murchadh Ó

⁷¹ L. McKenna (ed.), *Aithdioghluim Dána*, vol.ii (ITS, vol. 60, Dublin, 1940), 64.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷³ *AFM.*, vol. 5, 1593.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1563, 213.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 1573, 533.

Briain continued, and in 1575 a 'war broke out' between the two sides in which the Earl was victorious.⁷⁷

In 1580 Conchobhar, Earl of Thomond 'who had wrested the government of his principality from the hands of his seniors according to the laws, regulations, and ordinances of the sovereign of England', died.⁷⁸ Despite their disparaging comment on his anglicisation, the annalists nonetheless record a verse in his favour:

Twenty years was he
and five half years complete
Earl over the land of Adhar,
Conor, like Conn, the sunbright'.⁷⁹

According to the same entry, his son Donnchadh was 'installed in his place',⁸⁰ but in reality he succeeded to the Earldom without any inaugural ceremony.

Increasingly concerned at the resurgence of Gaelic practices and the tide of dissension which enveloped Connaught, and in particular Thomond and Clanrickard in the 1580s, the Tudor government determined to restore order through the implementation of the Composition of Connacht in 1585. The 'Indenture of Thomond' signed by Donnchadh Earl of Thomond, Muirchertach, Baron of Inchiquin and Sir Toirrdelbach Ó Brian declared that:

The names Stiles and titles of Captenships tanistships and all other Irish Authorities and Iurisdiccions heretofore used by the said lords Cheifteins and gent. together with all eleccions and customary divissions of land occasioning great strife and contencion amongst them, shall from hence forth be utterly abolished Extinct renounced and putt back within the said Cuntry of thomond for ever.⁸¹

With the commencement of the Nine Years War in 1594, the practice of inauguration was renewed with vigour largely under the auspices of Ó Néill and Ó Domhnaill in the course of their search for allies. English administrative records of this period express great concern at this resurgence of Gaelic practices. A letter to the Privy Council dated October 31, 1598 observed that Tadhg Ó Briain, the second brother of the Earl of Thomond had

⁷⁷ *AFM.*, vol. 5, 1683.

⁷⁸ *AFM.*, vol. 5, 1725.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ A.M. Freeman (ed.), *The Compossicion Booke of Conought* (Dublin, 1936), 17.

'drawn to him about seven or eight score loose men ...revolted from his duty, and ...combined with Redmond Burke' and that they had 'a practice among themselves to create the said Teig, O'Brien'.⁸² A subsequent letter from Lord Justices Loftus and Gardener to the Privy Council, dated November 3, 1598, confirmed news of Tadhg Ó Briain's 'dangerous creation to the name O'Brien'.⁸³ There is no record of the inauguration ceremony as such, or where it took place. While it is possible that Magh Adhair was the location, this cannot be assumed with any certainty, as the performance of 'emergency' inaugurations in this period, appear from available evidence to be characterised by their displacement from traditional sites.

By the seventeenth century, the Earls of Thomond were truly anglicised, spending a considerable amount of their time in England. A throw-back to their Gaelic traditions may be seen in a poem entitled *Tegasc Flatha* written by Tadhg MacDara MacBrody for Donogh O'Brien, fourth Earl of Thomond. This poem is a late example of the literary genre known as *Speculum Principum*, offering advice to a king. MacBrody's poem, in which he claims 'My duty urges these instructive lays, since Dunchad, Borom's offspring, great O'Brien, now pow'rful rules o'er Modha's ancient line'⁸⁴ has been interpreted as an antiquarian revival of this genre rather than a product of 'living tradition'.⁸⁵

⁸² *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1598, 309.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 329.

⁸⁴ 'Advice to a Prince', *Trans. Gaelic Soc.* (Dublin, 1808), 42.

⁸⁵ F. Kelly (ed.), *Audacht Morainn* (Dublin, 1976), xiv.

CASE STUDY 3. FROM CARRAIG AN DÚIN TO CILL MHC NÉNÁIN:

INAUGURATION IN TÍR CONAILL

The Uí Dhomhnaill are attributed no less than three inauguration places within Tír Conaill, the supplanting of one by the next suggesting a sequence of movement from the traditionally cited rock fortress of Carraig an Dúin to the church at Ráth Both in the mid-thirteenth century, and from there to Cill Mhic Nénáin.¹ An examination of this progression reveals that the church wielded a potent and transforming influence over inauguration practices within the kingdom of Tír Conaill.

An essentially pagan inauguration rite which involved a kingship candidate mating with a white mare was attributed to the Cenél Conaill by Giraldus Cambrensis in his twelfth-century *Topographia Hiberniae* (see chapter I, pp. 1-6).² Whether this rite was actually practised in twelfth-century Tír Conaill or was simply a recollection of an earlier and by then defunct ceremony is not known, but it is interesting to note that as late as the nineteenth century a memory of the rite, locked to its performance on Carraig an Dúin, still prevailed. In 1835 during the progress of the Ordnance Survey of Co. Donegal, John O'Donovan noted an encounter with one Manus O'Donnell 'a famous old warrior now in his 70th year ... the living oracle of the traditions of the district', who was careful to point out to the surveyors 'the rock at which his members were boiled in a cauldron'.³ O'Donnell's folktale is most probably a somewhat garbled version of Cambrensis' written account. Alan Bruford in his investigation of Gaelic folktales, notes that in many instances 'a consistent written archetype can be identified beyond reasonable doubt' for such stories.⁴ However, the association of the Cambrensis' rite with the Rock is the outcome of local tradition.

4. 10 The Traditions of Carraig an Dúin

In the absence of documentary evidence, the case for Carraig an Dúin or Doon Rock as an inauguration place, rests entirely on an assessment of its topography and archaeology and in particular on the wealth of folk tradition attached to it, elements of which may be

¹ K. Simms, *From king to warlords* (Suffolk, 1987), 28-9.

² J.J. O'Meara (ed.), *Gerald of Wales; the history and topography of Ireland* (London, 1982), 110.

³ J. O'Donovan, *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the County of Donegal collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1835*, 53.

⁴ A. Bruford, 'Gaelic folktales and Mediaeval romances', *Béaloides* 34, 1966, part I, 66.

founded in the sovereignty-goddess theme. Carraig an Dúin lies in the parish of Kilmacrenan, just under two miles west-southwest of the village of that name. It is a prominent landmark rising 507 feet above sea level, and typical of inauguration sites it commands a panoramic view over and beyond the relatively low-lying area of marsh and scrubland which surrounds it (see vol. 2, appendix 2, pp. 82-85). However, unlike the majority of inauguration places in use in the later Middle Ages, the rock is a naturally defensive, precipitous height, the summit of which can only be reached with some difficulty. It is an elongated quartzite plateau aligned northeast-southwest, partially enclosed on its south downslope by the remains of a drystone wall, 17m long, 3m high and 3m wide.⁵ A rough, heather-clad, rocky knoll with a relatively flat summit forms its higher northeast end (fig. 41). The recent classification of Carraig an Dúin as an inland promontory fort is inappropriate,⁶ as it is not a headland but a free-standing crag. Indeed the outward appearance of the Rock bears considerable resemblance to the fortified crag of Dunamase, Co. Laois, to the Rock of Cashel, Co. Tipperary and to the Scottish rocky citadels of Dalriada and those in Perthshire and Dunbartonshire (see chapter II, p. 81). Caesar Otway during his visit to the site in 1839 remarked on the 'peculiar natural fortress, in the midst of one of the most inaccessible districts' which 'might, if defended by resolute men, defy any force unaided by cannon, and a difficult matter indeed would it be to bring cannon to bear on it'.⁷ A late nineteenth-century romanticised description of the archaeology of the Rock noted that there were 'breaks in its sides ... evidently formerly built up and fortified, while a portion of the surface was levelled and surrounded with rude seats ... a Forum where the Druids held their councils'.⁸

There are varying accounts of the nature of the possible inauguration apparatus on the summit of Carraig an Dúin, all of which derive from local tradition. Manus O'Donnell in his conversations with the Ordnance Survey sappers, claimed that when he was a boy there was a stone beneath the northeast window of Kilmacrenan church which 'had in it the impression of a foot and other ornaments' and which had been destroyed by a 'Mr.

⁵ B. Lacy, *Archaeological Survey of County Donegal* (Lifford, 1983), 218.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ C. Otway, *Sketches in Ireland descriptive of interesting portions of the counties of Donegal, Cork, and Kerry* (Dublin, 1839), 23.

⁸ G.H. Kinahan, 'Additional list of megalithic and other ancient structures, barony of Kilmacrenan, County Donegal', *JRSAI* 9, 1889, 283-4.



Fig. 41 Pilgrims at Doon Well at the turn of the century, with Carraig an Dúin in the background

[NLI, 9330. W.L.J.]

Mac Swine, who having changed his religion, became a violent hater of everything Irish'.⁹ One of the earliest references to the Cill Mhic Nénáin stone is cited by Gough in his 1789 translated and updated edition of Camden's *Britannia* of 1607 in which he fleetingly refers to the venue of the 'ceremony of inauguration at a stone near Kilmacrenan'.¹⁰ O'Donovan was of the opinion that this inauguration stone was originally positioned on Carraig an Dúin,¹¹ and so was the antiquary Conwell who claimed that it was either destroyed or stolen from the chancel of the church in the 1820s.¹² In Kinahan's record of 1889, he makes no mention of this particular foot-impressed *leac* but describes 'a large whin-stone flag, with a peculiar squarish portion in its centre', on the summit of the Rock. Folk tradition claimed that if anyone could take this out he would find beneath it 'all the crowns of the ancient kings'.¹³ Local information gathered in the early twentieth century also pointed to this block of stone *in situ* at the southern end of the summit, 'as the spot at which Ó Domhnaill was inaugurated'.¹⁴ There is now no obvious trace of this stone, but it is possible that it forms the pedestal of a modern podium bearing a plaque, erected in recent years to commemorate the site.

The tradition that Carraig an Dúin was the inauguration place of the Cenél Conaill was largely perpetuated by accounts of the district compiled by nineteenth-century travellers and antiquaries. The *Post Chaise Companion* of 1803 referred to it as the 'rock on which the O'Donnells, princes of Tyrconnel, were always inaugurated',¹⁵ while both Otway and an anonymous writer in the *Dublin Penny Journal* were of the opinion that it was 'originally called the rock of Kilmacrenan' and that here 'the chieftains of Tyrconnel were inaugurated by the Abbots of Kilmacrenan'.¹⁶ This view of the Rock, not just as the possible pre-Christian venue of the Cenél Conaill inauguration ceremony, but as the site where Ó Domhnaill was inaugurated by the *coarb* Ó Firghil, was shared by O'Hanlon.¹⁷

⁹ J. O'Donovan, *op. cit.*, 53.

¹⁰ R. Gough (ed.), *Britannia: or a chorographical description of the flourishing kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland and the islands adjacent from the earliest antiquity by William Camden*, vol. 3 (London, 1789), 639.

¹¹ J. O'Donovan, *op. cit.*, 53.

¹² E.A. Conwell, *Discovery of the tomb of Ollamh Fodhla* (Dublin, 1873), 26-7.

¹³ G.H. Kinahan, *op. cit.*, 284.

¹⁴ Anon, 'Proceedings', *JRSAI* 45, 1915, 225.

¹⁵ *Post chaise companion or traveller's directory through Ireland* (Dublin, 1803), 562.

¹⁶ Anon, *The Dublin Penny Journal*, vol. 1, no. 7, 1832, 53.

¹⁷ Rev. J.C. O'Hanlon, *Lives of the Irish Saints*, vol. 6, 285.

The Ponsonby ladies in their tour through Donegal in 1837, walked to the 'Rock of Doon, where all the Kings of Donegal were crowned' and spoke of a well-known folk tradition concerning a benign 'fairy' who was thought to live at the foot of the Rock itself.¹⁸ This folk-tale was related in full to Caesar Otway by Tony O'Donnell in the 1830s, the fairy in his version of events being cast as mischievous and meddling. O'Donnell pointed to a 'sort of hollow in the eastern side of the rock, which forms a vestibule to an immense cavern which is *said* to be within ... the favourite abode of the *good* people, and their council chamber'. At the back of the hollow, supposedly lay the fairies' door.¹⁹ During his visit to the site in the late nineteenth century, Kinahan was also informed of the cave which was believed to exist under the Rock, but which he could not find.²⁰ The existence of a cave at Doon, fabled or factual, evokes the idea of the entrance to an Otherworld abode like *úaim Chruachan* - 'Ireland's gate of Hell' from which Morrígan, ancient goddess of battle, emerges in the *Dindshenchas* poem 'Odras'²¹ and from which in *Acallamh na Senorach*, the daughter of Bodb comes to speak with Caílte, who recognises her as one of the Tuatha Dé Danann.²²

The considerable anecdotal lore connecting fairies or the supernatural with inauguration and assembly hills, gathered by eighteenth and nineteenth-century travellers, may be no more than the product of lively imagination, but its prevalence is worthy of some consideration. William Wenman Seward, on observing an 'ancient judgement seat' on Kyle Hill, during his travels through Co. Laois *c.* 1795, noted that the 'common people [called] it the fairy chair',²³ while Charles Smith when passing Drung Hill in the Barony of Iveragh, related how the local people, believing that it was necessary for travellers to appease the spirit of the hill by versifying, enjoined him to recite some verses lest he 'meet with some mischance'.²⁴ The association of the supernatural with hills and mounds in traditional culture also extends to Gaelic Scotland. The nineteenth-century Scottish

¹⁸ F. and E. Ponsonby, 'Diary of a tour through Donegal, 1837', *Donegal Annual*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1973, 286.

¹⁹ C. Otway, *op. cit.*, 30-37. O'Donnell's lore claimed that troops of tiny people were seen entering the cave and that some gifted mortals observed the door open and glimpsed sumptuous apartments and splendid banquetings within. His long-winded tale tells how a mere mortal outwits a malevolent fairy who lived beneath the Rock.

²⁰ G.H. Kinahan, *op. cit.*, 283-4.

²¹ E. Gwynn (ed.), *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, part 4, (Dublin, 1991), 200-201.

²² J. Waddell, 'Rathcroghan; a royal site', *JIA* 1, 1983, 22.

²³ W.W. Seward, *Topographia Hibernica* (Dublin, 1795).

²⁴ C. Smith, *The ancient and present state of the County of Kerry* (Dublin 1756; reprint, Dublin & Cork, 1979), 59-60.

antiquary, Andrew Jervise, collected lore regarding archaeological sites on hills in Forfarshire and observed that here too the tradition of the presence of 'fairies' was considerable. In Glenesk he recorded a footprint stone locally known as the 'fairy's footmark' and in the parish of Carmyllie yet another example, discovered at a Bronze Age burial mound on a hill with the local name of the 'fairies' knowe'.²⁵ The popular perception of such landmarks as supernatural abodes or *síd*-hills may in some sense represent a veiled survival of the sovereignty-goddess theme, perhaps reiterating the association between the *síd* and kingship so obviously drawn in early Irish literary texts, notably in *Echtra Nerai* where the *síd*-mound of Crúachu is seen as the pagan otherworld source of kingship²⁶ and in the many references to *síd*-mounds in the *Dindshenchas*, among them *Síd Fer Femin*, the fairy mound of Bodb at Slievenamon²⁷ and *Síd Sinche*, the dwelling of Midir at Brí Léith.²⁸

Returning to Doon, *Tobar an Dúin* or Doon Well which is situated to the south of the Rock and its connection if any with inauguration practices here, merits some notice. In local tradition the well is credited with innumerable cures. A visual record of a pilgrimage, taken by a Welsh photographer at the turn of the century,²⁹ shows the ground surrounding the well embedded with an extraordinary clutter of sticks and crutches covered with rags (fig. 14).³⁰ The present caretaker of the site, Mr. Gallagher, describes how one cannot dig anywhere in the area around Tobar an Dúin without encountering the stump of a stick or crutch.³¹ The waters of the well when sprinkled on potato and corn crops were believed to prevent blight and various other disasters and such was the dramatic increase in pilgrims attending the well at the end of the nineteenth century, that a public road had to be made to provide access.³² In this century it continues to attract large numbers of pilgrims for the performance of the traditional Station and although the practice of planting sticks and crutches in the ground is now curtailed, a couple of carefully pruned birch trees nearby, are decked with a bizarre array of personal offerings including beads, medallions, broken statues, rags, crutches, bells, asthma inhalers,

²⁵ A. Jervise, 'Proceedings', *JRSAI* 5, part 3, 1866, 451.

²⁶ K. McCone, *Pagan past and Christian present in early Irish literature* (An Sagart, 1990), 151-2.

²⁷ E. Gwynn, *op. cit.*, part 4, 293.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, part 3, 350.

²⁹ NLI, 9330 WL - 9332 WL.

³⁰ Anon, 1915, *op. cit.*, 225

³¹ Gleaned in conversation, St Patrick's Day, 1996.

