

# NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE KINGDOM OF BRÉIFNE

By MÍCHEÁL Ó DUÍGEANNÁIN.

[Communicated]

## Abbreviated References :

- AI.—*The Annals of Inisfallen*. Facs. ed. Best and MacNeill, Dublin and London, 1933.
- ALC.—*The Annals of Loch Cé*. Ed. Hennessy, London, 1871.
- An. Clon.—*The Annals of Clonmacnoise*. Ed. Murphy, Dublin, 1896.
- An. Tig.—*The Annals of Tigernach*. Ed. Stokes, RC., XVI–XVIII.
- AU.—*Annala Uladh*, ‘Annals of Ulster.’ Ed. Hennessy and MacCarthy, Dublin, 1887–1901.
- BASJ.—*Breifny Antiquarian Society’s Journal*.
- BB.—*The Book of Ballymote*. Facs. ed. Atkinson, Dublin 1887.
- Book of Rights—*Leabhar na gCeart*. Ed. O’Donovan, Dublin, 1847.
- Breviarium—*Memoir of St. Patrick &c.* by Tírechán, Ed. in Lib. Ardm.
- CLAJ.—*County Louth Archaeological Journal*.
- Colonial Frontier—*The Colonial Frontier of the Kingdom of Tara*, by Eoin MacNeill. Proof copy.
- Colonisation—*Colonisation under the Kings of Tara*, by Eoin MacNeill. Author’s Original.
- CS.—*Chronicum Scotorum*. Ed. Hennessy, London, 1866.
- Dates—*Dates of Texts in the Book of Armagh relating to St. Patrick*, by Eoin MacNeill, JRSAL, LVIII.
- Earliest Lives—*The Earliest Lives of St. Patrick*, by Eoin MacNeill, *ibid*.
- Fen.—*The Book of Fenagh*. Ed. Hennessy and Kelly, Dublin, 1875.
- FF.—*Forus Feasa ar Éirinn*, by Geoffrey Keating. Ed. Comyn and Dineen, Dublin, ITS., 1902–1914.
- FM.—*Annala Rioghachta Éireann*, ‘Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by The Four Masters.’ Ed. O’Donovan, Dublin 1851.
- Genealogies—*The Uí Briúin Bréifní Genealogies*. JRSAL., LXIV.
- Gen. Tracts, I.—*Genealogical Tracts I*. Ed. Ó Raithbheartaigh, Dublin, 1932.
- Hy Many.—*The Tribes and Customs of Hy Many*, etc. Ed. O’Donovan, Dublin, 1843.
- ITS.—*Irish Texts Society*, London.
- JRSAL.—*Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*.
- Lib. Ardm.—*Liber Ardmachanus*. Ed. Gwynn, Dublin, 1913.
- LL.—*The Book of Leinster*. Lithographic reproduction of O’Longan’s facsimile, Ed. Atkinson, Dublin, 1880.
- Mac Fírb.—*Book of Genealogies* compiled c 1629–’70 by Dubhaltach Mac Fírbhisigh. Original MS. in the Library of University College, Dublin.
- OSL.—*Ordnance Survey Letters* Relative to the Antiquities of the Counties of Ireland, Collected during the Progress of the Ordnance Survey.
- Population Groups—*Early Irish Population Groups, their Nomenclature, Classification and Chronology*, by Eoin MacNeill, PRIA., XXIX, Section C.
- PRIA.—*Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*.
- RC.—*Revue Celtique*.
- RIA.—*Royal Irish Academy*.
- Top. Poems.—*The Topographical Poems of John Ó Dubhagáin and Giolla na Naomh Ó Huidhrín*. Ed. O’Donovan, Dublin, 1862.
- Tricha Cét.—*The Tricha Cét and Related Land-Measures*, by James Hogan, PRIA, XXXVIII, Section C.
- Vita Trip.—*The Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*. Ed. Stokes, Dublin, 1887.
- VT.—*The Vita Tripartita of St. Patrick*, by Eoin MacNeill, *Eriu*, XI.
- ZCP.—*Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*.

## FOREWORD.

FOR the student of early and medieval Irish history, the Bréifne region has a peculiar attraction, if only because of the seemingly insoluble problems it presents. In the first place, at the present moment we can reconstruct almost nothing of its story prior to the advent of the Uí Briúin. Then, even after that, for a long time the annals have so little to say of Bréifne that, remembering the nature of these records, one might be tempted to adopt a false explanation of their silence. Happy, we are sometimes told, is the land which has no history. Were that fatuous dictum true, and were it not that the real clue is supplied by the physical geography of the region, Bréifne might be regarded as one of the happiest states of Ireland during the early medieval period.

Right down through the ages, the Leitrim-Cavan area seems to have constituted to some extent a little world apart. The first recorded traditions of St. Patrick do not bring him into direct contact with the interior of the territory.<sup>1</sup> Legend makes that territory the seat of the greatest heathen sanctuary of the whole island<sup>2</sup>. (It is not without interest therefore that we notice that the only wooden phallic objects as yet unearthed in Ireland come from Cos. Cavan<sup>3</sup> and Meath). Tuaim Drecon (Tomregan) was the reputed home of a great healer, and the seat of schools for *légend*, *fénechas* and *filidheacht*, where the civil laws of the nation were first committed to writing.<sup>4</sup> From the fifth to the ninth century the interest, vitality, and energy of the nation seem to have been largely devoted to a development of monasticism which is well nigh without parallel. That development does not appear to have had any important repercussions in Bréifne, for there was no early religious community of any outstanding significance connected with the region. (The bombast of the *Book of Fenagh* notwithstanding, St. Caillin's foundation was really of minor note). As a result, one is inclined to speculate on the possibility that Bréifne may have remained one of the last strongholds of paganism in this country. It certainly was among the last of the Gaelic lordships to pass under direct English control. Even after Kinsale's disaster,

<sup>1</sup> See Tirechán's '*Breviarium*,' quoted I, *infra*.

<sup>2</sup> No satisfactory study of this important question has as yet been made. Perhaps the best contribution which has so far appeared is J. P. Dalton's *Cromm Cruaich of Magh Sleacht*, PRIA., XXXVI, Section C., No. 4.

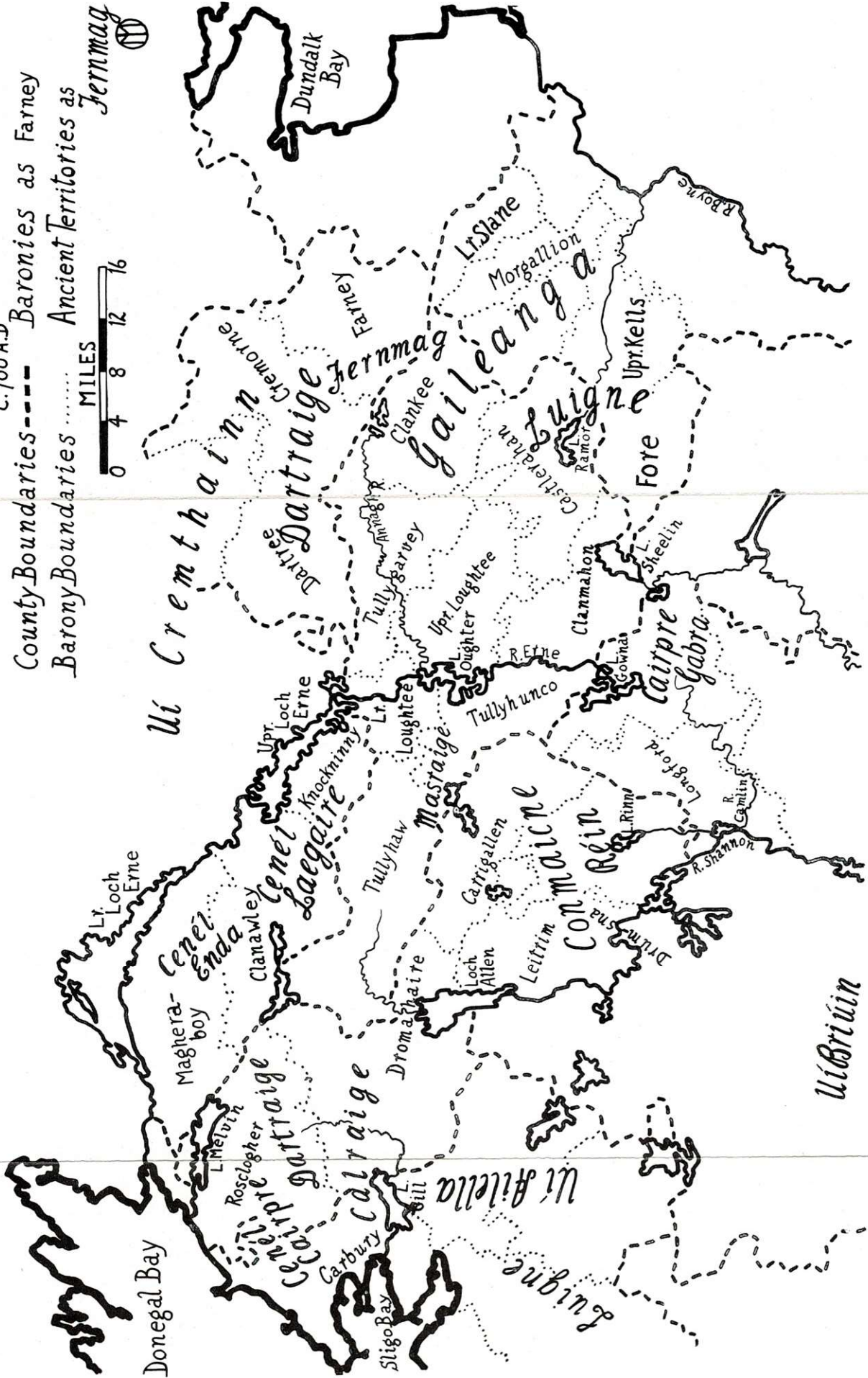
<sup>3</sup> See *Antiquity*, Vol. 4., p. 487.

