Echtrae Chonlai is between paganism and Christianity, embodied by the druid and woman respectively, and Conlae's dilemma about giving up his world, family and friends for the promise of everlasting life is highly germane to monastic ideals.

In his famous *Expositio in canticum canticorum* (Verbraken, 1963) Gregory the Great indulges in remarkable flights of fancy to squeeze spiritual edification from the exuberantly erotic Song of Songs, and begins the following exposition of his basic approach with remarks highly germane to the notion of *immram* or *echtrae*: "after the human race was expelled from the joys of paradise, coming into that wandering of the present life it has a heart blind to spiritual understanding. If this blind heart were to be told by the divine voice 'follow God' or 'love God', as it is told in the Law, once sent abroad and cold through the torpor of unbelief it would not grasp what it heard. Therefore, the divine discourse talks to the torpid and cold soul through certain figures about things that it knows and thus secretly recommends to it a love that it does not know (par. 1) For divine sentiments are clothed in known things, by which allegories are made, and, when we recognise the outer words, we arrive at the inner meaning (par. 2). For hence it is that in this book, which is written in the Song of Songs, are set words as if of carnal love, so that the soul, freshened by familiar discourse, may wax hot and through words about lower love may be stirred to higher love. For in this book kisses are mentioned, breasts are mentioned, cheeks are mentioned, thighs are mentioned, and in these words the holy description is not to be mocked but the greater mercy of God is to be contemplated (par. 3) . . . And one should know that in this book four speaking persons are introduced, namely the groom, the bride, young women with the bride and groups of companions with the groom. For the bride is the perfect Church, the groom is the Lord, the young women with the bride are initiate souls reaching maturity through new study. Moreover, the companions of the groom are either angels, who have often come from Him to appear to men, or indeed certain perfect men in the Church, who know how to announce the truth to men. But those who are individually young women or companions, are all together the bride because they are all together the Church" (par. 10).

Thus Gregory derives a spiritual message from ostensibly unedifying externals and introduces us to a central tenet of medieval allegory and typology, namely that important women in the Bible can usually be taken to symbolize or prefigure the Church. Moreover, it appears that "the Canticle of Canticles was held in particular esteem in early Ireland among the Céli Dé. In the *Teaching of Mael Ruain* we read that 'when a person was at the point of death, or immediately after the soul had left him, the *Canticum Salomonis* was sung over him. The reason for this practice was that in that canticle is signified the union of the Church and every Christian soul – *ceangal na heaglaise agus gacha hanma Criostuidhe*'" (McNamara, 1987, 105). A nice example of this allegorical approach to women is provided by Isidore in the case of the book of Esther, "in which it is written that the same queen in the image of the Church of God snatched the people from servitude and death, and by the death of Aman, who is interpreted as iniquity, the fame of that day is transmitted to posterity (*in quo eadem regina sub figura ecclesiae Dei populum a servitute et morte eripuisse scribitur, atque interfecto Aman, qui interpretatur iniquitas, diei celebritas in posteros mittitur*)" (*Etym.* VI ii 29).

Given the Christian flavour of her message and prophecy, it can hardly be doubted that the otherworld woman in *Echtrae Chonlai* symbolizes the Church in

accordance with an allegoristic principle undoubtedly familiar to early Irish monastic men of letters. The tale revolving round Conlae is thus an allegory of the global and individual conflict between pagan iniquity and Christian virtue (druid vs. woman), the claims of this world and those of the life everlasting (Conn vs. woman). Given the ease with which Gregory and others could allegorize the most blatant erotic details concerning the women in the Song of Songs, the whiff of sex surrounding the paradise of *Immram Brain*, *Echtrae Chonlai* and similar texts would obviously present no problems to a medieval Irish monk familiar with the idea of using discourse about carnal love to promote its spiritual counterpart. Consequently this feature is not good evidence for a fundamentally pagan view of the otherworld rather than an allegoristically Christian one.

Furthermore, the mainspring of this narrative can be regarded as biblical through and through by virtue of constituting a deliberate inversion of the narrative of the fall in Genesis. There, of course, the serpent is the agent of sin who induces the woman to eat the forbidden fruit and tempt Adam to do likewise, the result being mortality and damnation for the human race. In *Echtrae Chonlai* by contrast the woman successfully tempts Conlae to redemption and everlasting life with the apple of immortality despite the serpentine druid's efforts to thwart her. In essence, then, *Echtrae Chonlai* is an early Irish 'paradise regained', a thoroughly Christian composition inspired by the Bible. Far from calling for the hypothesis of a significant pagan native core, this tale is a prime example of an allegorical myth or, if one prefers, a mythical allegory firmly rooted in Christian ideology. Moreover, as a narrative pertaining to the pre-Patrician 'Old Testament' it has an obvious prophetic and typological significance in relation to the coming of Christianity, as do the two great parallel poems in *Immram Brain*. In this respect it is worth noting that the idea of pre-Christian revelation beyond the confines of Israel was by no means confined to the Irish. Thus Isidore remarks of the Sybils of ancient Greece and Rome that 'of all these are brought forth poems in which they are most clearly shown to have written many things for the gentiles too concerning God and Christ (*quarum omnium carmina efferuntur in quibus de Deo et de Christo et gentibus multa scripsisse manifestissime conprobantur*)' (*Etym.* VIII viii 7).

It thus transpires that mythological, historicising, allegoristic and typological factors could be combined freely and often inextricably together in varying proportions by early Christian Irish *literati* to modify preexisting narratives and generate new ones. This overall control of an authoritative but adaptable *senchus* enabled the Church and her allies to monitor and modulate the values and institutions of the governing class as a whole, while giving scope for various political groupings, both lay and ecclesiastical, to articulate and press their own particular claims (see ch. 10). Native mythological modes of thought and expression might resonate happily with those of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, and prove no less amenable to the pervasive influence of historical typology and allegory so crucial to the medieval Christian world-view. All in all, the upshot of these syncretistic trends in Ireland seems to have been a coherent ideological framework thoroughly in tune with the various spiritual and secular interests of a monastically oriented learned class whose socio-political concerns and connections extended well beyond the confines of the cloister.

That being so, the search for constituent values pertinent to the decoding of extant early Irish mytho-historical narratives will need to cover current ecclesiastical

learning and thought, including allegory and historical typology, as well as the so-called 'native' milieu of the secular norms and ideals discernible in roughly contemporaneous lay society. This dichotomy, of course, was very far from absolute. Indeed, it can only be assumed that early medieval Irish mythology and tradition, like those of other peoples (cf. 3 above and ch. 1, 3), were essentially shaped or reshaped by the social system of the time, and it has already emerged that that was basically characterised by *comuaim n-ecalsa fri tuaith* or the "sewing together of Church with State" (ch. 1, 11).

CHAPTER FOUR

The law and the prophets

1. The very extent of the surviving corpus of early Irish canon and civil legal tracts in Latin and the vernacular bears ample testimony to the preoccupation of medieval Ireland's men of letters with the law, and a number of considerations suggest that at least some aspects of this legal theory and practice have roots in the pagan Celtic or even Indo-European past.

Various classical authors, mostly drawing upon the lost Celtic ethnography of the first-century B.C. Greek philosopher-cum-historian Posidonius of Apamea (Tierney, 1960), provide snippets of information about pagan Gaulish legal practice. Thus the first-century Greek geographer Strabo remarks of the druids that "it is chiefly entrusted to these to try cases of homicide . . . and when there is an abundance of these they consider that there is also abundance of the land" (IV iv 4). Furthermore, Julius Caesar claims that "they decide about almost all public and private disputes and, if any crime has been committed, a murder perpetrated, or a dispute about inheritance or boundaries exists, these judge and determine the penalties" and speaks of a national judicial assembly of Gaul's druids held annually in the central territory of the Carnutes (*de Bello Gallico* VI 13, 5-10).

From this it would appear that the pagan Celts had well developed legal institutions and already held the belief so prominent in medieval Irish sources that good judgements promote natural abundance while bad judgements lead to corresponding scarcity (see McLeod, 1982, and ch. 5,1). Accordingly it is no surprise that the early Irish law tracts have been treated as a fruitful source of comparisons with the medieval Welsh and other more ancient Indo-European legal material aimed at recovering key pagan Celtic and Indo-European legal terms, concepts and processes. Valid and valuable though such comparative studies geared to prehistory are, if conducted with the necessary rigour, they should not be used to evade the crucial issue of how the early medieval Irish jurists themselves viewed the foundations and workings of their legal system as represented in texts compiled well after the triumph of Christianity in the fifth and sixth centuries. Dismissive claims that "though the Irish laws – like the Roman – have a Christian facade, their basic structure is pagan" (Binchy, 1954, 53) notwithstanding, attention to more or less contemporary conditioning factors seems worthwhile not only as an end in itself but also as a necessary prerequisite for effective research into pre-Christian antecedents.

Early Irish law recognized polygamy and several different types of wedlock with arguable Indian or other parallels suggesting pagan Celtic and Indo-European roots (e.g. Binchy, 1936, vi; Dillon, 1973, 13), and this has been seen as a symptom of juristic conservatism and independence of the Church. However, a recent study by Ó Corráin (1985b) points out that many such practices could not only be found in the Old Testament but were also less out of step than is commonly thought with the standards of an early medieval western Church still relatively indulgent towards marital practices that fell short of the Christian ideal. Whatever their ultimate origins, some of these customs betray signs of ecclesiastical influence. Moreover, although monogamy was only insisted upon for clerics and poets (e.g. *CIH* 588.26-38; Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 1984, 400-3), the Church's further aspirations could be expressed by juristic use of the unflattering Latin borrowing *adaltrach* 'adulteress' for an additional wife (cf. Power in Binchy, 1936, 84-8).

Needless to say, early Christian Irish lawyers preferred Old Testament parallels to the notion of pagan survival as a means of justifying the more questionable types of liaison. Thus the author of *Bretha Crólige* notes that "there is a dispute in Irish law as to which is more proper, whether it is a plurality of congress or one. For the chosen ones of God were in plurality of unions, so that it is not easier to condemn it than to praise it" (Binchy, 1938, 44-5). Furthermore, the right of a daughter in Irish law to inherit from her father in the absence of male descendants and keep this inheritance in the direct line by marrying a parallel cousin ultimately heir to her estate conforms to Moses' dispensation prompted by the case of Zelophchad's daughters: "if a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter" (Num. 27:8) and "every daughter, that possesseth an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may enjoy every man the inheritance of his fathers" (Num. 36:8). This and other scriptural precedents were duly recognised by Irish canon law (*Can. Hib.* XXXII, 19, cf. Ó Corráin, 1985b, 10-2).

According to Binchy the pivotal role ascribed to the king's judgements in early Irish ideology was at best a memory of the distant past: "it is clear that the king has no lawmaking powers as far as the traditional 'sacred' law is concerned. The task of 'finding', interpreting, and applying this devolved first on the Druids (again like the Brahmins in India), later on the *filid*, lit. 'seers', a learned caste who preserved and transmitted all the native lore in verse, later still on a more specialized caste (doubtless an offshoot from the *filid*) of professional jurists, the 'brehons' (Ir. *brithemain*, lit. 'makers of judgements'). In the period with which we are concerned here, these are the custodians and interpreters of the law, which, once it has been 'found', is regarded as the permanent and immutable formulation of ancestral wisdom" (1970, 16).

It will be argued later (ch. 5, 8) that the evidence for the king's judicial functions in early Christian Ireland is too extensive to be so lightly dismissed, but this contention is, of course, quite compatible with the simultaneous existence of a class of professional jurists capable of giving the king expert advice in suits brought before him and of trying others themselves. Druids may have performed such a function among the early Celts, but their judicial supremacy in first-century B.C. Gaul could presumably be an innovation connected with the recent decline of monarchy there (e.g. Caesar, *B.G.* I, 2-4 and 16(5); VI, 20; cf. de Vries, 1961, 234-5). There is no

good evidence that druids acted as judges in pre-Christian Ireland, and references in medieval Irish sources to an erstwhile poets' monopoly of legal utterance are more likely to be aetiologies of the role of the so-called "poet's judgement (*breth filed*)" consisting of *roscad* (see chs. 1,10 and 2, 6-8) in legal composition than even a dim recollection of historical fact (McCone, 1986c, 13).

All that can be usefully said on this topic is that Saint Patrick himself admits to facilitating his mission by means of payments made to kings (*regibus*) and to those "who used to judge among all the regions (*illis qui iudicabant per omnes regiones*)" in sections 53-4 of his fifth-century Confession (Hood, 1978, 33). While this might conceivably refer to druids, poets or the like in a putative judicial capacity, it seems a good deal more probable that specialised practitioners of law are intended. This evidence and the linguistically old ogam form *velitas* = Old Irish *filed* "of a poet" (cf. Thurneysen, 1946, 58) suggest that both the *brithemain* and the *filid* had already emerged as distinct professional categories prior to the advent of Christianity, when the pagan druid presumably still ruled the roost. That being so, it is hard to see how they can usefully be regarded as his more or less direct heirs (cf. ch. 1, 9), particularly when contemporary seventh- and eighth-century sources rigidly distinguish them from the still surviving, if marginalized, pagan druid (ch. 9, 12-4). The details of their institutional and cultural assimilation to the increasingly ascendant Church by the seventh century (ch. 1, 10-12) cannot now be recovered, but this contemporary symbiosis was a major concern of early Christian Irish *literati*, who devised appropriate aetiological narratives and ideological models to account for it. Regardless of what proportion of historical fact or fiction, pagan or Christian elements may have gone into them, modern scholars would do well to take these efforts and their implications seriously.

2. The eighth- or ninth-century legal tract *Uraicecht Becc* distinguishes between an upper *sóer-nemed* and lower *dóer-nemed* category of immune persons (cf. McCone, 1984d, 48-50). In addition to the landowning lords (*flaithi*) and freemen (*féini*) the former comprises clerics (*ecalsa*) and poets (*filid*), while the latter consists of "the people of every art besides (*des cacha dána olchenae*)" (*CIH* 1593.4-10). The text goes on to enumerate those *dóer-nemid* with independent status as follows: "wrights (*sair*), blacksmiths (*gobainn*), braziers (*umaidi*), workers of precious metals (*cerdu*), leeches (*legi*), judges (*brithemain*), druids (*druid*) and the people of every art besides" (ibid., 1612.4-9). The more detailed subsequent exposition introduces the "judge of three judgements" whose qualifications include Latin (1612.23-6, see ch. 1, 11), the master wright (*ollam suad sáer*) whose omnicompetence must include an ability to build churches according to the accompanying glosses (1612.27-35), the head of a monastic school (*suí litre*) with status equal to that of a petty king (1615.4-5), and his various subordinates in ecclesiastical Latin learning (*léigend*) with lower but still appreciable rank (1615.6-19). On the other hand, even a master (*ollam*) of metalwork or leechcraft does not exceed the status of a middle-ranking Latin scholar, poet, judge or wright (1613.9-16). Wrights specializing in making oratories, different types of boat, mills or artefacts of yew enjoy middle rank but combinations of two, three or all four of these can increase their status by up to double (1615.22-1616.16). Low ranking wrights include chariot-makers, house-builders, decorators, engravers and shield-coverers (1616.17-21), but two of these crafts may be combined to obtain a modest increase to the same status

as a master harpist (1616.22-4 and 31-6). Finally, the lowest independent rank of all is reserved for ring-makers, leather-workers, fullers and fishermen (1616.24-6).

This list reveals a thoroughly composite Irish *des dáno* dominated by professions essential, although mostly by no means exclusive, to the Church. Indeed, it is followed in the *Uraicecht Becc* by a statement that most of the professions in question might be practised by clerics or their dependents as well as by laymen without prejudice to their existing status: "any profession (*dán*), then, that we have said merits independent status [lacuna?] and does not impair the free status that he has without a profession (*dán*), if he should maintain (one), whether he be in lay society (*i túaith*) or the Church (*in eclais*)" (*CIH* 1616.37-1617.4 = 2333.23-9).

Reference has already been made to patronage of poets by kings and nobles of the *túath* (end of ch. 1, 11, and Breatnach, 1987, 89-94), and the legal tract *Críth Gablach*, for example, refers to a secular kindred's dealings with king, Church and *des cerdd* (ll. 280-2, here = *des dáno*) as well as to poets, harpers and a judge (*éccis*, *cruitti* at l. 591, *brithem* at l. 595) in a king's house on the occasion of a feast.

As early medieval Ireland's largest concentrations of population, the monasteries were major centres for crafts and trades as well as scholarship, as is amply demonstrated by the impressive ecclesiastical buildings, metal artefacts and manuscripts still surviving. Thus the valuable vignettes of life in an important monastery like Kildare to be found in Cogitosus' seventh-century Latin Life of Saint Brigit include the abbot's supervision of workers and stonemasons in the provision of a millstone for the community's mill (pars. 34-6; Bollandus, 1658, 135-41) and the efforts of wrights (*artifices*) under the supreme *ollam* of their craft in Ireland (*doctor et omnium praevius artificum Hiberniensium*) to repair a great door in the magnificent church with its lavish decorations of gold, silver, gems, painting and fabrics (pars. 37-8). A similar contemporary reality is reflected in a probably late ninth-century coda to the Tripartite Life of Patrick (Mulchrone, 1939, 155), which includes a judge (*brithem*), a bodyguard (*trénfer*), a singer of psalms (*salmchétlaid*), a doorkeeper (*astire*), a cook, a brewer, a charioteer, a woodcutter, three blacksmiths (*gobainn*), three metalworkers (*cerda*) and three seamstresses in the household of the saint and his successors in the Armagh abbacy.

Evidence for monastic schools of law, history and poetry as well as Latin learning has already been given (ch. 1, 10-11), and there is no shortage in hagiographical material of prototypes for the practice of medicine and metalwork in a monastic context. Typical figures of this ilk are bishop Assicus alias Tassach, Patrick's bronzesmith (*faber aereus*) responsible for making various ecclesiastical items, in Tírechán 22(1) (Bieler, 1979, 140, cf. 252 and 211), Saint Brigit's chief smith (*prímcherd*) bishop Conláed (Stokes, 1905, 128), the saintly leech (*liaig*) Áed mac Bricc (e.g. *Betha Brigte* ll. 270-1) and that gifted healer, metalworker and scribe Saint Daig of Inishkeen (see ch. 7, 2). Indeed, glosses on *Félire Óengusso* Aug. 18 mention "the three chief smiths of Ireland (*trí primcherda Hérenn*), namely Tassach with Patrick and Conlaed with Brigit and Daig with Ciarán, three bishops they" and further claim that Saint Ciarán of Saigir's chief smith (*prímcherd*) Daig was a blacksmith (*gobae*), metalworker (*cerd*), and scribe (*scríbnid*) who "made three hundred bells and three hundred croziers and three hundred gospels" (Stokes, 1905, 186). Also worth noting is the *AU* obit for the year 1110 of "Ferdomnach Dall, *fer léiginn* of Kildare", whom an interlinear gloss further describes as a "master harpist (*suí cruitirechta*)".