³² G.H. Kinahan, *op. cit.*, 284.

spectacles and false teeth. An assembly for special devotion at the well is held on New Year's Eve. A Columban origin has been argued for Tobar an Dúin,³³ but in local tradition it is not dedicated to any particular saint and indeed the origin of the Doon *turas* is comparatively modern, attributed to Lector O'Firghil, a Franciscan who had the gift of healing and performed his cures in the neighbourhood, possibly in the fifteenth century.³⁴ Otway's storyteller, Tony O'Donnell, spoke of the difficulties the friar encountered in his attempts to bless the well and how its sanctification ensured that the fairies of the Rock would never return. According to the same source, its waters were initially only good for the cure of murrain and black-leg in cattle, then it was seen to cure horses of a myriad of ailments and finally it provided a miracle cure for the bed-ridden and those on crutches. It was not only sought to heal complaints but also to procure marriages; it was used as a deterrent against infidelity in husbands and it was highly prized as anti-jealousy water.³⁵ Perhaps of more consequence is the suggestion that Doon Well may be identified by the earlier name of *Tobar Eithne*, mentioned in Manus O'Donnell's sixteenth-century *Life of Columcille*.³⁶ It must be added that a holy well called Toberenny, which lies within the medieval parish of Kilmacrenan, in the townland of Barnes Lower, a little over two miles north of the Rock, and which is associated with Columcille by the pilgrims of the *turas* in this area, has also been proposed as *Tobar Eithne*.³⁷ According to the *Life*, *Tobar Eithne* was named after Eithne, mother of Columcille, and it is here that the saint reputedly spoke the prophecy of the birth of Daluch 'the eleventh in descent from Conall Gulban; and of his seed shall be the kings of the clan of Conall Gulban forever'. The prophecy continues with the promise that the water of the well 'shall be blood and gore' any time one of Daluch's seed 'shall be about to die by weapons'.³⁸ The Eithne of *Tobar Eithne*, is apparently none other than a local manifestation of Eithne Tháebfata, pagan deity of the Túatha Dé Danann and sovereignty-goddess. In the prophecies concerning the birth of Columcille, it is told that 'a son shall be born to Ethne Taebfhoda, wife of Fedlimid son of Fergus Cennfada, son of Conall Gulban, son of Niall of the Nine Hostages. And

³³ Canon Maguire, *History of the Diocese of Raphoe*, vol. 1 (1920), 446.

³⁴ Anon 1915, op.cit., 225; É. Ó Muirgheasa, 'The holy wells of Donegal', *Béaloides* vol. 6, no. 2, 1936, 155-6; Rev. J. Fitzgerald 'Lector O'Friel and Doon Well', *Donegal Annual* 41, 1989, 95.

³⁵ C. Otway, op. cit., 37-43.

³⁶ K. Simms, op. cit., 28.

³⁷ Rev. P. Ó Gallachair, 'Columban Donegal', *Donegal Annual*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1963, 265.

³⁸ A. O'Kelleher and G. Schoepperle (eds.), *Betha Colaim Chille* (Dublin, 1994), 111.

Columcille shall be his name'.³⁹ Her position as mother of Columcille, in the *Life*, implies her transformation from pagan deity to Christian saint and by inference, the christianising of sovereignty. Eithne Tháebfata's conversion is also suggested in the early Irish literary text *Altram Tighe dá Medar* where a foster-daughter and namesake of the goddess takes leave of her Túatha Dé Dannan kin and relinquishes her soul to God and Patrick.⁴⁰ Significantly the *Life* also mentions that Cill Mhic Nénáin was formerly called *Doire Eithne* or Eithne's oak grove, a place-name which brings to mind the sacred grove of Diana Nemorensis in Aricia and Dodona's Grove in Epirus, both of which are associated with sovereignty-deities in the classical tradition.⁴¹

Unlike Aileach, which according to the *Tripartite Life of Patrick* was ordained by that saint as an inauguration place,⁴² and Indeoin which according to the *Life of St. Declan of Ardmore* was decreed and blessed by Declan as the place where the king of the Deisí should be inaugurated,⁴³ there is no reference in the *Life of Columcille* to a specific inauguration place or stone ordained for the kingship rites of Tír Conaill by Columcille. However, in the section of the *Life* dealing with 'marvels before his birth' there are references to a *lec* or flagstone inscribed with a cross and the 'Red Stone' or *cloch cruinn*, both of which are associated with the birth of the saint. The 'flagstone of the cowl' or *Lec an Cochail* is also mentioned in relation to his prophecies and miracles on returning from Iona, but none of these stones are known to have served as inauguration furniture at Carraig an Dúin or Cill Mhic Nénáin church. The *Life* tells how a 'fair youth in shining raiment' heralded the birth of Columcille and requested Eithne to take a flagstone from Loch mhic Chiabáin to Ráth Cnó in Gartan so that Columcille would be born upon it- 'and it befell that the foresaid flagstone was under him at his birth, and the child rested him crosswise thereon ... and the figure of that cross is in that stone from that time to this day.'⁴⁴ According to Manus Ó Domhnaill, Columcille's flagstone 'for working of marvels and wonders' remained to be seen at Ráth Cnó in the sixteenth century.⁴⁵ In present-day tradition Ráth Cnó has been identified as 'St Columcille's Oratory' in the townland of

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁰ K. McCone, *op. cit.*, 150.

⁴¹ J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: a study in magic and religion* (London, 1922; reprint Hertfordshire, 1994), 1-4.

⁴² K. Mulchrone (ed.), *Bethu Phátraic* (Dublin, 1939), 93.

⁴³ Rev. P. Power, *Life of St Declan of Ardmore* (ITS, London 1914), 45.

⁴⁴ A. O'Kelleher and G. Schoepperle (eds.) *op. cit.*, 37-9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

Churchtown overlooking Loch mhic Chiabáin, approximately four miles west of Carraig an Dúin. The saint's natal stone has been variously suggested as a flat stone lying within the church,⁴⁶ or alternatively a large, subcircular cupmarked slab situated on the crest of a ridge at Lacknacoó just south of Churchtown.⁴⁷ The second stone, *cloch cruinn*, is described as a 'round stone of the colour of blood' which Eithne brought forth during the birth. It was last recorded as being in the keeping of the *coarb* Ó Náan of Gartan ('who carries Collumkillie's *read stoane*'), in a pre-Plantation survey inquisition held at Lifford in 1609.⁴⁸ The remaining stone, *Lec on Cochaille* is described in the *Life* as a flagstone situated some miles from the church of Cill Mhic Nénáin upon which a miraculous cowl had been left by 'angels of God to Erin', and subsequently taken to the church to become a 'high relic of Columcille'.⁴⁹ If the footprint stone noted by Manus O'Donnell in the old church at Kilmacrenan was of any great antiquity, it would surely have been mentioned in the *Life* along with the aforementioned miraculous stones. The fact that it is not suggests that the footprint stone was quite late in origin, perhaps having been made when the inauguration ceremony removed to the church sometime after 1258.

4. 11 Ráth Both and Cill Mhic Nénáin: Inauguration and the Church

The intervention of the church in the ceremony of inauguration is well attested by the role of the *coarbs* of Máedóc and Da Chonna as officiators in the respective ceremonies of the kings of Bréifne and Connacht. The performance of the ceremony at ecclesiastical centres and the implication that it may have been moved under the influence of the church from traditional centres, is borne out by the Uí Dhomhnaill ceremonies held at the churches of Ráth Both and Cill Mhic Nénáin, and by the inauguration of Toirrdelbach Ó Conchobair at Áth an Termoinn in 1106 (see case study 4). It is also implied in the *Book of Uí Máine* that the *coarb* Ó Miadhacháin inaugurated the king of Uí Máine at Cluain Tuaiscirt na Sinna.⁵⁰ Likewise, an entry in an Eóganacht genealogical tract makes claims for the twelfth-century kings of Munster having been proclaimed in Cormac's Chapel on the Rock of Cashel.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Rev. P. Ó Gallachair, op. cit., 1963, 263-4.

⁴⁷ B. Lacy, op.cit., 280.

⁴⁸ Pat. 16 Jas. I, XXX. 13, 381; Rev. P. Ó Gallachair, 'Coarbs and erenaghs of County Donegal', *Donegal Annual*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1960, 277-8.

⁴⁹ A. O' Kelleher and G. Schoepperle (eds.), op. cit., 403.

⁵⁰ J. O'Donovan (ed.), *The tribes and customs of Hy-Many* (Dublin, 1863), 79.

⁵¹ F.J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* (London, 1973), 191.

The earliest reference to the venue of an Ó Domhnaill inauguration is for the year 1258 when in an eulogy written for Domhnall Óg Ó Domhnaill by Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, the poet declares that Domhnall was 'kinged ...in Ráth Both in the spring; the church was filled with us as we made the chief of Creibhlinn king'.⁵² The diocese of Raphoe (Ráth Both) was coterminous with the kingdom of Tír Conaill, and the twelfth-century cathedral of Ráth Both, in which Domhnall Óg was inaugurated, was built on or near the site of an earlier monastery. The foundation of that monastery is attributed to Columcille, and Adómnán is associated with it from the seventh century onwards.⁵³ If indeed the Ó Domhnaill had hitherto been inaugurated exclusively on Carraig an Dúin, this departure requires some explanation. It has been suggested that the choice of Ráth Both as the venue for Domhnall Óg's inauguration may have been influenced by Maol Pádraig Ó Scannail, bishop of Raphoe and reforming Dominican friar, who endeavoured to rid Tír Conaill of pagan practices and to exercise the authority of his office to the full.⁵⁴ In 1253 Ó Scannail was appointed to that office by the archbishop of Armagh on the advice of Innocent IV. He was consecrated in the Franciscan friary at Dundalk and subsequently appointed as the archbishop's vicar in the province of Armagh. Within three years of taking up office he complained to the pope of the persistence of idolatry in Tír Conaill and he obtained authority from Alexander IV in 1256 to use ecclesiastical censures against those laymen in the diocese of Raphoe who worshipped idols.⁵⁵ With the bishops' distaste for pagan ritual and the threat of ecclesiastical sanctions, it is conceivable that any references to past barbarous inauguration rites, or indeed the sites with which those practices were associated, were either abandoned outright or at least suspended on the occasion of what could be described as the summoned inauguration of 1258.

After 1258 there are no subsequent historical references to Ráth Both as the venue for Uí Dhomhnaill inaugurations. From 1399 onwards, Cill Mhic Nénáin is cited as the inauguration place of both the Uí Dhomhnaill and their vassals the Mhic Shuibhne, and as late as 1609 the cartographer Baptista Boazio noted it as 'Kilmacrenan wher O Donnel is

⁵² N.J.A. Williams (ed.), *The poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe* (ITS, vol. 51, Dublin 1980), 107.

⁵³ A. Gwynn and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses in Ireland* (Dublin, 1988), 94.

⁵⁴ K. Simms, *op.cit.*, 27-9.

⁵⁵ M.P. Sheehy (ed.), *Pontifica Hibernica: medieval papal chancery documents concerning Ireland, 640-1261*, vol. 2 (Dublin, 1962-5), 251.

made' on his map of Ireland.⁵⁶ According to the early sixteenth-century tract *Craobhsgaoileadh Chlainne Suibhne*, following a succession dispute among the Mic Shuibhne, Toirdhealbhadh Caoch Mac Suibhne was nominated by Ó Domhnaill at Cill Mhic Nénáin in 1399. The tract states that 'he was the first Mac Suibhne whom Ó Domhnaill ever inaugurated' and that traditionally the Mic Shuibhne 'as long as they remained in Scotland', were inaugurated on Iona by the successor of Columcille. However, when 'they were not at enmity with one another' the *airchinnech* Ó Firghil performed the ceremony. The tract goes on to say that 'no Mac Suibhne was ever proclaimed except in Columcille's precinct, and if any were inaugurated elsewhere, he could not be long in power'.⁵⁷ The real significance of this statement lies in the disclosure of Cill Mhic Nénáin as their place of inauguration and the introduction of the overlord Ó Domhnaill as nominator of the Mac Suibhne. In the later medieval period it became a common and general trend for leading vassals to be instituted by their overlords, the Ó Catháin for example being nominated by the Ó Néill in the sixteenth century.⁵⁸

The first reference to the inauguration of an Ó Domhnaill at Cill Mhic Nénáin is for the year 1461 when, following the defeat of Toirdhealbhadh Cairbreach Ó Domhnaill at Ceann Maghair, Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill went to Cill Mhic Nénáin and was 'styled lord after the lawful manner'. In turn, he nominated Maolmhuire Mac Suibhne as the Mac Suibhne Fanad.⁵⁹ The *Craobhsgaoileadh Chlainne Suibhne* points out that it was normal practice for the Mac Suibhne elected in this manner to pay tribute in the form of cattle to the Ó Domhnaill. But this was not done by Maolmhuire 'for he was strong and powerful, and his own tribe was in submission to him'.⁶⁰ The site is mentioned on the occasion of five different inaugurations in the sixteenth century. Aodh Óg Ó Domhnaill was 'nominated Lord of Tirconnell, on the 2nd day of August, by consent of God and man',⁶¹ and Domhnall Óg Mac Suibhne was proclaimed there in 1518.⁶² Toirdhealbhadh Mac Suibhne proceeded to Cill Mhic Nénáin in 1529 where he apparently 'forced the successors of Columcille to proclaim him Mac Suibhne, in opposition to the wish of the

⁵⁶ *Irlandiae Accurata Descriptio, auctore Baptista Boazio*, 1609.

⁵⁷ Rev. P. Walsh (ed.), *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne* (Dublin, 1920), 51.

⁵⁸ K. Simms, *op. cit.*, 30.

⁵⁹ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 1011-13; Rev. P. Walsh (ed.), *op. cit.*, 61.

⁶⁰ Rev. P. Walsh (ed.), *op. cit.*, 51.

⁶¹ *AFM.*, vol. 5, 1285.

⁶² P. Walsh (ed.), *op. cit.*, 71.

Cinéal Conaill',⁶³ breaking the by then traditional arrangement of their first being nominated by the Ó Domhnaill. Following the death of Aodh Ó Domhnaill in 1537, Maghnus Ó Domhnaill was inaugurated in his place by Ó Firghil 'with the permission and by the advice of the nobles of Tirconnell, both lay and ecclesiastical'.⁶⁴ In 1592 Aodh Ó Domhnaill, in declining health, assembled his loyal vassals, namely the Ó Baoighill and Mac Suibhne of Fanad and Tír Boghaine, at Cill Mhic Nénáin 'where the O'Donnell was usually inaugurated'. He resigned his lordship to his son Aodh Ruadh and the ceremony of the conferring of the name was legally performed by the *airchinnech* Ó Firghil on the third day of May.⁶⁵ Finally in 1603, according to the annals, Niall Garbh Ó Domhnaill, spurning a request by the Lord Justice to attend and receive a patent for Tír Conaill, went to Cill Mhic Nénáin, sent for Ó Firghil and was 'styled O'Donnell, without consulting the King's representative or the Council'.⁶⁶

The testimony of historical records indicates that Cill Mhic Nénáin church was consistently used as the inauguration site of the Uí Dhomhnaill and Mic Suibhne from at least as early as 1399 through to 1603. Why and precisely when it came to be chosen for the ceremony is a matter for conjecture. The Ráth Both inauguration of 1258 seems to have marked a watershed or turning point in the venue and nature of the Uí Dhomhnaill ceremony under Bishop Ó Scannail's influence. The church at Cill Mhic Nénáin may have been selected in the aftermath of Ráth Both because of its proximity to the older traditional site of Carraig an Dúin, and more pertinently because of the long association which the Uí Dhomhnaill had with that Columban foundation. The district of Cill Mhic Nénáin was the ancestral homeland of the Uí Dhomhnaill. It is mentioned in the annals under the year 1117 as the site of a battle in which the Cenél Conaill inflicted a defeat on the Cenél Eógain,⁶⁷ and their association with the church site itself is evident as early as 1129 when 'the house of Colum-Cille at Cill-mic-Nenain was taken by Ua Tairchert, from Aedh, son of Cathbharr Ua Domhnaill, and it was burned over him'.⁶⁸ The strong devotion of the Cenél Conaill to Columcille who, according to the *Life*, was fostered in the monastic church of Doire Eithne or Cill Mhic Nénáin - ['then was called from the

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁶⁴ *AFM.*, vol. 5, 1439

⁶⁵ *AFM.*, vol. 6, 1927-9.

⁶⁶ *AFM.*, vol. 6, 2343-5.

⁶⁷ *AI.*, 277.

⁶⁸ *AU.*, 577; *AFM.*, vol. 2, 1031.

church\The half of my name I conceal not\Cill mic Nenain my heavenly rest...’],⁶⁹ is also well attested. For instance, in 1090 the king of Tír Conaill sent the relics of the saint along with 120 ounces of silver to the monastery of Kells, Co. Meath, to be enshrined.⁷⁰ The late eleventh-century Shrine of the Cathach, which enclosed the manuscript of that name, was used as the battle standard of the Uí Dhomhnaill. According to Manus O’Donnell, the Cathach was encased in gilded silver and was deemed ‘Colum Cille’s chief relic in the land of Cineal Conaill Gulban’. If taken ‘thrice right-hand wise round the host of Cinel Conaill, when about to engage in battle’, they always returned safe in triumph. O’Donnell also explained that ‘it is on the bosom of a comarb or a cleric ... that it should be borne round the host’.⁷¹ A favourable comparison can be made between the use of the Shrine of the Cathach as a talisman of the Uí Dhomhnaill, and the Shrine of Máedóc or *Brecc Máedóc* which when carried clockwise round the men of Bréifne would ensure their safe return.⁷² Significantly, however, the *Brecc Máedóc* was also used at the inauguration ceremony of the king of Bréifne, during which it was carried round the king ‘to pledge him thereby to do right between man and man, whether weak or powerful’.⁷³ Considering the special significance attached to the Shrine of the Cathach by the Uí Dhomhnaill, it is not inconceivable that it may have been likewise employed during the inauguration ceremony of the Ó Domhnaill.

The ecclesiastical site of Cill Mhic Nénáin which lies two miles east of Carraig an Dúin, is situated on a long outcrop ridge commanding a good view of the surrounding countryside (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 11-13). The site of Kilmacrenan Castle lies immediately to the northeast. At the higher west-southwest end of the ridge there is a ruined church which was built post 1622 and refurbished in the eighteenth century. The surviving west wall of a Franciscan friary founded by Maghnus Ó Domhnaill sometime after 1537,⁷⁴ lies towards the east-northeast end of the ridge. There are no upstanding remains of the early church of Cill Mhic Nénáin, the site of which is occupied either by the friary, or possibly by the later church. It is likely that the inauguration ceremony was

⁶⁹ A. O’Kelleher and G. Schoepperle (eds.), *op. cit.*, 41.