<sup>4</sup> *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, III, 88; see *A Pioneer of Nations*, by Eoin MacNeill, *Studies* XI, 1922, or the same author's *Early Irish Laws and Institutions*, Dublin, 1935, Chap. IV.

# The Bréifne Region

C. 700 A.D.  
County Boundaries --- Baronies as Farney  
Barony Boundaries ..... Ancient Territories as Fernmag

MILES  
0 4 8 12 16



MAP OF BRÉIFNE.

and the fall of Dunboy, we find Ó Súilleabháin Béarra fighting his way from Cork to find refuge with Ó Ruairc. Later still, as contemporary records show,<sup>5</sup> in the time of the Confederate Wars, the Cavan-Leitrim area was an important base of the Catholic forces operating in the North.

As already remarked, the explanation of all this is, perhaps, to be found in the difficulty of the Bréifne country. All along the north-western marches stretches the chain of great waters comprising Upper and Lower Lochs Erne, Upper and Lower Lochs Macnean, and Loch Melvin. Behind this network of lake and river, high mountains raise their ramparts to stay the invader. The whole western end of Bréifne is a wilderness of barren heights and deep narrow glens, of rugged defiles and treacherous marsh, of countless lakes and myriad streams. South Leitrim and the adjoining parts of Cavan belong, it is true, to the great Central Plain. Even here, however, the land is broken up by innumerable low ridges and hillocks, into a veritable maze of valleys.<sup>6</sup> Extensive low-lying bogs remain even to the present day, while every other hollow has its little lake. Farther to the east, Lochs Gowna, Sheelin and Ramor guard the approaches, while the north-eastern borderlands shelter snugly behind the hills of Clankee, and the sheets of water scattered between Kingscourt and Redhills. East Cavan has, indeed, no great mountain mass comparable to that beyond Loch Allen, but it is never easy country, thanks to Slieve Glah and its satellite hills. Very apt indeed is the old proverb which says—“*Tri haimreide Herenn: Breifne, Bairenn Berre*”<sup>7</sup> for Bréifne was “ye rough third part of Connaught”.<sup>8</sup> The home of a valiant race, foemen might well regard it as “perilous Bréifne.”<sup>9</sup>

Early in the Middle Ages, the Uí Briúin kingdom which had arisen in this land of hills and lakes emerged as a potential factor in the national political situation, for Bréifne in the grasp of a powerful stock was a spearhead thrusting at the side of the Uí Néill. History repeats itself: nowhere have we a clearer instance of this than in the resurgence of Connacht during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Close on a thousand years before the whole

<sup>5</sup> e.g.—*Cín Lae Ó Mealláin*, ed. Ó Donnchadha, *Analecta Hibernica*, No. 3.

<sup>6</sup> One notices the number of local place-names compounded of *Corr-*, *Druim-* and *Mullach-*.

<sup>7</sup> “The three rough places of Ireland are, Bréifne, Bairenn and Bérre,” *The Triads of Ireland*, ed. Meyer, RIA., *Todd Lecture Series XIII*.

<sup>8</sup> An. Clon. sub A.D. 765.

<sup>9</sup> “*Breifne baoghalach*,” *Duanaire Finn*, I, 2, ed. MacNeill ITS., 1908; cf. “fierce Bréifne (*na Breifne burba*),” quoted from *Rawlinson B 512*, *Vita Trip.*, I, p. xv.

political structure of Ireland had been radically and violently altered by the Connacht conquests, which overthrew the old historic "Fifths" of the Ulaidh and the Northern Laighin. The movement which culminated in the árdriþip of Ruaidhrí Ó Conchobhair marked the beginnings of yet another wave of expansion from the West. In that movement the Kingdom of Bréifne played a considerable part; then more than ever, the fact of its existence was of national significance. The role Bréifne assumed in later days was likewise no mean one, and the list of her princes numbers leaders of major importance or of great romantic interest.

For these reasons, there is, perhaps, no need to attempt any further justification of the task here undertaken. Were such necessary, it would be found in the circumstance that educational experts are nowadays alive to the value of the 'local' antiquary's work as a school subject. But the interest and value of 'local history' are not matters for the school-teacher and local antiquary alone. Though seldom realised, it is none the less true that the medieval and early modern history of Ireland *as a whole* can never be really known, can never be accurately portrayed, until the story of the constituent principalities of the Gaelic commonwealth has been properly investigated. Some two years ago, the welcome announcement was made that a scheme was afoot to provide a series of local histories for the whole of the Saorstát. Joyous anticipations, alas! were speedily replaced by regrets when the type of study intended was officially designated. To those who know even a little of our Gaelic past, and of the native sources which preserve the story of our civilization, it is at once evident that the idea of producing *county* histories is both historically false and, one might even say, scientifically impossible. Knox's well known volume, *The History of the County of Mayo*<sup>10</sup> should have been a warning to those who would attempt such futilities. The counties of Ireland in almost every instance violate age-old historical divisions. In their origin and early history, they were nothing more than English shrievalties—the conqueror's areas of legal administration—and of their very nature can lay no claim to the local patriotism of their inhabitants. It is indeed hardly too much to say that the county-consciousness of which we so often receive full-page press reminders, is an absolutely new growth, and largely the work of athletic organisations. The historian may well be pardoned if, at times, he finds that consciousness a trifle ludicrous. Regional histories are well worth having, are indeed essential, but they must be of the proper kind; they must be based on those

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<sup>10</sup> Dublin, Hodges Figgis & Co., 1908.

semi-permanent, historical subdivisions of our country, to which the dioceses so often bear the closest relationship.

A few words about the names *Bréifne* and *Uí Briúin* may not be out of place here.

*Bréifne* : Philologically the word *Bréifne* is something of a puzzle. Neither its history nor its meaning is at all clear, and in consequence I prefer to leave these matters to the expert. It possesses, however, features deserving of some attention. To begin with, the first *e* is certainly long (hence the more or less consistent supplying of the accent, both in these notes and in the translation and annotations to the genealogies). That much can be established from poetry.<sup>11</sup> Then again, the name appears to belong to a class of collective folk-names compounded of a patronymic and the suffix *-ne*, to a class that is, which originated in the traditional period of our history.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, in Irish records the name appears only as a simple place-name of no exact application, and we are left to speculate as to its original significance.

*Uí Briúin* : At this late date it is strange to find oneself obliged to point out that the sept-name *Uí Briúin* has no connection whatsoever with the surname *Ua (ó) Briain* (O'Brien), beyond the fact that each is compounded of a form of *ua* + a patronymic. In the case of *Uí Briúin* the patronym is *Bríón* (Bríún), brother of Niall of the Nine Hostages<sup>13</sup>, while the surname has for patronym Brian Bóroimhe.

Some of the ground I purpose to traverse has already been covered by J. P. Dalton.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, in so far as my approach is from a widely different angle, follows on other lines, and is ultimately aimed at more comprehensive results, it can be fairly claimed that these notes are wholly a pioneer work. It must be remembered, however, that they are really nothing more than a preliminary essay, and make no claim to be complete. That being so, I trust that my readers will accord me no small measure of indulgence.

There remains but to express my gratitude to Professor Eoin Mac Néill. He it was who suggested this particular subject to me. Numerous references to his work, both published and unpublished,

<sup>11</sup> A discussion of the evidence would be suitable only for the pages of a journal devoted to linguistics. I may say in passing however, that the conclusion I have adopted is almost solely due to an analysis of examples which Mr. Gerard Murphy kindly made at my request.

<sup>12</sup> *v.* Population Groups, Part II.

<sup>13</sup> *v.* Genealogies, Introduction, p. 97, Note, and Sections I, Ia.; for an analysis of sept-names of the *Uí Briúin* class, see MacNeill, *op. cit.*, Part III.

<sup>14</sup> *Breifne before The Uí-Briúin*, BASJ., II, and *The Coming of the Uí-Briúin*, *ibid.*, III.

reveal some small part of my indebtedness to him. They cannot make known how much I owe to his inspiring and kindly guidance in the many long hours he sacrificed to help me. To him I dedicate this novice effort.

# I. THE DATE OF THE ORIGIN OF THE UÍ BRIÚÍN BRÉIFNÍ STATE.

TÍRECHÁN'S '*Breviarium*' on the acts of St. Patrick,<sup>15</sup> compiled from earlier sources somewhere about A.D. 700,<sup>16</sup> is the oldest authority we have for the political topography of north-eastern Connacht and the adjoining counties. It was written by a remote kinsman of the Uí Briúín<sup>17</sup> in or near Selca,<sup>18</sup> at which place it definitely locates the ancestral home of the Uí Briúín House—" *Uenit uero Patricius ad Selcam in quo er [ant filii] Briuin.*"<sup>19</sup> The *Tripartite Life of St Patrick*<sup>20</sup> and the genealogies are somewhat more explicit<sup>21</sup>, and agree in placing the seat of Bríón's sons at Duma Shelca (otherwise known as Dumha Chairn Fraoich)<sup>22</sup> close to Carnfree,<sup>23</sup> and not far removed from where the leading line of the Uí Briúín continuously maintained its home. As an Uí Briúín state therefore, the Bréifne kingdom owed its origin to a north-eastward expansion of Connacht dynasts. The dating of that expansion is the first problem which calls for investigation.

Tírechán's memoir is of great importance for our immediate purpose, the more so because its testimony is corroborated by the *Vita Tripartita*, a compilation of later date than the memoir.<sup>24</sup> That part of the latter work which concerns us is based almost wholly on Tírechán. Still it does embody here and there, material which is not to be found in the earlier text. From this, and from the fact that certain details found in '*Breviarium*'

<sup>15</sup> Lib. Ardm., 9 b 1-16 a 40; also publ. *Vita Trip.* II, 302 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Earliest Lives, 12; Gwynn, Lib. Ardm. p. xlv, suggests "probably after 664."