As relatively compact and privileged religious communities of clerics, scholars, lawyers, poets, artisans, musicians and so on within various larger territories under secular control, early Ireland's monasteries could readily be compared with and modelled upon the levitical cities and cities of refuge (*urbes fugitivorum*), the setting aside of which amidst the different tribes of Israel is described in the Pentateuch (e.g. Num. 35) and Joshua (20 and 21). As Ó Corráin has recently demonstrated at length (1987, 296-307), the concept of the monastic *civitas refugii* or *cathair attaig* "city of refuge" with levitical connotations drawn from the Old Testament is not only well developed in early Irish canon and vernacular law but is also applied as early as the seventh century by Cogitosus and the Book of the Angel to the great churches of Kildare and Armagh.

In a slightly earlier article a cogent general argument has been made in support of the revolutionary contention "that a large party in the Irish church in the seventh and eighth centuries consciously conceived of the mandarin caste of churchmen, scholars, jurists, canon lawyers, historians and poets, to which they belonged, as priests and levites in the strict Old Testament sense of these terms" (Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 1984, 394). As the discussion there makes clear by means of appropriate references (ibid., 394-6), in the Bible this is represented as a hereditary class tracing descent from Levi, the priesthood being reserved specifically for Aaron's lineage amongst them. Consecrated to the service of God, the tribe of Levi did not share in the general division of the land among the other twelve tribes, being allocated special cities and their environs along with tithes, firstlings, first fruits and sacrificial offerings from which to live instead. These sources of ecclesiastical income are duly stressed in the early Irish legal tracts (ibid., 406-12; cf. ch. 1, 11), and in his edition of *Uraicecht na Ríar* Breatnach has discussed the importance of inheritance from father to son in certain professions, especially that of poet or *fili* (1987, 94-8). Thus, according to par. 4 of the text, "if he be not the son of a poet, however, or a grandson (*manip mac filed, immurgu, nó aue*) only half honour-price goes to him, as Irish law says: only half honour-price goes to sages if it is not to a family (of sages) that they are born (*ní tet acht lethdíre do suídib, manip do chlaind genatar*)" (ibid., 104), while a *Bretha Nemed* tract states "for he who is not the child of a noble, or a poet, or a learned churchman (*ar nadbi clann airech, nó filed, nó ecnai*) sues only for half honour-price until he serve learning doubly" (ibid., 46).

1 Chronicles is especially rich in details about the various levitical functions in the royal period. Thus we find particular families of them designated doorkeepers (*ianitores*, 9:17f.), storekeepers and cooks (9:28f.), singers and musicians (*cantores*, 15:16f.), recorders and glorifiers of God's deeds (16:4), superintendents and judges (*praepositorum autem et iudicum*, 23:4), scribes (24:6), treasurers (26:20f.), as well as individuals charged with prophecy in song or to the accompaniment of a harp (15:22, 25:3). 2 Chronicles describes the adornment of the temple by carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, braziers and workers in gold and silver (24:12-4) as well as restoration work by carpenters and masons (*artificibus et cementariis*) under the supervision of Levites (34:10f.). Moreover, we are told that king Jehosaphat revived the fear of God in his subjects by sending out princes, Levites and priests who "taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord, and went about through all the cities of Judah and taught the people" (*docebantque in Iuda habentes librum legis Domini et circuibant cunctas urbes Iuda atque erudiebant populum*, 17:9).

There was, then, no lack of Old Testament analogues for a wide ranging and meticulously subdivided bipartite class of clergy and 'paraclerics', so to speak, capable of functioning either in their own separate communities or in society at large under its king as occasion demanded. Old Irish legal glosses seeking to justify a particular practice display a clear awareness of the levitical status of judges by claiming that "the People of God had ten judges in the ten principal cities of refuge (*bátar .x. mbreithemain la túaith nDé isna .x. prímchathrachaib ataig*)" (Ó Corráin, 1987, 300), and a good deal of evidence has been adduced to show that "in laying down the rules governing the priesthood, the Irish canonists follow the rules of the Pentateuch very closely" (Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 1984, 396-9). Poets, clerics and, apparently, monastic tenants were distinguished from the laity in general by a requirement of monogamy and sexual abstinence at appropriate points in the Church calendar (ibid., 400-4). Thus a well known short Old Irish narrative from the early ninth-century Book of Armagh has Patrick seeking to implement the prescription of 1 Timothy 3:2 that "a bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife (*oportet ergo episcopum inreprehensibilem esse unius uxoris virum*)" by appointing a "free man of good family without defect, without blemish . . . a man of one wife to whom has been born only one child" as first bishop of Leinster and finding a poet to fit the bill (Bieler, 1979, 176). This brief tale clearly implies a close relationship between the two orders, as do the close parallelism between poetic and ecclesiastical grades, poet's satire and saint's curse discussed earlier (ch. 1, 11). Moreover, Leviticus (21:17f.) explicitly forbids physical blemish (*macula*) in the case of a priest, and "it is evident that the legal prescriptions which govern the poet's married life derive directly from canonistic thinking and if one may judge by the terminology used, from the Apostolic Canons read in the light of Leviticus" (Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 1984, 403).

Such considerations point to the following conclusion: "there was, it seems, a 'tribe of the church' with differing orders, grades and functions; it was consciously modelled on the tribe of Levi, it formed a network of interlocking jurisdictions within and among the local kingdoms of early Ireland – and these kingdoms could be seen now as the tribes of Israel, now as the kingdom of David and Solomon" (ibid., 405). If so, this background should be reflected in aetiological narratives about the establishment of the law and learned class or *des dáno* appropriate to early Christian Ireland.

3. Tírechán represents Patrick as fasting for forty days and forty nights after the fashion of Moses, Elijah and Christ (*Moysaicam tenens disciplinam et Heliacam et Christianam*, 38(1)). Muirchú too likens certain of the saint's actions explicitly to those of Christ (I 19, 2) or Moses (II 5, 1) and implicitly to those of Elijah (I 20, 9-13, cf. ch. 2, 3), with whom he shares a penchant for self-fulfilling predictions about the demise of recalcitrant monarchs' dynasties (e.g. I 21, 2 and 1/3 Kgs. 21:21). Further striking similarities to Moses are alleged by the Supplementary Notes to Tírechán (Bieler, 1979, 165). The national apostle thus merits comparison not only with the greatest lawgiver and prophet of the Old Testament but also, as instrument of the Irish people's salvation, with the Saviour of mankind himself, whose own status as supreme teacher and prophet in the New Testament was given due typological emphasis through association with Moses and Elijah (e.g. Matth. 17:3f., Heb. 3:1f.). Indeed the Irish Canons make the commonplace allegorical and

typological claim that "Aaron represented the supreme priest, namely the bishop, and his sons presaged the figure of priests (*prespiterorum*), but Moses intimated the figure of Christ" (*Can. Hib.* 1, 3).

In Muirchú's account the pagan nobility and men of art surrounding king Lóegaire of Tara are generally hostile to Patrick's mission, and reluctant conversion of the monarch and many of his followers (I 21) is only brought about after considerable displays of strength by the saint. However, there are two notable exceptions to this pattern of resistance, namely Erc mac Dego (I 17, 3) and Dubthach maccu Lugair accompanied by his young pupil Fiacc (I 19, 3-4), each of whom on separate occasions alone of a large company rose as a mark of respect before Patrick to accept the faith and the saint's blessing.

Erc, "whose remains are now adored in that monastery which is called Slane", is identified as the founder of that famous centre for *brethemnas* 'judgement' in the early period (see end of ch.1, 10), and it comes as no surprise that he himself was accordingly regarded as Patrick's judge. Thus the catalogue of members of Patrick's household at the end of the Tripartite Life includes "bishop Erc, his judge (*a breithem*)", and there seems no reason to doubt that this tradition was already current in the seventh century, when Muirchú wrote, as can be proved with reference to Patrick's smith Tassach in the same list (see 2 above). Dubthach maccu Lugair, on the other hand, was a famous *fili* traditionally associated with the Uí Cheinnselaig of South Leinster (McCone, 1986b, 29-31) and is explicitly called a "most excellent poet (*poetam optimum*)" by Muirchú.

It has already been demonstrated that among those professions of the *aes dána* regarded as having pre-Christian roots particular importance attached to the *fili* (whose functions could subsume those of the *senchaid*) and the *brithem* in the monastic literature (ch. 1, 10-11). That being so, as Thurneysen saw in Dubthach's case (1921, 67), Muirchú's account is to be seen as an aetiology ascribing the privileged status of these two callings to their particularly close and early association with the Church. As has been pointed out by Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen (1984, 389-90), Muirchú's statement "and he believed first on that day in God and it was reckoned to him for justice (*credidítque primus in illa die Deo et repputatum est ei ad iustitiam*)" regarding Dubthach is a close echo of Genesis 15:6 about Abraham (*credidit Domino et reputatum est ei ad iustitiam*), which is cited by Saint Paul (Rom. 4:3) as part of an argument for justification by faith rather than the law. Indeed, this quotation may well be a cue drawing attention to a context containing the famous Pauline dictum echoed in the title of this chapter: "but now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested being witnessed by the law and the prophets (*nunc autem sine lege iustitia Dei manifestata est testificata a lege et prophetis*)" (Rom. 3:21 – cf. the role of Moses and Elijah as witnesses of Christ's transfiguration in Matth. 17:2-3). It is probably, then, in accordance with this scheme that Muirchú represents a lawyer, Erc, and a prophet, Dubthach, as the first witnesses to the new faith brought by Patrick, the implication surely being that pre-Patrician law and poetry were related to the Christian dispensation in Ireland in much the same way as the law and the prophets of the Old Testament were to the New Testament in the Bible.

Moreover, this pattern of faithful individuals standing out from a larger company of non-believers might be compared with Christ's call of a disciple like Matthew (Matth. 9:9-10) alias Levi (Mark 2:14-5, Luke 6:27-9) or, indeed, with the

inauguration of the Levites as a tribe devoted to God's service by responding to Moses' plea "if anyone is of the Lord let him be joined to me" (Ex. 32:26) and helping God's agent to suppress the worship of the golden calf.

Since the trio of Patrick, Dubthach and Lóegaire is at the heart of further evolved juristic accounts of the establishment of the current system of Irish law under the saint's auspices, it seems desirable to offer a brief summary and some elaboration of points made in greater detail elsewhere regarding the early genesis of this potent syncretistic myth (McCone, 1982, 143-4; 1984, 321-3; 1984b, 54-5).

It is tolerably clear from Muirchú's prologue that his Life of Saint Patrick was written at Áed of Sletty's prompting in order to provide Armagh with a counter to the claims recently made by Cogitosus for Kildare. Indeed, the expansionist aspirations of his Kildare neighbours obviously alarmed Áed sufficiently for him to seek protection by submitting his monastery to Armagh during the abbacy of Ségéne, i.e. between 661 and 688 A.D. Since Tírechán and Muirchú both deliberately bring Sletty's founder Fiacc into contact with Patrick, it seems that they wrote after Áed's action. Indeed, the otherwise strange appearance of a poet like Dubthach associated with the bitterly hostile Laigin at the court of an Uí Néill king of Tara was presumably an invention of Muirchú's in order to give the newly allied Áed's monastery a plug in the person of Dubthach's alleged pupil, the young Fiacc, whose subsequent foundation of Sletty is duly emphasised by the hagiographer.

Tírechán's reference to "most recent plagues (*mortalitates novissimas*)" (25,2) suggests that he wrote within a few years of the recurrent plague known as *Buide Conaill* that afflicted Ireland from 664-8 A.D. (e.g. *AU*). Since he has king Lóegaire remain a pagan (12) rather than becoming a reluctant convert to Christianity as in Muirchú's dramatic version, which rapidly became the standard account, Tírechán seems likely to have written either before or at about the same time as Muirchú. The most probable explanation for the tradition of Lóegaire's conversion not yet being in circulation when Tírechán wrote would be that the imaginative Muirchú invented it as part of a representation of the king that owed a good deal to those biblical despots Nebuchadnezzar, Darius and Herod (cf. ch. 2, 3).

As Liam Breatnach has shown in an important recent study (1986), the fragmentarily preserved legal tract *Cáin Fuithirbe*, the composition of which can be confidently dated within a couple of years or so of 680 on the strength of various fairly minor figures named in connection with its promulgation, contained references to the high king's conflict with Patrick and ultimate conversion that are presumably derived from Muirchú. That being so, we may assume that Sletty's submission to Armagh took place relatively early in Ségéne's long abbacy and that Muirchú and Tírechán produced their broadly complementary works in the Armagh interest in the 670s.

The main historical axis of Muirchú's work is provided by Patrick and Lóegaire at Tara, whose roles are explicitly and allusively likened to those of Christ and Herod in Jerusalem in the Gospels but given typological depth by additional comparisons with Old Testament figures. This scheme is obviously conditioned by the synthetic historical approach to Irish history as a microcosm of Christian world history centred on the coming of the faith (ch. 3, 9). The roles of Erc and Dubthach as representatives of the pre-Christian law and prophets bearing witness to the new dispensation are as yet relatively minor, but that of Dubthach in particular soon underwent major expansion in legal circles.

4. Unfortunately it is not clear whether *Cáin Fuithirbe* contained any reference to a review of the law by Patrick or ascribed any role to Dubthach in this process. However, the Old Irish law tract *Do Fastad Cirt ⁊ Dligid* does allude rather laconically to legal rules established by Patrick in Lóegaire's reign and to "their truth of nature and of conscience and of scripture (*a fír n-aicnid ⁊ coibse ⁊ screptra*)" (*CIH* 240.22; McCone, 1986c, 23), glossed "of the righteous men", "of the Christians" and "holy, of the head of a monastic school (*in fir léigind*)" respectively. This threefold establishment of truth by conformity to nature, scripture and conscience obviously derives from Saint Augustine as cited in the Irish Canons: *tribus modis agnoscitur omne verum, cum non venit contra naturam, et verbis scripturae conveniat, et animis prudentium non distinguat* (*Can. Hib.* XXII, 5).

A more detailed account of the activities of Patrick and his associates is given in the probably early eighth-century tract *Córus Béscnai*: "each law is bound. It is in this that the two laws have been bound together. It is the law of nature (*recht aicnid*) that was with the men of Ireland until the coming of the faith in the time of Lóegaire son of Níall. It is in his time that Patrick came. It is after the men of Ireland had believed in Patrick that the two laws were harmonised, the law of nature (*recht aicnid*) and the law of the letter (*recht litre*). Dubthach maccu Lugair the poet (*in fili*) displayed the law of nature. It is Dubthach who first paid respect to Patrick. It is he who first rose before him in Tara. It is Corc son of Lugaid who first bowed before him. He was in hostageship with Lóegaire. Lóegaire, then, refused Patrick on account of the druid Matha son of Umor. He, the druid, had prophesied to Lóegaire that Patrick would steal the living and the dead from him. Cairid son of Findchóem first bowed to him after him, as he was a poet (*fili*) of Lóegaire's. Erc, he is the first person who rose before Patrick at Ferta Fer Féige on the edge of the Boyne, and their prohibition was felled . . . Dubthach maccu Lugair the poet (*in fili*) recounted the judgements of the men of Ireland according to the law of nature and the law of the prophets (*recht fáide*). For prophecy according to the law of nature (*fáidsine a recht aicnid*) had prevailed in the judgement of the island of Ireland and in her poets. Prophets among them, then, had foretold that the blessed white language (*bélrae bán biaid*, glossed *in léigend*) shall come, i.e. the law of the letter, (and) that there are many things according to the law of nature that have reached what the law of the letter has not reached. Dubthach, then, showed (this) to Patrick. What did not contradict the word of God in the law of the letter and the consciences of Christians was harmonized in the order of judges by the Church and poets. All the law of nature was right except for the faith and its due, and (there was) joining of Church to state" (*CIH* 527.14-529.4).

The three key concepts of the law of nature, the law of the letter and the law of the prophets in the above passage recur in a rather different context in the Stowe Missal tract on the Mass: "what is chanted of the Mass thereafter, both introit and prayers and addition, as far as the lesson of the Apostles (the Epistle) and the Gradual, that is a figure of the law of nature (*recht aicnid*), wherein Christ has been renewed through all His members and deeds. The Epistle, however, and the Gradual, and from this to the uncovering (of the chalice), it is a commemoration of the law of the letter (*recht litre*) wherein Christ has been figured, only that what has been figured therein was not yet known. The uncovering, so far as half, of the host and the chalice and what is chanted thereat, both Gospel and Allelulia as far as *oblata*, it is a commemoration of the law of the prophets (*recht fáthe*). Wherein

Christ was manifestly foretold, save that it was not seen until he was born. The elevation of the chalice after the full uncovering thereof *quando canitur oblata*, that is a commemoration of Christ's birth and of his glory through signs and miracles" (*Thes.* II 252-3).

The four phases here related by a conventional typological process to Christ's coming clearly refer to the biblical sequence of the pre-Mosaic period of the patriarchs, the law, the prophets and the New Testament. Indeed, this is precisely the scheme presented by that major but hitherto unpublished eighth-century Irish exegetical tract on the Bible from Genesis to Revelation known as the *Bibelwerk* or Reference Bible: *quod sunt leges principales et unde incipit et finit unaquaeque de eis? Lex naturae et lex litterae, lex prophetiae et lex evangelii. Incipit lex naturae ab Adam usque Moysen, lex litterae a Moysen usque ad Samuhel, lex prophetiae a Samuel usque ad Iohannem Baptistae, lex evangelii ab Iohanne usque ad finem mundi* "what are the main laws and whence does each of them begin and end? The law of nature and the law of the letter, the law of prophecy and the law of the Gospel. The law of nature begins from Adam to Moses, the law of the letter from Moses to Samuel, the law of prophecy from Samuel to John the Baptist, the law of the Gospel from John to the end of the world" (McNamara, 1987, 89). Furthermore, Isidore gives the traditional definition of the first two orders of the Old Testament as the Law comprising the whole Pentateuch ascribed to Moses, and the Prophets consisting of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings (or 1 and 2 Kings), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezechiel plus the twelve minor prophets, but sets the pre-Mosaic section of the Pentateuch apart by stating that "what was given through Moses, however, is properly called the Law" (*Etym.* VI i 5). The standard scheme here and in the Reference Bible is precisely mirrored in Fintan mac Bóchra's poem in *Do Suidigud Tellaich Temra*, par. 12, on great judgements in Ireland (ch. 3, 11):

4.	*Dálais Moyse, monur nglé* *bretha lánmaithi litre* *dális Duid ar sine* *bretha fíra fáitsine*	Moses delivered, bright deed, perfect judgements of the letter. David delivered according to age true judgements of prophecy.
11.	*Iarsin ro·génair in gein* *hÍsu ó Muiri ingein* *co tárfas bretha co mbail* *tria núfiadnaise nóemglain*	Thereafter was born the child Jesus from maiden Mary, and judgements were shown with goodness through his holy pure new testament.