⁷⁰ R. Ó Floinn, ‘The 11th-12th century renaissance in metalwork’, in M. Ryan (ed.), *The illustrated archaeology of Ireland* (Dublin, 1991), 166.

⁷¹ Rev. H.J. Lawlor, ‘The Cathach of St Columba’, *PRIA* 33C, 1916-17, 322-3.

⁷² C. Plummer (ed.), *Bethada Náem nÉirenn* (Oxford, 1922), vol. 2, 196-7

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ A. Gwynn and R.N. Hadcock, *op. cit.*, 272-3.

held in the earlier church and possibly transferred to the friary church c. 1537. Until the 1820s, according to the Ordnance Survey's 1835 records and that of the antiquary, Conwell, a stone bearing the impression of a footprint and other carvings, lay beneath the northeast window of the chancel of Cill Mhic Nénáin church. Neither account specifies whether it was housed in the friary church or in the later church and there is no record of how long it had been there, or whether it had been taken from elsewhere. O'Donovan opted for an origin at Carraig an Dúin, but could find no evidence to support his hypothesis. An interesting note in the *Calendar of State Papers* for July 1537 mentions that on the death of Aodh Ó Domhnaill in 1537, his son Maghnus was 'inaugurated as Chief of the O'Donnells by the stone near the church of Kilmacrenan with the usual ceremonies'.⁷⁵ If indeed the Cill Mhic Nénáin stone was an integral feature of the inauguration ceremony at that church site and situated within the church itself, outside in the churchyard, or at an appointed spot on the ridge, it raises a number of questions with regard to the nature of the ceremony.

In the only somewhat detailed seventeenth-century accounts of the inauguration rite at Cill Mhic Nénáin, written by Lughaidh Ó Clérigh and Dom Philip O'Sullivan Beare, the liturgical form of the rite is emphasised. Ó Clérigh described the geographical location of the site 'in the middle of the cantred of the Cenél Lughaidh, on the north of the [river] Leannan' and he emphasised its historical significance as the place where Colum Cille 'the renowned saint of Cenél Conaill was fostered' and where the Ó Domhnaill was inaugurated in the chieftaincy of his territory.⁷⁶ Ó Clérigh couched his description of the rite in language which suggests familiarity and long-standing practice. In 1592 the *archinnech* Ó Firghil performed the ceremony of naming Aodh Ruadh, the Ó Domhnaill 'in the legal way that was the custom of his nation hitherto'. Afterwards, the clergy proceeded to 'supplicate the Lord on his behalf, and to sing psalms and hymns in honour of Christ and of Colum ... for the success of his sovereignty, as was usual with them'.⁷⁷ The ceremony conducted by Ó Firghil was by the sixteenth century the undisputed customary inauguration rite of the Uí Dhomhnaill. Liturgical elements such as supplication and the singing of psalms and hymns were not considered unusual, but integral to the ceremony as a whole. In his *Historiae Iberniae Compendium* and later in

⁷⁵ *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1537.

⁷⁶ Rev. P. Walsh, *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill* (ITS 42, London, 1948), 39.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

his *Zoilomastix*, written in the period 1625-26⁷⁸, O'Sullivan Beare also stressed the ecclesiastical character of the ceremony, but he reversed the sequence of events and introduced elements unmentioned in Ó Clérigh's description. According to O'Sullivan, the ceremony commenced with a Mass during which the rod of office was consecrated. The chief-elect then received the sacrament of Confession and after he had received the Eucharist he swore to profess and uphold the Catholic faith. A secular rite took place outside the church with Ó Domhnaill leading the assembly there, mounting a horse, receiving the rod of office and being proclaimed and acclaimed as the Ó Domhnaill.⁷⁹ O'Donovan took issue with parts of O'Sullivan's account, suggesting that the idea of the chief-elect swearing to uphold the Catholic faith during the inauguration ceremony was anachronistic and that there was no evidence to believe that the rod of office was consecrated before it was handed to the chief. Most of the earlier accounts of inauguration rites placed that function in the hands of the *ollamh* or poet.⁸⁰ Both O'Donovan and Mac Cana point out that the *Zoilomastix* was essentially a propagandist work. Its primary intention was to 'rouse the Spaniards to sympathy with the Irish' and therefore it cannot be taken as an entirely reliable account of the Ó Domhnaill inauguration rite and its religious ceremony.⁸¹ Additional seventeenth-century commentary on the rite was provided by Céitinn in his *Foras Feasa* of c. 1620 and by Lynch in his *Cambrensis Eversus* published in 1662. In Lynch's refutation of Cambrensis' account of the Cenél Conaill rite, he counterclaimed with his own understanding of the nature of the ceremony, making reference to the rod of office only. On the occasion of an inauguration, all assembled 'on the appointed hill...one of the lords arose, and holding in his hands a white wand...he presented it to the chieftain elect'.⁸² Likewise, Céitinn refuted Cambrensis' account of the Cenél Conaill rite and claimed that the Ó Domhnaill was inaugurated 'seated in the midst of the nobles and council of his own territory ... a chief of the nobility of his district' standing before him 'with a straight white wand in his hand'.⁸³ However,

⁷⁸ P. Mac Cana, 'Review of Selections from the *Zoilomastix* of Philip O'Sullivan Beare', *Celtica* 6, 1963, 290.

⁷⁹ J. O'Donovan, *The genealogies, tribes and customs of Hy-Fiachrach* (Irish Archaeological Society, Dublin, 1844), 439.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 439-440.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 439; P. Mac Cana, *op. cit.*, 292.

⁸² Rev. M. Kelly (ed.), *Cambrensis Eversus*, vol. 3 (Dublin, 1851-52), 341-343.

⁸³ D. Comyn (ed.), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, vol. 1, (London, 1902), 21-4.

in an apparently contradictory statement in the same work, he assigned the role of inaugurator to Ó Firghil, with Ó Gallchobhair acting as the 'marshal of the hosts'.⁸⁴

There is clearly no consensus of opinion among the four seventeenth-century commentators on the procedure and content of the inauguration ceremony at Cill Mhic Nénáin. Taking Ó Clérigh's account as probably the most reliable of the four, an attempt can be made to reconstruct what may have taken place. The role of the *airchinneach* Ó Firghil as officiator is not in dispute as this is well attested in the annals. Ó Clérigh reveals that there were two parts to the ceremony - (a) that performed by Ó Firghil either within the church or possibly on the reputed footprint stone in the churchyard where the latter handed the chief-elect his *slat tighearnais* (b) followed by the purely liturgical supplication and psalm-singing performed within the church. In O'Sullivan's somewhat jumbled and in part fabricated commentary, and in Céitinn's contradictory account, a distinction is made between a secular rite performed, as they both state, outside the church by 'one of the lords', which in the case of O'Sullivan Beare's description, is preceded by a liturgical rite. Inauguration ceremonies which involved distinct secular and liturgical rites are recorded elsewhere in northern Europe for the early and later medieval periods. Widukind in his account of Otto I's inauguration as King at Aachen in 936, records that the ceremony commenced with an essentially secular enthronement ritual outside the church performed by the *duces et milites* making Otto 'in their own traditional way' which was followed by an ecclesiastical rite conducted within the church, culminating in a great feast.⁸⁵ Likewise, the early Anglo-Saxon *Ordines* refer to the election which preceded the liturgical rite and the feast which followed.⁸⁶ The combination of a traditional open air rite and formal church proceedings was customary to the inauguration ceremony of the Dukes of Carinthia as recounted by Johann Abbot of Viktring in the fourteenth century (the details of the traditional rite are discussed in chapter I, (p. 8). Johann explained that after taking possession of the *Fürstenstein*, the traditional rite ended with the lighting of several festive fires after which the assembly adjourned to the medieval church of Maria Saal at Karnberg where Mass was celebrated.⁸⁷ Closer to

⁸⁴ Rev. P.S. Dinneen (ed.), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, vol. 3, (London, 1908), 13.

⁸⁵ J.L. Nelson, 'Inauguration rituals', in P.H. Sawyer and I.N. Wood (eds.), *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds, 1977), 54.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁸⁷ F. Schneider (ed.), *Johannis Abbatis Victoriensis, Liber Certarum Historiarum* (MGH Scriptorum Rerum Germanicarum in usum Scholarum, vol. 1, Hannover, 1909), 290-93.

home, Hugh Macdonald in his description of the fifteenth-century inauguration ceremony of the MacDonald Lord of the Isles noted that 'the bishop of Argyle, the bishop of the Isles, and seven priests, were sometimes present; but a bishop was always present...' during the secular rite which was presided over by the MacMhuirich and reputedly performed at the Finlaggan Stone on Eilean na Comhairle. This was followed by Mass which was presumably held in the chapel on nearby Eilean Mór - 'the people pouring their prayers for the success and prosperity of their new-created lord'.⁸⁸

In the case of the Carinthian and MacDonald ceremonies it is not just the traditional rite but also its site which is maintained. The liturgical elements are an adjunct, requiring the re-assembling of the inauguration party at a nearby church site. In this regard it is interesting to note that in local tradition the opinion still persists that while an ecclesiastical ceremony was held at Cill Mhic Nénáin, the inauguration rite proper was carried out on Carraig an Dúin. A commemorative notice at the site reads - 'On this rock took place the secular ceremony of the inauguration of the O'Donnell chieftains, the religious ceremony having taken place earlier in the nearby abbey at Kilmacrenan'.

4. 12 Conclusion

When John O'Donovan's Ordnance Survey sappers interviewed the local folklorist, Manus O'Donnell in 1835, he drew a clear distinction between what took place on the Rock and what occurred in the church. While it was at the Rock that the kings of his sept 'were boiled in a cauldron', he stressed that the 'O'Donnells were crowned within the old church' upon a footprint stone. It is unclear from his statement whether he was distinguishing between two separate rites which comprised the ceremony as a whole, the one performed on the Rock and the other at the church (as the prevailing tradition emphasises), or whether he was referring to the total supplanting of the older traditional ceremony at Carraig an Dúin by a church-based ceremony at Cill Mhic Nénáin. Circumstantial evidence suggests that in all probability a secular Cenél Conaill rite was practised at Carraig an Dúin until it was effectively, but perhaps temporarily, arrested by Bishop Ó Scannail's en-kinging of Domhnall Óg Ó Domhnaill at Ráth Both in 1258. Domhnall's predecessor Gofraid may have been the last Ó Domhnaill to be inaugurated at the traditional site ten years previously in 1248, but there is a gap of almost 150 years,

⁸⁸ J.R.N. Macphail (ed.), *Highland Papers* (SHS, 1914), vol. 1, 23-4; J. Bannerman, 'The Lordship of the Isles' in J.M. Brown (ed.), *Scottish society in the fifteenth century* (London, 1977), 224-5.

unaccounted for in historical records, between the Ráth Both ceremony and the first reference to an inauguration taking place at Cill Mhic Nénáin in 1399. In effect, there is no evidence to suggest that Cill Mhic Nénáin was adopted as the Ó Domhnaill place of inauguration immediately after Ráth Both. The Mac Suibhne was made at the church site as early as 1399, but the first direct annalistic reference to its use as the Uí Dhomhnaill site, is for the year 1461. Curiously, although over a dozen members of the Uí Dhomhnaill assumed the chieftainship, and most by force during the political turmoil which characterised Tír Conaill at the latter end of the thirteenth century and throughout most of the fourteenth century, the annals are silent with regard to the venue of their respective inauguration ceremonies. In the circumstances, the abandonment of Carraig an Dúin in favour of Cill Mhic Nénáin may have been a much more gradual process.

CASE STUDY 4. ROYAL LANDSCAPES AND THE PRACTICE OF INAUGURATION

IN MEDIEVAL MAG NAÍ

The plain of Mag nAí, or Machaire Connacht, stretches some fifteen miles south from Roscommon to Elphin, and sixteen miles from Castlereagh east to Strokestown. Within this relatively small area there are three marked royal landscapes associated with the kingship of Connacht, two of which are more particularly connected with the Uí Chonchobair family of Síol Muiredaig. Lying three miles northwest of Tulsk is Cruachu - an elaborate complex of over fifty monuments, strewn across the eastern end of a broad ridge, and incorporating an area four square miles in extent.¹ The second landscape lies a little over four miles to the south of the last, at Ard Caín [Ard Caoin], and comprises an impressive group of burial and ritual monuments, central to which is the mound of Carn Fraích. The third area of concern is the residential site and settlement of Cluain Fraoich, which is situated some five miles east, in the fertile lakeland corridor which runs between Strokestown and the upland country of Cruachu and Ard Caín.

This case study endeavours to trace the transition from a provincial kingship inauguration rite, conjecturally performed at Cruachu in late prehistory, to a more specific Síol Muiredaig ceremony which may have been initiated at Carn Fraích as early as the eighth century, or alternatively, as late as the mid-twelfth century. Cruachu has generally been viewed as one of the great prehistoric provincial royal centres. However, the promulgation of Christian law there in the eighth and ninth centuries, together with the fact that it was the venue of an early historic *óenach*, and the centre of some military activity in the eleventh century, and again in the thirteenth century, intimates that Cruachu should also be viewed beyond prehistory. The early historic activities at the site, mentioned above, suggest that it may well have continued to be the royal residence of the kings of Connacht, and very tentatively, the provincial place of inauguration after the late Iron Age. A shift in the centre of royal settlement within Mag nAí is also proposed for the thirteenth century, a change which saw the effective end of Cruachu as the dwelling place of the kings of Connacht and the creation of a new Síol Muiredaig royal residence at Cluain Fraoich, five miles east of the original provincial *caput*.

¹ J. Waddell, 'Rathcroghan: a royal site in Connacht', *JIA* 1, 1983, 27, and 'Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon', in *Introduction to archaeological geophysics* (Galway, 1993), 109-110.

4. 13 Cruachu

In his study of the impressive complex of monuments which constitute the royal site of Cruachu, Waddell has highlighted the difficulties in determining its true extent.² Indeed some early sources, such as Ó Dubhagáin's topographical poem 'Cuid Connacht annso agus a thús do Chruachain' ('The Connacht section here, and its commencement with Cruachu'), suggest that the place-name Clár Cruachain, or the plain of Cruachu, is interchangeable with Mag nAí and Machaire Chonnacht.³ The most that can be concluded from this conundrum is that the four square miles of concentrated monuments on the expansive ridge north of Tulsk, represents the early royal capital of Connacht, the hinterland of which was variously called Mag nAí, Machaire Chonnacht and Clár Cruachain.

The early Irish sagas, namely *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (TBC) and *Táin Bó Fraích* (TBF), emphasise the tradition of royal settlement at Cruachu, with TBF⁴ and *Fled Bricrenn*⁵ offering comparable vivid descriptions of the house of Ailill and Medb. Both *Eachtra Airt meic Cuind*⁶ and the *Dindshenchas* poem 'Estid a churu im Chruachain'⁷ also designate it as a cemetery of renown, with *Senchas na Relec* describing it as one of the three chief burial places of Ireland, the others being Tailtiu and the Brugh. The latter text also proposes a list of the worthies buried there, and refers to fifty burial mounds at Óenach na Cruachna.⁸ The third function of ceremony, ritual and implied inauguration is more allusive and centres largely on Medb Chruachna as the personification of the sovereignty of Connacht or Cóiced Medba.⁹ Medb is credited with no less than four husbands - Conchobar of Ulster, Fidech mac Féicc, Eochaid Dála and Ailill mac Máta, each of whom

² Ibid., 1983, 26-7.

³ J. Carney (ed.), *Topographical poems by Seán Mór Ó Dubhagáin and Giolla-na-naomh Ó hUidhrín* (Dublin, 1943), 19, 'Triallum, ní turas aoibhill, ó shluagh Macha mhóraoibhinn; ní toghaois acht dál gan dol, ó Dhrobhaois go clár Cruachon'; J. O'Donovan (ed.), *The topographical poems of John O'Dubhagáin and Giolla na naomh O'Huidhrín* (Dublin, 1862), 49, 'Let us pass, it is not a pleasant journey,/ From the host of Macha, great, and delightful,/ It is not wisdom, but delay, not to proceed/Over the Drobhaois to the plain of Cruachan'.

⁴ W. Meid (ed.), *Táin Bó Fraích* (Dublin, 1974), 3 [65-76].

⁵ R.I. Best and O. Bergin (eds.), *Lebor na hUidre: the Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin, 1929), 264-5; G. Henderson (ed.), *Fled Bricrend* (ITS, London, 1899), 68-71.

⁶ K. Meyer and J. Strachan, 'The adventures of Art son of Conn, and the courtship of Delbchaem', *Ériu* 3, 1907, 151.

⁷ E. Gwynn (ed.), *The metrical Dindshenchas*, part 3 (Reprint Dublin, 1991), 348-9.

⁸ R.I. Best and O. Bergin (eds.), op. cit., 128, 'Roptar iat so trá prímlreilce Herend ría cretim .i. Crúachu. in Brug. in Talltiu'.