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* 14-15, VT. 24.

<sup>18</sup> Dates, 97, VT. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Lib. Ardm., 12 d 25.

<sup>20</sup> quoted *infra* p. 119.

<sup>21</sup> Genealogies, III, IIIa.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, IIIa.

<sup>23</sup> 3 mls. S.E. of Rath Croghan, and 1 ml. S. of Tulsk, in the townland of Carns, Ogulla parish, bar. and co. of Roscommon, OSL., Co. Rosc., II, 139.140.

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Mac Neill in his paper, *The Origin of the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*, JRSAL, vol. lix, makes the case that "the original text which forms the basis of the extant text" of the *Tripartite Life* was compiled by Tírechán himself, the '*Breviarium*' representing a preliminary essay on the same subject. Miss Mulchrone's well known study, *Die Abfassungszeit und Ueberlieferung der Vita Tripartita*, ZCP., XIV, dates the compilation of the extant version of the *Vita* between 895 and 901 A.D.

are omitted from the 'Vita,' we conclude that in the extracts given below we have both the original, and a revised version of the same narrative. We shall see that complete harmony—from our point of view—exists between the two accounts. We are consequently justified in placing considerable reliance on the information they supply.

*Breviarium.*

(a)

"*Et uenit [i.e. St. Patrick] in Campum Rein . . . Mittens autem Patricius Methbrain ad Fossam Slecht*

(Lib. Ardm. 11 a 36—11 b 10)

"*Finit liber primus in regionibus Nepotum Neill peractus. Incipit .ii. in regionibus Connacht peractus.*

(*ibid.* 11 b 16-18).

"*Uenit ergo Patricius sanctus per alueum Fluminis Sinnæ per Uadum Duorum Auium in Campum Ai.*

(*ibid.*, 11 c 4-6).

(b)

"*Uenit uero Patricius ad Selcam in quo er [ant filii] Briuin*

(*ibid.* 12 e 25-26).

(c)

"*Et exiit ad regiones Callrigi Tremage et fecit aelessiam iuxta Druim Leas . . . et erexit ad Campum Ailmaige, et fundavit aelessiam ibi id est Domnach Ailmaige . . . Et perrexit ad Campum Aine, . . . et uersus est Euoi et in Campum Cethni et*

*Tripartite Life.*

(a)

"*Luid iarom Patricc iTetba tuaiscird . . . Dochóid Patraic iarsin tairinusce do Maig Slécht.*

"*Luith iarom Patraic ícrích Connacht for Snam-dá-én tar-Sinainn. (I, 92).*

(b)

"*Dochóid Patraic iarsin coMag Selce .i. do Dumai Šelce, ocus isand robatar se meic Briain .i. Bolc, Derc, Derthacht, Eichen, Cremthan, Coelcharna, Echaid (I, 106).*

(c)

"*Luid Patraic iarsin hicrich Callraig doDruim Dara balí atá indiu Druim Lías . . . . Táraill leiss isnaib glinnaib sair dú itá indiu cenel Muinremair . . . Luid Patraic sech Druim Cliab oChaisiul hIrre lasna Rossa sair iarMaig Ene . . . .*



*Breviarium.*

*maledixit flumen quod dicitur  
Niger Drobaicum autem benedixit  
. . . Et maledixit aliis fluminibus  
id est Flumini Oingae et Saele . . .  
intrauit in Campum Sereth trans  
amnem Inter Es Ruaid et mare  
et fundauit aeclessiam hi rRaith  
Argi. Et castrametatus est in  
Campo Sereth . . . Et perrexit for  
Bernas Filiorum Conill in Campo  
Tochuir . . . . .  
Peruenit Patricius per Sinonam  
.iii. uicibus et .iii. annos compleuit  
in occidentali plaga ”*

(*ibid.* 15 a 20-15 b 26).

*Tripartite Life.*

*Isann sin mallachais do Duib  
. . . Robennach immorro do  
Drobéiss . . .*

“ *Cobá thri, tra, dochúaid  
Patraic tar Sinaind hitir Conn-  
acht . . . Secht mbliadna dóu  
icprocept do Connachtaibh.  
Forácaib bennachtain léu ocus  
ceilebraiss diib.*

*Luid Patraic do Ess Ruaid ”*  
(I, 144-146).

Patrick is portrayed (a) as working in the neighbourhood of the adjacent parts of the counties Longford and Leitrim. Journeying thence, he *crosses the Shannon* to enter Connacht. At Selca, (b), he is brought into contact with the sons of Brión. Finally, (c), he comes into the adjoining parts of the present counties of Sligo and Leitrim, where is situated the territory of a branch of the Calraige. (In this district, some of which ultimately formed an integral part of the Uí Briún kingdom of Bréifne, the *Vita Tripartita* locates the Cenél Muinremair who are not mentioned by the ‘*Breviarium*.’) Then, his labours in the western province being ended, the Saint passes out of Connacht into the land of the Northern Uí Néill, the boundary being indicated as in the Drowes—Lower Erne region. It is quite clear from both texts that the narrator does not regard Bréifne as the seat of an Uí Briúin lordship.

The question now is, to what period are these texts to be referred? The answer may be obtained by confining our attention to the ‘*Breviarium*.’ We have seen that Gwynn suggests “probably after 664 A.D.” as the time of Tírechán’s writing, while Dr. Mac Neill favours the year 700 (or 701). If we could look with absolute certainty on either of these dates as representing the time to which the traditions preserved in Tírechán’s memoir are referable, we would have very effective support for the whole argument which

is to be developed from the annals. But, it may be argued, the '*Breviarium*' is clearly a collection of older traditions native to their own individual localities and thus, cannot be considered as actually referring to Tírechán's time. It will however, be readily agreed that no particular item in the collection was written down for the first time before a date long subsequent to the death of Patrick (*ob.c.461*), though conceivably some were committed to writing in the lifetime of persons who, as young men, had been contemporaries of the saint, and who, in their old age, either wrote themselves, or told their stories to the actual writers. In a word, the matter embodied in the texts before us may be held to be not older than about A.D. 500.

Our argument from the '*Breviarium*' and the *Tripartite Life* may now be reiterated in concise form. The two works embody detailed traditions, of local origin, as to the Uí Briúin and the political topography of districts ultimately incorporated in the Uí Briúin Bréifni kingdom. These traditions, in their first written form hardly older than the opening of the sixth century, do not reflect the existence of an Uí Briúin state in the Cavan-Leitrim region.

The genealogies carry us one step further. The last common ancestor of the Uí Briúin Bréifni and of the parent stem, was Fergus son of Muiredach Mál (son of Eogan Sreb, son of Dauí Galach, son of Bríón).<sup>25</sup> From Fergna son of Fergus descended the Cavan-Leitrim branch, while from Eochu Tirmcharna son of Fergus descended the ruling sept of Connacht.<sup>26</sup> Tradition makes Dauí Galach and his brothers contemporaries of St. Patrick.<sup>27</sup> Fergna and Eochu Tirmcharna being great-great-grandsons of Dauí Galach, should, therefore have lived about the middle of the sixth century.<sup>28</sup> It is clear that the Uí Briúin Bréifni lordship could not have originated before the branching out of the Uí Briúin in the persons of Fergna and his brother. In other words, c.A.D. 550 is indicated by the genealogies as the earliest possible date by which Bréifne Ua mBriúin could have come into being.

The first point to be made from the evidence of the annals is that, the year 792 can be established as a *terminus ultimus* in any endeavour

<sup>25</sup> Genealogies I-XIII.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, XIV.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, II-III; '*Breviarium*' and *Vita Trip.* as already quoted, FF. quoted Genealogies IIa, note.

<sup>28</sup> This date is tested by the following:

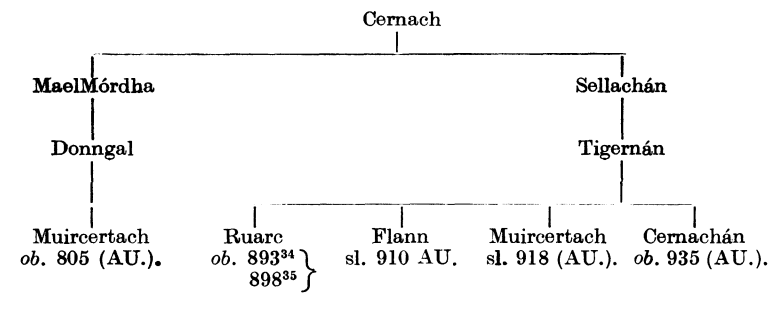
- (a) Aedh son of Eochu Tirmcharna *ob.* 567, AU., C.S., 574, F.M.
- (b) tradition makes Fergna a contemporary of Colmcille, Genealogies, XIIIa.
- (c) by taking one of the earlier Uí Briúin Bréifni dynasts who can be dated (*e.g.* Cernachán brother of Ruarc eponymous ancestor of the Ó Ruaircs), and reckoning backwards.

to fix the time of the rise of Bréifne as an Uí Briúin lordship. Certain objections may be raised to the premises on which that conclusion is to be based, and the first necessity is to consider those objections.