In the legal context *recht aicnid* and *recht fáithe* are said to have been in operation before the coming of Patrick, who brought *recht litre* with him and harmonized the pre-existing Irish law with this. From a legal standpoint the fundamental terms are *recht litre* and *recht aicnid*, which forms the basis of the typologically oriented *recht fáithe*, pre-Christian utterances foretelling the coming of the new dispensation.

According to Binchy, "it is true that some comparative legal historians have claimed to note an echo of classical Roman jurisprudence in the term *recht aicnid* 'the law of nature' which figures among the 'sources' of the *Senchas Már*. But though this expression is undoubtedly borrowed from Latin – more probably from patristic than from legal literature – it has in Irish a totally different meaning from that of *ius naturale* (or *ius naturae*) in the works of Ulpian or Pomponius or the

Stoic philosophers from whom the classical jurists took the idea" (1983, 13). In the discussion (ch. 3, 10) of Cormac mac Art's precocious belief in God and righteous pre-Patrician judgements attention was drawn to the centrality of the Pauline concept that from the beginning God stood revealed in his creation for those with eyes to see. Allied with the apparently native Irish belief that the righteousness or otherwise of judgements was liable to be manifested by a favourable or adverse reaction on the part of nature at large (see 1 above and McLeod, 1982, 358-62), this may have contributed to the fundamental early medieval Irish idea of a pre-Patrician *recht aicnid* or 'law of nature' that proved largely compatible with the later Christian dispensation.

Nevertheless, the relevance of the classical Roman juristic concept of natural law, at least as modified in the light of Paul's specialized use of it in Romans 2:14-5, should not be underrated. For instance, the second-century A.D. Roman jurisconsult Gaius gives the basic definition as follows at the beginning of his well known *Institutiones*: "all peoples that are governed by laws and customs (*qui legibus et moribus reguntur*) use partly their own law and partly the common law of all men, for the law that each people has established for itself is proper to itself and is called civil law (*ius civile*), in the sense of law proper to the state, but what natural reason (*ratio naturalis*) has established among all men, that is observed equally among all peoples and is called the law of peoples (*ius gentium*), in the sense of law that all nations use". Saint Paul's crucial reformulation in response to the question of faith and the Mosaic law was as follows: *cum autem gentes quae legem non habent naturaliter quae legis sunt faciunt eiusmodi legem non habentes ipsi sunt sibi lex qui ostendunt opus legis scriptum in cordibus suis testimonium reddente illis conscientia ipsorum* "for when the gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness" (Rom. 2:14-5). Leading up as it does to the discussion in Romans 4 of Abraham's righteousness through faith rather than the circumcision enjoined by Jewish law (see 3 above), this concept of a natural propensity to justice in conformity with the spirit rather than the letter of the Mosaic law could readily be applied to the patriarchal phase of the Old Testament, as in the Stowe Missal tract above.

That influential cleric Isidore, who is inevitably concerned to distinguish between divine and human laws, incorporates a crucial expansion of the dichotomy between specific *ius civile* and more or less general *ius gentium* into a trichotomy comprising a further *ius naturale*, which is not only truly universal but also intrinsically just and hence compatible with God's will: *Omnes autem leges aut divinae sunt, aut humanae. Divinae natura, humanae moribus constant . . . Ius autem naturale [est] aut civile aut gentium. Ius naturale [est] commune omnium nationum, et quod ubique instinctu naturae non constitutione aliqua habetur . . . Nam hoc, aut si quid huic simile est, numquam iniustum [est], sed naturale aequumque habetur . . . Ius civile est quod quisque populus vel civitas sibi proprium humana divinaque causa constituit . . . Et inde ius gentium, quia eo iure omnes fere gentes utuntur* "however, all laws are either divine or human. The divine exist by nature, the human by customs . . . Law, however, is natural or civil or of peoples. Natural law is common to all nations and what is held everywhere by the impulse of nature, not by some regulation . . . . For this or anything like it is never unjust but is always held to be natural and fair . . . Civil law is what each people or state has established as peculiar

to itself for human or divine reason . . . And thence it is law of peoples, because almost all peoples employ it" (*Etym.* V ii & iv).

It thus seems likely that *recht aicnid* was chiefly modelled upon *ius naturale* as defined by Isidore and could, with Saint Paul's help, be compared with the pre-Mosaic dispensation in Israel during the patriarchal period. Moreover, Martin McNamara has recently drawn attention to an illuminating passage on *lex naturae* in the Reference Bible apparently reflecting Eucherius' influence: "why did the Lord give the law only to the one people of the Jews? That is, not to one alone but in anticipation he gave the law of nature to all men, through which many good men emerged, like Enoch and Noah and Abraham and out of that ancestry and their deserts they were the sons of Israel and deserved to receive the law of the letter when the law of nature passed?" (1987, 94).

According to Isidore *Moyses gentis Hebraicae primus omnium divinas leges sacris litteris explicavit* "Moses of the Hebrew race was the first of all to expound divine laws in sacred letters" (*Etym.* V i 1). Moreover, etymologically writing was held to be of the very essence of *lex* 'law, ordinance' as opposed to *ius* 'law, justice' and *mos* 'custom': *ius autem dictum, quia iustum. Omne autem ius legibus et moribus constat. Lex est constitutio scripta. Mos est vetustate probata consuetudo, sive lex non scripta. Nam lex a legendo vocata, quia scripta est* "justice, however, is (so) called because it is just. Moreover, all justice consists of laws and customs. Law is a written regulation. Custom is a usage tried by age or an unwritten law. For law is (so) called from reading, because it is written" (ibid. V iii 2). These considerations appear to be reflected in the Irish Canons' simple use of *lex* to refer to Pentateuch law.

In the first instance, then, *recht litre* refers to the written Mosaic law, as is clearly the case in the Reference Bible, Fintan's poem and the Stowe Missal tract above. However, allusion there to Christ's being prefigured in that law is in perfect accord with the New Testament doctrine that the Old Testament law had been brought to fulfilment by Christ, whose Sermon on the Mount is obviously meant to echo Moses' promulgation of the old law before the assembled tribes of Israel. Jesus, indeed, declares his basic respect for the Old Testament dispensation as follows: *nolite putare quoniam veni solvere legem aut prophetas. Non veni solvere sed adimplere. Amen quippe dico vobis donec transeat caelum et terra iota unum aut unus apex non praeteribit a lege donec omnia fiant* "think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matth. 5:17-8).

In relation to Irish law Patrick was cast in a composite role drawn from the two typologically interlocking biblical figures with whom he was most persistently compared: like Moses in ancient Israel he was the divinely inspired promulgator of the first written law, but at the same time he resembled Christ as bringer of the full evangelical dispensation by now embodied in the whole Bible and the Church's subsequent teaching. Consequently the *recht litre* brought to Ireland by Patrick was represented as historically analagous to the biblical law of Moses and Christ, but in practice also included other ecclesiastical learning and could be glossed *léigend* '(written) Latin learning' or the like (see above). Like Christ in Israel, Patrick was said on arrival in Ireland to have been confronted by a worthy pre-existing system of law and prophets, termed *recht aicnid* and *recht fáithe* in the senses intimated

earlier. In keeping with this model, he supposedly treated these with respect and, rather than abrogating them, brought them to fulfilment in harmony with the Church's *recht litre* and the Christian conscience (see first paragraph above).

It can thus be seen that the evolution of early Irish law, like and, indeed, in conjunction with the periodization of Ireland and her Gaelic conquerors' history (see ch. 3, 7-10), was being consciously represented along biblical lines by monastic *literati* from at least the seventh century onwards. This process is made still more explicit in the full narrative account of Patrick's review of Ireland's law and institutions.

5. In a recent article the present writer has discussed the various extant recensions of the so-called 'pseudo-historical' prologue to the great compilation of vernacular Irish law called *Senchus Már* (McCone, 1986c, 1-5), has offered a translation of what seems to be the prologue's original core (ibid., 5-10) along with an analysis of its contents (ibid., 10-8), and has argued for an early eighth-century date roughly contemporary with the *Senchus Már* as a whole (ibid., 18-28) before presenting a text with commentary of Dubthach maccu Lugair's central judgement in *roscad* (ibid., 29-35). Since this more detailed treatment is available for reference, it will be sufficient here to draw attention to a number of salient features of this important text, which fleshes out the narrative details underlying the passage from the *Senchus Már* tract *Córus Bésctnai* cited in the first paragraph of section 4 above.

The narrative proper begins with king Lóegaire urging the murder of one of Patrick's followers in order to test the saint's position on the Christian law of forgiveness. The king's brother Núadu duly slays Patrick's charioteer Odrán. Terrified by an earthquake and darkness resulting from the angry saint's invocation of his God, the men of Ireland offered Patrick arbitration and his choice of judge. This fell upon 'the chief poet of the island of Ireland', Dubthach maccu Lugair, 'who was a vessel full of the Holy Spirit'. Dubthach lamented the apparent unavoidability of offending either Patrick by recommending forgiveness or God by opting for retribution in the teeth of the Gospels' injunction to forgive one's neighbour, but this fear was assuaged by a guarantee that God would speak through him after his mouth had been blessed by the saint. Dubthach then utters a long *roscad* replete with arguments drawn from Scripture and advocates a compromise between the claims of punishment and forgiveness by sentencing Núadu's body to death for his crime but granting God's mercy upon his soul. A note then adds that this arrangement succeeded a previous system of full retribution but that, since Patrick is no longer available to guarantee the divine side of the bargain, the current compromise is a wergild payment (*éraic*) for culpable homicide.

Patrick then summoned the men of Ireland to an assembly, preached the Gospel and demonstrated his miraculous powers to them, so that they "acknowledged the whole will of God and Patrick". Lóegaire called for "the establishment and arrangement of every law among us" , and "it is then that all the men of art (*aes dána*) in Ireland were assembled so that each displayed his craft (*a cheird*) in the presence of Patrick before every lord in Ireland. It is then, indeed, that it was entrusted to Dubthach to show the judgement and all the poetry of Ireland (*taisféuad breithemnusa ⁊ uile filidechta Éirenn*) and whatever law had held sway among the men of Ireland in the law of nature and in the judgements of the island of Ireland and in the poets (*i recht aicnid ⁊ i mbrethaib innse Éirend ⁊ i filedaib*), who had prophesied that the white language that shall be would come, i.e. the law of the letter

(*recht litre*). For (it is) the Holy Spirit that had spoken and prophesied through the mouths of the righteous men who had formerly been in the island of Ireland (*tria ginu na fer fírén celacrabatar in inis Érenn*), as it had prophesied through the mouths of the righteous men and the patriarchs in the law of the Old Testament (*tria ginu na fer fírén ⁊ na n-úasalaithre i recht petarluice*). For the law of nature had covered much that the law of the letter had not reached. The judgements of true nature (*inna bretha fíraicnid*), then, that the Holy Spirit had uttered through the mouths of righteous judges and poets (*tria ginu breithemon ⁊ filed fírén*) of the men of Ireland from when this island was settled up to the (coming of the) faith, Dubthach showed them all to Patrick. Of whatever belonged to the law of nature apart from faith and its due and the joining of Church to state, then, that which did not conflict with the word of God in the law of the letter and the New Testament (*fri bréithir nDé i recht litre ⁊ núfiadnaise*) and with the consciences of Christians was joined in the regulation of judgement by Patrick and the churchmen and lords of Ireland. So that it is the *Senchus Már*. Nine men, then, were selected for the drawing up of this book, namely the three bishops Patrick and Benén and Cairnech, the three kings Lóegaire, Corc and Daire, Ros mac Tricim the expert in legal language and Dubthach and Fergus the poet. Legal knowledge (*nofis*) is the name of the book that they drew up, i.e. knowledge of nine men, and we encounter narrative illustration of this above. This, then, is the law of Patrick, and no human judge of the Gael can annul anything that he find in the *Senchus Már*" (*CIH* 341.39–342.20).

The final section of the prologue asserts the subordination of historian, poet and judge to ecclesiastical scholar since Patrick's coming (see ch. 1, 11), and describes the alleged earlier breaking of the poets' monopoly over judgement: "since Amairgen White-knee gave the first judgement in Ireland, judgement was in the hands of the poets alone until the colloquy of the two sages in Emain Machae" but the utterance of that pair was so obscure to the listening nobles that, on the Ulster king Conchobor mac Nessa's recommendation, "judgement, therefore, was taken away from the poets apart from their proper part of it, and each of the men of Ireland received his share of the judgement" (*CIH* 342.21–34).

It is to be noted that the relationship between the laws in Ireland is described by virtually the same words in the *Córus Bésnai* passage and the prologue. The latter, however, explicitly compares the divinely inspired natural judgements and prophecies of pre-Patrician Ireland's righteous judges and poets with the inspiration of pre-Christian Israel's righteous men and patriarchs by the Holy Spirit, thus further implying that the old law's subsequent accommodation to the demands of the Bible, particularly the New Testament, and Christian conscience was analagous in both cases. The quasi-biblical scheme of an Irish 'Old Testament' law being adapted with due reverence to the Patrician 'New Testament' could hardly be more clearly expressed (cf. ch. 3, 10).

It has been argued in section 3 above (cf. ch. 2, 3) that Muirchú had already drawn a typological and historical analogy between Patrick and Christ, Lóegaire and Herod, Tara and Jerusalem, while introducing Erc and Dubthach as contemporary individual representatives of the old law and prophets prepared to bear witness to the new. The later juristic versions basically adhere to this scheme but depict the Irish analogues of the Old Testament law and prophets more literally as the *recht aicnid* and *recht fáithe* practised by certain righteous judges (*brithemain*) and poets (*filid*) in the pre-Patrician period.

This shift left the poet Dubthach free to be equated with a major biblical figure of mediation between the Old and New Testaments. John the Baptist functions as both the last representative of the old law and prophets and as Christ's harbinger. Thus Jesus' remarks about him include the following: *omnes enim prophetae et lex usque ad Iohannem prophetaverunt* "for all the prophets and the law prophesied until John" (Matth. 11:13), *sed quid existis videre? prophetam? utique dico vobis et plus quam prophetam. Hic est de quo scriptum est, ecce mitto angelum meum ante faciem tuam qui praeparabit viam tuam ante te* "but what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" (Luke 7:26-7). This, of course, is precisely the kind of role played in the *Senchus Már* prologue by Dubthach maccu Lugair as a representative of the pre-Patrician order of *filid* who is inspired by the Holy Spirit to pave the way for Patrick's teaching.

At the beginning of his ministry "the word of God came unto John (*factum est verbum Dei super Iohannem*) the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentence for the remission of sins (*praedicans baptismum paenitentiae in remissionem peccatorum*); As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight (*parate viam Domini rectas facite semitas eius*)" (Luke 3:2-4, cf. Matth. 3:1-3). This imagery is quite deliberately imitated in Dubthach's case. Thus Patrick's blessing upon his utterance guarantees that the Holy Spirit will speak God's word through him, the first part of his poem concentrates upon the Joannine concerns of baptism, repentance and forgiveness, and the second part opens with a clear echo of Isaiah's prophecy as applied to John, *áilim Día, dírged mo sét* "I beseech God, let him make my path straight" (McCone, 1986c, 14-5).

Dubthach, of course, functions in this historically framed myth as the perfect prototype of the *fili* in the post-Patrician scheme of things. By virtue of his status as God's mouthpiece and Patrick's ally the poet becomes the leading representative of the *des dáno* and their activities in relation to the new faith and its requirements. As the brief saga version of these events, *Comthóth Lóegairi*, puts it, "their excesses were, then, put from them therein and they were arranged in their propriety" (*LU* 9774), the implication being that these professions now owe their position to the poet's advocacy and the Church's approval in the persons of Dubthach and Patrick respectively. One is reminded of the Levites' subordination to the priesthood in chapter three of Numbers, and presumably this early Irish narrative is meant to provide a mytho-historical sanction for the restriction of the highest *sóer-nemed* status to churchmen (*ecalsa*) and poets (*filid*), while other types of *áes dáno* are only granted various levels of subordinate *dóer-nemed* status (see 2 above).

The central legal issue in the prologue is whether or not homicide is exempt from Christ's famous modification of the Mosaic code in the Sermon on the Mount: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for and eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matth. 5:38-9). Dubthach's poem deploys much scriptural erudition and sophistry in order to justify the death penalty in such cases, the suggestion being that forgiveness should here apply to the soul rather than the body. Since the actual penalty for homicide in Ireland was usually a wergild

payment, this advocacy of the death penalty seems strange at first sight. However, it was very much in tune with clerical thinking at the time in Ireland and elsewhere. Thus the Irish Canons display considerable enthusiasm for corporal and capital punishment, quoting with approval Jerome's dictum that "to punish those guilty of homicide or sacrilege is not an effusion of blood but administration of God's laws (*homicidas et sacrilegos punire, non est effusio sanguinis, sed legum Dei ministerium*)" (*Can. Hib.* XXVII 8c., cf. McCone, 1986c, 17-8). It would appear that the Church and her lawyers, having failed to induce the secular aristocracy to abandon the financially advantageous system of wergild, grudgingly acknowledged it as a second best solution to the problem of culpable homicide.