⁹ T. Ó Máille, 'Medb Chruachna', *ZCP* 17, 1928, 144.

in turn compete to be her spouse and undergo a symbolic marriage or *banais rige*.¹⁰ In the older recension of *Cath Muigi Rath*, Cruachu is cited as one of the three *feiseanna* of Ireland, ranking with Temair and Emain as an historic provincial kingship inauguration ceremony.¹¹ Allusions to the *banais rige* of the kings of Connacht, in which Cruachu is specifically mentioned, persist as an archaism in both the annals and bardic poetry. We find Aodh son of Cathal Dall Ó Conchobair who was slain by Tomaltach Mag Oirechtaig in 1274, after a brief reign, lamented as ‘Crede’s descendant ... the spouse of Cruachu for a fortnight’,¹² and the poet Seaán Ó Clumháin addresses Aodh, son of Toirdhealbhadh (slain 1356) as ‘caomhchéile Cruachun’ (‘fair spouse of Cruachu’).¹³

The sagas and topographical lore relating to Cruachu stress its otherworld character, with a host of figures entering and emerging from *úaim Chrúachan*, ‘Ireland’s gate of hell’. The cave is generally identified with Oweynagat, a natural fissure in the limestone rock located a little over a half mile southwest of Rathcroghan mound. It consists of two chambers and was originally entered through a man-made souterrain constructed of drystone walling.¹⁴ In *Acallamh na Senórach*, it is the place from which Bodb of the Tuatha Dé Danann comes to speak with Cailte¹⁵ and it is the ‘fit abode’ of the ‘horrid Mórrígan’, goddess of battle, in the *Dindshenchas* poem, ‘Odras’.¹⁶ In both *Cath Maige Mucrama*¹⁷ and *Fled Bricrenn*,¹⁸ ill-natured magic swine and red birds, the three daughters of Airitech masquerading as female werewolves, and three cats, all with evil intentions, emerge from the cave. Apart from this fearful entrance to the otherworld, there are also various allusions in the saga material to the *síd*-mound of Cruachu. In TBF, when

¹⁰ Ibid., 130-36.

¹¹ C. Marstrander, ‘A new version of the Battle of Mag Rath’, *Ériu* 5, 1911, 233.

¹² Ann. Conn., 163; *A.L.C.*, vol.1, 475.

¹³ L. McKenna (ed.), *Aithdioghluim Dána*, vol.1 (ITS 37, Dublin, 1939), 8 [12].

¹⁴ J. Waddell, op. cit., 1983, 33. The inner lintel of chamber (A) bears an ogham inscription which has been translated as ‘(the stone or grave) of Fraich, son of Medb’. A second untranslatable inscription occurs on a lintel in chamber (B).

¹⁵ S. O’Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, vol. 2 (London, 1892), 203.

¹⁶ E. Gwynn, op. cit., vol. 4, 201.

¹⁷ M. O’Daly (ed.), *Cath Maige Mucrama* (ITS 50, Dublin, 1975), 48-9 [34-36], ‘Out of it too came the swarm of three-headed creatures that laid Ireland waste until Amairgene ... destroyed it ... Out of it also had come the saffron-coloured bird-flock and they withered up everything in Ireland that their breath touched ... Out of it had come these pigs ... whatever land they traversed no corn or grass or leaf grew on it until the end of seven years’.

¹⁸ R.I. Best and O. Bergin (eds.), op. cit., 265 [8761-62], ‘Dobretha a cuit dóib ind aidchi sin agus dolléithe tri caittini a húaim Crúachan dia saigid .i. tri bíasta druideachta’ [‘One night as their portion was assigned them, three cats from the Cave of Cruachan were let loose to attack them, i.e. three beasts of magic’]; G. Henderson (ed.), op. cit., 72-3.

the warrior Fraích is wounded following his struggle with the *péist* ('monster') of Dublind Fraéech, he is carried off to the Síid of Crúachan by the women of the *síd*.¹⁹ Likewise in *Echtraí Nerai*, the central character, Nerae, after a series of bizarre happenings, eventually finds himself in the *síd*-mound.²⁰ The overriding concern of this tenth-century tale²¹ is sovereignty, and as Watson has pointed out, it is also very much pro-Connacht, concerning itself with the progression and preservation of the sovereignty of the province.²² This he suggests is particularly evident in the narrative elements of the tale dealing with the capture by the Connacht men of the *cathbarr Bríain* (crown of Briun), and the defeat of the bull calf by the Finnbennach of Connacht.²³

While the collective evidence of the saga material, including the passing reference to *Feis Chruachna*, strongly suggests that inauguration rituals were performed there, at least in later prehistory, there is less certainty in designating the actual venue within the rich complex of monuments that constitute this ancient royal capital of Connacht. As early as 1779, Charles O'Connor of Belanagare was of the opinion that the great mound at Rathcroghan was the 'place of Election and Inauguration of our Provincial Kings'.²⁴ Rathcroghan mound, which stands at the approximate centre of the complex, is a very large, circular, steep-sided and flat-topped mound, 5m high, c. 88m in diameter at base and 32m across the flat summit. Two opposing ramps set into the eastern and western flanks of the mound lead up to the summit, which is delimited in part by a low bank. A small, oval mound (c. 5m x 4m) lies within this enclosed area.²⁵ Until the recent discovery of an impressive enclosure surrounding the great mound, no clear-cut physical

¹⁹ W. Meid (ed.), op. cit., 9.

²⁰ K. Meyer, 'Echtra Nerai', *Revue Celtique*, vol.10, 215-27. In this disturbing tale, a feast is hosted by Ailill and Medb at Cruachu on Samhain Eve. The day before, two captives had been crucified, and at the feast Nerae witnesses a gruesome contest of bravery in which a prize is offered to those who will accept the challenge of placing a withe on the foot of one of the captives - a challenge which Nerae accepts. In the course of events the hero provides the captive with a drink and then takes him back to Cruachu to his torture. On his return, Nerae has a premonition of the destruction of Cruachu by fire and sword, in which he finds the dún burnt and 'a heap of heads of their people cut off by the warriors from the dún'. He follows the host through *úaim Chruachan* into the *síd*-mound, and while there, he is warned that the royal capital will indeed be razed the following Samain unless the *síd*-folk are destroyed. On the third day before the following Samain Eve, Nerae goes to the *síd*-mound and seizes the calf of the cow of Aingen. The men of Connacht then destroy the *síd*-mound and take out of it the crown of Briun, 'the third wonderful gift in Erin', which had been hidden in the well of Síid Cruachan.

²¹ P. Mac Cana, *The learned tales of medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1980), 86.

²² A. Watson, 'A structural analysis of *Echtra Nerai*', *Études Celtiques*, vol. 23, 1986, 142.

²³ *Ibid.*, 134-5.

²⁴ J. Waddell, op. cit., 1983, 24.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

comparisons could be made between Rathcroghan and the royal sites of Temair and Emain, both of which are distinguished by their enclosures with internal ditches. A geophysical survey at the site in 1996, however, confirmed the existence of a large enclosure c. 370m in diameter which surrounds not only the mound but a number of barrows and pillar stones in its immediate vicinity.²⁶ Investigation of the mound itself revealed that, somewhat like the mound at Emain,²⁷ it was heaped up over a series of earlier archaeological features which lie deep within its core. Among these hidden structures is a possible cairn, two concentric 'walls', and an embanked enclosure buried under the periphery of the mound. Above these structures and closer to the surface, a number of overlapping linear and circular features have been detected, which may represent 'foundation trench slots, drains, ditches or the palisade trenches of enclosures and structures built and rebuilt over a number of generations'.²⁸ Although the interpretation of this intricate archaeology is in its infancy, it is clear that the site upon which Rathcroghan mound was constructed was in use over a long period of time. Any theory as to the function of the great mound, with its broad, flat summit, is mere conjecture, at present. However, it could conceivably have been erected as a *forad* to facilitate viewing the proceedings at assemblies and to provide an appropriate venue for the *feiseanna* or inauguration ceremonies of Cruachu's betrothed, in the later Iron Age.

By the ninth century, historical sources such as the *Félire Óengusso* would have us believe that Cruachu, like Temair, was deserted - 'Rathcroghan, it has vanished with Ailill offspring of victory; fair the sovereignty over princes that there is in the monastery of Clonmacnois'.²⁹ This dramatic statement is somewhat contradicted by the fact that the 'Law of Patrick' was promulgated at Cruachu in 783,³⁰ followed by the 'Law of Ciarán'

²⁶ Department of Archaeology and Applied Geophysics Unit, *ArchaeoGeophysical Imaging Project Newsletter*, no. 5, November 1996.

²⁷ B. Wailes, 'The Irish "Royal Sites" in history and archaeology', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, No. 3, 1982, 8-10; Excavations at Site B by D. Waterman revealed several successive phases of residential circular timber buildings dating to the Late Bronze Age. The latest residential timber building was taken down and replaced by a large ritual structure composed of five concentric circles of timber posts. This curious arrangement of posts was partially burnt in the third century b.c. and a covering mound heaped up over it about the same time. The ritual activity at Site B including the erection of the covering mound therefore occurred in the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age (mid to late first millennium b.c). See also 'Navan Fort', *Current Archaeology* 22, 1970, 304-8.

²⁸ Y. Brennan, F. Delaney and J. Fenwick, 'The anatomy of a mound: geophysical images of Rathcroghan', *Archaeology Ireland*, vol. 10, no. 3, Autumn 1996, 20-23.

²⁹ W. Stokes (ed.), *Félire Óengusso Céili Dé* (London, 1905; reprint 1984), 24.

³⁰ *AU.*, part I, 239, 'Promulgation of Patrick's law in Cruachain by Dub da Leithi and Tipraite son of Tadc'.

in 814,³¹ and the ninth-century *triads* make it clear that one of the three *óenaig* of Ireland was held there at that time.³² If the site continued to be used for festivities and ceremonial occasions by the kings of Connacht, well into the eighth and ninth centuries, it would seem logical to assume that they still dwelt at Cruachu and had their inauguration rites performed there in a new Christian ethos, but the sources do not bear testimony to this. There is not a single reference to the inauguration of a king of Connacht at Cruachu in the early historic period; but both Tírechán writing in the seventh century, and retrospectively, some of the twelfth-century saints' *Lives*, hint at the Christianising of the province and its kingship. Tírechán for instance, in relating how the daughters of king Loíguire were converted to Christianity by St Patrick, at the well of Clebach on the east slopes of Cruachu, intimates that Christianity has arrived and gripped the very heart of the province. Eithne and Fedelm are baptised at the well, they receive the Eucharist and then die and are buried in a *tumulus* beside the well.³³ A more direct message is given in the details of a fanciful encounter between St Findchua and Tommaltach (d.774), the eighth-century king of Connacht, as related in the *Life* of Findchua of Brí-Gobann. In this story, Tommaltach seeks the aid of the saint in order to do battle with his enemies in Connacht. Findchua arrives at 'Cruachan of Mag Aí' and in return for certain agreed tributes, he miraculously banishes the enemy at Cúil Cnámrois. Among the tributes then due to him is 'the king of Connacht's raiment from crown to ground every year [erradh rígh Connacht o mhullach co lar gacha bliadne dhó]'.³⁴ This tribute finds certain echoes in a particular rite set down in the Ó Conchobhair inauguration tract (the core of which may date to the twelfth/thirteenth century),³⁵ in which the *coarb* of Da Chonna received both the king's raiment and his horse, in the course of the inauguration ceremony.³⁶

The *Book of Rights*, compiled in the mid-eleventh century, attaches a particular significance to Cruachu as the seat of the king of Connacht. In the section dealing with the stipends from the king of Cashel, the 'king who holds pleasant Cruachain' is entitled to 'a hundred horns, a hundred swords ... a hundred tunics besides'.³⁷ Still more revealing,

³¹ Ibid., 271, 'Ciarán's law was exalted at Cruachain by Muirgius'.

³² K. Meyer (ed.), *The Triads of Ireland* (Todd Lecture Series, No. 13, 1906), 4-5.

³³ L. Bieler, *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin, 1979), 142-5.

³⁴ W. Stokes, *Lives of saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford, 1890), 94 and 241-2.

³⁵ K. Simms, 'Gabh umad a Fheidhlimidh: a fifteenth-century inauguration ode?', *Ériu* 31, 1980, 139-45.

³⁶ M. Dillon, 'The inauguration of O'Conor', in J.A. Watt, J.B. Morrall and F.X. Martin (eds.), *Medieval Studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn*, S.J. (Dublin, 1961), 197.

³⁷ M. Dillon (ed.), *Lebor na Cert* (ITS 46, 1962), 7 [58-61].

however, is that part entitled ‘Of the profits of Connacht as Benén tells’, which gives precedence to the rents of Connacht relating to the maintenance and attendance at Cruachu.³⁸ On more than one occasion it refers to the king of Connacht as ‘king of Connacht and Cruachain’,³⁹ or the king of Connacht in Cruachain’,⁴⁰ and the high-king of Cruachu’.⁴¹ There are also various passing references in the annals to Cruachu from 1061 through to 1595, but most of these refer to short-lived military activity at, or in the vicinity of, the site. Following the Battle of Glenn Patraic in 1061, in which Aodh Ó Conchobair was victorious, the defeated Ó Flaithbheartaigh, lord of Iarthar Connacht, was beheaded and his head carried to Cruachu,⁴² and in 1223 and again in 1263 Cruachu features as a halting point for the armies of the Ó Domhnaill.⁴³ In a number of obituaries for thirteenth and fourteenth-century Uí Chonchobair kings, their presence at Cruachu is frequently used as a metaphorical expression for the kingship of Connacht. For instance, when Cathal Ó Conchobair was deposed by his younger brother Magnus in 1288, the annalist remarks, ‘The son of kingly Conchobar Ruad was king of Connacht north and south; seven years and a half a year was the reign of Cathal in Cruachu’.⁴⁴ As late as 1384 this allusion appears in the obituary of Ruaidrí mac Aodh whom Ó Maoil Chonaire describes as having ‘obtained the reins for sixteen years and a quarter, at Cruachan Aoi, without contention’.⁴⁵ This last reference cannot be taken to mean that there was a royal residence at Cruachu because as will be demonstrated below, the royal capital shifted in *c.*1293 to Cluain Fraoich, during the reign of Aodh son of Eoghan, and the annals indicate that Ruaidrí son of Aodh also resided there *c.* 1368.

4. 14 Cruachan in Magh Luirg

There are puzzling references in the annals to the use of a place called ‘Cruachan’ for the inauguration ceremonies of the Mhic Dhiarmata on two occasions in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The first concerns the attempted inauguration in 1315 of Diarmait

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 47-55.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 50-51, [733]

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 52-53 [753] ‘do rig Connacht co Cruachain’.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 54-55 [802].

⁴² *AFM.*, vol. 2, 881.

⁴³ *AFM.*, vol. 3, 205-7: In 1223 an army was led by the Ó Domhnaill (Domhnall Óg) to Croghan; *AFM* vol. 3, 391: In 1263 an army was led by Ó Domhnaill (Óg) into Connacht, and joined Aodh Ó Conchobhair at the Curliu Mountains. They proceeded from there to Cruachain.

⁴⁴ *Ann. Conn.*, 181.

⁴⁵ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 695.

Gall Mac Diarmata,⁴⁶ and the second refers to the inauguration of Ruaidrí Mac Diarmata, who set himself up in opposition to Conchobar Mac Diarmata in 1478.⁴⁷ In a footnote to his edition of the *Annals of Connacht*, Freeman conjectured that the 'Cruachan' in question might be Rathcroghan and that Diarmait Gall's opponent, Maelruanaid Mór, the reigning lord of Magh Luirg in 1315, or his successors, could possibly have been made at Rathcroghan under the auspices of Ó Conchobair.⁴⁸ To make matters more complicated, in 1837, during the progress of the first Ordnance Survey, O'Donovan encountered one Brian MacDermot who claimed that the true site of Cruachu was Croghan Hill at the north end of the village of Croghan, near Boyle.⁴⁹ The hill lies in Mac Diarmata's territory of Magh Luirg, about six miles south of Carraig Loch Cé (also called Carraig na Rígh and Carraig Mhic Dhiarmata) which was the principal stronghold of the Mic Dhiarmata from at least as early as the twelfth century.⁵⁰ The claim that this small and modest height (OD 389) was the site of Cruachu carries little credibility, but that it was possibly the Mhic Dhiarmata inauguration place of Cruachan or Croghan, cited by the annalists, is quite plausible. In 1911, Knox accepted this identification and having examined Croghan Hill where at that time 'the bull fair'⁵¹ was held, he concluded that the low-lying, flat-topped hill was 'mainly natural', but that there was 'something on the top which might have been a little mound or cairn'.⁵² The construction of a water tank on the summit of the hill has removed all trace of Knox's alleged mound or cairn. The presence of an impressive bivallate rath in a commanding position on the east side of the village, just north of Croghan House, is also noteworthy and merits some consideration as the possible site of the Mic Dhiarmata ceremony.

4. 15 The Inauguration at Áth an Termoinn

From at least as early as 1224, the Uí Chonchobair kings of Connacht were inaugurated four miles south of Cruachu, at Carn Fraích.⁵³ However, the earliest documented venue

⁴⁶ *Ann. Conn.*, 239.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 581.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 238, f.n. 2.

⁴⁹ J. O'Donovan, *Letters*, op. cit., 100, 114.

⁵⁰ Mentioned in *ALC* in 1184, 167.

⁵¹ An analogous tradition relating to cattle at Rathcroghan is told by W. R. Wilde in 'Memoir of Gabriel Beranger, and his labours in the cause of Irish art, literature, and antiquities from 1760 to 1780', *JRSAI* 11, 1870-71, 248. The black cattle of the district surrounding Rathcroghan were customarily herded to the vicinity of the great mound on May morning. There they were bled and the warm blood was mixed with oaten meal and onions or scallions to make possets.

⁵² H.T. Knox, 'The croghans and some Connacht raths and motes', *JRSAI* 41, 1911, 95-6.