The earliest actual rulers of Bréifne mentioned in the *Annals of Ulster* are,

- (i) Cormac mac Duibh dá Chrích, '*rí Breifni*,' A.D. 791 (=792).<sup>29</sup>
- (ii) Muircertach mac Donngaile, '*rex Breibne*,' A.D. 804 (=805).<sup>30</sup>
- (iii) MaelDúin mac Echtgaile, '*rex virorum Breibne*,' A.D. 821 (=822).<sup>31</sup>
- and (iv) Cernachán mac Tigernán, '*ri Breifne*,' A.D. 930 (=931).<sup>32</sup>

In the examination made below of the information to be gathered from these references, the first three kings here named are held to belong to the Uí Briúin. It may however, be suggested that there is little justification for this, on the grounds (a) that (unlike Tigernán father of Cernachán), neither Cormac, nor MaelDúin, nor their fathers are to be found in the genealogies, and (b) that Muircertach cannot be regarded as the son of the only Donngal named by the genealogists<sup>33</sup>. For the moment the objection to Cormac and MaelDúin may be admitted, but that to Muircertach is debatable, and is perhaps worthy of somewhat detailed discussion. In as short a form as possible the case against Muircertach is as follows. If he were a son of Donngal mac MaelMórdha meic Chernaig—the only Donngal mentioned by the genealogists—he would be a second cousin of Ruarc (eponymous ancestor of the Ó Ruaircs) and the other sons of Tigernán mac Sellachán meic Chernaig. This becomes quite clear when put in tabular form.

<sup>29</sup> 787, FM.<sup>30</sup> 800, FM.<sup>31</sup> *om.* FM.<sup>32</sup> 929, FM.<sup>33</sup> Genealogies, XXIV.<sup>34</sup> FM.<sup>35</sup> CS.

Cernachán and Ruarc were the only sons of Tigernán to die a natural death. Judging by the date of Cernachán's decease Ruarc could not have been more than fifty to sixty years old at his demise. He should therefore have been born somewhere between 830 and 850. The Muircertach mac Donngaile whose obit is noticed (AU.) *sub anno* 805 is thus seen to have died some twenty-five to forty-five years before Ruarc's birth. He died King of Bréifne, that is to say having already attained adult age. In all likelihood then, he was born at least about twenty years before A.D. 805, or in other words, forty-five to sixty-five years before the birth of Ruarc, his own second cousin, which is manifestly absurd.

This objection is readily met. It does not do more than raise the possibility that Muircertach is not to be regarded as a son of Donngal (son of MaelMórdha, son of Cernach). It is not impossible however, that he was, like Ruarc, a great-grandson of Cernach's, for, if we can assume that Muircertach, Donngal and MaelMórdha were born quite early in the lives of their fathers, and that on the other hand, Ruarc, Tigernán and Sellachán were born when their respective fathers had reached late middle age, we can account for practically the whole of the forty-five to sixty-five years interval between the births of Muircertach and Ruarc. Such an assumption no doubt, stretches the argument rather far, but it cannot be entirely disregarded.

The whole problem with regard to Cormac, Muircertach and MaelDúin may be solved if we allow for the moment the arguments against them outlined above, and then view the difficulty thus raised from either of two standpoints. In the first place the objections are readily met if one looks on the three kings named as representing a line, or lines of the Uí Briúin Bréifni which had passed out of the royal succession prior to the compilation of the earliest extant collections of Bréifne genealogies, in which case, they would have been ignored by the compilers. The matter however, is finally disposed of by limiting our attention to the *Annals of Ulster* themselves. All three kings of Bréifne mentioned in AU. before 931 A.D. must be regarded as belonging to the Uí Briúin. Otherwise, the Uí Briúin are to be understood to have replaced an antecedent Bréifne dynasty at as late as a date somewhere between A.D. 792 and 931. As Ó Máille points out, from at least as early as 750 A.D. the Ulster Chronicle supplies records that are contemporary with the events they describe<sup>36</sup>. They might therefore, be expected to afford some indication of so momentous an event as the emerging of the Uí Briúin kingdom of Bréifne, had that

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<sup>36</sup> *The Language of the Annals of Ulster*, Manchester, 1910, §17.

event occurred as late as the period 792-931. In point of fact they give no such indication in their records for the forty years in question. More important still, I have nowhere been able to unearth the slightest tittle of evidence to show that *any* kingdom of Bréifne existed within the historic period, prior to the setting up of the Uí Briúin Bréifni confederation. It must then be maintained that the Connacht dynasts had won a foothold in the Leitrim-Cavan area before A.D. 792.

Two terminal points now stand revealed, the one, c.550 A.D., before which Uí Briúin dominion over Bréifne territory could not possibly have been attained, and the other, 792, when such dominion had already been secured. Somewhere in the intervening two hundred and forty years the foundations of the new kingdom were laid. Here is the only real certainty that examination of this particular problem yields. Endeavours to arrive at a more exact date result in no conclusion which can be absolutely sustained. It is necessary to state this clearly before proceeding to say that I am of opinion that Bréifne Ua mBriúin first came into being at a date not very long before A.D. 792, and almost certainly not earlier than somewhere about 700. Such a contention will, no doubt, meet with a degree of opposition. Its probability can none the less, I think, be fairly well demonstrated.

To begin with, there is a certain amount of information to be gained from an examination of all the annalists' references both to the parent stock, and to the various branches of the Uí Briúin prior to the introduction of surnames. That information however merely confirms conclusions which can be reached by other and simpler means. Hence it is more convenient to limit attention to the most reliable of our medieval chronicles<sup>37</sup>, namely the *Annals of Ulster*, from which the following notices have been extracted.<sup>38</sup>

577, *Iugulatio Aedha mic Echach Tirimcarna . . . la hUi Briuin.*

666, *Dubinnrecht mac Dunchada rex .h. mBriuin Ai moritur.*

743, *Iugulatio Duibdoithre regis nepotum Briuin.*

746, *Ar .H. Briuin in deisceird . . .*

752, *Foirddbe Caillrighe Luirg la uu Briuin.*

754, *Bellum airdd Noiscan inter nepotes Briuin ⁊ genus Coirpri*

757, *Iugulatio Duinn mic Cumuscaigh ri .H. mBriuin in deisceirt.*

758, *Bellum Droma Robaigh inter nepotes Fiachrach ⁊ nepotes Briuin . . .*

766, *Bellum Sruthrae itir .H. Briuin ⁊ Conmaicniu . . .*

<sup>37</sup> The most reliable, that is, of those which give any considerable amount of information about Bréifne.

<sup>38</sup> References are to the corrected, not to the textual dates.

- 775, *Bellum achaidh liag inter nepotes Briuin ⁊ Maine.*  
 787, (a) *Bellum Goli in quo nepotes Briuin uicti sunt*  
       (b) *Ar nepotum Briuin hUmil . . .*  
 796, *Mac Ferggusa ri .H. mBriuin . . .*  
 806, *Connmach iudex nepotum Briuin mortuus est.*  
 812, *Ar Calraighi Luirgg la hU Briuin*  
 818, . . . *Reges nepotum Briuin, id est Diarmait mac Tomalt-*  
       *aigh ⁊ Maelcothaigh filius Fogertaigh . . .*  
 822, . . . *Nepotes Briuin prostrati sunt . . .*  
 830, *Cumbae hUae mBriuin in deiscirt . . .*  
 846, *Connmhach mor mac Coscraigh rex nepotum Briuin . . .*  
 912, *Cleirchen mac Murchada, ri .H. mBriuin Seola . . .*  
 961, *Mac Ercadha ri .H. mBriuin Seola obiit.*  
 988, *Dunlang . . . ⁊ Muirghis . . . do comtuitim in hUib*  
       *Briuin Sinna.*

Taking these entries as they come, we find that for 577 refers simply to the Uí Briúin. The second, by specifying the Uí Briuin Aí, implies that it recognises the existence of other and distinct Uí Briúin. At 743 we have no distinguishing description. The 746 annal definitely mentions the 'Uí Briúin in Deiscirt.' Under the dates 752, 754 we find no differentiation as to branches. In 757 mention is once more made of the Uí Briúin of the South. The notices for the years 758, 766, 775, and one entry for 787, do not distinguish subdivisions. A second entry for the latter date mentions however, the 'Uí Briúin hUmil.' In the annals for 796, 806, and 812 the general sept name alone is given. The 818 record speaks of two kings of the Uí Briúin, thus perhaps referring to branches which are not specified. At 822 the entry refers merely to the '*nepotes Briuin.*' Under the year 830 the 'Uí Briúin in Deiscirt' receive mention once again. At 846 however, the chronicler is content with the simple generic name. The three remaining extracts specify distinct septs. Our list closes with the year 988 because there are no further references until the second half of the eleventh century, when of course, the introduction of surnames has radically altered the whole situation. Altogether, out of the twenty-one annals tabulated, only eight distinguish between specifically named branches of the Uí Briúin, and of these eight, five have reference to the same particular branch.<sup>39</sup> More noteworthy still, the first series of entries to clearly differentiate between independent septs only begins after the year 846. As regards both

<sup>39</sup> I take it that the 'Uí Briúin in Deiscirt' and the 'Uí Briúin Seola' are one and the same.

of these points it must not be forgotten that, with the exception of the first three or four extracts, we are dealing here, in every instance, with records compiled by men who were contemporaries of the events they describe. There must be some explanation then, of the strange lack of precision which characterises these contemporary documents. The explanation probably is, that it was only after the middle of the ninth century that the distinctions between the various Uí Briúinsepts became sufficiently clear to enable contemporary annalists, writing at some distance from the places in question, to differentiate always between the various branches. If that explanation be correct, we could with justification suppose that the general date of the Uí Briúin expansions was not too far removed—say no more than two hundred years or so—from the middle of the ninth century, or in other words was, at the very earliest, somewhere in the region of 650 A.D. (I may be permitted to recur to a point already noticed *i.e.*, that the first suggestion in the *Annals of Ulster* of the existence of different branches is to be found under the year 666).