6. This brings us to the commission of nine appointed to draw up the *Senchus Már*. Consisting as it does of three bishops, three rulers and a trio of poets and judges, this body precisely matches the three constituents of judgement according to *Uraicecht Becc*, namely the churchman's judgement (*breth ecalsa*) based on Scripture, the poet's judgement (*breth filed*) based on maxims (*for roscadaib*) and the ruler's judgment (*breth flatha*) combining both of these with precedents (see ch. 1, 10). Moreover, in early medieval Ireland the *cúl-airecht* or 'back court' as described in a short Old Irish legal text recently edited by Fergus Kelly consisted a king, a bishop and a "sage of every language of an *ollam*", glossed "*ollam* of poets" (1986, 78, 80 and 89-91). Obviously we are dealing with yet another aetiology of contemporary practices and perceptions, the three classes involved being comparable with the priests (*sacerdotes*), Levites (*Levitae*) and princes (*principes*) appointed by the virtuous king Jehosaphat firstly to teach the law among the cities of Judah (2 Chron. 17:7-9) and then to pass judgements in Jerusalem (ibid., 19:8). Still more to the point, perhaps, was a tendency in some Irish exegetical circles, animadverted to by Pádraig Ó Néill (1979, 154), to divide the Old Testament into three periods or orders, namely those of the kings (*reges*), the judges or prophets (*prophetae*) and the priests (*sacerdotes*).

A similar tripartite scheme in the *Uraicecht* focusing upon the traditional law or *fénechus* as a whole rather than the ruler's role in its application speaks of *breth bérla báin* or *léigend, breth filed* or *filidecht* and *breth féni* or *fénechus* (*CIH* 1612.23-6, 1614.31-2). This has its most direct aetiology in the story of how Cenn Fáelad first effected a written vernacular merger of these disciplines in a monastery around the middle of the seventh century (ch. 1, 10).

The so-called 'genuine' prologue to the *Senchus Már* covers much the same ground by giving the following answer to its opening question "the law of the men of Ireland, what has preserved it (*senchas fer nÉrenn cid conid:róeter*)?": "the joint memory of two old men (*comchuimne dá sen*), transmission from one ear to another (*tindnacul chluaise diaraili*), the chanting of poets (*dichetal filed*), increment from law of the letter (*tórmach ó recht litre*), corroboration according to law of nature (*nertad fri recht n-aicnid*), for those are the potent practices in relation to which the judgements of the world are established" (*CIH* 346.24-347.17; Thurneysen, 1927, 175). The first two constituents reflect not only the importance of memory and oral statement for the legal process in Ireland as in other societies, whether literate or non-literate, but also the belief that Irish law was unwritten until the coming of Patrick. The need for such oral testimony to be corroborated matches the biblical precept that "one witness shall not stand against someone (*non stabit testis unus*

contra aliquem) . . . but in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word stand (*sed in ore duorum aut trium testium stabit omne verbum*)'' (Deut. 19:15, cited by *Can. Hib.* XVI, 7) or ''that the testimony of two men is true (*quia duorum hominum testimonium verum est*)'' (John 8:17). The accompanying glosses presumably reflect standard doctrine in identifying the last three elements with the three poets or jurists, the three bishops and the three rulers respectively on the commission charged with drawing up the *Senchus Már*, and a comparison with the passage from *Córus Béscnai* in section 4 above points to the equivalence of *díchetal filed* and *recht fáithe* 'law of the prophets' in the Irish scheme of things.

The combination of ingredients such as these under the Church's aegis as symbolised by Patrick brought into being a new written law for early Christian Ireland in which, as *Cáin Fuithirbe* puts it, ''that which is contrary to conscience has been made forfeit by ink (*ro:dílsiged la dub in dícubus*)'' (Breatnach, 1986, 52). This seems to contradict the *laisser-faire* approach envisaged by Binchy: 'the introduction of Christianity in the fifth century brought in its wake the art of writing into a society that was still archaic, even primitive. As a result the members of an already powerful and well-organized legal caste were enabled, one might almost say by accident, at an exceptionally early period of social evolution to embody in permanent form the oral tradition that provided the framework of that society' (1973, 22).

Indeed, the passage cited from the 'pseudohistorical' prologue in 5 above makes it clear that, as far as early Ireland's men of letters were concerned, the sacrosanctity of the *Senchus Már* resided in the fact that it was held to be God's law as promulgated by His apostle Patrick. Its status as a repository of pagan ancestral wisdom figures as the major source of its authority only in some modern writings. To the medieval jurists themselves the validity of all Irish law, whether pre- or post-Patrician, depended upon God's inspiration and its apostolically certified compatibility with biblical and Christian teaching as well as nature. As an Old Irish gloss on *Cáin Fuithirbe* puts it, 'let the judges bear in mind, since they are not pagans (*ginnti*), that they did not transgress as long as they were in periods of unbelief (*i réib écretme*, i.e. before Patrick brought the faith) until ignorance of the baptism of salvation (*anfis bait[se] slái[ne]*) destroyed them if they deviated from the law of nature that God had given them (*usind recht aicnid do:rat Dia doib*)' (*CIH* 773.5-8; Ó Corráin, 1987, 291). This seems to reflect the Pauline doctrine at the heart of the Epistle to the Romans (especially chapters 4-8) that sin and death came into the world through Adam, that Mosaic law defined and punished offences, but that only faith and baptism in Christ could save man fully from the consequences of sin. However, what matters most for present purposes is the statement that God had granted *recht aicnid* to Ireland's pre-Patrician inhabitants through their righteous judges, a point reiterated by the glossing of *íar fénechus* ''according to traditional law'' as *.i. íarsin aicniud do:rat Dia dúinn* ''i.e., according to the (law of) nature that God had given to us'' (*CIH* 773.21).

7. Although *recht litre* in the Christian sense was seen as Patrick's gift to Ireland, the continuing validity of much of the *recht aicnid* allegedly in force there hitherto came to be ascribed to rather more than mere general divine promptings through nature. Thus by about the eighth century Irish *literati* were daring to assert that the pre-Patrician Gaels had already been vouchsafed privileged, if indirect, access to *recht litre* according to its strict definition as Mosaic law.

The Harley recension of the 'pseudohistorical' prologue, which may or may not continue the original at this point, has Dubthach explain to Patrick prior to giving judgement in the case of Núadu that "what was before you in Ireland was judgement of law (*breth rechta*), i.e. that was revenge, foot for foot and eye for eye and life for life (*cos i cois ⁊ súil i súil ⁊ anim in anim*)" (*CIH* 340.21-2), an obvious reference to the Old Testament injunction "thou shalt exact life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot (*animam pro anima, oculum pro oculo, dentem pro dente, manum pro manu, pedem pro pede exiges*)" (Deut. 19:21, cf. Ex. 21:23-5). The clear implication is that the pre-Patrician *breth rechta* practised by king Cormac mac Airt (ch. 3, 10) and other righteous men in Ireland was essentially Mosaic (cf. McCone, 1986c, 12).

Indeed, that remarkable Middle Irish synthetic historical compilation *Scél na Fír Flatha* not only echoes aspects of the 'pseudohistorical' prologue's Patrician settlement but also endows its hero Cormac with a distinctly Mosaic aura as ruler presiding over "the most noble assembly that was held in Ireland before the faith, since it is the rules and laws that were made in that gathering that will last in Ireland till Doomsday" (par. 4). These legal activities include the promulgation of twelve ordeals for distinguishing between truth and falsehood. Several of these, namely Morann's three collars (pars. 12-16, cf. ch. 3, 10), Sencha mac Ailella's lot-casting (par. 18), Sen mac Aige's lot-casting (par. 22) and a practice allegedly brought from Israel by Caí Caínbrethach (par. 23), are associated with figures on the H.3.17 recension of the 'pseudohistorical' prologue's list of pre-Patrician authorities. After arranging the laws, Cormac declared a seven-year jubilee (*iubail*) lifted from chapter 25 of Leviticus between one Feast of Tara (*Feis Temro*) or "Passover/Easter of the gentiles/pagans (*cáisc na ngente*)" and the next (par. 55), and this was followed by the authoritative writing of Ireland's histories, genealogies and regnal successions down to that time in the so-called 'Psalter of Cormac' or 'Psalter of Tara', which is thus represented as a kind of Irish Pentateuch (see end of ch. 3, 10).

It has already been seen that the formation of the Irish language under the auspices of Fénius Farsaid was set in Egypt (ch. 2, 4), which the ancestors of the Gael under their leader are said to have left to begin their protracted wanderings to Ireland in the aftermath of the Israelite exodus under Moses (ch. 3, 7). The account of the ordeal introduced by Caí in *Scél na Fír Flatha* shows how this link could be further exploited to provide a plausible explanation for the unnaturally high proportion of Mosaic judgements ascribed to the Irish *recht aicnid* implemented by Cormac and others well before Patrick set foot in Ireland: "now Caí Caínbrethach, the pupil of Fénius Farsaid, the twelfth or seventy-second disciple of the school (cf. Ahlqvist, 1982, 47) which Fénius sent out from Greece in order to learn the many languages throughout the countries of the world, it was that Caí who brought that ordeal with him from the land of Israel, when he had come to the chosen people (*túath Dé*) and had learned the Law of Moses. And it was he that used to deliver judgements in the school after it had been gathered from every side and it was he that ordained the *Breth Caí*. It was the same Caí moreover who first ordained in Ireland the law of the four tracks [= *Cethairslicht Athgabála*], for only two of the school came to Ireland: Aimirgen Glúngel the poet and Caí the judge. And Caí remained in Ireland until he had spent nine generations, in consequence of the righteousness of his judgements. For it is judgements that he used to deliver, namely judgements of the law of Moses (*bretha rechta Maisi*), and therefore judgements of law (*bretha rechta*)

are very abundant in Irish law (*fénechas*). These were the judgements of law (*bretha rechta*) which served Cormac" (par. 24).

In a recent discussion of this and related passages Ó Corráin points out that a brief notice of Caí's role in Cormac's Glossary proves that in its essentials this tradition goes back at least as far as the eighth century (1987, 288-91). The H.3.17 recension of the 'pseudohistorical' prologue provides the fullest account (*CIH* 1653.16-1654.9), elaborating on how Caí went on an expedition from Thrace, joined the sons of Míl and came with them to Ireland. It is to be noted that Caí and Amirgin, his pupil according to H.3.17, present us with a by now familiar pairing of judge or *brithem* and poet or *fili*. Indeed, this aetiology is particularly ambitious in projecting a contemporary hallmark of these two professions, namely an Isidorean amalgam of classical and biblical knowledge (ch. 1. 10-11), right back to the Milesians themselves.

8. In editing the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* Herrmann Wasserschleben brought great erudition to bear upon identifying the sources used by the early medieval Irish canon lawyers, and concluded: "it stands out among all contemporary and older systematic collections for the wealth of its patristic and ecclesiastical historical material, and attains particular importance on account of countless excerpts from Irish synodal decisions and statutes, which grant an insight into the peculiar views and tendencies of the national Church there and of the national law" (*Can. Hib.*, xiii). Moreover, "an extraordinarily large number of citations are taken from Holy Writ, about 500, but in this connection it seems striking at first sight that almost ⅔ of these belong to the Old Testament. On closer inspection, however, this seems explicable: for a whole series of situations and questions requiring treatment and consideration the Old Testament material presented an embarrassment of riches, whereas for many of the same the New Testament had scarcely anything to offer" (ibid., xiv).

Owing to the rather different preoccupations of the scholars concerned, the contribution of such sources to early Irish vernacular law has only recently begun to be investigated seriously. However, the profound intermingling of secular and canon law along with their practitioners in the monastic schools is beginning to emerge clearly from seminal studies by Ó Corráin and Breatnach already referred to (see bibliography and ch. 1, 10-11). It can now be confidently stated that all early Irish law betrays the Old Testament stamp so typical of the early medieval Irish learned classes' overall outlook and likewise manifested in other intertwined branches of *senchas* such as genealogy, gnomic tracts and narrative mytho-history.

Various factors presumably conspired to produce the affinities between Irish and Mosaic law so clearly perceived by native *literati*. To begin with, direct borrowing from Scripture is the obvious explanation for many features, including the identification of major monasteries with the levitical cities of refuge (2 above) and emphasis upon the salubrious effects of offering *dechmada* ⁊ *primiti* ⁊ *almsana* "tithes, firstfruits and alms" (e.g. Num. 18:26 *decimas . . . primitias*, Luke 11:41 *elemosynam*) according to the so-called 'genuine' prologue to the *Senchas Már* (*CIH* 351.9; Thurneysen, 1927, 176) and *Córus Bésgnai* (*CIH* 522.33; Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 1984, 384).

In Irish law "the normal disposition of a man's estate on his death was by equal division amongst his lawful sons, except chattels, of which daughters received *lann*,

rann and *bregda*, and any property which the father had himself acquired which they shared equally with sons. This inheritance by the sons is nowhere, to my knowledge, expressly stated, but it is everywhere implied . . . if there is no male heir, a daughter or daughters inherit all chattels, and may inherit all other property as well. In this event, the daughter was a *banchomarba*, a female heir, and this privilege of women dates back to early times'' (Dillon in Binchy, 1936, 134). ''The son of a *banchomarbu* did not inherit *finntiu* unless his father, while being husband to his mother, was also the nearest surviving member of her *fine*'' (ibid., 151), i.e. after her death the estate reverted to the male patrilateral next of kin, typically her parallel cousin, whose sons would be hers too if she married him. Only when the one or more inheriting siblings that constitute a *gel-fine* die out without further descendants in the male line, a situation known as *díbad* ''extinction'', is the family property shared out among the more distant degrees of paternal kin represented by the *derb-fine*, *iar-fine* and *ind-fine* (ibid., 134). Furthermore, ''his father puts an undutiful son (*mac ingor*) out of inheritance and bestows his inheritance on him who performs his maintenance (*a goire*)'' according to *Córus Bésgnai* (*CIH* 534.26-7). Good early evidence for the equal division of an estate between surviving sons in Tírechán (McCone, 1984b, 57-8) is corroborated by a clear statement to that effect in the Irish Canons (see below), a somewhat obscurely defined extra portion of property known as the *cumal senorba* apparently being reserved for the head of the inheriting kindred (Dillon, ibid., 141-2).

The Irish Canons had no difficulty in finding scriptural justification for these prescriptions. The duty (*pietas*, cf. OIr. *goire*) of sons towards their parents and its relevance to testamentary provision is stressed at various points with the help of apposite quotations from the Pentateuch and elsewhere (e.g. *Can. Hib.* XXXI, 13-4, XXXII, 1-2). The quotation of Numbers 27:8-11 suffices to establish the basic principle of inheritance: *homo cum mortuus fuerit absque filio, ad filiam eius transibit hereditas eius. Si filiam non habuerit, habebit successores fratres suos; quodsi non habuerit fratres, dabis hereditatem fratribus patris eius; si autem non habuerit fratrem patris, dabitur hereditas his, qui eius proximi sunt* (*Can. Hib.* XXXII, 9) ''if a man die without a son, his inheritance shall pass unto his daughter. If he have no daughter, he shall have his brethren as heirs (cf. the *gel-fine*). And if he have no brethren, thou shalt give his inheritance unto his father's brethren (cf. the *derb-fine*). And if he have no father's brother, his inheritance shall be given to those who are next to him (cf. the *iar-fine* and *ind-fine*)''. After referring to the Mosaic law's requirement that a father bestow a double portion of his inheritance upon his firstborn son (cf. Deut. 21:17), the Canons represent what is obviously the current Irish custom of the *cumal senorba* as a later modification of this: ''in most recent days a father divides equally among all his sons and reserves to himself, as if to one of his sons, a part of the inheritance and whole substance, which he entrusts to his firstborn, and it shall be his inalienably, or shall be divided after the firstborn's death between his heir and his brothers and their successors'' (*Can. Hib.* XXXI, 18).

It is, of course, hardly likely that early medieval Irish jurists simply jettisoned their pre-Christian rules in so fundamental an area as inheritance and replaced them with provisions taken over root and branch from Mosaic law. In the type of patrilinear system familiar not only from Old Testament Israel but also from a wide range of Indo-European and other peoples, nothing could be more natural than inheritance in the direct male line by preference before moving steadily outwards

through the various degrees of the father's male collateral kin. This is, indeed, essentially the type of system ascribed by Tacitus to the Celts' Indo-European neighbours, the Germans, in the pagan period: "everyone's heirs and successors are his own children, and there is no will. If there are no children, the next grade in possession (consists of) brothers, paternal uncles, maternal uncles" (*Germania*, par. 20). Here, of course, reversion is to the maternal kin after a certain stage, whereas the Irish system makes no such provision. Furthermore, insistence upon the duty of looking after ageing parents is too much of an anthropological commonplace for biblical borrowing to be the most likely explanation. It therefore seems probable that the broad similarities between the medieval Irish and Old Testament inheritance rules owe more to statistically acceptable coincidence than to extensive borrowing. On the other hand, Goody's remarks about the impact of Islam upon parts of black Africa present obvious parallels with the early Irish situation vis à vis biblical and canon law: "the existence of a legal code which was so closely linked with the word of God (it was as if the only law was canon law) meant that there were strong pressures upon certain societies, or anyhow upon important groups within those societies, to adopt new forms of social action. The influence of these law books – Maliki law from the Maghreb – upon Sudanese societies has been touched upon by various authors and it cannot be doubted that changes of considerable significance have occurred and are continually occurring, in the system of kinship and marriage as well as in the organization of kin groups, in the position of the chief, etc. But what is of central importance here is not so much the diffusion of Islam but the fact that Islam is a religion of the book" (1968, 240-1). So, of course, is Christianity, and a core of coincidental agreement may well have been enhanced by imitation of the Bible, the most likely candidate being the 'Zelophahad' rule about a daughter inheriting in the absence of sons but needing to marry a paternal kinsman in order to transmit this to her own offspring (see 1 above).

Be that as it may, the basic point is that such similarities, regardless of how they had arisen, encouraged early Christian Ireland's monastic jurists in the belief that their native law had particular affinities with the Mosaic code. Once this conviction had taken root, even manifest discrepancies could be explained away historically. Thus, as has been pointed out in 5 and 7 above, the doubtless ancient Irish institution of *éraic* or 'wergild' as the normal penalty for culpable homicide was explained as an unavoidable later substitute for a Christian modification of the Mosaic principle of 'life for life' allegedly observed in Ireland prior to Patrick's coming.

9. Lévi-Strauss has suggested that so-called 'primitive' thought, as opposed to the modern western mode inherited from classical Greece via Rome, typically integrates past and present by means of a relatively static mytho-historical model that is primarily concerned with authorising various values and institutions regarded as essentially immutable thereafter (cf. McCone, 1986c, 13). When actual and irresistible changes threaten to dislocate such a system, reintegration can only be achieved by modifying, recreating or (as in the rather special case of allegory) reinterpreting the past in the light of the new present. As Vansina puts it, "traditions are altered, more or less consciously, to fit in with the cultural values of the time" (1973, 96).