⁵³ 'Congaibh róm t'aghaidh, a Aodh' (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS. 490), 162.

for an Ó Conchobair ceremony is not Carn Fraích, but Áth an Termoinn where Toirrdelbach Ó Conchobair was made king over the Síol Muiredaig in 1106.⁵⁴ The Uí Chonchobair emerged as the leading family of Síol Muiredaig in the second half of the tenth century when the progenitor of the name, Conchobar mac Taidc, assumed the kingship of Connacht.⁵⁵ Their ascendancy was interrupted and threatened throughout the course of the eleventh century by both the Uí Ruairc and the Uí Flaithbheartaigh, and by the intervention of Muirchertach Ó Briain, King of Munster, in Connacht affairs. After the death of Tadc Ó Conchobair in 1030, Art Ó Ruairc became powerful enough for the annals to style him *rí Connacht* on his death in 1046,⁵⁶ and from 1067 to 1074 Aodh Ó Ruairc held the kingship and is acknowledged as such in the regnal lists.⁵⁷ There is no evidence to indicate where Conchobar mac Taidc or his later tenth and eleventh-century Uí Chonchobair successors were installed as kings of Síol Muiredaig, but some possibilities can be explored. While the Uí Chonchobair may well have adopted Carn Fraích as their king-making site during their rise to power in the second half of the tenth century, it is not inconceivable that the inauguration of Toirrdelbach at Áth an Termoinn in 1106 may have marked a watershed between the conjectured earlier performance of ceremonies at Cruachu, and the transfer to Carn Fraích. If this theory has any substance, it necessitates the assumption that the inauguration at Áth an Termoinn might have been an attempt by the church to disengage the Uí Chonchobair from an essentially pagan kingship ritual, performed, as has been speculated, at Cruachu, or possibly by then at Carn Fraích. The thirteenth-century kings of distant Tír Conaill experienced the hand of the church in their royal affairs when, in 1258, Bishop Maol Pádraig Ó Scannail had Domhnall Óg Ó Domhnaill inaugurated at Ráth Both. It is argued in case study 3 that this was ostensibly an effort to break the tradition of pagan inauguration at Carraig an Dúin.⁵⁸ The suggestion that the Síol Muiredaig might have been similarly recalcitrant as late as the twelfth century is, however, somewhat contested by the opening lines of the Ó Conchobair inauguration tract, which would have us believe that a wholly Christian rite with a strong ecclesiastical presence had been the hallmark of the inauguration ceremony of the kings of Connacht from as early as the fifth century - 'as Patrick ordained when he

⁵⁴ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 983.

⁵⁵ F.J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* (London, 1973), 252-3.

⁵⁶ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 851; *AU.*, 485.

⁵⁷ Rev. J. Ryan, *Toirdelbach O Conchubair (1088-1156): king of Connacht, king of Ireland co fresabra* (O'Donnell Lecture X, Dublin, 1966), 4-5.

⁵⁸ N.J.A. Williams (ed.), *The poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe (ITS 51, Dublin, 1980)*, 107.

made Duí Galach son of Bríon, ... king'.⁵⁹ The tract claims that twelve bishops, together with Patrick, attended Duí Galach's inauguration, and that consequently it was proper for all successive kings of Connacht 'to have the coarbs of those bishops at his inauguration'.⁶⁰ The compilation of the core of this tract may date to the twelfth or thirteenth century,⁶¹ and it is tempting to suggest that the opening lines are mere propaganda, the reality perhaps being that until Toirrdelbach, a youth of eighteen years, was made king at Áth an Termoinn in 1106, the input of the church had been nominal.

In a footnote to his edition of *AFM*, O'Donovan suggested that Áth an Termoinn was probably located on the Shannon near Termonbarry, at the far eastern extent of Co. Roscommon,⁶² but he did not venture a precise location, and presumably his guess was based on an approximation of the place-name. Áth an Termoinn translates as the ford of the termon,⁶³ which implies that we are dealing with a place within the termonland of a church site, at a fording point on a river. Within the parish of Termonbarry, the church site of Cluain Coirpthe, which was identified by O'Donovan as Kilbarry,⁶⁴ meets this description. Significantly the *coarb* of Berach is listed in the Ó Conchobair inauguration tract as one of the twelve who were privileged to attend the inauguration of a king of Connacht.⁶⁵ Perhaps one other factor in favour of this location is that it was the burial place of the Uí Mhaoil Chonaire who were the inaugurators of the Uí Chonchobair.⁶⁶ Kilbarry church lies in a bog island a short distance west of the broad River Shannon and north of the village of Termonbarry Bridge. St Berach's foundation is now much ruined, but when recorded by O'Donovan in the last century, five ecclesiastical buildings stood at the site including a medieval church and the base of a round tower. He also noted a stone on the brink of the Shannon in the northern extremity of the townland of Kilbarry which he recorded as being eight feet long, four broad and three thick, and which still exhibited 'the impression, as it is believed of Barry's knees'. The local tradition of the time, 'as all

⁵⁹ M. Dillon, *op. cit.*, 196.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ K. Simms, *op. cit.*, 139-45.

⁶² J. O'Donovan (ed.), *Annals of the kingdom of Ireland*, vol. 2 (Dublin, 1854), 982, f.n. f.

⁶³ *DIL.*, 588.

⁶⁴ J. O'Donovan, *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the County of Roscommon collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1837*, vol. 2, 39.

⁶⁵ M. Dillon, *op. cit.*, 196. Dillon (f.n. 3) takes Cluain Coirpthe to be synonymous with Termonbarry.

⁶⁶ *Ann. Conn.*, 355, '1385 AD: Tanaide O Mailchonaire, ollav of the Sil Murray in History and Poetry ... died at Lammas in his own house, after a victory of Uinction and Penance, and was buried in Clooncorpey'; *AFM.*, vol. 4, 923, '1441 AD: O'Mulconry, i.e. Maoilin the son of Tany, Ollav of Sil Murray ... was interred with honour in the church of Cluain Coirpthe'.

the old men there would swear', held that the stone was used as 'a boat to ferry people across the Shannon',⁶⁷ a tale which matches the lore regarding St Magnus' stone at Ladykirk in South Ronaldshay (see chapter III, p. 125).⁶⁸ This stone has not been recorded since, and cannot now be located. Despite the merits of Kilbarry, the Ó Conchobair inauguration tract makes it clear that it was the *coarb* of Da Chonna from Es mac nEirc who, above all the *coarbs* in attendance, had the most important role to play in the ceremony. It was he who received the newly inaugurated Ó Conchobhair's horse and raiment, and he mounted that horse from Ó Conchobhair's back.⁶⁹ An entry in the *Annals of Connacht* dealing with the inauguration of Feidhlimidh son of Aodh, in 1310, stresses the prominent role of the *coarb* of Es mac nEirc - 'so he [Maelruanaid Mac Diarmata] carried him to Carnfree and installed him on the mound according to the practice of the saints, and of Da Conna of Assylin in particular'.⁷⁰ Es mac nEirc, which translates as the cataract or waterfall of the sons of Eirc, is also known as Es Uí Fhloinn and anglicised Assylin. First mentioned in the annals under the year AD 748,⁷¹ this place-name commemorates Dachonna or Mochonna son of Eirc, a disciple of Colum Cille, who reputedly founded an early monastery at Boyle in the sixth century.⁷² Two slightly different versions of the story of its founding are related in *Vita Tripartita* and *Betha Colaim Chille*. In the first, having failed to persuade the Cenél nEirc of the benefits of Christianity, Patrick returned to the district for a second time. While crossing the Buill (River Boyle), his chariot was upset at a certain ford on the river, near the waterfall of mac nEirc, which was thereafter called Áth Carpait ('the ford of the chariot'). He then foretold that the upper or western part of the river would abound with fish and that Colum Cille would build a monastery there, while the eastern or lower course would be unfruitful.⁷³ In *Betha Colaim Cille*, Patrick comes again to the Buill (Boyle) which we are told was so deep that it was impassable without a ship or fishing boat, and he 'bade the eastern part of the river become shoal, and the water grow shallow, that men might ford it on foot or horseback from that time till Doom'.⁷⁴ Having caused the river to subside, he prophesied that a church and community of monks would be established there

⁶⁷ J. O'Donovan, op. cit., 16.

⁶⁸ J.P. Windwick, 'The Ladykirk Stone', *POAS* 6, 1927-8, 55-6.

⁶⁹ M. Dillon, op. cit., 197.

⁷⁰ *Ann. Conn.*, 223.

⁷¹ *AFM.*, vol. 1, 351.

⁷² Rev. J. O'Hanlon, *Lives of the Irish saints*, vol. 3 (Dublin, ?), 266-7.

⁷³ K. Mulchrone (ed.), *Bethu Phátraic* (Dublin, 1939), 88 [1655-63].

by Colum Cille, and that the founder and his fraternity would be able to conduct their labours 'hither and thither as their need may be'. The saint's prophecy was fulfilled and the place where Colum Cille built his church was named the 'Waterfall of Mac n-Eirc upon Boyle [Es Mac n-Eirc ar Buill]'.⁷⁵ Correlating perfectly with its topographical description in *Betha Colaim Chille*, Dachonna's foundation was first identified by O'Donovan as a ruined church and graveyard situated on a bluff overlooking a waterfall in the River Boyle, about a half mile west of the town (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 42-3).⁷⁶ The church, with its graveyard and enclosure, lies in the townland of Mocmoyne which is adjoined south of the river by the auspiciously named townland of Termon. Within Termon there is a small rath, and appropriately, St Patrick's holy well. In the last century the well was described as a natural spring overshadowed by two very old thorn trees which flanked either side of a large seat-like rock about two feet high.⁷⁷ It has since been modernised with the addition of a hood; but a boulder, possibly the same as that described by Kelly, lies a short distance east-northeast of the well. It contains two natural depressions in its upper surface which local tradition claims are the impressions of St Patrick's knees. In the modern town of Boyle there are now three crossing points on the river, but the more ancient fording points were Áth Carpait and Áth dá laarg. The site of Áth Carpait was still known in the locality in the last century and was recorded by Rev. Kelly who placed it at a point east of Assylin church, just a little below the old Catholic church on the north bank of the river, and running from there across to St Patrick's well on the opposite side.⁷⁸ The second ford is situated further downstream, on the east side of the town, opposite the Cistercian abbey of Boyle. Before the bridge was built beside the abbey, there was a small island in the middle of the river which divided it into two courses making it fordable at that point - hence its name Áth dá laarg or Ath dá ghabhul, the ford of the two forks or water-courses.⁷⁹ It is referred to in the annals for the first time in 1174 in relation to the Cistercian abbey of Boyle, which went by that name,⁸⁰ but

⁷⁴ A. O'Kelleher and G. Schoepperle (eds.), *Betha Colaim Chille* (Dublin, reprint 1994), 15 [29].

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 17 [30], 157 [152-3].

⁷⁶ J. O'Donovan (ed.), *Annals*, op. cit., vol.3, 161-2, f.n. s.

⁷⁷ Rev. J.J. Kelly, 'The antiquities of Boyle', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 8, 1880, 103.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Rev. J.J. Kelly 'The antiquities of Boyle', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 7, 1879, 579.

⁸⁰ *AFM.*, vol. 3, 15, 'Maurice O'Duffy, Abbot of the Monastery of Ath da laarg, on the River Boyle, died'.

according to the *Martyrology of Donegal* there was an earlier church here which was associated with the bishop Mac Cainne.⁸¹

Given that there is a townland called Termon south of the river, and that a ford called Áth Carpait once existed a short distance east of Assylin church, within the bounds of Termon, it may be taken that Áth Carpait and Áth an Termoinn are one and the same place. To be more specific about the exact site of the inauguration of Toirrdelbach Ó Conchobair in 1106, the acknowledged role of the *coarb* of Da Chonna in the proceedings of the Ó Conchobair ceremony would suggest the church site of Es Mac nEirc itself, or an appointed place within its termonland, perhaps St Patrick's well and 'seat', which actually marked the south side of the ford.

Just as the Uí Dhomhnaill did not apparently return a second time to Ráth Both after 1258, the inauguration at Áth an Termoinn may well have been a singular affair - an attempt to bring the Uí Chonchobair into line and firmly establish the place of the church in their inauguration ceremonies. The best opportunity to do so was probably with the youthful Toirrdelbach. Significantly, Toirrdelbach was made king of Connacht at the instigation of Muirchertach Ó Briain, king of Munster, who deposed the former's elder brother Domhnall in 1106.⁸² Although Muirchertach's principal interest in appointing Toirrdelbach for the kingship, was to maintain his well-established dominance in Connacht,⁸³ his reputation as an innovator in ecclesiastical affairs and his ardent patronage of church reform may have been highly influential in the choice of Áth an Termoinn as Toirrdelbach's place of inauguration in 1106. Toirrdelbach himself would in time become a worthy patron of the church. In the 1120s he had a relic of the True Cross (sent to Ireland by Pope Calixtus II in 1119) enshrined in the Cross of Cong which was made either at Roscommon or Tuam by the craftsman Máel Isu Ua Echan.⁸⁴ He was also a

⁸¹ J. H. Todd and W. Reeves (eds.), *The Martyrology of Donegal* (Dublin, 1864), 325, 'Bishop Mac Cainne of Ath-da-laarg, by the side of Cenannus'.

⁸² *AFM.*, vol. 2, 983.

⁸³ D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), 144. In 1093 Muirchertach expelled the Síol Muiredaig into Cenél Eógain, settled their lands on the south Connacht dynast, Ua hEidin, and then appointed Ua hEidin king of Connacht.

⁸⁴ R. Ó Floinn, *Irish shrines and reliquaries of the middle ages* (Dublin, 1994), 37.

benefactor of Clonmacnoise and Tuam, and the raising of Tuam to metropolitan status at the Synod of Kells in 1152, was largely the result of his prestige and influence.⁸⁵

4. 16 Carn Fraích and the Connacht Landscape of the Fraích Saga

In c. 1840, during agrarian unrest in Co. Roscommon, a deputation of the people of the Barony of Roscommon announced to Matthew O'Connor of Belnagare (uncle of the O'Connor Don) that at a general meeting 'it was proposed, and unanimously resolved that he should be proclaimed King of Connaught ... and the deputies respectfully requested him to appoint a time for the performance of the ceremony, on the hill of Carnfree'.⁸⁶ Mr. O'Connor declined; but earlier in 1643, on the testimony of both Elizabeth Hollywell, the widow of the clerk of Roscommon town, and Christopher de la Hyde, a justice of the peace, 'all the rebell soldiers thereabouts [went] to Tulks to make Charles O'Connor Dun [of Ballintubber] king of Connaught'.⁸⁷ There is no specific mention of Carnfree in the last case - the rebels could have assembled at the Dominican abbey, or at the late medieval castle in the village of Tulsk itself, but reasonable speculation points to the Hill of Assembly at Carnfree as the most likely venue for this gathering. In these instances, then, we may be witnessing a recollection of the significance of Carn Fraích as a seat of authority and a fit place for the election of leaders, both for the rebels of 1641 and as late as the nineteenth-century in respect of the farming people of the county.

The annals record four Síl Muiredaig inaugurations at Carn Fraích between 1225 and 1407. The first of these concerns the election of Toirrdelbach son of Ruaidrí Ó Conchobhair in 1225. Toirrdelbach had successfully overthrown Aodh son of Cathal Croibhdhearg, with the assistance of his brother Aodh and with the support of Aodh Ó Néill of Tír Eógain, in that year.⁸⁸ Three years later in 1228, at the instigation of Richard Burke, Toirrdelbach was expelled from the kingship and his younger brother, Aodh, was inaugurated at Carn Fraích 'as was customary with every king who had ruled over Connacht before him'.⁸⁹ This statement seems to imply that Carn Fraích had been in use

⁸⁵ F.J. Byrne, 'The trembling sod: Ireland in 1169', in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vol.2 (Oxford, 1987), 34. Byrne suggests that this status may have been claimed as early as 1123 when Ó Conchobhair commissioned the Cross of Cong.

⁸⁶ J. Hardiman (ed.), *A chorographical description of West or H-Iar Connaught written AD 1684 by Roderic O'Flaherty* (Dublin, 1846), 141-2.

⁸⁷ Quoted by O'Flaherty, 141, from a protestant deposition, dated April 10, 1643.

⁸⁸ *Ann. Conn.*, 9.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

for this purpose for some time. Although not recorded in the annals, Aodh mac Feidhlimidh, on the testimony of the poet Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, was also inaugurated there in 1264. In the poem 'Dearmad do fhágghas ag Aodh', Giolla Brighde recounts his visit to Aodh's house at Cruachain where he lost his brooch in the rushes of the bed. The poet tells the story of his return there to try to recover it. He describes Aodh as 'the stately-eyed king of Carn Fraoich' - a likely allusion to his having been inaugurated there, and it seems clear from the poem that Aodh's royal residence was near or beside Cruachain.⁹⁰ By 1310 the growing influence of the Mic Dhiarmata in the affairs of their Uí Chonchobair overlords was apparent. In that year Maelruanaid Mac Diarmata, foster-father of Feidhlimidh son of Aodh Ó Conchobhair, determined to make him [Feidhlimidh] king by force, in order to offset the intervention of the Burkes in Connacht. The annals record that 'he carried him to Carnfree and installed him on the mound according to the practice of the saints ... and ... Fedlimid ... was proclaimed in a style as royal, as lordly and as public as any of his race from the time of Brian son of Eochu Muigmedoin till that day'.⁹¹ Feidhlimidh's reign was challenged in 1315 by Ruaidrí son of Cathal, but he received no support from Mac Diarmata, from whom he 'demanded recognition of his dominion and lordship'. He nevertheless proceeded to take pledges and hostages from the rest of the Síol Muiredaig, and was made king on Carn Fraích.⁹² The wrenching of the kingship and lordship of Síol Muiredaig back and forth among the Uí Chonchobair family members continued into the fifteenth century; and in 1407 Cathal son of Ruaidrí was challenged by Brian son of Domhnall who destroyed Tulsk Castle and had himself placed on the mound of Carn Fraích, with the support of the Clann Donnchada.⁹³ The attested use of Carn Fraích as the Uí Chonchobair place of inauguration can be pushed back at least to the reign of Aodh son of Cathal Croibhdhearg. A bardic poem celebrating his succession to the kingship in 1224, preserved in an eighteenth-century MS, records the inauguration of Aodh in the lines 'Tigid Conacht go Carán Fraoicc do rioga t'earladh fionmhaoith' ('[The men of] Connacht come to Carn Fraoich to enking your soft fair hair').⁹⁴

⁹⁰ N.J.A. Williams (ed.), *The poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe* (ITS 51, Dublin, 1980), 163 [4].