This supposition is confirmed by something else that emerges from the extracts just quoted, that is, by the fact that, the Uí Briúin as a whole are seen to come really into the limelight only after the middle of the eighth century. At this juncture it is worth while noticing that an identical conclusion may be reached from a scrutiny of the lists of the Kings of Connacht,<sup>40</sup> for we there discover that down to the time of King Flathruae the Uí Fiachrach were strong enough, on quite a number of occasions, to assert successfully their claim to the Connacht throne. It is only after Flathruae's death (779, AU.) that the Uí Briúin are able to limit the succession to their own members.<sup>41</sup> Not until then are they supreme in the lands west of the Shannon. Allowing at the most about one hundred and fifty years, for the period when they first surely, but imperceptibly, commenced to push their way to the forefront, we are led to the conclusion that they are not likely to have begun to emerge at all from their original, narrow confines until somewhere in the neighbourhood of A.D.600. (That they were unlikely to have done so before c.500 seems to be indicated by the fact that the Uí Máine, who did not come from Airghialla before the middle of the fifth century, were able to seize upon territories almost alongside the

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<sup>40</sup> *i.e.* lists from (a) the annals, (b) *The Laud Synchronisms*, ed. Meyer, ZCP., IX, (c) *Synchronismen der Irischen Könige*, ed. Thurneysen, ZCP., XIX, (d) LL., 42, (e) BB., 42, (f) *A Poem on the Kings of Connacht*, ed. Liddell from Rawl. B 502, ZCP., IX, and (g) Giolla na Naomh Ua Duinn's poem on the Kings of Connacht, BB, 49.

<sup>41</sup> See Chap. III.

Uí Briúin homeland).<sup>42</sup> Further, the first natural outlets of the Uí Briúin would have been inside Connacht itself, where there long seems to have been ample room for powerful ruling septs to expand. This is clear from the history of Cairbre Droma Cliabh, Uí Máine, Tír Fhiachrach Muaidhe, Tír Ailella and Tír Amhalgaidh, none of which came into the hands of their historic possessors before the fifth century. The western province seems to have long remained a sparsely populated region, almost a waste land in fact, well deserving the poetic name of 'Olnécmacht.'<sup>43</sup> Of this the old story-teller was well aware when he put the following words in the mouths of the Uí Máine leaders, "*Feucham cia an chruiceadh ina teirce daoine don Bhanba, agus ina lia d' Fhearaibh Bolcc, agus cumhgaidhiom orra e. Ata cuigeadh Chonnacht acc na h-Aithigh Tuathaibh . . .*"<sup>44</sup> The genealogists indeed suggest that the earlier Uí Briúin conquests were in fact, those which they won within the bounds of their own native province, for they embody the tradition that the Uí Briúin Umhaill, Seola, Sinna, etc. all broke off from the parent stem before the branching out of their Bréifne kinsfolk.<sup>45</sup> It has already been seen that c.600 A.D. is the probable date of their first expansions. The acquisition of territory in the Cavan-Leitrim area should therefore, have been after that date.

In the case of a sept which constitutes the dominant element in a particular territory some distance removed from the original homeland of its kinsfolk, the name of the sept, when it becomes the distinctive name of the territory, affords—if it can be dated—an indication of the probable date of the occupation of that territory by that particular sept. Now in Bréifne, Teallach Eachach and Teallach Dúinchadha get their names from Eochu (son of Maenach son of Baithín) and from his second cousin Dúinchadh (son of Dubthach son of Dubh dá Chrich).<sup>46</sup> Furthermore they are called after the first of the Uí Briúin to give their names to parts of Bréifne. We conclude, with a high degree of probability, that the districts in question were not Uí Briúin territory before the period in which the names Teallach Eachach and Teallach Dúinchadha originated.<sup>47</sup> The names are not earlier than c.700<sup>48</sup> which is therefore the probable prior date of the first Uí Briúin conquests in Bréifne.

<sup>42</sup> Hy-Many, p. 3 ff.

<sup>43</sup> See RIA. *Dictionary of the Irish Language* under *écmacht*.

<sup>44</sup> Hy-Many, 9-10.

<sup>45</sup> Genealogies, I<sup>a</sup>, IV, VI, VI<sup>a</sup>, VIII, IX, IX<sup>a</sup>, XI, XII, XIII, XIII<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Genealogies, XVI, XVI<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> cf. Chap. III.

<sup>48</sup> Eochu and Dunchadh being four generations removed from Fergna son of Fergus, *floruit* c.550, should have lived about A.D. 700.



The failure of our annalists to provide anything but the scantiest information about the early history of Cavan and Leitrim is of especial significance when we consider how completely the first beginnings of the Uí Briúin lordship there have been veiled. In its ultimate extent the historic kingdom of Bréifne formed a huge, extremely defensible salient protruding between Ulster and the Southern Uí Néill; a salient which strongly held, could completely dominate two of the three main routes to the North, while being at the same time within easy striking distance of the third;<sup>49</sup> and a salient from which powerful leaders, when allies of the Kings of Connacht, would have Midhe and Brega at their mercy. Here was a kingdom whose very existence could be an extremely grave peril both to Airghialla and to the Northern and Southern Uí Néill. Had it originated in some sudden eruption from out of Connacht leading immediately to the seizure of any considerable extent of territory, it would assuredly have been hopelessly broken, if not utterly destroyed, by one or all of the major states to which it would have been so potent a danger. But, when we turn to the annals, we find that the first north-eastward expansion of the Uí Briúin has completely escaped notice. It has had no reactions of which our chroniclers could tell. The first intimation of the change that we receive is a casual reference, towards the close of the eighth century, to a King of Bréifne. Already by 792 the north-eastern branch of the Uí Briúin is so strong that its ruler is styled monarch of Bréifne; but it does not yet command forces which are a positive menace to Airghialla or to any branch of the great Uí Néill. More than a hundred years must elapse before that is to happen. Then with the coming of the tenth century we suddenly find Bréifne embroiled with Tethba, Midhe, Brega and Cenél Eoghain. War breaks out no less than five times in eighty years.<sup>50</sup> In the circumstances there can be but one explanation. When we first hear of it in 792, the Uí Briúin kingdom in Bréifne was as yet only in its infancy. It cannot therefore have arisen very long before that time. Once more the opening of the eighth century suggests itself as the probable prior date of its foundation.

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<sup>49</sup> In a hitherto unpublished, thesis Colm Ó Lochlainn shows that the three chief roadways leading into the Northern Province were (a) the western coast road crossing the Erne at Ballyshannon, (b) the eastern highway via Dundalk, and (c) a road passing through east Cavan, across Monaghan, and so into the heart of Ulster.

<sup>50</sup> *v.* Chap. III.

## II. THE PEOPLES OF BRÉIFNE AND THE BRÉIFNE BORDERLANDS BEFORE THE COMING OF THE UÍ BRIÚIN.

TO give, within the limits of a study such as this, a really adequate account of the peoples who inhabited Bréifne and the Bréifne borderlands before the advent of the Uí Briúin is an absolute impossibility. For some of these early peoples, *e.g.*, the Fir Domnann, the amount of positive information to hand is so negligible, and so confused by the accidents of story telling, that any attempt to establish or refute their actual historicity, or to define the extent of their territories, would entail a careful analysis of all our available sources, and that on a scale disproportionately elaborate for the general project here undertaken. For others, the bulk of the material at our disposal belongs to times long subsequent to the opening of the eighth century, to a period that is, when, in their manifold ramifications their ruling families had spread far and wide as subordinate, but still powerful groups within the Uí Briúin Bréifni sphere of influence. As an inevitable consequence, any desire for a thorough examination of their earlier history, and any hope of attempting to fix the exact bounds of their territories as they were prior to the coming of the Connacht overlords, have had to be abandoned. The scope of this chapter therefore is confined to establishing, in a general way, the territories of those older population groups whose existence was a certain, indisputable fact within the historic period. This reduces the number of peoples and petty states studied to eleven namely the Gailenga (Gailing) Móra, Luigne, Cairpre Gabra, Conmaicne Réin, Masraige, Calraige, the three Uí Néill kingdoms west of the Erne (Cenél Cairpre, Cenél Enda and Cenél Laegaire), Dartraige Coininnse and Fir Fhernmaige.

*Gailenga Móra*: The name Gailenga belongs to the class of plural folk-names which goes back to prehistoric times.<sup>51</sup> The peoples who bore it were tributary communities according to the *Book of Rights*,<sup>52</sup>

Relying on the story of the battle of Crinna, and on genealogical tradition, Prof. MacNeill<sup>53</sup> has reached the conclusion that, when they seized Tara, and established the kingdom of Midhe, the Connacht kings planted (c. 250–300 A.D.) certain frontier districts with colonies of subject peoples brought from Connacht, so as to

<sup>51</sup> Population Groups, pp. 59 ff.

<sup>52</sup> p. 188.

<sup>53</sup> Colonisation.

protect their newly won conquests from those whom they had dispossessed. Prominent among these buffer colonies was that of the Gailenga. The territory of these colonists is to-day in part represented by the barony of Morgallion (*Machaire Gaileng*), Co. Meath. But it stretched far beyond the bounds of Meath, for it included the mountainous district of Sliabh Guaire.<sup>54</sup> The name Sliabh Guaire survived down to O'Donovan's time, and was originally applied to the greater part of the baronies of Castlerahan and Clankee (and possibly also to portions of the barony of Tullygarvey) Co. Cavan.<sup>55</sup> It included Loch Ramor—"Loch Muinremhoir . . . hi Slebh Guaire"<sup>56</sup>—and extended at least as far north as the Annagh River watershed in Clankee, for Loch Suidhe Odhráin was in it.<sup>57</sup> In a note to his edition of the 'Four Masters,' O'Donovan<sup>58</sup> informs us that the name Suidhe Odhráin survives in 'Syoran' or 'Seeoran,' a townland in the parish of Knockbride, barony of Clankee, and about one mile west of Upper Loch Skeagh. Thus, all this hilly end of east Cavan would seem to have belonged to the Gailenga, a conclusion that is to some degree supported by one of the Dindshenchas poets who calls it "*slebe gannardda Gaileng*,"<sup>59</sup> as well as by the fact that the Gailenga are actually described as 'of Sliabh Guaire.'<sup>60</sup>

*Luigne*: Alongside the Gailenga was situated the Luigne colony, also a tributary people with a name of prehistoric origin.<sup>61</sup> Like the Gailenga they claimed descent from Cormac Gaileng. In consequence of this, and for reasons which will appear below, I think we are justified, not merely in regarding them as a branch of the Gailenga, but also in concluding that, in conjunction with the Gailenga proper, they constituted a single political confederacy.<sup>62</sup> As Dr. MacNeill points out,<sup>63</sup> there was a close political bond between the two groups, and the annals show that, while each had its own dynastic line, kings of the Luigne ruled over the Gailenga, and kings of the Gailenga over the Luigne.