Obviously this is likely to have happened on a large scale in the wake of Ireland's conversion to Christianity, although the details inevitably elude us in the absence of sources predating that process. Indeed, Ó Corráin makes the following apt remarks

about early medieval Ireland's *literati*: "this caste of hereditary or quasi-hereditary scholars quite self-consciously held themselves in the highest esteem and discharged duties of very considerable political and social importance: they were the custodians of the past – the *mos maiorum* (in church as in lay society), the royal pedigree, dynastic (and ecclesiastical) genealogy and *origo gentis*. Their powers, as the arbiters of good custom, as provers of pedigree (and thus of claim to role and property), as panegyrists of the great and, above all, as makers of the past who re-shaped it to accord with the pretensions and ambitions of the contemporary holders of power, were extensive and jealously guarded' (1986, 142).

Medieval Irish literature abounds in episodes testifying to the importance attached to the past as a sanction for present realities and aspirations. Thus the 'first' poetic satire uttered by the *fili* Cairbre in protest against maltreatment by king Bres (Gray, 1982, 35) permanently validated the genre and defined its proper use, while it has been seen (end of 6 above) that the leading role played in its compilation by God's apostle Patrick was made the guarantee of the *Senchus Már*'s inviolability.

It has been argued (ch. 3, 6) that the ecclesiastically inspired development of a chronological and synchronistic framework for *senchus* did not significantly affect these fundamentally mythical functions. It is, of course, true that Irish synthetic history was cast in a superficially dynamic mould by virtue of being adapted to and from the biblically oriented scheme of Christian world history with its successive phases (ch. 3, 7-10), but the counterpoise of historical typology must be borne in mind. This method was applied at almost every conceivable level to represent the Old Testament as a prefiguration of the New and the New Testament as a fulfilment of the Old, thus bridging the major divide between them and integrating the Jewish past with the Christian present and future. In effect, it provided a means of accommodating the relatively static view of the past as a display of permanent truths to the dynamic of progressive revelation and vice versa.

Early Christian Irish jurists are unlikely to have been sure how far their *fénechus*'s extensive affinities with biblical and canon law were due to borrowing, coincidence or virtually endless combinations of the two, but they could presumably have ascribed all or most of these to the Church's impact upon law and society by casting Patrick in the role of a divinely inspired radical reformer, had they so wished. The disagreeable corollary would have been that Christianity had had a major disruptive effect on Irish *mores*, that a great deal of the current social and ideological *status quo* was no more than two or three centuries old, and that native practices and beliefs prior to the *annus mirabilis* of 432/3 A.D. had been seriously out of tune with God's law – in short, that until quite recently the Irish had been beyond the pale of God's providence. Small wonder that such a message did not appeal.

Equally obvious advantages attached to the alternative of claiming that the main elements of Irish law, Old Testament parallels and all, were already in place when Patrick came to Ireland and only required fairly minor adaptation, in collusion with the native learned establishment, to bring them to perfection in the light of Christian revelation. In practice, this enabled the Church to claim ultimate control over and, where necessary, modify a body of laws and institutions geared to the social and political milieu in which it had to operate. After all, in the words of the *Senchus Már* prologue cited in 5 above "the law of nature had covered much that the law of the letter had not reached".

At the more abstract level of theory, this construct made it possible to develop a 'native' historical typology in which Christianity represented the natural or logical fulfilment of pre-existing trends and traits in Irish history and society rather than a rude intrusion from outside. The potentially uncomfortable break between the pre-Christian past and the Christian present could thus be minimised and the integration of both phases into an essentially unitary mytho-historical model facilitated. Such a scheme inevitably implied a gratifyingly large role for divine providence in Ireland's pre-Patrician history, the substantial accommodation of which to that of Old Testament Israel could only increase its efficiency as a typological precursor of the Patrician settlement. Pauline claims that God's will could operate beyond the confines of Israel even before Christ's appearance, medieval doctrine about the divinely inspired Greek and Roman sybils (end of ch. 3, 12) and so on made it possible to endow pre-Christian Ireland with certain righteous kings, judges and prophets, but a more literal approach based on Caí's alleged contact with Moses soon supplemented this. The parallels between Irish and biblical history were eventually even enhanced to the point where the two-stage promulgation of the law by Moses and Christ was echoed by adding a major legal assembly under Cormac to the one presided over by Patrick. Indeed, a combination of mythical interest in the remote past with the needs of historical typology presumably accounts for the well known early Irish juristic practice of seeking and often enough, no doubt, inventing legal precedents in the actions of important figures from their pre-Patrician 'Old Testament' (cf. Binchy, 1952, 33; 1973, 40-44).

The age-old integrity and divine sanction of most of Ireland's social and legal system could be thus be congenially asserted, a major advantage for clerics and their associates being the ease with which convenient innovations could be given the prestige of antiques by being slipped into the pre-Patrician *senchus*. In effect, these monastically oriented men of letters were Ireland's first nativists, eager to assert their own and their patrons' place in a unique cultural continuum going back to the Milesian invasion of Ireland and beyond to still more distant Thracian ancestors' peripheral involvement in epoch-making biblical events. So dazzling is the array of the most international, up to date and authoritative scholarship of the time brought to bear upon whatever native materials were used, and so imposing is the composite edifice so constructed, that it continues to mesmerise modern counterparts, whose own rather less coherent model essentially substitutes Celts and Indo-Europeans for Milesians and Thracians respectively while asserting early Christian Ireland's peculiar affinities with ancient India rather than ancient Israel.

CHAPTER FIVE

Kingship and society

1. The almost obsessive concern of medieval Irish writers with kingship is apparent from even the most cursory glance at their literary output, especially in the field of narrative, and clearly reflects the pivotal role ascribed to monarchy in politics, society and the overall scheme of things. The main aim of this and the next chapter is to identify certain key aspects of this ideological system and then to consider their literary manipulation within the broader context of a Christian society with roots in a pagan past.

As already indicated (ch.1, 5-6), kingship is an area in which many scholars have been particularly prone to stress the conservatism of the medieval Irish outlook, the tenacious adherence to pagan traditions, and the weakness of the Church's impact. Thus according to Byrne in the opening chapter on 'the Irish concept of kingship' of his book *Irish kings and high-kings* "the records offer a detailed picture of a self-absorbed society, at the same time archaic and sophisticated – a backwater undisturbed by the mainstream of the Latin middle ages, to which it paradoxically contributed a refreshing current of intellectual liveliness and religious idealism. The primitive characteristics of Irish society, and in particular the archaic features of Irish kingship, find their nearest European parallels in pre-Christian Scandinavia" (1973, 12).

The very abundance of Irish material relating to kingship, the importance of the institution in the Bible as well as in medieval Christian Europe as a whole, and the existence of germane comparative data from other Indo-European societies make it a uniquely good platform for assessing the interplay of pagan and Christian factors. It seems appropriate to start by looking at possible or probable Celtic and Indo-European antecedents.

2. Extensive comparative evidence clearly shows that the Old Irish words for the king and the basic territorial unit ruled by him, *rí* and *túath* respectively, both go right back through Common Celtic to Indo-European protoforms (**rēǵ-s* and **tewtā*) with similar basic meanings (Binchy, 1970, 3-8; McCone, 1987, 110-1, 115-6, 142-4). As pointed out earlier (ch. 1, 7), precise phonetic and rather less well defined semantic correspondences of this kind do indeed imply some degree of continuity with the prehistoric past, but continuity as such is too vague a notion to be useful

in the absence of further specifics and in any case does not preclude significant intervening change.

Nevertheless, there is no shortage of comparative evidence indicative of an appreciable pagan Celtic and Indo-European input into the early Irish concept of kingship. For instance, the Irish king's major functions as leader in war, presider over his assembled people or elders and judge or lawgiver, although commonplace enough, are at least closely paralleled in other ancient Indo-European societies, notably those of the Hittites, the Spartan Greeks and the Romans (McCone, 1987, 135-6).

At the heart of early Irish kingship theory lay the notion that a kingdom's welfare in both the social and natural spheres was intimately bound up with the sovereign's physical, social and mental condition. Medieval Irish literature abounds in descriptions attributing peace, social stability, good weather, abundance of crops, livestock and so on to the "sovereign's truth" or *fír flatha*. Conversely, other passages record the catastrophic consequences such as strife, bad weather, pestilence and famine liable to result from the *gáu flatha* or "sovereign's lie". These concepts, which will be further explored and illustrated below, are typical enough manifestations of so-called 'sacral kingship'.

The essence of this ideology and institution, various forms of which are widespread among the peoples of the earth (e.g. Frankfort, 1948, on ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia), is that the monarch has supernatural attributes as mediator between the human and divine worlds. Thus on page 64 of a collection of many scholars' contributions on facets of this topic entitled *The sacral kingship* James formulates the basic idea as follows: "as the intermediary between the human and the natural orders, the supernatural potency embodied in the kingship flows through this appointed channel into the body politic establishing a state of harmony, equilibrium and beneficence in the integration of nature and society. It is on this basis that the institution exercises a sacerdotal function, and for this reason that the throne must always have a virile, healthy and alert occupant, since the king, symbolising the community and its transcendental and temporal aspects, is the unifying and dynamic centre".

It seems probable that a sacral kingship along such lines existed among the pagan Celts and Indo-Europeans. Pagan Gaulish belief in the fecundating effects of good judgements has already been mentioned (ch. 4, 1), and Livy's somewhat rationalized version of what was presumably a native account of the Gaulish conquest of North Italy presents us with an ideal pagan Celtic monarch Ambigatus who was "distinguished by both personal and public virtue and fortune, since in his reign Gaul was so fertile in crops and men that the abundant multitude seemed scarcely able to be ruled" (V, 34, 2). In the broader Indo-European context Odyssey 19, 109-14 provides a clear description of the abundance of crops, flocks and fish expected to characterize a just reign, and Calvert Watkins has compared Old Irish, Indo-Iranian and Greek data pointing to "a feature of Indo-European culture: a simple but powerful ethical notion of the Ruler's Truth . . ., which ensures the society's prosperity, abundance of food, and fertility, and protection from plague, calamity, and enemy attack" (1979, 181, cf. Dillon, 1947, 3-8 and 1973, 16-8).

Given that such notions are by no means confined to Indo-European peoples (e.g., Frankfort, 1948, 51 on Egyptian *maat* 'truth', cf. Wagner, 1971), this general hypothesis needs the support of circumstantial correspondences that make it

possible to reconstruct genetically significant details linked to an overall Celtic and Indo-European doctrine of kingship along with its mythical realizations.

3. It is well known that certain women are represented in Irish literature as the wives of a considerable number of kings traditionally belonging to different generations or even periods. The evidence relating to two particularly celebrated exponents of this pattern, Medb of Crúachu and Medb Lethderg, has been assembled by Ó Máille, who cites a statement in *LL* to the effect that Medb Lethderg would not let a king into Tara without his being her spouse (1927, 137). Moreover, Ó Cathasaigh remarks of the similar Eithne Thóeb-fota, who marries Cormac Mac Airt in *Esnada Tige Buchet* but appears as his grandfather Conn's wife at the beginning of *Echtra Airt meic Cuinn*, that "in a traditional oneiromantic text she is explicitly identified with the sovereignty of Tara" (1977, 31), and further points out on the basis of a comparison between *Esnada Tige Buchet* and *Cnucha Cnoc os Cionn Life* that functionally "the Laginian Medb Lethderg ('Red-side') is equivalent to the Laginian Ethne Thóebfota ('Long-side')" (ibid., 77).

In *Baile Chuind*, an arguably early list of Tara's kings cast in the form of obscure prophecies, various monarchs are said to 'drink' the sovereignty (Murphy, 1952, 146-9), and female symbols of sovereignty are not infrequently represented as bestowing a drink upon kings-to-be. For instance, in the prophetic Tara king-list entitled *Baile in Scáil* a supernatural enthroned woman described as *flaith Érenn* "the sovereignty of Ireland" pours a draught of red liquor (*derg-(f)laith*) from a vat into a cup and her companion then foretells the king to whom it is to be apportioned. In *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* a hag by a well successively offers thirsty princely brothers a drink in return for a kiss but is rebuffed. However, when their half-brother, the future king of Tara Niall Noígíallach, has intercourse with her, she is transformed into a beautiful maiden and likens herself to the 'sovereignty' (*flaithius*). Similarly, in a tale recounted in *Cóir Anmann* 'the fitness of names' Dáire Doimthech's five sons, each named Lugaid, encounter in turn a hideous, filthily clad old woman in a well appointed house containing ale (*linn*), but all except Lugaid Laigde refuse her advances. However, when Lugaid sleeps with her she is transformed into a beautiful maiden and states *missi in flaithius ⁊ gébthar rige nÉrenn úait* "I am the sovereignty, and the kingship of Ireland will be obtained from you" (Stokes, 1891, 318-21). Moreover, the very name Medb (< *Med^hw-a*) is a feminine derivative of *mid* 'mead' (< *med^hu*) and must once have signified something like 'mead-woman' (cf. O'Rahilly, 1943, 15).

As Murphy recognized (1937, 143-4), essentially the same configuration of elements occurs in Aristotle's account of the Greek foundation of Massilia, present-day Marseilles, on the southern coast of Gaul (Rose, 1886, 459 = Zwicker, 1934, 2-3; Latin version Justinus XLIII 3, 8-11 = Zwicker 95). According to this the Greek colonists arrived just as the local Gaulish king's daughter was about to choose a husband by offering him a drink. She duly chose the Greeks' leader, they married and their son's descendants supposedly still live in Massilia. This looks very much like a Massiliote assimilation of a native Gaulish myth to account for Greek sovereignty over a city state bordering on their territory. If so, the notion of a king's daughter transmitting sovereignty to the man of her choice by proffering him a drink prior to marriage and thus establishing a dynastic line is clearly attested among the pagan Gauls as well as the early medieval Irish. The

highly circumstantial correspondences involved point strongly to common Celtic inheritance.

These features conform to a well attested but by no means ubiquitous variety of sacral kingship centring round a so-called *hieros gamos* or "sacred marriage" between the king and a goddess held to embody the territorial sovereignty (cf. Binchy, 1970, 11-2). Rather than the king being viewed simply as a god in his own right, as in pharaonic Egypt, divine power is supposed to flow through him by means of intercourse with a deity, a sexual symbolism apposite to the monarchy's fecundating function that has been discussed in the second part of Frankfort's book (1948) with reference to ancient Mesopotamia. Evidence for a hierogamous sacral kingship in ancient Ireland has been assembled and discussed by de Vries (1961, 235-47), and it is in this light that numerous women associated with kings and kingship in early Irish literature are commonly referred to as 'sovereignty goddesses'.

Just as the Gaulish princess in Aristotle's tale preferred a stranger whom she had never seen before to local suitors, so too are the future spouses of kings often represented in early Irish literature as spurning advances nearer home for love of their hitherto unseen intended. For instance, at the beginning of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* the fair Étaín encountered "at the edge of the well" (l. 3) by king Eochaid Feidlech, who is immediately smitten with her, is so unabashed by his request to sleep with her as to state that this is precisely what she has come for (ll. 48-9). After telling him her name and pedigree, she continues: "I have been here for twenty years since I was born in the *síd*-mound. The men of the *síd*-mound, both kings and nobles, asking for me, but it was not got from me because I have loved you with a child's love since I was able to talk on account of your great reputation and your splendour, and I have not seen you before and I recognised you immediately by your appearance. It is you that I have come for then" (ll. 52-7). Similarly, according to *Cóir Anmann*, "Éogan the Great (eponymous ancestor of the Munster Éoganacht) went to Spain on a visit. The king of Spain at that time was Éber the Great son of Midna. Éogan, then, met with great affection in Spain on that journey. The king, then, had a noble unmarried daughter at that time, Bera daughter of Éber her name. And she had given love in absence (*grád écmaise*) to Éogan before he went into Spain. Éogan, then, took the maiden thereafter and she bore him distinguished offspring, namely a wondrous son Ailill Ólomm and two daughters, Scuithniam and Caimell their names" (par. 38).

A strikingly similar constellation of motifs is found in the first piece of Sanskrit literature read by many learners, namely the *Nalopākhyāna* or Nala episode from the vast epic Mahābhārata (3, 53, 1f.). Stimulated by reports, the handsome, truthful king Nala and king Bhīma's beautiful daughter Damayantī fall in love with each other unseen (*adṛṣṭa-kāma*: 53, 16). Correctly diagnosing his daughter's pining condition, Bhīma decides to summon royal suitors so that she can make her own choice of husband (*svayaṁ-vara*; 54, 9). Nala is obliged to plead four gods' suits before Damayantī, but she recognises him as the object of her love and promises to choose him at the assembly. However, the gods assume Nala's appearance. Confronted by five look-alikes of her beloved amidst the host of suitors, Damayantī induces the gods to reveal themselves by uttering a number of truths (*satya*; 57, 13f.), chooses Nala with their blessing and marries him. Nala's happy reign is characterised by right and due custom (*dharma*; 57, 42) as well as religious offerings, which significantly include the famous sovereignty ritual of *aśva-medha* or 'horse-

sacrifice' (57, 43; see 4 below). His union with Damayantī produces a son Indrasena, a daughter Indrasenā and general prosperity to his "treasure-filled land (*vasu-sampūrṇā vasu-dhā*)" (57, 42-3).

Some years later he loses his kingdom and possessions in a dice game, and in derangement abandons his wife. As MacDonell puts it, "many and striking are the similes with which the poet dwells on the grief and wasted form of the princess in her separation from her husband. She is *like the young moon's slender crescent obscured by black clouds in the sky; like the lotus-flower uprooted, all parched and withered by the sun; like the pallid night, when Rāhu has swallowed up the darkened moon*. Nala, meanwhile, transformed into a dwarf, has become charioteer to the king of Oudh. Damayantī at last hears news leading her to suspect her husband's whereabouts. She accordingly holds out hopes of her hand to the king of Oudh, on condition of his driving the distance of 500 miles to Kundina in a single day. Nala, acting as his charioteer, accomplishes the feat, and is rewarded by the king with the secret of the highest skill in dicing. Recognised by his wife in spite of his disguise, he regains his true form. He plays again, and wins back his lost kingdom. Thus after years of adventure, sorrow, and humiliation he is at last reunited with Damayantī, with whom he spends the rest of his days in happiness" (1900, 298).