⁹¹ *Ann. Conn.*, 223.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 233-35.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 401.

⁹⁴ 'Congaibh róm t'aghaidh, a Aodh' (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS. 490), 162; K. Simms, *From kings to warlords* (Suffolk, 1987), 26-7.

In the absence of any evidence for inaugurations taking place at the mound earlier than 1224, there are speculatively just three periods in which it could have assumed this purpose. It might for instance have had its genesis when the Síol Muiredaig, under the leadership of Muirgius son of Tomaltach, rose to prominence among the Uí Briúin Aí in the closing years of the eighth century. Alternatively it may have become an inauguration place when the Uí Chonchobair became the more powerful family among the Síol Muiredaig, from the time of the reign of Conchobar mac Taidc, king of Connacht (967 - 73). It was also tentatively suggested above that the inauguration at Áth an Termoinn in 1106 may have marked a hiatus between kingship inaugurations held at Cruachu in the pre-twelfth century period, and the establishment thereafter of Carn Fraích as the acknowledged inauguration place of the Uí Chonchobair.

The identification of Carn Fraích with a small, flat-topped mound of earth and stone in the townland of Carns, less than two miles south of Tulsk, has not been proven beyond doubt. Nevertheless, the combined literary, archaeological and historical evidence makes the strongest case for this monument above any other in the district. In his Ordnance Survey letters of 1837, John O'Donovan, referring to the mound at Carns, wrote 'I can confidently say that I discovered Carnfree',⁹⁵ but he provided no supporting evidence other than the nature of the monument itself, and later in a footnote to his edition of *AFM* he suggested that a reference in the *Rennes Dindshenchas* to the location of Carn Fraích, confirmed his claim.⁹⁶ O'Donovan's Carn Fraích is situated at the highest point of a broad limestone ridge with thin soil cover, which extends over a mile in an east-west direction, incorporating the greater part of the townlands of Carns, Lismurtagh and Carrowgarve (see vol. 2, appendix 1, pp. 44-6). The small circular and grass-covered mound of Carn Fraích stands at a height of 400 feet above sea level, commanding a superlative view of the surrounding countryside. Built upon limestone rock outcrop, the mound is 1.5m in height, c. 11m in diameter at base on its north-south axis (fig. 42). It is composed of earth and sizeable blocks of limestone, retained at base by a single course of large kerbstones set on edge. The small summit is slightly dished and no more than 7.5m in

⁹⁵ J. O'Donovan, *Letters*, op. cit., 27-8.

⁹⁶ *AFM.*, vol. 3, 221 (fn.a).



Fig. 42 Carn Fraích viewed from east side.



Fig. 43 Duma na Selga viewed from south side.

diameter.⁹⁷ The Ó Conchobhair inauguration tract provides extra details of the mound. It explains that during the ceremony, Ó Maol Chonaire alone was allowed to stand on the mound with the king-elect. Notwithstanding the protocol of the occasion, the small diameter of the summit would certainly not have accommodated more than two people. On behalf of Ó Conchobhair's vassal, Ó Maoil Bhrénainn, Ó Connachtáin was charged with the duty of keeping 'the gate of the mound' and he was also responsible for making sure that the mound was maintained and ready to receive a royal candidate whenever necessary. There is an implication here that he had to ensure that it was suitably decked for such an event.⁹⁸ The reference to 'the gate of the mound' is interesting as, although there is now no trace of a bank or fosse enclosing Carn Fraích, it does suggest that the mound may have been set within an enclosure. Apart from Carn Fraích, a rich complex of monuments extends over the area of the ridge, among them the so-called Duma Selga - a round-topped mound surrounded by a berm and a fosse, which lies 285m southeast of Carn Fraích (fig. 43). Directly east, there are two pillar stones, one of which is prostrate, and the other, which is called Cloch Fhada na gCarn, is contained within a small embanked enclosure with an internal fosse. In the immediate area of Duma Selga there are three ploughed-out ring-barrows, with a fourth extant and larger one positioned immediately south of the road which runs in an east-west direction north of Carn Fraích. A fifth well-preserved example lies in the townland of Carrowgarve. At the far east end of the ridge there are the remains of what is likely to be a late or post-medieval dwelling with an accompanying medieval field system and a standing stone. The dwelling and the greater part of the extensive field system is surrounded by an impressive circular enclosure which may have been the ecclesiastical boundary of an early church site - possibly the Patrician site which Tírechán refers to as *Selca*, the place 'where there were the halls of the sons of Brión, together with a great number of holy bishops'.⁹⁹ A second and more compact field system, and a late *sean-bhaile*, lie midway between this and Carn Fraích. One of the more impressive monuments on the ridge are two conjoined circular earthworks which straddle the townlands of Lismurtagh and Carrowgarve. The southern earthwork comprises a low mound, with a concave summit, which is enclosed by a fosse

⁹⁷ Preliminary results from recent geophysical survey of the mound in, *ArchaeoGeophysical Imaging Project Newsletter* no. 3, 1995, 6, suggests that it is composed primarily of loose stone and earth, but that the possibility of identifying internal details, such as a cavity, are remote by this method.

⁹⁸ M. Dillon, *op. cit.*, 197.

⁹⁹ L. Bieler, *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin, 1979), 196-9.

surrounded by a broad berm, while its northern counterpart is a simple enclosure with a surrounding bank and external fosse. The morphology and configuration of this monument has been likened to that of An Forradh and Teach Chormaic at Tara.¹⁰⁰ Immediately to the northwest, west and south of the ridge, there are a large number of ringforts and enclosures scattered over the landscape. There is a notable absence of ringforts on the ridge at Carn Fraích and on the high ground at neighbouring Cruachan, and it has been suggested that their exclusion may be attributed to a deliberate avoidance of the ritual and royal landscapes of both these places.¹⁰¹

The sagas and topographical lore relating to Carn Fraích are rich in place-names and colourfully account for the putting up and naming of the mound, but for all that, they are potentially confusing and provide few clues to the identity of the places which they cite. A range of inter-related place-names which include Ard Cáin, Cnoc na Dala, Duma Selga, Carn Lámha, Loch Bágha, Cluain Fraoich, and Loch Máigh, are mentioned in the saga material and *Dindshenchas*, while *Vita Tripartita*, and a single genealogical reference from Mac Firbisigh, introduce additional place-names like Mag Selcae, Dumha Chairn Fraoich, Loch Selcae and Domnach Mór Maigi Selcae. It is the task here to try to identify where all of these places might lie in relation to Carn Fraích itself, and by so doing give more credence to O'Donovan's assertion that the mound at Carns is indeed the Ó Conchobhair inauguration place of Carn Fraích.

The warrior Fraích, son of Fidach Foltrud, after whom the mound was named, appears as the central character in the Old Irish prose tale *Táin Bó Fraích* (TBF), and in an incident in the epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (TBC). In the first, he seeks the hand of Ailill's daughter Findabair, but Fraích refuses Ailill's purchase-price; and the latter, fearing that Fraích would bring a host of the kings of Erin against him, lures him into a pool which is the abode of a monster. Findabair leaps into the pool and offers him a sword to defend himself. Ailill tries to prevent her from doing so by casting a spear which Fraích blocks, receiving a fatal wound to his hand. The pool thereafter receives the name of 'Dublind Fráech i mBréib i tírib Connacht'.¹⁰² Inevitably he hears the cry of the Síd (identified by

¹⁰⁰ M. Herity, *Rathcroghan and Carnfree: Celtic royal sites in Roscommon* (Dublin, 1990), 27-8.

¹⁰¹ M. Herity, 'A survey of the royal site of Cruachain in Connacht III: ringforts and ecclesiastical sites', *JRSAI* 117, 1987, 135-6.

¹⁰² W. Meid (ed.), *op. cit.*, 9.

Fraíech as the weeping of his mother Bé Find of the Síde, and the women of Bóand) and the women gather around him and bring him off to the Síde of Crúachan [berdait úadib i ssíd Crúachan].¹⁰³ In what is obviously a transferred tradition in TBC Recension I,¹⁰⁴ Fraíech's adversary is not the péist of 'Dublind Fraíech', but Cú Chulainn, and the setting of the tale removes from Connacht to southeast Ulster, near Sliab Fuait. Fraíech is slain at a ford which thereafter is called Áth Fraíech, and his body is carried back 'into the fairy mound which was called Síde Fraíech ever afterwards'.¹⁰⁵ O'Rahilly has explained that the Fraíech prose tale contained in *Lebor na hUidre* could be as early as the ninth century and by implication this provides us with the earliest reference to Síde Fraíech. In the late Middle Irish versification of TBF - *Carn Fraoich, soitheach na saorchlann*,¹⁰⁶ and in the fourteenth-century poem *Osnadh carad i gCluain Fraoich*,¹⁰⁷ additional place-names and nuances are introduced; and these, taken in conjunction with the topography of Carn Fraíech as elucidated in both the prose and verse forms of the *Dindshenchas*, serve to build a broader picture of the geographical setting of the Fraíech saga. The only direct reference to the location of Carn Fraíech occurs in one of three Carn Fraíech extracts from the *Book of Lecan* incorporated into the *Rennes Dindshenchas*. According to the first of those accounts, following the death of Fraíech he was carried up to the Hill of the Assembly which is described as lying to the southeast of Crúachan [Cnoc na dala ria Cruachnaib sairrdeas], and 'there he was buried, and from him the cairn is named'.¹⁰⁸ If the compilers of the *Rennes Dindshenchas* were correct in their geography - and there is no reason to assume that this information is unreliable - the small but prominently appointed mound in the townland of Carns which O'Donovan identified as Carn Fraíech fits their description admirably. We also first meet with the place-name Cnoc na Dala in this reference, and in the metrical *Dindshenchas*. While it would seem reasonable to assume that it refers to that conspicuous ridge, south of the village of Tulsk, and at the summit of which Carn Fraíech is situated, in the metrical *Dindshenchas* the explanation for the relationship of Carn Fraíech to the hill introduces considerable ambiguity. The question is asked 'what was the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰⁴ J. Carney, *Studies in Irish literature and History* (Dublin, 1979), 75-6. Carney suggests that Fraíech's eventual re-emergence from Síde Cruachan in TBF is in anticipation of his fight against Cú Chulainn in TBC.

¹⁰⁵ C. O'Rahilly (ed.), *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Dublin, 1976), 149; Focessat úadib issa síde. Síde Fraíech ainm in tsída sin íarom, 27 [855-57]. These lines are drawn from *Lebor na hUidre*, the oldest surviving manuscript of Irish prose tales dated c. 1100.

¹⁰⁶ J. Carney, 'Carn Fraoich soitheach na saorchlann', *Celtica* 2, 1954, 156-94.

¹⁰⁷ N. Ross (ed.), *Heroic poetry from the Book of the Dean of Lismore* (Edinburgh, 1939), 198-207.

¹⁰⁸ W. Stokes, 'The prose tales in the Rennes Dindshenchas', *Revue Celtique* 16, 1895, 137.

former name of the pointed cairn?’ and it is told that ‘Cnoc na Dala was its name aforetime, in the days of Medb great and glorious’.¹⁰⁹ The old Irish *cnoc* carries a range of meanings including hill, mound and cairn;¹¹⁰ which leaves the possibility that Cnoc na Dala was, as the *Dindshenchas* tells us, no more than an earlier name for the mound itself and not one applied to a more extensive area. This ambiguity is also present in the Lismore fragments of *Acallamh na Senórach* where, in an encounter between Patrick and Caeilte, Patrick and his company assemble at Carn Fraích and Patrick speaks there with Caeilte about the existence of God - ‘Then the whole company rose and moved on to the cairn of Fraech son of Feradach [sic, recte Fidach], and Patrick went up upon the eminence’¹¹¹ [Ocus éirghetar in slógh rompu do charn Fhraeich meic Fhiodhaig ocus táinic Pátraic suas isin cnuc].¹¹² In this, there is no reference as such to Cnoc na Dala, but Carn Fraích is referred to both as a cairn or mound and an eminence [cnuc]. Cnoc na Dala is also mentioned, if very briefly, in conjunction with Carn Fraích in the early fifteenth-century MS Laud 610 text of *Acallamh na Senórach* - ‘tangadur rompo co Cnoc na dála bodes, risa raiter Carnn Fraich meic Fidaig’ - which suggests that they are one and the same.¹¹³ It may be concluded then that Cnoc na Dala is simply an alias for Carn Fraích. The versifier of the *Dindshenchas* variously describes Carn Fraích as the strong cairn [cairn cruaid], the round cairn [carn cruind] and the peaceful elf-mound [sith sidamail]. In accounting for its lore, he goes further and tells us that ‘many names belonged to the Hill [or cairn, ‘in cnoc’] in succession’.¹¹⁴ He does not expound on those names, but in a poem on Duma Selga in the same work, reference is made to Ard Caín upon which the grave of Fer Fota or Duma Selga is said to have been located.¹¹⁵

As stated above, Duma Selga is the name applied to a burial mound a short distance southeast of Carn Fraích. The earliest reference to it is made by Tírechán, Patrick’s seventh-century biographer, who locates the *aulae* or royal halls of the sons of Brión at this place.¹¹⁶ Duma Selga occurs again in the *Vita Tripartita* where it features as the

¹⁰⁹ E. Gwynn (ed.), *The metrical Dindshenchas*, part 3 (Dublin, 1991), 356-7.

¹¹⁰ *DIL.*, (Dublin, 1990), 125.

¹¹¹ S.H. O’Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, vol. 2 (New York, 1970), 136.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, vol.1, 125.

¹¹³ W.H. Stokes and E. Windisch (eds.), *Irische Texte* 1 (Leipzig, 1900), 212 [7598-9]; From MS Laud 610, 145a1 - The White Earl’s Book, written for James, 4th earl of Ormond 1404-52, contains the *Félire Óengusso* and *Acallamh na Senórach*.

¹¹⁴ E. Gwynn (ed.), *op.cit.*, 356-7 [17].

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 386-7.

¹¹⁶ L. Bieler, *op. cit.*, 196-9.

venue of St Patrick's blessing of the sons of Brión [Dochóid Pátraic iar sin co Mag Selcae .I. do Dumu Selcae, is and sin ro batar meic Briuin].¹¹⁷ Mac Firbhisigh, in his Uí Briúin genealogies, refers to St Patrick's blessing of Duach Galach and he connects Duma Selga with Carn Fraích in his statement that the former 'is called Dumha Chairn Fraoich today'.¹¹⁸ As late as 1448, Duma Selga is cited in *AFM* as the place where Seán Mac Branain, lord of Corco Ochlann died.¹¹⁹ This reference would suggest that there was a residence or settlement at Duma Selga in this period; and it might relate to the late medieval building and extensive field system at the eastern end of the ridge near the *duma* itself.

There is some uncertainty in attempting to relate the place-names, quoted in the sources examined above, with the landscape at Carns and its adjacent townlands, but a number of conclusions can be loosely drawn. It can be reasonably proposed that Cnoc na Dala was an alternative name for the mound of Carn Fraích, while Ard Caín, on which Duma Selga was situated, was the name of the height or ridge at Carns which at least embraced the area extending from the mound of Carn Fraích to Duma Selga.

There are three other place-names in the Carn Fraích district, noted in *Vita Tripartita*, which carry the root *selga/selcae*. These are Mag Selcae [the plain of the hunt], Loch Selcae, and Domnach Mór Maigi Selcae which refers to the existence of an early church in that plain where St Patrick baptised the sons of Brión, after he had blessed them at the Duma.¹²⁰ Both Tírechán and the *Vita Tripartita* refer to Patrick founding a church on Loch Selca.¹²¹ When attempting to determine the location of the Domnach Mór, the obvious candidate is the conjectured early church site situated east of Duma Selga, at the far eastern end of the ridge. At a glance we can see that it is not sited by a lake and there is no lake now bearing the name Loch Selcae in the immediate area of either Carn Fraích or Duma Selga. However, in the last century there were still traces of two large lakes in the neighbourhood of the church site, one of which could have been Loch Selcae.

¹¹⁷ K. Mulchrone (ed.), *Bethu Phátraic* (Dublin, 1939), 66-67 [1205-6].

¹¹⁸ M.V. Duignan, 'The Uí Briúin Bréifni genealogies', *JRSAI* 64, 1934, 104.

¹¹⁹ *AFM.*, vol.4, 959; F.J. Byrne in *Irish kings and high-kings* (London, 1973), 232, explains that the Corco Ochlann or Cenél Maic Ercae were situated east of the Uí Briúin Aí on the shores of the Shannon, and having acquired a spurious descent from Brión they became known as the Uí Briúin Sinna.

¹²⁰ K. Mulchrone (ed.), *op. cit.*, 66-67.

¹²¹ L. Bieler, *op. cit.*, 196-9; K. Mulchrone (ed.), *op. cit.*, 67, 'Ocus ró fothaigestar eclais for Loch Selcae .I. Domnach Mór Maigi Selcae, in quó babtizauit Úu Briúin, et benedixit'.