<sup>54</sup> Glosses in *Féilire Oengusso Céili Dé*, (ed. Stokes, London, Henry Bradshaw Society, 1905) and in *Féilire Huí Gormáin* (ed. Stokes, Henry Bradshaw Society 1895) *sub* 13 Oct.

<sup>55</sup> FM. I., p. 11, note z.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, A.M. 2859.

<sup>57</sup> AU., An. Tig., ALC., FM. *sub* anno 1054, CS. *sub* 1052.

<sup>58</sup> FM. *loc. cit.*

<sup>59</sup> *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. Gwynn (RIA., *Todd Lecture Series*), Pt. IV, 164; cf. Tempest and Mac Neill, *An Ancient Poet's View*, CLAJ., VII, 457, 464, 466, 467.

<sup>60</sup> BB., 195 a 15; for further notes on the Gailenga v. Top. Poems, *passim*, and *Book of Rights*, 188, note v.

<sup>61</sup> *Book of Rights* p. 186, and Population Groups, *passim*.

<sup>62</sup> cf. *Book of Rights*, 103, 104, notes h and i.

<sup>63</sup> Colonisation.

Professor MacNeill<sup>64</sup> locates the Luigne territory in the baronies of Upper and Lower Kells, Co. Meath, and suggests that it "may have extended into Co. Cavan." That it did so extend, and that there was no very clear line of demarcation between it and the lands of the Gailenga, is, I think, sufficiently clear from the following references: (a) "*Loch Muinremhoir hi Luighnibh hi Slebh Guaire*"<sup>65</sup>; (b) "*Toghal innsi locha Muinremair la Maelsechnaill for fianlach mar di maccaib bais Luigne ⁊ Galeng robatar oc indriudh na tuath more Gentilium*."<sup>66</sup> The latter quotation is particularly significant. It seems to show that the Luigne and Gailenga raiders in question had been plundering Meath, and that their headquarters were in Cavan. Presumably therefore, in the year 846 the main stronghold of their kinsfolk lay in the latter county. Further, the reference quoted from the 'Four Masters' shows that Sliabh Guaire was not the sole possession of the Gailenga proper, but also in part belonged to the Luigne. Nowhere can I find any evidence that offers a clear indication of where exactly the Luigne kingdom ended, and the Gailenga kingdom began. It is interesting to note that, according to tradition, the Gailenga, Luigne, and Saithne together constituted one *tricha cé*.<sup>67</sup> In his papers on the 'Black Pig's Dyke,'<sup>68</sup> Kane produces evidence which tends to show that, in the interval between the Connacht seizure of Tara and the invasion of Cúiced Ulad by the three Collas, all that part of Cavan east of a line passing from Loch Sheelin via Slieve Glah to a point on the Monaghan boundary between Upper Loch Erne and Sherlock, had been cut off from the province to which it had heretofore belonged and annexed to the kingdom of Tara. "I have often argued," says Prof. MacNeill,<sup>69</sup> "in favour of Kane's view that the Ulster frontier, before the Airgialla invasion, ran from L. Boderg to L. Gowna, L. Kinale, and L. Sheelan, thence northward to Sliabh gCleath, until it joined the Worm Ditch at its western end, then bent eastward and south-eastward along the Cavan border . . . This would imply that the kingdom of Emain in the defensive period preceding its overthrow had lost the eastern half of Co. Cavan, but had retained control of the western half; in other words, that the kingdom of Tara had been able to seize and hold a wedge of territory with its base on the north-western bounds of Co.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> FM. AM.2859.

<sup>66</sup> AU. *sub anno* 846; cf. FM. *sub* 845.

<sup>67</sup> Tricha Cét, p. 217.

<sup>68</sup> *The Black Pig's Dyke*, PRIA., vol. XXVI, Section C, and *Additional Researches in the Black Pig's Dyke*, *ibid.*, vol. XXXII, Section C.

<sup>69</sup> Colonial Frontier.

Meath, and its apex near Clones.”<sup>70</sup> There are no grounds, that I know of, to justify us in rejecting this view. If we accept it, it leads to the conclusion that all of east Cavan as annexed by Midhe, i.e., the south-eastern parts of the baronies of Clanmahon and Upper Loughtee, the whole of Castlerahan, most, if not the whole of Clankee, together with an uncertain amount of Tullygarvey, all constituted Luigne-Gailenga territory, in part peopled by the Luigne and Gailenga themselves, and in part by the vassal communities subject to them.<sup>71</sup> There may be objections to such a conclusion, but at least this much is certain, that the Luigne and Gailenga held all Cavan east of a line from Loch Sheelin to Shercock, and that we know of no other prominent peoples who could have held the lands between that line and the Ulaid frontier as already described.

*Cairpre Gabra*: Some time between the fifth and seventh centuries North Tethba became the lordship of a sept whose rulers claimed descent from Coirpre son of Niall of the Nine Hostages. This territory, henceforth known as Cairpre (Coirpre, Cairbre) Gabra (Cairbre Ua gCiardha etc.)<sup>72</sup> filled the gap between the Luigne-Gailenga colony to the east and the Conmaicne Réin lordship to the north-west. As Prof. MacNeill justifiably points out,<sup>73</sup> before it became a real Uí Néill possession, this part of Midhe presumably belonged to a frontier colony of the same status as those we have just discussed. In this regard it cannot be altogether without significance that Mac Firbhisigh, in his *Book of Genealogies*, describes one of the branches of the Gailenga as the “Gaileanga of North Teathfa.”<sup>74</sup>

In all probability at the opening of the eighth century Cairpre was of very limited extent. The vital centre was at Granard,<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup> In this respect it is of interest to note the extent of Midhe as described by Keating, FF. I, 112, 114, cf. ‘*A Fragment used by Keating*,’ ed. Walsh, *Archivium Hibernicum* I.

<sup>71</sup> Some of these *aithech* communities are named in Gen. Tracts I, A 112, 113, Ba 15, Bc 8, 9.

<sup>72</sup> OG. following O’Donovan wrongly locates Cairbre Ua gCiardha in the barony of Carbury, Co. Kildare. Actually it was identical with Cairpre Gabra.

<sup>73</sup> Colonisation.

<sup>74</sup> (a) Mac Firb., 575.

(b) Here we have an additional reason for supposing that the Luigne-Gailenga territories in the north of Midhe were of very considerable extent. It is worthy of notice

(i) that, according to one of the additional poems in the *Book of Rights* (p. 246), the territories of the Gailenga, Conmaicne Réin and Uí Briúin Bréifne were conterminous, and

(ii) that, according to Gen. Tracts I, *loc. cit.*, there was another branch of the Luigne in Moygoish (Uí Mac Uais) Co. Westmeath.

<sup>75</sup> Vita Trip. I, 90.

but Ardagh lay without the southern frontier.<sup>76</sup> Judging by the way its rulers ultimately succumbed to the Ó Cuinns, Ó Fearghails and other Conmaicne families, it was probably never a really strong state, and possibly did not include the most northerly portion of the modern barony of Granard, though the north-western frontier in part may have followed the line of the Carn Clonhugh hills (anciently called Sliabh Cairpri) as far as Loch Gowna. Two of the *aithechthuath* communities who dwelt within or near its borders are known to us by name, viz. Tuath Airbre "in Tethba" and Tuath Glasraige "in Cairbre, round Loch Silenn."<sup>77</sup>

*Conmaicne Réin*: North-west of Cairpre lay the lands of the Conmaicne Réin. Dr. MacNeill's view that here also was a frontier guard of Connacht origin<sup>78</sup> receives a certain measure of support from the tradition, preserved by this people themselves that, in a time of great need, they had migrated from their homeland in Galway, and had settled round Fenagh in the barony of Leitrim.<sup>79</sup> But if Kane's view<sup>80</sup> be sound, that the Ulster frontier to the west as it stood after the fall of Tara, was marked by the line of the upper Shannon as far south as Loch Bodergh, then the Conmaicne Réin colony must have been of later origin than the Luigne-Gailenga settlements, and must represent a second stage in the disintegration of the kingdom of Emain.

In the *Book of Rights* (p. 100) the Conmaicne as a whole are regarded as tributary peoples. According to the genealogists<sup>81</sup> they derived their name from Lugaid Conmac son of Oirbsen Már. To him they traced their descent through Fergus mac Róig, in whose person they are introduced into the Milesian genealogical synthesis.<sup>82</sup>

It is doubtful if the exact extent of the Conmaicne Réin territories, as they were at the opening of the eighth century, can ever be satisfactorily determined. The reason of this is, that the evidence which has come down to us dates almost entirely from the time when certain of the leading sub-septs of this branch of the Conmaicne had spread in all directions in South and North Leitrim, over most of Co. Longford, and even into Co. Westmeath. The versions of the Conmaicne Réin genealogies contained in the Books of Ballymote and Fenagh give elaborate accounts of the later ramifications of all

<sup>76</sup> *op. cit.* 86.

<sup>77</sup> Lists of the *aithechthuatha*, Gen. Tracts. I.