Among Indo-European literatures the choice of a husband by a king's daughter, usually on the basis of tests or ordeals, is not confined to the allegedly archaic peripheries inhabited by Celts and Hindus (ch. 1, 7). In Greek mythology an obvious figure of this type is Iasus' fleet-footed daughter Atalanta, outrunning and then killing her suitors until defeated by Melanion through slowing down to pick up the three golden apples he had strewn in her path (Apollodorus 3, 9, 2). Penelope's attributes and behaviour in the Odyssey are still more revealing and will be discussed below. Damayantī's acts of truth to winnow the four false Nalas from the true one likewise constitute a test, as does the feat of chariot driving she demands later. In Irish tradition the sexually symbolic charioteering tests confronting a would-be king of Tara according to *De Síl Chonairi Móir* have been described earlier (ch. 3, 4) and will figure again near the end of the present section. The challenge of making love to an at first sight ugly hag has a similar import, and in *Echtra Airt meic Cuinn* the future king of Tara, Art, must go on a dangerous quest and slay fierce supernatural adversaries to win his bride-to-be's hand (cf. Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 27-8).

Indian *svayaṃvara* or 'own choice' is generally held to represent an old type of marriage amongst the *kṣatriya* caste of kings and warriors (e.g. Wezler, 1965, 6-7, n.13), the opening chapters of the Nala episode providing the best evidence for this institution. In firmly patrilinear societies like those of ancient Ireland, Greece or India, not to mention the ancestral Indo-Europeans themselves, it would be strange indeed if the all-important kingship were left literally in the gift of a mere woman. Stranger still, perhaps, that the king's daughter endowed with such a privilege by her people should normally be expected to select a stranger she had never set eyes on before, as implied by the Indian and Irish traditions of *adṛṣṭa kāma* and *grád écmaise* respectively. On the whole, this hardly looks like a real institution, obsolete or otherwise, in the societies concerned. Given Stig Wikander's demonstration that divine functions and configurations may be transferred to heroes in the Mahābhārata (1947; cf. Dumézil, 1970, 4-5), Nala and Damayantī may be suspected of carrying the impress of an archetypal sovereignty myth, as was argued in the case of Aristotle's similarly euhemerized account on the strength of the manifest

connection of the relevant features with 'sovereignty goddess' types in early Irish literature.

Disguise or concealment and subsequent transformation or revelation are essential ingredients of this myth, being still discernible in probable modern folktale derivatives like the story of Cinderella or that of the frog-prince as recorded by the brothers Grimm (cf. the remarks on their version of 'the golden bird' below). In early Irish literature the 'sovereignty goddess' may be hidden beneath an uninviting exterior to be transformed by association with her destined royal husband, as in *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* and the *Cóir Anmann* story of the Lugaid brothers above. Near the beginning of *De Síl Chonairi Móir* king Eterscél of Tara's mate, the *síd*-frequenting herdswoman Mes Búachalla, is described as large and repulsive of aspect, but a functionally equivalent alternative version in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* makes her a regally born and beautiful seamstress hidden away in a hut with only a skylight by cowherd fosterers until discovered by Eterscél's men, brought to him and raised to her proper status by marriage to the king, whose previous lack of offspring is remedied by the birth of a son, Conaire (par. 5-8). In the tale from *Cóir Anmann*, the woman is confronted with five Lugaids just as Damayantī must choose between five Nalas, but in both cases the true spouse is ultimately disclosed. Due allowance being made for the inversion of sexes and the unfavourable outcome, a still more striking Irish analogue of Damayantī's dilemma is provided by *Tochmarc Étaíne* (III, 15-9), in which king Eochaid digs up the *síd*-mound to which his wife Étaín has been abducted by Midir and is promised satisfaction. When confronted by fifty look-alikes, he is confident of recognising the real Étaín from her skill in serving drink but unwittingly selects a daughter born after their separation.

Irish literature tends to focus upon the beneficial transformation of the woman on contact with her destined spouse, but *Echtra Airt meic Cuind* does depict Conn's distress at the loss of his wife Eithne: "and the death of his wife lay heavily with him and impinged upon him to such an extent that he could not order or govern the kingdom or the sovereignty" (par. 2). While the Nala episode describes the heroine's lovesick condition prior to obtaining her proper husband, greater emphasis is placed upon the adverse effects of subsequent separation upon both partners, namely Damayantī's physical and mental deterioration as well as Nala's decline from magnificent king to menial dwarf. However, these are merely opposite sides of the same coin, and Damayantī's recognition and their reunion restore both to former glory.

The markedly equine connotations of Rhiannon in the the Middle Welsh *Mabinogi*, especially the first branch *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet* (ed. Thomson, 1957), have been emphasised by Alwyn and Brinley Rees: "originally her name may have meant 'Great Queen', and she is repeatedly associated with horses. Wrongly deemed guilty of destroying her child, she is obliged to sit by the horseblock ready to carry visitors on her back to the court. After disappearing in Llwyd's magic fortress, her punishment is to have the collars of asses, after they have been carrying hay, about her neck. Furthermore, the loss and recovery of her son is linked with the birth of a colt which is later given to him when he shows a remarkable interest in horses and (in the Fourth Branch) his acceptance of a gift of horses is the prelude to his death" (1961, 45). Given the ritual significance of the horse as a symbol of sovereignty in Celtic and some other Indo-European cultures (see 4 below), it seems reasonable to

look for other diagnostics of the goddess or woman of sovereignty in Rhiannon's representation, and indeed these soon become apparent.

To begin with, the unmarried king Pwyll first spies her on horseback when sitting on a mound (*gorsset*) near his court in expectation of a wondrous sight (*rywedawt*, ll. 196-8). After various of his followers have failed to catch her on different occasions, Pwyll himself rides after her and succeeds in getting her to wait for him (ll. 203-74). Her beauty is peerless (ll. 278-80, *bot yn diuwyn ganthaw pryt a welsei eiroet o uorwyn a gwreic y wrth y ffryt hi*) like that of Damayantī above or a manifest Irish sovereignty figure like Étain waiting for king Eochaid at the well at the beginning of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (e.g. ll. 43-4, *cruth cách co hÉtain, cáem cách co hÉtain*). Like Étain (see above), she has resisted proposals nearer home for love of a king she has never seen before: "the chief errand I had was to try and see you . . . I am Rhiannon daughter of Heueyd Hen, and I am being given to a man against my will. And I have not desired any man, and that for love of you (*ac ny mynneis innheu un gwr, a hynny o'th garyat ti*), and I will not desire him even now unless you refuse me. And it is to find out your answer concerning that that I have come" (ll. 282-8).

At a feast set a year thence to unite the pair Pwyll's rash generosity enables his rival Guawl to claim Rhiannon from him, and Rhiannon announces a feast after a further year, ostensibly to wed Guawl but really to secure Pwyll's triumph by means of a ruse. This involves Pwyll's appearance at the celebrations disguised as a beggar (*gwiscaw bratteu trwm ymdanaw a oruc Pwyll, a chymryt lloppaneu mawr am y draet*, ll. 366-7) to request the fill of a magic bag. The impossibility of filling this enables Pwyll to bring Guawl to the bag and tip him in, whereupon Pwyll's men appear and Pwyll casts off his beggar's rags (*a bwrw y bratteu a'r lloppaneu a'r yspeil didestyl y amdanaw a oruc Pwyll*, ll. 378-91). Subsequently Guawl is literally beaten into submission and gives up his claim on Rhiannon, who then marries king Pwyll and eventually bears him a son. Pwyll's beggarly disguise after losing his intended bride for the first time and prior to regaining her and revealing himself is uncannily reminiscent of Odysseus's basic behaviour to be considered below and arguably presents us with a somewhat rationalised Celtic reflex of the king's transformation in such circumstances.

This cumulative dossier of correspondences, some of them quite circumstantial, between Ireland or Wales and India creates a strong presupposition that a shared Indo-European foundation is involved. However, this hypothesis would be greatly strengthened by comparative data from the early literature of a third branch at least, which brings us to king Odysseus and his queen Penelope in Homeric Greek epic.

The Odyssey depicts a situation in which the hero's long delayed return from Troy has led to his being, in effect, declared missing, presumed dead. In consequence nobles from Odysseus' own island kingdom of Ithaca and some nearby territories assemble to feast and await his queen Penelope's selection of a new husband. Penelope's famed procrastination made hers a quite abnormally drawn-out *svayaṁvara*, so to speak, in the course of which the royal household and kingdom were being steadily impoverished by her suitors' notorious greed and misbehaviour, obvious disqualifications from kingship that are consistently condemned both in the Odyssey and in similar early Irish literary contexts (see 4 below). Moreover, Penelope makes the significant claim that her own physical and mental state deteriorated from the very day that her husband left her to sail for Troy: "for the

gods who possess Olympus destroyed my beauty (*aglaiēn*) from when he went in hollow ships" (18, 180-1) and "Eurymachus, indeed the immortals destroyed my excellence, form and stature (*aretēn eîdós te démas te*) when the Argives embarked for Ilium and my husband went with them. If he should come and look after my life, my fame (*kléos*) would be greater and fairer in that case" (18, 251-5).

The Odyssey thus vividly and consistently portrays the land of Ithaca and its sovereignty, now vested in his wife Penelope, languishing in the absence of their rightful lord Odysseus. Penelope is, of course, explicitly represented as a mortal in the epic (e.g. 5, 217). However, it seems quite reasonable to assume that she is either a euhemerized sovereignty goddess or has attracted the key attributes of such a figure by virtue of her role in the myth exploited by the Odyssey. This function may help to explain certain aspects of her behaviour after Odysseus's clandestine arrival in Ithaca that have struck modern commentators as bizarre or irrational.

G.S. Kirk has argued on the strength of apparent inconsistencies in the plot "that an earlier version, in which the contest was arranged in full collusion between husband and wife, has been extensively but inadequately remodelled by the large-scale composer" (1965, 177). Support is sought in Amphimedon's underworld resumé of events in the final book: "but he with manifold cunning bade his wife set up a bow and grey iron for the suitors" (24, 167-8). This, however, is scarcely inconsistent with the main narrative's version, in which the idea of the test to find a new husband is Penelope's but her disguised confidant Odysseus provides strong encouragement (19, 570-87). At most this might imply a variant in which Odysseus first put the idea into Penelope's head, but it does not follow that he had revealed himself to her beforehand.

Kirk finds support for his contention in three of Penelope's actions and one of Odysseus's in the main narrative: "First the odd episode at 18. 158ff., where she is inspired by Athene to act provocatively towards the suitors and so become 'more honoured than before by her husband and son'. If Odysseus had not yet revealed himself, his natural reaction to this performance would be one of resentful suspicion; instead we are told that he 'rejoiced because she was eliciting gifts from them and charming their heart with soothing words, *but her mind was eager for other things, nóos dé hoi álla menoína*. Secondly, Odysseus's insistence in the next book that if his feet are to be washed by a servant it must be by an aged retainer. This almost inevitably means Eurycleia, who will certainly recognise his scar. That is what in fact happens – yet it is not what Odysseus is depicted as wishing to happen, for he turns his face into the shadow and fears Eurycleia may recognise him. Why then did he so carefully specify an old retainer? Probably, after all, for the precise purpose of being recognized and so declaring himself to Penelope during their nocturnal conversation. Thirdly, Penelope's announcement of the trial of the bow at the end of that conversation. This is utterly illogical. Evidence has been accumulating all that day that Odysseus is near at hand. She may not believe Telemachus, Theoclymenus, or the disguised Odysseus, but she has just related to the last of these a dream which clearly portends the very same thing – that her husband is near and will destroy the suitors. Admittedly she thinks this dream may be false, but it would be welcome to her and Telemachus if it were not. She envisages the possibility, then, that it is not false; so why does she proceed in the very next line, apparently without special reason, to announce a contest which will result in her immediate acceptance by one of the suitors? . . . . Lastly, when the suitors have

failed to string the bow. Penelope herself insists at surprising length that it should be given to Odysseus to try – a poorly motivated insistence if she really thought him a beggar" (ibid. 176-7).

As regards the second point above, Odysseus's manifest antipathy towards the haughty young female slaves who pander to the suitors (344-5 etc.) provides an adequate motive for his request for a sensible old woman to wash his feet, and one might reasonably expect a number of such people to be available in the palace. Eurycleia's selection is indeed inevitable in terms of the plot and leads to a memorable scene, but there is no need to posit an earlier version in which this was deliberately engineered by the hero. As to the final difficulty, Odysseus has already misled Penelope into believing him to be, despite his present unfortunate condition, a Cretan of high royal birth, son of Deucalion and grandson of Minos (19, 172-81), a pedigree that would give him every right to sue for her hand. That leaves the first and third arguments, which bring us back to the posited sovereignty myth of Indo-European origins.

On arrival in Ithaca after his long absence and wanderings Odysseus at first fails to recognise his home through the intervention of Athene (13, 188-235), who then reveals all (236-360), helps him to stow his treasures (361-91) and in order to give him the advantage of surprise over his numerous enemies makes him in turn unrecognisable to his own people by magically changing him into a decrepit and ill clad beggar who will initially consort with the lowly swineherd Eumaeus (392-438). After being briefly restored by Athene to his true regal appearance so that his son Telemachus, who has just returned from Sparta and Pylos, may recognise him (16, 154-320), Odysseus resumes his base beggarly mien (452-9).

The following morning Telemachus sets off to visit his mother in the palace and bids the swineherd follow later with Odysseus. Having been encouraged by Telemachus's tidings and the Argive seer Theoclymenus's prophecy that Odysseus is already in his native land and will bring woe to the suitors (17, 84-165), Penelope seeks tidings of the stranger who has by now arrived unrecognised in his own home (492-540). The "odd episode at 18. 158 ff." follows immediately upon Odysseus's victory in single combat over another beggar. Suddenly minded by Athene to appear before the suitors, Penelope experiences a magical restoration of the beauty impaired by her husband's departure twenty years ago (180-1): "then the noble goddess (Athene) gave her immortal gifts so that the Achaeans might behold her. First she purified her fair countenance with immortal beauty such as garlanded Aphrodite is anointed with whenever she goes to the lovely dance of the Graces; and she made her taller and fuller to behold and made her whiter than sawn ivory" (190-6). When Penelope appears before them, the suitors are duly filled with longing for her beauty (212-3), Eurymachus admiring her "since you surpass (other) women in form and stature and balanced mind within (*eidos te mégethós te idè phrénas éndon eísas*)" (248-9). She then hints at her readiness to remarry and, to the still disguised Odysseus's delight, shames the suitors into giving her fine gifts (250-303).

It is hardly a coincidence that Odysseus's first interview with Penelope begins by applying to her the famous simile of the fecundity of a righteous king's rule (2 above): "indeed, your glory reaches broad heaven, like that of some noble king who, ruling god-fearingly among many stalwart men, upholds righteous judgements (*eudikías*), and through (his) well-doing (*ex euergesíēs*) the black earth bears wheat and barley, and trees are heavy with fruit, and it breeds unfailing livestock, and the

sea provides fish, and the people fare well (*aretōsi*) by him" (19, 108-14). Finally, the beggar Odysseus's prediction of her husband's imminent return (19, 261-316), Eurycleia's stifled recognition of the hero (349-502) and a dream clearly portending Odysseus's arrival and slaughter of the suitors (536-69) is followed by Penelope's "utterly illogical" decision to marry whoever should be able to string Odysseus's bow and shoot an arrow from it through twelve axes (570-81). This test is as unmistakable a symbol of phallic penetration as the requirement in *De Śíl Chonairi Móir* (Gwynn, 1912, 134, 138-9) that a successful aspirant to the Tara kingship drive a chariot through the opening slit between two stones to rub his axle against a third known as Fál or the "stone penis". Like Conaire in the early Irish tale, only Odysseus succeeds in passing the test in question, after which he reveals his true identity to all, slays the suitors and is restored to his wife and kingdom.

Irrational though Penelope's behaviour may seem in terms of normal human motives, it conforms fully to the inner dynamic of the type of sovereignty myth already identified from early Irish and Indian sources. Viewed in this light, the association of the improvement in Penelope's looks and spirits with Odysseus's as yet unappreciated arrival in the palace and victory in a brawl would be quite deliberate, while her decision to set up the test to find her mate would constitute an entirely appropriate or even inevitable response to the accumulating premonitions of Odysseus's return and revenge. On this level Penelope functions as a barometer, so to speak, for Odysseus's progress: her sudden blossoming is a subconscious response to her royal husband's proximity and a prefiguration of his ultimate success, which is encompassed through the challenge she is inspired to impose.

To my wife, Katharine Simms, I owe an explicit reference to a very similarly conditioned empathy in a Grimms' fairytale replete with sovereignty symbolism, 'the golden bird' (*der goldene Vogel*, no. 57 in the 1960 Winkler edition). This tells how the lowly regarded youngest of a king's three sons eventually succeeds on a quest where his two depraved brothers had failed, thus acquiring a golden bird, a golden horse and, by a kiss, a beautiful princess. After almost killing him, the brothers steal and bring these treasures to their father amidst great rejoicing, "but the horse did not eat, the bird did not sing and the maiden sat and wept (*aber das Pferd, das frass nicht, der Vogel, der pfiff nicht, und die Jungfrau, die sass und weinte*)" (ibid., 327). Subsequently the youngest son manages to slip into the palace disguised as a pauper: "no one recognised him, but the bird began to sing, the horse began to eat, and the beautiful maiden stopped weeping. The king asked in astonishment 'what does that mean?'. Then the maiden spoke: 'I don't know why, but I was so sad and now I am so happy. I feel as if my rightful bridegroom had come (*ich weiss es nicht, aber ich war so traurig, und nun bin ich so fröhlich. Es ist mir, als wäre mein rechter Bräutigam gekommen*)' " (ibid., 328). Then she told all, the wicked brothers were executed, "but he (the youngest) was married to the beautiful maiden and designated the king's heir (*er aber ward mit der schönen Jungfrau vermählt und zum Erben des Königs bestimmt*)".

It could, then, be argued that the Odyssean poet, far from failing to rework an assumed prototype altogether neatly, has achieved a highly effective counterpoint in the person of Penelope between a behaviour pattern conditioned by the stylised conventions of a sovereignty myth presumably known to his audience and a psychologically realistic portrayal of the diffidence and pessimism natural after two decades of repeatedly frustrated expectations. If so, these striking ancient Greek and

later German parallels with the Celtic and Indian material considered above provide vital further points of comparison to corroborate the hypothesis of a significant Indo-European core.

4. The integrating function characteristic of a sacral king in relation to society and the world about him has already been referred to (2 above). Furthermore, a rather distinctive tripartite representation of this process seems to typify the cultic practices, institutions and mythical or historical narratives of various Indo-European peoples.