According to an observer of that time, they had both been drained and were by then nearly dry in summer.¹²² There are three additional sites in the hinterland of the ridge which meet the description of a church by a lake. The first of these is Aghclare church by Shad Lough, which lies under two miles directly south of Carn Fraích. At that site there is a late medieval church, centrally placed within a square graveyard which partly overlies an earthen enclosure. The enclosure comprises a circular area *c.* 45m in diameter, defined by a bank and an external fosse, and it may well represent the boundary of an earlier ecclesiastical foundation which could conceivably be Domnach Mór Maigi Selcae. In the low-lying lakeland district which extends from the ridge of Carn Fraích eastward to Strokestown, there are two early church sites with small enclosures, one of which lies in the townland of Killukin, southeast of Ardakillin Lough, and the other at Ballintemple on the east side of Fin Lough and south of Cloonfree Lough. Both of these sites lie up to four miles east of Carn Fraích, which would seem much too far a distance from the core ritual area. Logically, perhaps the best candidates for Loch Selcae and its lakeside Domnach Mór Maigi Selcae, are either the church site immediately east of Duma na Selga on the ridge and one of the two dried up lakes at its foot, or Shad Lough and Aghclare church.

The late versifications of the Fraích saga - *Carn Fraoich, soitheach na saorchlann*, and *Osnadh carad i gCluain Fraoich* - introduce a second mound into the landscape setting of the tale. Both refer to it as Carn Lámha/Láimhe - the place where the warrior's hand was buried, and they situate it beside Carn Fraích.¹²³ Carn Lámha has not survived as a place-name on the ridge at Carn Fraích. It can only be speculated that the respective poets may have had one of the half dozen ring-barrows on the ridge in mind, perhaps Cloch Fhada na gCarn, or the one situated *c.* 300m northeast of the mound of Carn Fraích. Both works also give alternative names for the lake which TBF refers to as Dublind Fráech, and in which the warrior Fraích fights the *péist*. In the first, the lake is called Loch Badha - 'Peist gu .c. cos ba cinnteach ar loch badha banlinnteach',¹²⁴ and in the second it is

¹²² Rev. J.J. Kelly, *op. cit.*, 49.

¹²³ J. Carney, *op. cit.*, 190, 'Fraoch's hand was put beneath Carn Lámha, and - a daring arrangement - Fraoch, a warrior who had slain warriors ... was put beneath Carn Fraoich beside it; N. Ross (ed.), *op. cit.*, 205, 'The Cairn of the Hand is this cairn beside me, from Fraoch's hand it is called, a warrior who turned not back in fray, a man of bold strength in fight'.

¹²⁴ J. Carney, *op. cit.*, 166-7, 189.

referred to as Loch Máigh - 'Caorthann do bhí ar Loch Máigh'.¹²⁵ While at first it might be tempting to try to relate Loch Badha or Loch Máigh to Loch Selcae, the compilers of the *Rennes Dindshenchas* state that the 'black linn of Brei [is] today called the Suca'. In other words, that lake or pool was located on the River Suck which flows due south some eight miles west of the ridge of Carn Fraích. There are a number of small lakes on the meandering course of the Suck, one of which, situated on the river stretch between Ballymoe and Athleague, carries the name Lough Doo.

4. 17 A New Royal Residence at Cluain Fraoich

Moving into very different terrain about five miles east of Carn Fraích, we come to Cloonfree Lough and its hinterland of hilly pasture. Lying less than half a mile north of the shoreline and a short distance from the nineteenth-century Cloonfree House, there is a moated site on the brow of a long pasture ridge. This is reputed to be Aodh son of Eoghan Ó Conchobhair's royal residence of Cluain Fraoich, which was erected sometime between his inauguration in 1293¹²⁶ and his death in 1309.¹²⁷ In 1683, Rev. John Keogh of Strokestown compiled a description of this site as a contribution to Sir William Petty's intended Atlas. He identified it as 'the King of Connaught's palace', but the basis for that claim is unknown.¹²⁸ O'Donovan,¹²⁹ Quiggin¹³⁰ and more recently Graham¹³¹ have tacitly accepted Keogh's identification. Both *AFM* and *ALC* refer to the palace of the king of Connacht for the year 1306, but neither of these sources gives it a precise location. During the war which broke out in 1306 between Aodh son of Eoghan Ó Conchobhair, king of Connacht, and his rival and kinsman Aodh son of Cathal, the latter marched to 'longport Uí Chonchobair' and burned 'pailis Rig Connacht'.¹³² After the raiders had burned the 'royal residence [rioghbaile]', Aodh son of Eoghan overtook them, and immediately deprived them of their prey. The same entry in *ALC* adds that the 'houses of the fortress [tigib in Longpuirt]' were burned in addition to the palace.¹³³ These references, although

¹²⁵ N. Ross (ed.), op. cit., 200-201 [2569].

¹²⁶ *Ann. Conn.*, 189.

¹²⁷ *Ann. Conn.*, 217.

¹²⁸ J. O'Donovan, *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the County of Roscommon collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1837*, 47-8.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹³⁰ E.C. Quiggin, 'O'Connor's House at Cloonfree', in E.C. Quiggin (ed.), *Essays and Studies presented to William Ridgeway* (Cambridge, 1913), 334.

¹³¹ B.J. Graham, 'Medieval settlement in County Roscommon', *PRIA* 88, 1988, 31.

¹³² *AFM.*, vol.3, 483-5.

¹³³ *A.L.C.*, vol.1, 534-5; Hennessy notes that 'a marginal note in the Dublin copies of the Annals of Connacht states that pailis Chluana Fraoich is intended', f.n. 3, 534.

by no means explicit, seem to indicate that we are dealing with a *longport* which contained a *pailís* together with a number of houses. Hennessy, in a footnote to his edition of *ALC* also identified the palace with what he called the 'immense square fort' at Cloonfree, and later Graham mistook this remark for that of the annalist.¹³⁴ To see how the moated site at Cloonfree might approximate with the new royal residence, it is worth looking at Ó Dálaigh's fourteenth-century poetic description of O'Conchobhair's *pailís*. In his celebration of that royal residence, the poet Aonghus Ó Dálaigh (possibly Aonghus mac Cearrbhaill Bhuidhe Uí Dhálaigh) describes it in considerable detail, presenting a picture of a sizeable earthen enclosure containing a house.¹³⁵ He refers to a well-defended site with a single earthen rampart [Aonmhúr atá ag Aodh Eangach] - a 'spacious wall' surmounted by a 'belt of dark boarding' with just one entrance.¹³⁶ A well roofed 'pleasant house' apparently of wood, lay within it, 'cool in heat, warm in tempest'.¹³⁷ The poet also alludes to its location 'conspicuous as far as the eye can see',¹³⁸ and to its ideal setting - 'spring water at hand for its banquets, wood at hand for its buildings, close at hand each requirement, pasture at hand for its droves of steeds'.¹³⁹ The well-preserved moated site at Cloonfree comprises a modestly sized, enclosed rectangular area, 36m by 29.4m. Ó Dálaigh mentions just one rampart surrounding the *pailís*, but the moated site is defined by an inner and outer earthen bank, with traces of stone facing on the inside of the former. A deep and broad fosse lies between both banks¹⁴⁰ which might reflect the 'cloidhe na cathrach' referred to by the poet.¹⁴¹ The original entrance is positioned towards the west end of the south side. Ó Dálaigh also refers to a *cúilteach* or 'back-house' by the side of the main house - a house which was 'equal to summer in the north against the cold shrill pang of February'.¹⁴² Quiggin suggested that this could have been an out-post or guard-house and that it might be identified with a small rath which lies in

¹³⁴ B.J. Graham, op. cit., 31, 'In 1306, when the palace and fortress of Aedh Ua Conchobair at Cloonfree are described in the annals, special emphasis is given to the 'immense square fort'.

¹³⁵ Eulogies on newly built royal residences are not uncommon. Following the death of Conchobar son of Toirrdelbach Ó Briain in 1328, the poet Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh composed an elegy based on praise of the late patron's house, 'Cathair Conchobhair' (Chairconner, Co. Tipperary), for which see Rev. L. McKenna, in *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 47, 1919, 1-3.

¹³⁶ E.C. Quiggin, op. cit., 345 [27-28].

¹³⁷ Ibid., 347 [33-4].

¹³⁸ Ibid., 341 [17].

¹³⁹ Ibid., 343 [25].

¹⁴⁰ Information courtesy of Gearoid Conroy, Archaeological Survey of Ireland.

¹⁴¹ E.C. Quiggin, op. cit., 339 [9].

¹⁴² Ibid., 345 [31].

the second field north of the *pailís*,¹⁴³ but it could equally have been an ancillary building located within the larger moated site and one of the 'houses' of the fortress burnt down in 1306.

It could be claimed that in its fundamentals, the poet's *pailís* might relate to the rectangular moated site at Cloonfree, but there is no solid evidence to make a positive identification and indeed there are at least two other monuments in the district which could qualify for the title of *pailís*. Of particular interest to this investigation is a reference in both *AFM* and the *Annals of Connacht* to the stronghold of Ruaidrí Ó Conchobair, king of Connacht, at Ard an Choillin. In 1368 Tadhg son of Manus Ó Conchobhair was captured by the Ó Conchobhair and imprisoned in his fortress [longport] at this place.¹⁴⁴ Later, in 1388 Domhnall Ó Conchobhair burned Ard an Choillin, together with the 'island' of Loch Cairrgín,¹⁴⁵ and in 1489 Ó Conchobhair's *longport* was subjected to yet another attack from his opponent Ruaidrí, son of Feidlimidh.¹⁴⁶ The same place-name is also cited as the location of the house of Muirchertach Dub Mac Cinaith who died there in 1473 - 'A hen was laying three eggs a day at the house of Muirchertach Dub Mac Cinaith at Ardakillin, and he died after that'.¹⁴⁷ The townland of Ardakillin [Ard an Choillin], with its lake of Loch Cairrgín, lies immediately west of Cloonfree. It contains over half a dozen unremarkable raths. When the lake was lowered during a drainage scheme in 1852, five crannógs were revealed. A large number of finds of late Iron Age and Early Christian material, including high status objects such as a hinged brooch of bronze, ornate bone combs, decorative cheekpieces of horse-bits, bone trial pieces and iron fetters, were also uncovered.¹⁴⁸ The largest of the crannógs occupies a promontory projecting into the lake from its east shore and may be the 'castle [*caislén*]' of Loch Cairrgín which was burnt by the men of Teathba, in 1137,¹⁴⁹ and the 'island' which was again burnt during Domhnall Ó Conchobhair's attack in 1388. The lakeside settlement was long established and appears to have been relatively continuous. As late as 1593, Tadhg Óg Ó Conchobhair Ruadh was in possession of 'a lake and island called Ardkillin in the country called the

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 335.

¹⁴⁴ *AFM.*, vol.2, 643; *Ann. Conn.*, 335.

¹⁴⁵ *AFM.*, vol. 4, 713.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1169.

¹⁴⁷ *Ann Conn.*, 565.

¹⁴⁸ W.G. Wood-Martin, *The lake dwellings of Ireland; or ancient lacustrine habitations of Erin, commonly called crannogs* (Dublin, 1886), 233-39.

¹⁴⁹ *AFM.*, vol. 2, 1055.

Clountyes', Co. Roscommon.¹⁵⁰ The entry in the annals for 1388, cited above, makes a distinction between Ardakillin and the 'island' on Loch Cairrgín. Therefore, we can reasonably assume that Ruaidrí Ó Conchobhair's *longport*, and the 'island' or *caislén*, are two separate sites.

It would be exceptional to find two important royal residences in the main line of kingship, built closely together within a century of each other. Given that the modern townlands of Cloonfree and Ardakillin are contiguous, there are some grounds for believing that Aodh Ó Conchobair's *pailís* at Cluain Fraoich and Ruaidrí Ó Conchobhair's house at Ard an Choillin are identical. A conclusion on the exact location of that *pailís* is, however, more difficult to reach. Ó Dálaigh's poem makes it clear that the *pailís* was in a conspicuous location, and just one field east of Ardakillin townland boundary and lying within Cloonfree, there is a very large subrectangular enclosure on a height, which is defined by a single bank and external fosse. A short distance further to the east, there is an equally sizeable enclosure in a lofty location. Either of these impressive monuments and not necessarily the moated site, could be the location of the royal residence celebrated in Ó Dálaigh's poem.

Increasingly, however, studies of moated sites in Connacht indicate that this dwelling type was not exclusively Anglo-Norman, but was also constructed by the Gaelic Irish, at least by the fourteenth century, and probably as early as the thirteenth century. In Co. Roscommon, for instance, a number of moated sites have been found in territory which was never subjected to Anglo-Norman colonisation.¹⁵¹ A recent study of a moated site with an adjoining enclosure, on Inishatirra Island, Co. Roscommon, has established that it was the residence of Conchobar Mac Diarmata in 1343, and that it remained a Mhic Dhiarmata stronghold into the early seventeenth century.¹⁵² This type of evidence lends considerable support to the assertion that the moated site at Cloonfree is indeed Aodh Ó Conchobhair's *pailís*, which he built some time after 1293.

Although a number of his predecessors had built strongholds outside of Mag nAí, Aodh Ó Conchobhair's decision to erect a house at Cluain Fraoich is portrayed by the poet as

¹⁵⁰ *Fiants*, vol. 3, 1586-1603, 223 [5826].

¹⁵¹ Information courtesy of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland, National Monuments Service.

¹⁵² I am indebted to Kieran O'Connor for drawing my attention to this site, and for access to his forthcoming publication, 'The moated site on Inishatirra Island, Drumharlow Lough, Co. Roscommon' (*Roscommon Journal*, 1997).

breaking what was apparently a long tradition of royal residence at Cruachu. Ó Dálaigh writes, 'Or do I descry yonder Croghan's rath which has come to grassy Cloonfree? to the west there is only its phantom, to the east we see its semblance ... to abandon Croghan's rampart for Cloonfree is no reproach to Aodh of fair-smooth locks'.¹⁵³ Returning momentarily to the reign of Aodh son of Feidhlimidh (inaugurated 1265), the poet Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, in his poem 'Dearmad do fhágghas ag Aodh' (referred to above) addresses him as the 'stately-eyed king of Carn Fraoich', but throughout the poem it is clear that Aodh dwells at Cruachu. In fact the whole poem concerns the poet's return to the house of Aodh son of Feidhlimidh at Cruachain, 'the fairy hostel of the scion of Bearnas', to retrieve a lost brooch.¹⁵⁴ It was with Aodh son of Eoghan, then, that the break with Cruachu seems to have been made in favour of Cluain Fraoich.

The place-name Cluain Fraoich is also to be found in the poem entitled *Osnadh carad I gCluain Fraoich*, which is based on the Fraích saga and attributed to An Caoch ó Chluain (Ó Dubhagáin d. 1394).¹⁵⁵ In this instance, however, the poet makes it clear that the Cluain Fraoich of which he speaks is the meadow in which Carn Fraích is situated - 'The sigh of a dear one is in the Meadow of Fraoich ... here in the east is the cairn beneath which lies smooth-haired Fraoich ... 'tis from him the Cairn of Fraoich is named'.¹⁵⁶ He intimates that the meadow is in the immediate vicinity of the cairn - 'then is brought to the Meadow of Fraoich the hero's body to a bloody bier; to the meadow his name was given'.¹⁵⁷ It seems possible, then, that the original Cluain Fraoich was indeed the meadow in which Carn Fraích is situated, and that Aodh Ó Conchobhair could have adopted this name as a suitably royal title for his *pailís* which he built c. four miles to the east. This may have been done with the intention of attaching the necessary prestige to the new royal residence and of firmly establishing the relationship between it and the place of inauguration.

¹⁵³ E.C. Quiggin, op. cit., 343 [21-23].

¹⁵⁴ N.J.A. Williams, op. cit., 162-9.

¹⁵⁵ N. Ross (ed.), op. cit., 250, quoting O'Rahilly who suggests that since *cam* has the meaning "blind of an eye," like *caoch*, the poet is probably identical with Cam Cluana, i.e. Ó Dubhagáin, whose death is recorded in 1394 (*Misc. Ir. Ann.*, 152-3; *AFM.*, sub anno).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 198-9, 'Osnadh carad i gCluain Fraoich ... Ag so thair an carn fá bhfuil Fraoich mac Fiodhaigh an fhuilt mhaoith ... is uaidhe shloinntear Carn Fraoich' [2541-48].

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 204-5, 'Beirear ann sin go Cluain Fraoich corp an laoich go caiseal chró; ar an gcluain tugadh a ainm; is mairg mhaireas dá ló' [2645-48].

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

In his study of enclosed places in Celtic Britain, Alcock has stressed that 'in our attempts to observe and to understand the past it is absurd to deny ourselves the assistance of any single part of the evidence'.¹ He was speaking in particular of authoritative historical sources for Celtic Britain, in the period A.D. 500-800, which, in combination with archaeological evidence, he used to good effect in order to elucidate the function of palisaded, embanked and stone-walled enclosed places like Dunadd and Dun Duirn in Scotland.² From the outset of the research for this thesis, it was realised that little or nothing could be gleaned about the inauguration sites of medieval Irish septs without extensive use of an array of reliable historical sources. The information provided by authoritative documentary evidence has been used in the first instance to point to those sites which were frequented for inauguration, and where possible it has been used as context.³ The process of compiling a corpus of twenty-nine attested inauguration places on this basis has enabled a profile of the types of sites used for medieval inauguration to be constructed. For the seeker of 'royal' assembly places, it may provide a blueprint against which undocumented sites of similar morphology can be set.