<sup>78</sup> Colonisation.

<sup>79</sup> Fen. 175 ff., 182 ff.

<sup>80</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>81</sup> Rawl. B 502, 161a-b, BB. 159, ff., Fen. 382, ff.

<sup>82</sup> See *Celtic Ireland*, 47.

their sub-septs, but not the slightest clue as to the location of any one of them. Even if they did provide such a clue it would avail us little in dealing with the problem immediately before us, for in the period just prior to the Uí Briúin invasion of Bréifne it is unlikely that the Conmaicne territories extended much beyond the bounds of South Leitrim. Almost the only information at our disposal is the vague indication supplied by Tírechán<sup>83</sup> that St. Patrick journeyed directly from Cairpre to Magh Réin, and that the Shannon formed the frontier between Magh Réin and Connacht. But nowhere is the exact line of demarcation between Conmaicne Réin and Cairpre even suggested. No more can safely be said than that it must have been somewhere in the adjoining parts of Longford and Leitrim. It seems obvious however, that from fairly early historic times the Conmaicne were the dominant people in the baronies of Leitrim, Carrigallen and Mohill. The approximate extent of their original domains within these territories can, perhaps, be inferred from certain place-names there. First of all the name Magh Réin itself is probably derived from Loch Reane near Fenagh.<sup>84</sup> Fenagh was called Fídnacha Máighe Réin<sup>85</sup> and, therefore, presumably in the plain properly so called. Sliabh an Iarainn sometimes went by the name Sliabh Comaicne.<sup>86</sup> East of Carrick-on-Shannon were Feda (?=Coillte) Conmaicne,<sup>87</sup> 'the Woods of Commaicne.' Cloone river and village in the barony of Mohill probably recall the name of Cluain Conmaicne. Away to the north, on the Dromahaire-Tullyhaw border is the tiny Munter Eolus Loch, named after the most famous of the Leitrim sub-septs of the Conmaicne Réin.<sup>88</sup> To the north-east, Magh Sleacht, in the Ballymagauran—Lake Garadice district, while probably dependent on the Conmaicne, was outside the Conmaicne territories proper. (See Masraige below).

[NOTE : The real difficulty with regard to the Conmaicne Réin is to define their south-eastern frontier, which may have cut off a considerable portion of Longford from Tethba. It has already been remarked that Cairpre Gabra possibly did not include the northern portion of the barony of Granard. One may in fact hazard the guess that Cairpre was really rather limited in extent, for tradition makes North Tethba and Bregmaine together constitute one *tricha céd*.<sup>89</sup> (As against this there is of course, the fact that Cairpre itself alone is also described as forming a *tricha céd*.<sup>90</sup> However, the confusion

<sup>83</sup> 'Breviarium,' Lib. Ardm., 11a.

<sup>84</sup> Not from Loch Rinn=Loch Airinn (Oirinn).

<sup>85</sup> Fen. *passim*; v. OG. *s.v.*

<sup>86</sup> e.g. Gen. Tracts I, 198, 200; "Sliab Conmaicne Condacht," *Book of Lecan*, 271 a 15.

<sup>87</sup> OG.

<sup>88</sup> In later days the name Conmaicne Réin when denoting a territory is often seen to apply only to the lordship of Muintir Eoluis.

<sup>89</sup> *Tricha Cét*, 217.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*

here may, perhaps, be interpreted as revealing absence of exact knowledge of the extent of Cairpre.) Further, the *Annals of Ulster* under the year 766 record a defeat of the Conmaicne at a place called Sruthair, the victors being the Uí Briúin.<sup>91</sup> This battle is generally taken to be the first distinct evidence we have of Uí Briúin aggression east of the Shannon, and O'Donovan<sup>92</sup> identifies the site of the battle with Abbeyshrule on the Inny. As Dr. MacNeill points out, this is apparently "too far south, and Sruthair is a frequent name in Irish topography."<sup>93</sup> Assuming that the battle took place in Longford,<sup>94</sup> it is rather in the nature of a coincidence (a), that there was a Sruthair in the barony of Moydow some ten or twelve miles north-west of Abbeyshrule, where there was a ford crossing the Shannon,<sup>95</sup> and (b), that, according to the Ordnance Survey maps, in some of its reaches the Camlin River is called by the name 'Rhine.' Is it possible that this represents the original *Rén*, *Rian*, from which Magh Réin etc. derived? In the course of time most of Longford fell into the hands of Conmaicne rulers. Can it be that even in the eighth century the Conmaicne territory extended eastwards well into that country?]

*Masraige*: Magh Slecht was the home of the Masraige.<sup>96</sup> Once more we are dealing with folk whose name is of a prehistoric order,<sup>97</sup> but this time the folk belongs to the *aithechthuatha*,<sup>98</sup> that is to say, was apparently one of the oldest communities in Ireland. These Masraige preserved their individuality at least as late as the second half of the fifth century, and perhaps even down to the eighth century, if the lists of the plebeian folk-groups are in fact, based on documents which go back to that time, and which dealt with contemporary existing population groups.<sup>100</sup> Their territory ultimately fell into Uí Briúin hands and they disappeared from history.

*Calraige*: North-west of the Conmaicne Réin, and separated from them by the Shannon and Loch Allen, were the territories of a group of Calraige communities. These Calraige were like the Masraige in that not only were they bearers of an ancient name,<sup>101</sup> but were also of the *aithechthuatha*.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>91</sup> cf. An. Tig., RC. XVII, 263, FM. sub 761. <sup>92</sup> FM. loc. cit. <sup>93</sup> VT., 15.

<sup>94</sup> Of course I have as yet been able to find no reason why the battle may not have been between branches of the Uí Briúin and Conmaicne living west of the Shannon, and have been fought at Shrúle, near Loch Mask. This problem will only be settled when the pedigrees of the opposing kings have been traced. So far as I have been unable to unearth them.

<sup>95</sup> See OG. under *Grellach Sruthra*, and *Inis an tSruthro*.

<sup>96</sup> The most successful endeavour to define the relative positions of Magh Rein and Mach Slecht will be found in Dalton's paper on Cromm Cruaich.

<sup>97</sup> Population Groups, 67, ff. et passim.

<sup>98</sup> Lists of the *aithechthuatha*, Gen. Tracts, I; for a definition of the status of the plebeian folks see Prof. Mac Neill's introduction to the latter work, p. vi.

<sup>99</sup> FM. sub A.D. 464, Fen., 88.

<sup>100</sup> See above.

<sup>101</sup> Population Groups, ut. cit.

<sup>102</sup> Gen. Tracts I, 107. It is indeed strange to notice, now that we have reached the westernmost parts of Bréifne, how much of that territory before the coming of the Uí Briúin, was the home of neighbouring peoples which must be numbered amongst the last of the more ancient communities of our island to be submerged by prominent ruling stocks of the medieval period.



At the opening of the eighth century they appear to have been spread over all North Leitrim and a very considerable proportion of Co. Sligo. This area formed part of the over-kingdom of Connacht according to the '*Breviarium*' and the *Tripartite Life*.<sup>103</sup> Having given an account of St. Patrick's acts in the Sligo-Killaspugbrone district, the latter text<sup>104</sup> immediately proceeds to relate an anecdote concerning the Calraige of Cúl Chernadan. Judging by other references to Cúl Chernadan (Cúl Cherna)<sup>105</sup> either this anecdote is misplaced, or else the defining term 'Cúli Cernadan' is an error. If the latter be the case, the Calraige intended are probably those situated in the Loch Gill district. Next comes a digression telling of an accident which befell Patrick at the River Boyle, and of the treatment he received at the hands of Cenél macc nEircc. (As Dr. MacNeill remarks,<sup>106</sup> there is uncertainty, both in the '*Breviarium*'<sup>107</sup> and *Tripartite Life*, as to the exact place these territories should occupy in the order of narration). Thereafter the saint is described as journeying to the Calraige country about Drumlease,<sup>108</sup> called 'Callrige Tremage' in the '*Breviarium*,' (otherwise known as 'Calraige Locha Gile,' 'Calraige Droma Cliab,' etc.),<sup>109</sup> and the name of which is preserved in that of the parish of Calraighe adjoining Loch Gill, in the barony of Carbury Co. Sligo.<sup>110</sup> According to the *Vita Tripartita* he next visited Cenél Muinremair "in the Glens eastward" from Drumlease, where he founded Domnach Sratha,<sup>111</sup> while the "*Breviarium*" portrays him as going to Ailmág<sup>112</sup>—"Ailmag la Calraige"<sup>113</sup>—in which he founded Domnach Ailmáige, the name of which is recalled by that of the present townland of Donaghmore (adjoining the town of Manorhamilton) in the parish of Cloonclare and barony of Dromahaire, Co. Leitrim.<sup>114</sup> Then, according to both texts, he travelled to the coastal plains in the neighbourhood of the rivers Duff and Drowes.<sup>115</sup> It is evident that the 'Ailmág' of the '*Breviarium*' and the 'Cenél Muinremair in the Glens' of the

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<sup>103</sup> See Chap. I, above, pp. 119, 120.

<sup>104</sup> *op. cit.* I, 141-142.

<sup>105</sup> *v.* OG.

<sup>106</sup> VT, 22, 23.

<sup>107</sup> *v.* Lib. Ardm., 15 a 17-19.

<sup>108</sup> See above p. 119.

<sup>109</sup> See OG. under *Calraige*, *C. Droma Cliab*, *C. Laithim*, *C. Locha Gile*, *C. Mor*.

<sup>110</sup> See *Geinealach Chorca Laidhe* (ed. O'Donovan in the *Miscellany of the Celtic Society*, Dublin, 1849), p. 28 and Top. Poems, p. XXXVII.

<sup>111</sup> *Vita Trip.* I; 144-146.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted above p. 119.