To begin with, there is widespread literary and linguistic evidence for a basic Indo-European institutional dichotomy between the **koryos* or 'Männerbund' and the **tewtā* or 'tribe' (McCone, 1987; cf. 1986d, 16-22). The former was an itinerant werewolf society of typically youthful, aristocratic and as yet propertyless and unmarried warrior-hunters (**hyuhen-es* or **hyuhn̥-k̂ōs* "youths", **moryos* "killers", **wl̥kʷōs* or **lukʷos* "wolves") who fought on foot with javelin and shield, the latter a propertied and preeminently cattle-owning community of older married soldier-farmer householders (**potey-es*) who may have been divided by birth and wealth into a yeoman infantry (**wihros*) and a chariot-borne aristocracy (**h₂ner-es*) culminating in the king (*rēk̂-s*). A third age grade was constituted by the elders (**senōs* and **gerh₂ont-es*), members of the **tewtā* beyond military age who were apparently charged with various advisory, judicial and religious functions (McCone, 1987, 125 and 134).

It is clear from Livy's historicising account of Rome's first four or so-called 'pre-Etruscan' kings that the vigorous Romulus essentially embodies the wildness (*ferocitas*) of the Männerbund's *iuventus*, the elderly and pacific Numa the juridical and religious concerns (*iustitia religioque*) of the *senatus*, and the stern Tullus a more dutiful approach (*fides*) to warfare appropriate to the soldier-farmers of the *populus*. These three successive stages culminate in Ancus, who combines his predecessors' qualities in a reign marked by success and prosperity of the state or *civitas* as a whole in war and peace. This mytho-historical pattern replicates a cultic one. Thus of ancient republican Rome's most prestigious priestly quartet the *flamen Quirinalis* was devoted to a war-god intimately linked with Romulus, the *flamen Martialis* to the soldier-farmers' deity, and the *flamen Dialis* to the wise father of the gods, while the *rex sacrificulus* provided the ritual continuation of the former kings' sovereign integrating role (Livy II. 2. 1; McCone, 1987, 127-35).

In connection with the last of these Dumézil draws attention to "the *regia*, the *regia domus*, on the Forum. In the historic period, the *rex* and the *regina* do not live there: the *regia* is essentially the department of the grand pontiff, who has taken unto himself the most active part of the religious heritage of the king. But it still remains, in name, the "house of the king", and rituals like that of the October Horse, on the Ides of the first month of autumn, make sense only if the *regia*, which holds an important place in them, is understood in this fashion" (1973, 119-20). Franz Schröder long ago (1927) connected this equine sacrifice in Rome with similar fructifying rituals involving horses in Norse, Greek, Indian and Irish sources, and argued for their origins in a sexually symbolic Indo-European sacrifice to secure the fecundity of a king's reign, as is particularly apparent from the Irish, Indian and Germanic evidence (Davidson, 1988, 54-6).

The Irish institution is known only from the somewhat hyperbolical pen of the twelfth-century Giraldus Cambrensis: "there is, then, in the northern and further

part of Ulster, among the Cenél Conaill to be precise, a certain people that is wont to appoint a king for itself by an excessively barbarous and abominable rite. When the whole people has been gathered together, a white horse (*iumentum candidum*) is brought into the midst. Whereupon he who is to be elevated not into a chief (*in principem*) but into a beast, not into a king (*in regem*) but into an outlaw (*in exlegem*), approaching bestially in the presence of all, no less impudently than imprudently declares himself too to be a beast. And when the animal has been killed forthwith and boiled in pieces in water, a bath is prepared for him in the same water. Sitting in this, he himself eats of those meats brought to him, his people standing round and eating with him. He also quaffs and drinks of the broth in which he is washed not from some vessel, not with his hand but just with his mouth all around. When these things have been thus carried out by due rite, not right, his kingship and lordship have been confirmed (*regnum illius et dominium est confirmatum*)" (*Topographia Hibernica* 3, 25). A probable narrative equivalent of this ritual is supplied by the *Cóir Anmann* tale of the five Lugaids, in which Lugaid Laígde's sexual encounter with the woman of sovereignty was preceded by his capture and consumption of a fawn (*lóeg*), from which one of his brothers made a feast (*feis*) for them (Stokes, 1891, 318-9). The basic significance of *feis* in such regal contexts as the *Feis Temro* or Feast of Tara has been well brought out by Carney: "*feis* is the verbal noun of *foaid* 'sleeps, spends the night'; hence *feis la mnaí* means 'to sleep with (or, to marry) a woman'" (1955, 334).

The celebration of the *aśvamedha* after Nala's successful wooing of Damayantī has already been mentioned (3 above), and a study by Jaan Puhvel compares this patently sexual Indian sacrifice for the prosperity of king and kingdom, in the course of which the king's first wife places the dead horse's penis in her lap (cf. Schröder, 1927, 311), with the Roman *October equus* and, above all, the Irish inauguration rite (1970). In Dumézil's words, "once returned, the horse is sacrificed according to an extremely detailed ritual which entails a very rich symbolism, the horse being assimilated to the totality of what the king and through him his subjects may expect. Just before the sacrifice the body of the living horse is divided into three sections, front, middle and rear, upon which three of the king's wives (the titular queen, the favourite, and a woman called 'rejected') respectively perform unctions placed under the patronage of the gods Vasus, Rudras and Ādityas and aimed to procure for the king, variously, spiritual energy (*tejas*, in front), physical force (*indriya*, in the middle), cattle (*paśu*, at the rear), these three benefits, divided between the three functions, recapitulating themselves in a fourth term, prosperity or good fortune (*śrī*)" (1966, 226-7).

The oldest attested meaning of the second term of the compound *aśva-medha* is 'broth', which may be significant in relation to the rite described by Giraldus, and Puhvel draws attention to the Gaulish royal name *Epo-meduos* containing the words 'horse' (*epo-* < **ekwo-*, whence also Skt. *aśva-*) and 'mead' (1970, 164 and 167). Insisting that the inversion of sexes affecting the human and animal principals in the Indian and Irish rituals cannot be dismissed as trivial, Puhvel gives reasons for regarding the inaugural context and sexual roles in the Irish record as closest to the presumed common prototype: "the Indo-European pattern of theriomorphic hierogamy was clearly King and Mare, the Near Eastern and Aegean one Queen and Bull (e.g. Europa, Pasiphae in Cretan saga, wife of Archon Basileus in Greek religion, and so on). The Indic *aśvamedha* is thus a halfway house of trans-

formation'' (ibid., 168-9). Dumézil (1973, 70-84) further discusses an episode from the Mahabhārata in which the disgraced king Yayāti is restored to celestial integrity by a quartet of variously endowed grandsons fathered upon his daughter Mādhavī, like the Irish Medb a feminine derivative of the Indo-European **medʰu* ''mead'' (3 above), by a succession of four monarchs. In accordance with Indian ideology these grandsons individually excel in wealth, strength and the paired sovereign attributes of truth and sacrifice, all of which they combine to elevate Yayāti.

There is, of course, no trace of tripartition and integration in Giraldus's account of the Donegal inauguration. However, this feature does occur in the well known account of the Tara king Lugaid Réoderg's conception. This presents an Irish mythical scheme strikingly similar in import to the Indian equine ritual (Dumézil, 1973, 105-6), an early Iranian account of the separation of Yimo's sovereignty (cf. Skt. *Yama* ''twin'' < **yem-os*) into three parts acquired by a god, a warrior and a landowning dynast respectively (ibid., 40-2), and also to the historicising legend of Rome's first four kings (McCone, 1987, 135-8).

According to the beginning of *Cath Bóinde* ''(there was) a king who assumed the kingship of Ireland once, namely Eochaid Feidlech . . . It is on this account that he was called Eochaid Feidlech (''steadfast''), because he was steadfast (*feidil*) with everyone, i.e. that king was honourable towards everyone. He had four sons, namely the three Find-emna (''white triplets''), i.e. *emain* (''twins/triplets'' < **yem-ni*) a thing that is not divided, and Conall Anglondach . . . The former were born of the same delivery – Bres, Nár and Lothar their names – and it is they who begat Lugaid of the three red stripes (*Lugaid trí ríab nderg*) upon their own sister the night before giving the battle of Drumcree to their father so that the three of them fell there by Eochaid Feidlech's hand''. *Aided Meidbe* gives a somewhat more detailed account in which the incestuous sister is named as Eochaid's daughter Clothru, who is said to have enjoyed the sovereignty of Connacht until murdered and supplanted by her more famous sister Medb. Furthermore, *Cóir Anmann* explains the significant physical consequences of king Lugaid's triple conception: ''Lugaid Réo nDerg, i.e. of the red stripes (*sríab nderg*), i.e. (it is) two red stripes that were over him, namely a belt under his throat and a belt over his middle. His head resembled Nár, his chest Bres, (and) from his girdle down (it is) Lothar that he resembled'' (par. 105).

Clearly this Irish myth too sees the sovereignty as three in one, so to speak, and tells of the prevention of a potentially catastrophic threefold split through the sexual intervention of a royal daughter, who symbolises the kingship's transmission and reintegration in the person of her triply fathered son Lugaid. In Dumézil's opinion ''there is certainly nothing functional in the meanings of the fathers' names'' (ibid., 105), but Nár may be translated ''magnanimous, righteous'' or the like and Bres ''fight(er)'', while Lothar might reflect a rare glossary word for ''assembly'' or perhaps be read as Lóthar and equated with the better attested word for ''vessel'' (OIr. *loathar*, later *lóthar* < IE **lewh₂trom*). If so, Lugaid's head would embody the moral, his torso the martial and his nether regions the productive landowning aspect in a manner strikingly reminiscent of the horse's ritual division in the *aśvamedha*.

In strictly functionalist terms (ch. 3, 3-4), the relationship between myth and social reality seems unlikely to be any more literal in this instance than in that of the

king's daughter's own selection of a spouse to succeed her father (3 above). These incestuous mating habits are presumably determined by her mythical role as the carrier of sovereignty rather than reflecting actual past or present behavioural norms rare indeed beyond the confines of ancient Egypt. Hence the paradox that, on the mythical plane, this socially unacceptable activity may signify the eminently desirable continuation of the sovereignty in the royal father's direct male line, as in the case of king Eterscél's fathering of his successor Conaire upon his own daughter Mes Búachalla in *De Şíl Chonairi Móir*. Conversely, in this context a conventional exogamous liaison can only imply the kingship's less welcome passage to an outside group. A case in point is *Esnada Tige Buchet*, which recounts the eventual transfer of the Tara kingship personified by Eithne Thóebfota (3 above) from Laginian dynasts, represented by her decrepit royal father Cathaer Már and his selfish sons, to the Síl Cuinn ancestors of the Uí Néill in the person of Cormac Mac Airt, to whom she bears Cairbre Lifechair, Cormac's successor in tradition, and is later married (Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 74-80).

5. The points raised above constitute a substantial dossier of varied evidence, including some remarkably circumstantial correspondences, for an Indo-European institution, ideology and mythology of sacral kingship. This was based on the widely attested notion that the well-being of society and nature flowed from a ritual marriage between a goddess and the new ruler to emerge after appropriate tests. The former might be called **Med^{h}w-ī* or **Med^{h}w-ā* after the draught of mead (**med^{h}u*) involved in the ceremony, which apparently centred upon an equine ritual and associated feast. The success of such unions was held to depend upon maintenance of the king's 'truth' as manifested by his physical perfection, social standing, justice and so on, any serious infringement of which constituted a 'lie' liable to rupture this happy state of affairs (cf. Dumézil, 1973, 44-6).

The beneficial natural, social and moral effects held to accrue from successful liaisons of this type could be given mythical expression as radical improvements in the principals' appearance, status or mental condition. Conversely the dire results of failure could find narrative realization as a separation of the partners accompanied by the physical, social and/or psychological deterioration of one or both.

As argued above, free males in Indo-European society presided over by its king seem to have been divided into three main age grades, each with its appropriate attributes and functions. These comprised a semi-independent warrior-hunter association of unsettled and unmarried youths, a settled community of married soldier-farmers, and a group of retired elders charged with religious and judicial counsel. In view of this it is hardly surprising that regal fortunes should be viewed in terms of the integration, disintegration or reintegration, as the case might be, of three essential ingredients. Needless to say, such tripartite configurations might, with appropriate shifts of emphasis, survive significant reorganization of one or more of their triple constituents, as seems to have happened in ancient India (McCone, 1987, 146).

There is thus a good deal of convincing comparative evidence that certain key elements of the early Irish theory and practice of kingship have come down from Celtic and Indo-European antiquity relatively intact. Nevertheless, important though the implications of this are for comparative Indo-European studies and attempts to assess the contribution of inherited native forms and concepts to early

Christian Ireland's culture, it by no means follows that her monastically oriented men of letters viewed and described the politically and ideologically crucial institution of kingship in consciously pagan terms or refrained from tampering with it as scrupulously as nativist scholarship tends to imply. Their actual attitudes should emerge from an examination of the representation of sovereignty in early medieval Irish sources that is as unclouded as possible by the question of antecedents.

6. Early Irish literature sets great store by the king's personal qualities. For example, a long and detailed list of the social and moral traits appropriate to a good ruler is given by *Tecosca Cormaic* (Meyer, 1909, 12-5). Much the same concern lies at the heart of the still older gnomic tract *Audacht Morainn*, the so-called 'B-version' of which summarily recommends that the king be merciful (*trócar*), righteous (*fírión*), proper (*cosmail*), conscientious (*cuibsech*), firm (*fosaith*), generous (*eslabar*), hospitable (*garte*), of noble mien (*fial-ainech*), steadfast (*sessach*), beneficent (*lessach*), able (*éitir*), honest (*inric*), well-spoken (*suthnge*), steady (*forustu*), true-judging (*fír-brethach*), and then names the following alliterative pairs inimical to ruler's falsehood (*gáu flathemon*): lordship and worth (*flaith ⁊ febas*), fame and victory (*cluith ⁊ coscar*), progeny and kindred (*cland ⁊ cenél*), peace and life (*síd ⁊ sáegul*), prosperity and parturitions (*toceth ⁊ tortha*) (Kelly, 1976, 16-7).

Great kings in saga narrative are liable to be described by similar catalogues in which physical and martial attributes loom large alongside social and intellectual or moral factors. Thus according to *Scél na Fír Flatha* "in beauty (*áilaind*) did Cormac come into that great assembly, for the like of his form (*delb*) had not come, except for Conaire son of Etersceél or Conchobar son of Cathbad or Óengus son of the Dagdae". After a detailed description of his glorious apparel (*écosc*), the highlights of the king's physical beauty (*cruth*) are prefaced by the remark that he was "handsome, fair, without blemish, without defect (*cruthach cáem cen ainim cen athais*)" (pars. 3-4). The virtues of two of those other regal paragons Conaire and Conchobar are covered by a set menu of virtually identical and partially alliterative triads in the sagas *Aided Chonchobair* (par. 5) and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (par. 102) respectively, citation here being from the latter: *nicon fil locht und isind fir sin eter chruth ⁊ deilb ⁊ dechelt, eter méit ⁊ chórae ⁊ chutrummae, e[ter] rosc ⁊ folt ⁊ gili, eter gais ⁊ álaig ⁊ erlabrae, eter arm ⁊ erriud ⁊ écosc, eter áni ⁊ immud ⁊ ordan, eter gnáis ⁊ gaisciud ⁊ cenél* "there is not a fault in that man as regards form and appearance and attire, as regards stature and symmetry and proportion, as regards eye and hair and whiteness, as regards wisdom and manners and eloquence, as regards armour and apparel and equipment, as regards beauty and wealth and worth, as regards habits and heroism and family".

Three terms in this description, namely *delb* "figure, form", *gais* "wisdom" and *gaisced* "martial prowess, valour", recur as a single triad in *Aided Chrimthainn maic Fidaig*, which states of the king of Connacht, Fiachra mac Echach, *ba láech ar gaisced, ba coicertaid catha ⁊ tíre ar gais, ba rígda ar deilb* "he was a hero in martial prowess, he was an adjuster of battles and territories in wisdom, he was kingly in form" (par. 15). As a compound of *gae* "spear" and *sciath* "shield", *gaisced* "set of arms" and then by extension "martial prowess, valour" evidently belongs to the sphere of the warrior. Indeed, receipt of *gaisced* was a key element in a young warrior's initiation, as when Conchobar simply gives the precocious Cú Chulainn a spear and shield in response to the latter's request for *gaisced* (*Táin*¹ 616-26; cf.

McCone, 1986d, 16-7; 1987, 112-4). *Gaís* "wisdom" is above all an essential prerequisite for judgement (*mes*), an activity closely connected with the professionally skilled *áes dáno*. Thus the legal tract on status *Uraicecht Becc* glosses *ollam gaíse* "professor of sagacity" as *in saí brethemun* "the master judge" (*CIH* 1618.11). *Delb* "form", on the other hand, was of peculiar importance to kings, as when Cúscraid son of Conchobar is described as *adbar ríg ar deilb* "the makings of a king in form" in *Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó* (par. 14).

It would appear, then, that the ideal king in ancient Ireland was supposed to excel in the three basic areas of military prowess, mental discernment and physical beauty, thus combining the functions of warrior (*láech*) and judge (*brithem*) with his own specifically regal need for a perfect appearance. There is an obvious relationship between physical magnificence and material munificence, a good example being the praise of Conaire's son and heir apparent Lé fri Flaith "for generosity and shape and form and horsemanship (*ar gart ⁊ c[h]ruth ⁊ deilb ⁊ marcachas*)" in section 106 of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*. Moreover, the typical martial hero of early Irish saga, the "hero within the tribe" as Marie Louise Sjoestedt puts it (1949, chap. 6; cf. Nagy, 1984), was at the same time a propertied pillar of an aristocratic society in which "refusal of hospitality (*esáin*) is a very grave offence" (Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 76-7). Accordingly both liberality in peace (*gart* etc.) and prowess in war (*gaisced*) are important facets of an individual's overall social worth expressed by the virtually untranslatable legal term *folud*, which can refer to whole or part of a spectrum covering due property rating, behaviour appropriate to one's position and rights, fulfilment of legal obligations, honesty, religious observance and so on. The legal tract *Críth Gablach* declares the *folud* peculiar to a king to consist of acting for his *túath* in various external legal dealings, giving them a righteous judge, upholding the material support (*folog*) due under certain circumstances, and providing a duly constituted and conducted assembly (*óenach*) for the proper promulgation of a military hosting (*slógad*), or special ordinance (*rechtge*) in the three crucial areas of armed expulsion of foreigners (*rechtge do indarbbu echtarchiniuil*), preparation of crops (*rechtge fri túar foraid*) and "faith that illuminates" (*recht creitme ad·annai*) (pars. 36-9). It further decrees forfeiture of a king's proper status and entitlements through such social stigmas as being caught performing menial tasks or going round without his proper retinue as well as through manifest cowardice in battle (par. 40).