An analysis of field-based research, presented in chapter II, has shown that the twenty-nine verified medieval inauguration places are characterised by approximately eight different monument types. But mounds both enclosed and unenclosed, hilltop enclosures and churches represent the more frequent choice of venue. The ideal requirements for the performance of inauguration ceremonies are quantifiable to a certain extent. There are practical considerations such as (1) a good prospect; (2) easy access; (3) an earthen platform, knoll or terrace for standing upon; (4) and proximity to a principal residence or settlement. In addition, there are more esoteric qualifications which could include a burial place of special significance to the sept (Carn Amhalgaidh); a site claimed from a rival sept as a result of expansion (Magh Adhair, Tulach Óg); or to a lesser degree, a place marking one of the actual or desired territorial limits of the kingdom (Indeoin, Cluain

¹ L. Alcock, 'The activities of potentates in Celtic Britain, AD 500-800: a positivist approach', in S.T. Driscoll and M.R. Níeke (eds.), *Power and Politics in early medieval Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1988), 22.

² *Ibid.*, 23-39.

³ On the use of history as context see S.T. Driscoll and M.R. Níeke, 'Introduction: reworking historical archaeology', in S.T. Driscoll and M.R. Níeke (eds.), *op. cit.*, 1-5.

Tuaiscirt na Sinna). In this study of sites in use in the medieval period, some of these factors or a combination of them are at play.

Historical dates for the use of specific monuments as king-making sites are sporadic and generally discontinuous; but it can be reasonably proposed that Magh Adhair was the inauguration place of the kings of Dál gCais as early as the tenth century (pp.172-3), and that the Ailech dynasty had adopted Tulach Óg by the eleventh century (pp. 154-6). The records of sacred trees at Cráeb Telcha and Ruadh Bheitheach suggest that these sites may have served the same function for the Ulaid (p. 65) and the Uí Fiachrach Aidne, at least as early as the beginning of the twelfth century (p. 21). Carn Fraích is first intimated as the Síol Muiredaig inauguration site in a bardic poem celebrating the succession of Aodh son of Cathal Croibhdhearg to the kingship of Connacht in 1224 (pp. 219-20). However, it is perhaps significant that the otherworld connotations of Carn Fraích are disclosed in a reference to 'Síol Fraích' in a version of the prose tale *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (preserved in Lebor na hUidre), which O'Rahilly suggests could be as early as the ninth century (p. 223). The documented origin of Carn Amhalgaidh is particularly interesting, as both the *Dindshenchas* and the account of the inauguration of Ó Dubhda in the *Book of Lecan* attribute it to the early historic progenitor of the sept - Amalgaid son of Fiachra Ealgach. Both sources propose that Amalgaid built the carn as a viewing point, a place of assembly and inauguration, and that finally he himself was buried within it (pp. 62-3). Indeoin is also ascribed early origins as the king-making site of the Déisi, in the *Life of St Declan of Ardmore* which was compiled in the eighth or ninth century. The author of the *Life* tells of the sanctification of Indeoin by St Declan in the reign of king Ferghal, but he adds that traditionally it was known as the inauguration place and seat of the Déisi 'in pagan times', which intimates that it was frequented in late prehistory (pp. 91-3).

The inauguration sites of Tulach Óg, Cráeb Telcha, Ruadh Bheitheach and Magh Adhair are recorded in the annals as having had a single *bile*, or in the case of the first perhaps a grove of sacred trees. Where they were actually sited in relation to the monuments and whether they were planted on small mounds is unclear, but it is reasonable to suppose that the enclosures at Tulach Óg, Ruadh Bheitheach and Cráeb Telcha may have defined the sanctuaries of their respective sacred trees. It is also conceivable that the small mound adjacent to the larger flat-topped mound of Magh Adhair could have been the location of

the *bile* Magh Adhair, and it may be of some significance that Richard Bartlett (1602) illustrates what appears to be a small low mound, planted with a couple of trees, in the northern half of the hilltop enclosure at Tulach Óg (fig. 32).

The reason why some septs used different monuments to others for their inauguration ceremonies is problematic. Why, for instance, was the Ó Raghallaigh inaugurated within an enclosure on Sheantomuinn, while the Ó Dubhda and the Ó Conchobhair were proclaimed on the summit of mounds? Why too was the later medieval Ó Néill proclaimed sitting in a stone chair on the downslope of Tulach Óg, and not within the enclosure which crowns the hill? There is certainly no single answer to these questions, but the continuity of a sept in one territory and the displacement of another to a new area may have been a factor which influenced the choice of sites. Tulach Óg, for instance, became the kingship centre of the Ailech dynasty after they had annexed Airgialla in the late tenth/early eleventh century. At that point they may have either adopted an existing flagstone on the downslope of the hill as their *Leac na Ríogh* or ordained a new stone for their king-making ceremonies - a stone which later became part of a chair. The motive behind the removal of the ceremony to church sites is more transparent, and has been discussed in regard to the inauguration of the Ó Domhnaill at Ráth Both and Cill Mhic Nénáin (pp. 195-204), and the en-kinging of the young Toirrdelbach Ó Conchobair at Áth an Termoinn in 1106 (pp. 213-18). Most curious is the case of the Uí Dhubhda who had two inauguration sites on either side of the River Moy, Carn Amhalgaidh being the more important of the two as it commemorated the eponymous ancestor of the sept. The reason why they also used Carn inghine Bhriain is unstated, but the east-west division of their territory into two halves by the River Moy may have warranted two sites, more particularly because the medieval Ó Dubhda claimed jurisdiction as far northeast as the River Cowney which enters the sea at Drumcliff - an area which actually lay in the territory of Cur Iorra some distance beyond the bounds of Tír Fiachrach. In attempting to address this question of variety in choice of sites, it is perhaps also well to remember that what survives of these sites at ground level represents only a tiny fraction of the full story. Descriptive field survey is in a sense superficial and the data accrued are generally insufficient to produce a detailed evaluation of the sites concerned. Archaeological excavation is really required to quantify the true nature of the monuments chosen, or perhaps primarily erected, for inauguration.

The terms 'royal' and 'ritual' have been current in Irish archaeology in recent years, particularly in regard to investigations of the prehistoric provincial kingship centres. It has been surmised that specific mounds within these complex sites were the venues for inauguration ritual. Newman tentatively refers to An Forradh at Temair as 'the [inauguration] Mound';⁴ Waddell suggests that the remains of a possible burial mound on the summit of Rathcroghan mound 'would, if anything, tend to confirm the tradition that this was a ritual inauguration mound';⁵ and Lynn more recently has proposed that the mound at Emain may have been 'built to provide a backdrop or platform for archaeologically invisible rites'.⁶ Lynn's questioning of the function of the mound at Emain, which was erected in 95/4 BC, is important, and in particular his conjecture that it was 'purpose-built for kingly inauguration'.⁷ While of itself the process of king-making may be archaeologically unverifiable, the rites which constituted the medieval inauguration ceremony are reasonably well documented and the presentation of site types used indicates that mounds rank as the more frequent venue for the performance of the ceremony. It has been suggested that the term *forad* may accordingly be the most appropriate functional description for them (pp. 72-3). One of the most interesting challenges ahead is the archaeological testing of this theory. Were some *foraid*, like known Anglo-Saxon meeting mounds⁸ and Northern European ting mounds, erected primarily for the purpose of assembly in the early historic period?

In regard to the ceremony, it has been demonstrated in chapter I that the enduring ritual symbols of the rod and shoe, which enjoyed a remarkable longevity in the Gaelic world, had their roots in Indo-European tradition, and that the various rites which constituted the ceremony were not immutable. Subtle alterations in the symbolism of ancient rites and props, and the introduction of new objects like reliquaries, were not esoteric but pragmatic resolutions, introduced to reflect, aid and abet the establishment of new

⁴ C. Newman, *Tara: an archaeological survey* (Discovery Programme Monographs 2, Dublin, 1997), 319.

⁵ J. Waddell, 'Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon', in *Introduction to Archaeological Geophysics* (University College Galway, 1993), 112.

⁶ C.J. Lynn (ed.), *Excavations at Navan Fort 1961-71: D. M. Waterman* (Belfast, 1997), 228.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ R.A. Adkins and M.R. Petchley, in 'Secklow Hundred mound and other meeting place mounds in England', *Archaeological Journal* 141, 243-51, have demonstrated that of the twelve meeting mounds excavated in England, eleven are non-sepulchral (many of them post-Roman) and just one proved to be a re-used prehistoric barrow.

political legitimacies. In this sense the progress of Irish royal ritual is a useful barometer for measuring the degree of ecclesiastical influence in secular affairs, the descent of kingship, and the re-structuring of the Gaelic polity in later medieval Ireland whereby the chief or lord became dependent on the support of his most powerful vassals.

The positive revision of the Cenél Conaill rite, which reputedly involved symbolic sexual union with a white mare, horse sacrifice and a ritual bath, is largely due to the notable comparisons which have been made between the details of Cambrensis' description and known Indo-European practices, but it also finds later if fainter echoes, and perhaps some small validation, in the king-making rites of the Uí Chonchobhair and the Uí Dhubhda. Folk tradition gathered by MacNeill on the Aughris peninsula (where it has been proposed Carn inghine Bhriain is located), alludes to Ó Dubhda's 'famous white horse' and its hoof marks on a flagstone at Comhra Donn (pp. 64-5). The Irish *gabor*, which in poetic usage means a white mare, is embraced in the Méig Uidhir inauguration place of Sciath Ghabhra; and Simms has pointed to the role of the horse in the Ó Conchobhair inauguration tract, suggesting that the act of the king-elect stooping to enable the inaugurator Ó Maol Chonaire to mount the king's horse may hearken back to Cambrensis' description of the king of Tír Conaill 'professing himself to be a beast also'.⁹ The ritual of bathing, which in Cambrensis' account is a grisly affair, surfaces again in the Ó Dhubhda rite. Mac Firbis, in his citation of the 'Privileges of the race of Caomhan', states that Ó Caomháin, Ó Dubhda's principal vassal, was entitled to 'take the first bath' (p.10).¹⁰

Bloch has argued that royal symbolism is constructed out of non-royal symbolism, and that all symbolic constructions of authority involve the same elements.¹¹ The ubiquitous presence of the rod and shoe in Vedic ritual, classical literature, Irish sagas and bardic poetry, and their many applications other than royal, strongly supports this view. McCone has recently shown that the condition of being one-eyed, one-armed or one-legged, which is attributed to divine and mythical warriors, may have had its origins in the actual battle-

⁹ K. Simms, *From kings to warlords ...*, op. cit., 23. Simms, pp. 23-4, also notes this theme of the king miming the role of a horse in a mid-thirteenth-century elegy for the chiefs Maghnus and Eachmharach Ó Catháin, in which the poet recollects playing at inaugurations when they were children..

¹⁰ J. O'Donovan (ed.), *Hy-Fiachrach*, op. cit., 143.

¹¹ M. Bloch, 'The ritual of the royal bath in Madagascar: the dissolution of death, birth and fertility into authority', in D. Cannadine and S. Price (eds.), *Rituals of Royalty: power and ceremonial in traditional societies* (Cambridge, 1992), 271-2.

wounds borne by fighting men, and that it subsequently became a token of the youths of the Indo-European Männerbund or warrior society.¹² These attributes were apparently assimilated into myth, appearing in a myriad of guises as potent symbols of destructive force and supernatural power. The image of the otherworld visitor and the kingship claimant with one foot shod and one foot bare seems to find its place in this mythology of the monstrous physique, as perhaps does the recurring use of the shoe as a symbol of a rightful claimant in Irish bardic poetry (pp. 34-5). Although the shoe, viewed in this context, did not have its genesis as a symbol of royalty, it is realised as a trapping of Irish kingship rituals in the Bréifne en-kinging ceremony, in its use as a symbol of a rival claimant's intentions on the eve of the inauguration of Aodh Mag Uidhir in 1589, and in its well-attested engagement in the later medieval inaugurations of the Ó Conchobhair at Carn Fraích and the Ó Néill at Tulach Óg (pp. 35-7). By extension, the act of the royal candidate standing upon a *leac*, or placing one foot into a single shod footprint impression, must logically be a variation on the rite of the single shoe. The use of recumbent stones as inauguration furniture was not peculiar to Gaelic society. Like the ritual props, this convention had considerable universality, and again it ultimately has its origin in non-royal practices. The last Emperor of Byzantium, Constantine XI, was crowned in the early fifteenth century on a circular slab of red porphyry within the little church of St Sophia at Mistra in southern Greece, and as late as the last century the kings of Merina in central Madagascar initiated the beginning of the agricultural year (which involved a ritual bath) on a stone which was also associated with coronation and circumcision rituals.¹³

The extent to which there may have been regional variations in the formal acts and paraphernalia employed in the ceremony is more difficult to quantify, but the evidence presented in chapter III suggests, for instance, that while stone chairs constituted the ceremonial furniture in some cases, in others *leacs* such as the extant example at Cnoc an Bhogha and that implied in the place-name Leic Mhicil, or footprint stones like the one recorded at Cill Mhic Nénáin, appear to have been used. An investigation of the possible periods of origin of the two Ó Néill chairs, however, suggests that the advent of the chair

¹² K. McCone, 'The Cyclops in Celtic, Germanic and Indo-European Myth', *Studia Celtica* 30, 1996, 106-9.

¹³ M. Bloch, *op. cit.*, 277.

may have been a later medieval phenomenon. The interchangeable use of the terms 'stone' and 'chair' in descriptions of the regal throne at Tulach Óg, and its very name, *Leac na Ríogh*, argues that the original inauguration furniture was a *leac* which was later incorporated into a chair. This process of assimilating into a *sedes regalis* a king-making stone, or stones symbolising the eclipse of one civilisation by another, is evident in the fate of the Stone of Scone on its removal to Westminster by Edward I in 1296, and in the assemblage of old (masonry from the Roman town of Virunum) and new parts which comprise the curious Carinthian *Herzogstuhl*.

A new insight has arisen out of what was primarily intended as an investigation of the ceremony and siting of inauguration. By the later medieval period at least, a number of the hills on which chiefs were named seem to have served additional administrative and social functions (pp. 49-52). This is most clearly demonstrated in regard to Sheantomuinn, Carn Amhalgaidh, and Carn inghine Bhriain, and perhaps also in the case of a number of the Class B sites such as Tulach Ó Dheadhaidh, Croshy Duff and possibly Kyle Hill.

Lying in some instances within the lands of the traditional inaugurator and within easy reach of the principal chiefly residence, there may well be a case for viewing these hills of gathering as places where the royal became public, where the chief and his people, or at least his principal vassals and household officials, encountered each other, and the affairs of the lordship were conducted. As places of *oireachtais*, parley and mustering grounds, open air ceremonial centres and social theatres, they may essentially have acted as an administrative focus for the lordships in which they lay.



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ABBREVIATIONS

- AI* *The Annals of Inisfallen*, ed. and trans. Seán Mac Airt (Dublin, 1951)
- A.L.C.* *The Annals of Loch Cé: a chronicle of Irish affairs, 1014-1590*, ed. W.M. Hennessy (2 vols., London, 1871)
- Anal. Hib.* *Analecta Hibernica, including the reports of the Irish Manuscripts Commission*
- Ann. Clon.* *The Annals of Clonmacnoise, being annals of Ireland from the earliest period to A.D. 1408, by Conell Mageoghagan*, ed. Denis Murphy (Dublin, 1896; reprint Felinfach, 1993)
- Ann. Conn.* *Annála Connacht (A.D. 1224-1544)*, ed. A. Martin Freeman (Dublin, 1944)
- ASNI Archaeological Survey Northern Ireland
- Ann. Tig.* *The Annals of Tigernach*, ed. and trans. Whitley Stokes, in *Revue Celtique*, xvi-xviii (1895-7; reprint, 2 vols., Felinfach, 1993)
- Cal. Carew MSS* *Calendar of the Carew manuscripts preserved in the archiepiscopal library at Lambeth* (6 vols., London, 1867-73)
- Cal. pat. rolls Ire., Jas I* *Irish patent rolls of James I: facsimile of the Irish record commissioners' calendar prepared prior to 1830*, with foreword by M.C. Griffith (I.M.C., Dublin, 1966)
- Cal. S.P. Ire.* *Calendar of the state papers relating to Ireland* (24 vols., London, 1860-1911)
- Chron. Scot.* *Chronicum Scotorum: a chronicle of Irish affairs ... to 1135, and supplement ... 1141-1150*, W.M. Hennessy (ed.) (London, 1866).

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| <i>Fiants</i> | <i>The Irish fiants of the Tudor sovereigns</i> , K. Nicholls (ed.), 3 vols. (Dublin, 1994). |
| IFC | Irish Folklore Commission |
| <i>IHS</i> | <i>Irish Historical Studies</i> |
| <i>ITS</i> | <i>Irish Texts Society</i> |
| <i>JACAS</i> | <i>Journal of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise Antiquarian Society</i> |
| <i>JCHAS</i> | <i>Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society</i> |
| <i>JGAHS</i> | <i>Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society</i> |
| <i>JIA</i> | <i>Journal of Irish Archaeology</i> |
| <i>JKAS</i> | <i>Journal of the Kildare Archaeological Society</i> |
| <i>JRSAI</i> | <i>Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland</i> |
| NLI | National Library of Ireland |
| <i>NMAJ</i> | <i>North Munster Antiquarian Journal</i> |
| <i>POAS</i> | <i>Proceedings of the Orkney Archaeological Society</i> |
| <i>PRAI</i> | <i>Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute</i> |
| <i>PRIA</i> | <i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy</i> |
| <i>PSAS</i> | <i>Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland</i> |
| RCAHMS | Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland |
| TCD | Trinity College Dublin |
| <i>ZCP</i> | <i>Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie</i> |

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Douglas, Manx Museum MS 1596A

Dublin, NLI MS G192; MS 2656

Dublin, RIA MS 23 F.12; MS 490

Dublin, RSAI, Walter FitzGerald, Places of inauguration of Irish kings and chiefs with a description of that ceremony

Dublin, TCD MS 1209/15; MS 1209/16; MS 1209/17; MS 1209/19

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