<sup>113</sup> OG. under *Ailmag*.

<sup>114</sup> OG. 352.

<sup>115</sup> *v.* OG. under *Machaire Eaba*, *Mag Aine*, *Mag Cetni*.

*Tripartite Life* have reference to the same general locality, and that, the Domnach Ailmáige of the former is to be equated with the Domnach Sratha of the latter. Further, since St. Patrick is supposed to have ended his labours in these parts by coming to Euoi (Machaire Eaba), Druim Chliab, Caisel Irre, na Rossa, Mag Ene (Aine, Magh Cetni), and the rivers Dub and Drobes, his itinerary from Drumlease, as envisaged by the narrators, must have swung—broadly speaking—east, north, northwest, west and north-east in a great half-circle taking in all the northern part of the barony of Dromahaire and the whole of the barony of Rosclogher. Thus in the phrase “*Tárait leiss isnaib glinnib sair*”<sup>116</sup> the word *sair* is to be interpreted as applying only to the outset of the journey described. This obvious fact together with the location of Domnach Ailmáige enable us to refute Stoke’s location of Cenél Muinremair (which is manifestly absurd in any case)<sup>117</sup> and to identify “*na glinna*” with the group of valleys including Glenboy, Glenfarne, Glenaniff, Glenade and Glencar in the baronies of Dromahaire and Rosclogher; in a word, it is justifiable to infer that these two texts regard the Calraige as the dominant people of all that part of Co. Leitrim which lies west of the Shannon. In so doing, they receive a certain measure of support from other sources. The Bodleian manuscript *Rawlinson B. 502* has an important genealogical tract which is possibly based on materials dating from the Old Irish period. This tract describes the Calraige of these regions as “*trebul Challaigí fri lochaib Éirne aniar*” which, we may interpret as ‘the threefold Callraigi whose territories stretch from the Erne lakes westward.’<sup>118</sup> The main extant recensions of the Calraige genealogies<sup>119</sup> regard as one folk the ‘Calraige of Loch Gill’ and the Dartraige of North Leitrim, a tradition that is adopted in the topographical poems of Ó Dubhagáin and Ó hUidhrin.<sup>120</sup> The territory of the Calraige, as distinct from that of their Dartraige kinsfolk, was destined to pass at an early date into the hands of the Uí Briúin,<sup>121</sup> and from it the Uí Briúin sept of the Uí Cearbhaill Chalraige<sup>122</sup> took its distinctive name. Dartraige, however, remained directly subject to its own old ruling stock<sup>123</sup> as a subordinate lordship within the Uí Briúin kingdom. From this circumstance it became known as “Dartraige Meg Fhlannchaidh,” a name which

<sup>116</sup> Vita Trip. I, 144.

<sup>117</sup> *op. cit.* Index of Places.

<sup>118</sup> *op. cit.* 143 a 41-42; cf. *Top. Poems*, 56, ll. 5-10.

<sup>119</sup> *Geinealach Chorca Laidhe*, 26, 28, BB. 200 a, *Book of Uí Máine*, 342.

<sup>120</sup> *Top. Poems*, 56.

<sup>121</sup> The last Calraige king of these territories *ob.* 791 (=792) AU.

<sup>122</sup> *v. Genealogies*, XXXIV, XXXIVa.

<sup>123</sup> Calraige genealogies *ut cit.*, *Top. Poems* &c.

was applied to the whole barony of Rosclogher.<sup>124</sup> The complete and rapid submergence of all these wide territories under the Uí Briúin is strikingly demonstrated by the fact that the *Book of Rights*, compiled about the beginning of the tenth century,<sup>125</sup> absolutely ignores the existence of Dartraige.

*Cairpre Droma Cliabh, Cenél Laegaire and Cenél Enda* : According to the Rawlinson tract already mentioned<sup>126</sup> "the following are the septs which are west of Erne lakes namely the septs of the Uí Néill—which are nearest to the lakes—as follows, Cenél Cairpre meic Néill and Cenél Laegaire meic Néill and [Cenél] Ennae meic Néill. West of *them* are Callraigi Mór and Luigne, *tuatha* of *aithechs*, which are considered as being in bondage (*i n-geillni*), and are not [therefore] reckoned among the Connachta. The Uí Ailella, [however], are not reckoned among the Connachta because they are descended from a free brother of Niall and Brian as we have said. All of these, one with another, constitute the *teóra Connachta*. These are the *tuatha* which are west of the lakes [of the Erne]; east of the lakes, however, are the 'Two Nialls' and the 'Airgialla.'

Here we have information of the highest importance regarding the political topography of the lands immediately west of the River Erne and its lakes before they fell under the sway of Ailech and Airgialla, and of the North-west Cavan—North Leitrim area before the coming of the Uí Briúin. The political distributions described are very clear; in the north, from west to east, stretched the three Uí Néill territories, to the south, and southwest<sup>127</sup> of which lay the lands of the Calraige, which reached as far south as the northern boundaries of the Luigne and Uí Ailella domains. Cenél Cairpre has given its name to the modern barony of Carbury, Co. Sligo; Cenél Enna has been identified by O'Donovan with the territory later more usually known as Tuath Rátha, which included the whole of the barony of Magheraboy, and probably the adjoining parts of the barony of Clanawley.<sup>128</sup> Since these three septs between them are evidently represented as occupying all the lands nearest the Erne lakes, the Cenél Laegaire territories must have included at least the remainder of Clanawley and the whole of the barony of Knockinny. The country of the Luigne and Uí Ailella

<sup>124</sup> O'Donovan, *Top. Poems*, p. xxxvii.

<sup>125</sup> *Celtic Ireland*, p. 86.

<sup>126</sup> *op. cit.*, 143 a 6-14.

<sup>127</sup> 'West' according to the tract, which however, must not be literally interpreted.

<sup>128</sup> v. OG., OSL. for Co. Fermanagh, *Book of Rights*, p. 120; cf. Gein Fearmanach.

is to-day in part represented by the baronies of Leyney and Tirerrill. The Calraige must, therefore, have been the dominant people of the whole southern half of the barony of Carbury, and of all of the baronies of Dromahaire and Rosclogher.

There is one other interesting feature about this Rawlinson tract. It preserves for us a clear tradition of which we find many traces in early historical lore,<sup>129</sup> namely, that at a period subsequent to the fall of Emain, but not yet been accurately determined, the line of the Erne formed the north-east boundary of Connacht. Prof. MacNeill has suggested to me that the original of this tract may date from the eighth century. If that suggestion could be established as correct, then we would have further support for the view put forward in the preceding chapter, since Uí Briúin are clearly not regarded as rulers of any territory in these regions. In the *Book of Rights*, Tuath Ratha is reckoned as part of the over-kingdom of Ailech; the same seems to be true of Cenél Cairpre, but there is no specific mention of Cenél Laegaire.<sup>130</sup> Seemingly it is included in the Airgialla sub-kingdom of Fir Manach. We know nothing, however, of the exact date at which Fermanagh, west of the Erne, was incorporated by Airgialla.

*Fir Fhernmaige and Dartraige Coininnse*: Among the major subdivisions of Airgialla was the territory of Cremthainne or Uí Cremthainn (first mentioned in the *Annals of Ulster* at 717 A.D.), whose dynasties claimed descent from Colla Fo Chrí. According to Dr. MacNeill this territory would "appear to have comprised the southern and western parts of Co. Monaghan, the Clogher district in Tyrone, and so much of Fermanagh as lies between these and the Erne."<sup>131</sup> The Cremthainne districts of south and west Monaghan comprised the kingdoms of Dartraige Coininnse (first mentioned in the *Annals of Ulster* under 998) and Fir Fhernmaige (first mentioned in the same annals at the year 698) bordering on north-east Cavan. The names of these two kingdoms survive still in the names of the baronies of Dartry and Farney, Co. Monaghan, but the area of their territories was considerably larger than that of the baronies, and they also appear to have been conterminous. We have already seen that east Cavan was largely, if not wholly, the territory of Luigne and Gailenga colonies, the exact northern limits of whose lordships have not been determined. It is possible that they were conterminous with the Dartraige-Fernmag domains, in which case the boundary between

<sup>129</sup> *c.g.* AU. *sub.* 817=818 A.D.

<sup>130</sup> *op. cit.*, 120; cf. Mac Neill, *Celtic Ireland*, 89.

<sup>131</sup> VT., 31.

them would seem to have been somewhere just inside Co. Cavan or along the Monaghan-Cavan boundary.

Here we conclude our examination of the earlier peoples of Bréifne and the Bréifne borderlands. The sum-total of our knowledge amounts to this : in the time of the Pentarchy, all the Bréifne area east of the Shannon belonged to Cóiced Ulad ; after the establishment of the kingdom of Tara, east Cavan was planted by Luigne-Gailenga colonies brought thither from Connacht, whose territories covered the baronies of Castlerahan and Clankee, and possibly, also most of Tullygarvey, together with much of Upper Loughtee ; at a somewhat later period South Leitrim fell into the hands of similar colonists, known as the Conmaicne Réin ; north-east of them were the Masraige, an ancient folk, whose territories may have ranged over a considerable portion of the baronies of Tullyhaw, Tullyhunco and Lower Loughtee ; Leitrim west of the Shannon seems always to have formed part of Connacht, and, at the opening of the eighth century formed the territory of the Calraige and Dartraige, who also held large areas in the adjoining districts of North Sligo ; to the north and north-west, the Bréifne marches were conterminous with the Uí Néill septs of Cenél Cairpre, Cenél Enna and Cenél Laegaire, while to the north-east they bordered on the Airgialla kingdom of Cremthainne, which, like the Uí Néill lordships already mentioned, originated after the final overthrow of the kingdom of Emain ; of the parts of Bréifne round Loch Oughter and Slieve Glah we really know nothing whatsoever.

(To be continued).