Handsome appearance and conduct, martial prowess, social distinction, and wisdom all figure as qualifications for kingship in the gnomic *Tecosca Cormaic* cast in the form of a dialogue between the mythical king of Tara and his son Cairbre Lifechair: "'O grandson of Conn, O Cormac' said Cairbre, 'whence is sovereignty taken over kingdoms and families and kindreds?' 'Not difficult' said Cormac, 'by virtue of shape and breeding and discernment (*cruth ⁊ cenél ⁊ érgnae*), through wisdom and rank and generosity and soundness (*gaís ⁊ ordan ⁊ eslabrae ⁊ indracus*), by virtue of hereditary right and eloquence (*dúthchas ⁊ airlabrae*), by dint of fighting and an army (*inguin ⁊ sochraite*) it is taken'" (par. 5).

Needless to say, the sagas provide ample illustration. The emphasis upon beauty in an aspirant to kingship has already been adequately exemplified. Cormac Mac Airt's well known accession to the Tara monarchy as a result of a true judgement in the tales *Genemain Chormaic*, *Scéla Eogain ⁊ Chormaic* and *Cath Maige Mucrama* (both ed. O'Daly, 1975) has been aptly discussed by Ó Cathasaigh (1977,

62-5). In *De Síl Chonairi Móir* a supernatural army is assembled by his mother Mes Búachalla to secure the kingship of Tara for Conaire by threat of force in the face of the local population's initial hostility. As already pointed out (ch. 3, 4), this text and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* recount Conaire's progress to the kingship in a structurally similar way despite significant surface differences. In the latter version (pars. 11-4) the future king is foretold in a vision induced by ritual trance at a *tairb-feis* or "bull-feast", and the youthful Conaire duly appears in conformity with this (cf. Lugaid Réoderg in *Serglige Con Culainn*, pars. 23-7). Since, however, he is manifestly under age, the people of Tara refuse to accept him: "'It seems to us that our bull-feast and our incantation of truth have been spoiled, since it is a beardless young lad that has been shown to us in it'. 'That does not matter' said he. A young generous (*eslobar*) king is no blemish. That is not to be judged extinction of patrimony (*ní messi díb[ad] á sin*, l. 163: original reading best preserved in D iv 2 *ní mis díb- essin*, Knott, 1936, 49). I have a paternal and grandpaternal right to bind the hostages of Tara'. 'Wonder of wonders' said the host. They bestow the kingship of Ireland upon him, and he said 'I shall enquire of the wise that I may be wise myself'" (par. 15). In this case Conaire overcomes opposition by a peaceful insistence upon his qualifications of generosity and hereditary right, thus in effect giving a true judgement acknowledged as such by his subjects-to-be. His subsequently declared aim to become wise completes a triple qualification in the major spheres of material, social and intellectual capacity.

Conversely, failure in one or more of these departments can bring a king down. A physical defect, debility or niggardliness can cause loss of sovereignty. For instance, the law tract on bees *Bech-bretha* alludes to the arguably historical deposition of the seventh-century Ulster dynast Congall Cáech ("C. the one-eyed") from the Tara kingship through being blinded in one eye by bees (pars. 31-3; Charles-Edwards and Kelly, 1983, 131). Cormac's Glossary tells how king Caier of Connacht's wife urged her lover, the poet Néide, to request from the generous king a knife that it was a taboo (*geis*) of his to give, satirise him when he refused and thus cause a blemish that would drive him from the kingship. This was duly done, three blisters arose on his cheeks, and the sight of these caused Caier to flee, thus leaving the kingship to Néide (Stokes, 1862, xxxvi-xl). On the other hand, the sagas *Aided Chonchobair* and *Aided Fergusa Maic Léti* (Binchy, 1952) tell how the Ulster kings in question were unanimously granted special dispensations by their devoted subjects from the normal consequences of serious physical disfigurement and continued in office until these defects brought about their deaths, although the deferment of Fergus's end was only possible by keeping all knowledge of his now hideous appearance from him. Ailill Ólomm abdicates the Munster kingship in favour of his son Éogan on account of old age in *Cath Maige Mucrama* (par. 20), and meanness is a prime cause of king Bres's downfall as related in *Cath Maige Tuired* (pars. 36-9). The reign of the lower-class (*aithech*) usurper Cairbre Cinn Chait (C. "Cat-head") after the slaughter of Ireland's noble lineages (*sóer-chlanna*) and their kings was predictably catastrophic (Thurneysen, 1917, 60-9), while a false judgement sets Conaire on the slippery slope in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (pars. 20-1; cf. O'Daly in Dillon, 1968, 114), similarly affects Bres in *Cath Maige Tuired* (pars. 26-30), and forces Mac Con to abdicate in the Cormac tales mentioned in the previous paragraph.

7. The crucial legal term *enech* "face, honour" (Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 84-6) has a basic physical sense still well attested in Old Irish and guaranteed by the Welsh cognate *wyneb* "face", but is inextricably linked with conformity to appropriate social or martial norms and with truthfulness in general. As *Críth Gablach* puts it, a man's honour-price (*lóg n-enech*) remains intact only as long as his *folud* (see 6 above) is unimpaired, i.e. he avoids situations "in which everyone's face collapses (*hi tuitet enech cáich*)", namely the failure to rebut a defamatory satire, hearing of false testimony or evasion of sureties, which are bluntly said to entail *cacc fora enech* "excrement on his face" or dishonour (par. 21). Face, social and moral worth are connected to the extent that justified satire or a false judgement are supposed to have direct physical effects, as in the tale about Caier and Néide above. Indeed, Cormac's Glossary defines *ferb* "blister" as "a bubble (*bolg*) which the man puts on his cheeks after satire or after false judgement" (Stokes, 1862, 19).

The nexus of physical, martial, social and moral or intellectual attributes that constitute a person's *enech* is enhanced in the king's case to *fír flaithemon* or "ruler's truth", which is distinguished by cosmic resonances reaching beyond the individual into the depths of nature, society and morality as a whole (cf. Frankfort, 1948, 3).

8. As is abundantly clear from law tracts such as *Críth Gablach*, *Uraicecht Becc* or *Míadslechta*, the society over whose welfare the king presided in ancient Ireland was meticulously divided into different social classes based upon property or calling, these being liable to more or less elaborate further subdivisions on the basis of wealth, function, professional standing or various combinations of the three.

The backbone of that society consisted of a landowner class of soldier-farmers termed *gráid túaithe* ("the grades of the kingdom/lay society") collectively and *fer túaithe* ("man" of the same) individually at the beginning of *Críth Gablach*, the Old Irish law tract that deals with them in greatest detail. In hierarchical arrangement this class fell into two major divisions. The lower of these comprised the various grades of propertied commoner, for which *Críth Gablach* (pars. 3-4) uses the name of the central *bóaire* category as an overall term whereas *Uraicecht Becc* prefers *féni* (*CIH* 1593.6). For the upper division of nobles primarily distinguished by the adherence of clients both use the terms *flaith(i)* or *gráid flatha* (e.g. *Críth Gablach* par. 23, *CIH* 1593.6 and 1595.26).

The peaceful land- and householding side of *gráid túaithe* activities, commonly termed *trebad*, was the specialization of a professional class of *briugaid* or hospitallers, whose high rank depended on the successful provision of hospitality to any visitors who might request it, and feasts given by such figures are a prominent feature of a number of famous early Irish sagas (McCone, 1984c, 2-7). According to *Tecosca Cormaic* "everyone is a hospitaller until refusal (of hospitality) (par. 31, *briugaid cách co eitech*)", and the opening of *Esnada Tige Buchet* claims of the *briugu* Buchet that "fire had not been extinguished under his cauldron since he took up householding (*ní-ro-díbdad tene fóa choriu ó ro-gab trebad*)" before proceeding to king Cathaír's praise: "true, o Buchet, you were a hospitaller for feeding companies (*briugaid bíata dám*), a gift your valour (*gal*), your generosity (*gart*), your prowess (*gaisced*), your smile of welcome (*fáilte*) to everyone in your great drinking hall (*midchúairt*)". Fergus Kelly points out in his recently published *Guide to early Irish law* that under normal circumstances "unlike a king or lord, the *briugu* has no military role" (1988, 36; cf. McCone, 1984c, 19, n.54).

As will emerge in chapter nine, the martial aspect of the functionally composite *grád túaithe* was the specialist preserve of mostly youthful warrior-hunters known as *féindidi* or *fian*-members and explicitly excluded from the ownership of property essential to the status and activities of *briugu* and *fer túaithe*. As *Tecosca Cormaic* puts it, "everyone is a *fian*-member until landowning (*fénnid cách co trebad*)". Because of well documented clerical disapproval of this institution to be discussed later (ch. 9, 8; cf. McCone, 1986d, 3-6) other less socially specific terms for the career warrior such as *láech* "hero", *trén-fer* "strong man, bodyguard", *cath-míl* "battle champion" are often preferred in the extant pre-Norman literature.

The third and final specialists were, of course, the *áes dáno*, a carefully subdivided class of professional practitioners of numerous different skills that has already been discussed in some detail (ch. 4, 2). It has also been seen that key sections of this were closely connected with the monastic establishment in the early Christian period (ch. 1, 9-12). Naturally, such ecclesiastical elements are generally absent from depictions set in the pre-Patrician past, but biblically inspired historical typology presumably invested these with significance as a prefiguration of the current early Christian system (ch. 9, 13-4).

It is worth noting in passing that these three specialist groups of *briugaid*, *féindidi* or the like, and *áes dáno* give a remarkably clear focus in early Irish ideology to the three functions central to the Dumézilian system, namely peace plus material and natural abundance ('third'), warfare ('second'), and knowledge centring upon law and religion (bifurcated 'first'; see ch. 1, 2). Since, however, there seems to be no good evidence for a corresponding category among other Indo-European peoples, the medieval Irish hospitaller does not offer a way out of the difficulties and uncertainties associated with Dumézil's notoriously vague 'third function' (cf. McCone, 1987, 146-7). Be that as it may, what matters for present purposes is that the hospitaller, warrior and *áes dáno* classes obviously represent the functional 'primes' of early Irish social theory, and we would do well to analyse relevant Irish material in terms of this actually attested contemporary tripartition rather than the Dumézilian model ascribed rather doubtfully to the ancient Indo-Europeans two or more millenia previously.

In relation to these three constituitive social activities the king's integrating function was real as well as symbolic. Members of the *grád túaithe* were expected to fight in time of war (e.g. *Críth Gablach*, par. 37), but the importance of hospitaller-like *trebad* revolving round farming and the provision of hospitality and feasts appropriate to their and their guests' status is well brought out by *Córus Bésgnai*, which begins its definition of the *fled dóendae* or "human feast" by referring to *fled cuirmthige cáich dia flaith* "an alehouse feast from each to his lord" (*CIH* 525.5; cf. Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 81 on *cóe*). The role of the king as leader in war and battle is so commonplace in the sagas and annals that it will suffice here to note the long catalogue at the end of the saga *Cath Almaine* of kings great and small slain in the battle of Allen in 722 A.D. (cf. *AU* entry for that year). The provision of hospitality was likewise an important royal function. For instance, the saga *Cath Maige Tuired* dwells upon king Bres's catastrophic failings in this area (par. 36-9), the proper layout of a king's feasting hall or *tech midchuarda* is described in prose by *Críth Gablach* (par. 46) and through a diagram as well as in verse by *LL* 3637-789, and *Tecosca Cormaic* (par. 4) lists the "proprieties of a king and an alehouse (*ada flatha 7 cuirmthige*)".

However, the king also has significant further functions linking him with the *des dáno*, above all his role as judge and lawgiver, typical instances of which in sagas about Cormac Mac Airt have been given in section 6 above. In the gnomic genre *Tecosca Cormaic* twice recommends that a king give true judgements (*bered fír-bretha*, pars. 1.38 and 6.28), be a poet and one versed in traditional law (*rop fili, rop fénech*, par. 6.12-3), judge everyone according to his substance and dignity (*mestar cách iarna míad, rop midid cáich iarna míad*, par. 6.43 and 45), and that his judgements and decisions be sharp and light (*ropat áithe étromma a bretha ⁊ a chocerta*, par. 6.49), while *Audacht Morainn* has a litany of precepts pertaining to law as well as various other matters, each beginning with *ad:mestar* "let him judge/estimate" (Kelly, 1976, 10-5).

The law tracts provide corroboration. For instance, *Críth Gablach*, probably a trifle schematically, earmarks Mondays and Saturdays of the king's week for judgement(s) (*lúan do brithemnacht . . . satharn do brethaib*, par. 41), and Fergus Kelly notes that an Old Irish text on court procedure recently edited by him "illustrates the involvement of both judge and king in the judicial process. The judgement is arrived at and expounded by a judge or judges . . .. but it is clear that the king – and the other dignitaries of the back court – also exercise some function in relation to judgement. Thus par. 2 describes the king and other dignitaries as 'the cliff which is behind the courts for promulgation' (*fri breth ⁊ forus*). It would seem, therefore, that the judgement is promulgated by the king or other dignitary, or at least that it is announced in his presence and with his approval, and consequently supported by his power and prestige" (1986, 80). This supreme *cúl-airecht* or 'back court' consists of king, bishop and chief poet representing the three types of judgement underlying Irish law according to *Uraicecht Becc* (*CIH* 1592.3-39), namely a cleric's judgement (*breth ecalsa*), a poet's judgement (*breth filed*) and the comprehensive ruler's judgement (*breth flatha*). Moreover, the mythical authority for this is provided by the commission of kings, bishops and poets allegedly established by Patrick to draw up the main body of early Irish law, the *Senchus Mór*, as representatives of the law of the letter (*recht litre*), the law of the prophets (*recht fáithe*) and the law of nature (*recht aicnid*) respectively (ch. 4, 6).

As Marilyn Gerriets has recently demonstrated (1988), there can be no doubt that the king was regarded as the fount of justice in early Ireland. Although a judge in his own right, he would normally take expert advice from professional jurists or *brithemain*, to whom he might also delegate the decision of various cases. This, indeed, is the situation envisaged by the legal text *Gúbretha Caratniad* "the false judgements of Caratniae", *brithem* of the mythical Tara monarch Conn Cétchathach, in which "every judgement that was submitted to Conn, Conn used to refer it to him, (and) then Conn would ask him 'what judgement have you given?'" (*CIH* 2192.5-6). Caratniae then reels off a string of judgements, each of which appears to contravene basic rules and is declared false by Conn until Caratniae justifies it with regard to the exceptional circumstance involved. Here the king is represented as someone well versed in legal affairs but lacking the detailed expertise of the professional.

This scheme of three functionally distinct basic social categories and an integrating fourth can be expressed mythically in genealogical terms, as was argued at the end of section 4 with regard to Eochaid Feidlech, his three sons Bres, Nár and Lothar, and their joint son Lugaid Réoderg. The functions so interrelated are made

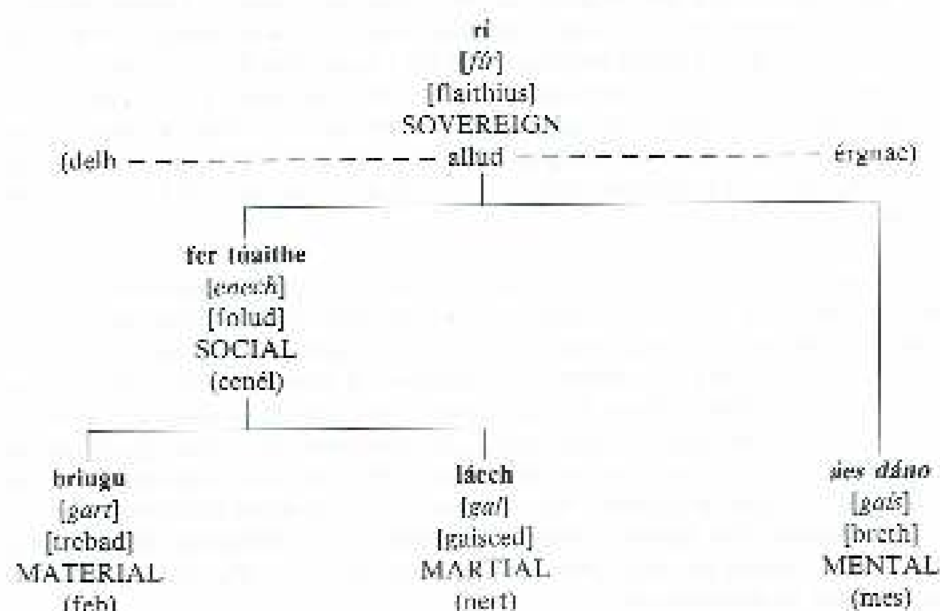
still more explicit in a genealogical narrative from the Book of Leinster about a quartet of brothers famous in saga: "Art Mes Delmonn son of Sétnae Sithbacc had four sons, namely Mes Gegra the king (*rí*) of the Laigin, Mes Réta, i.e. Mac Da Thó . . . ., Mess Dána the battle-champion (*cath-mil*), Mes Domnann, i.e. the poet (*fili*)" (Knott, 1936, 72-3). Significantly, it is known from elsewhere that the only brother whose role in life is not specified here, Mes Róeta alias Mac Da Thó, was a *briugu* (McCone, 1984c, 4) to complete the trio of hospitaller, warrior and member of the *áes dáno* related to the king.

9. These considerations point to something like the system represented diagrammatically below, in which three separate specializations in the ideologically crucial areas of material provision, warfare and mental capacity are integrated in two stages. The first two are combined by a landowning class of farmer-soldiers, and then the most exalted of these, the king, further incorporates the *áes dáno* aspect.

Certain key terms and concepts tend to be associated with these spheres in the literature. Owing at least in part to the exigencies of alliteration so prominent in the descriptive passages in 6 above, there is considerable variation in the actual words used, but usually this happens within the confines of a recognizable semantic field and in what follows one appropriate word will do duty for a cluster of others with similar sense or implications.

Activities and qualifications of the *briugu* are covered by terms like *gart* "generosity", *trebad* "property-management" and *feb* "wealth", those of the *láech* or warrior by *gal* "valour", *gaisced* "bearing arms" and *nert* "strength", and those of the *áes dáno* by *gaís* "wisdom", *breth* "judgement", *mes* "discernment" and *dolus* "knowledge". All of the attributes of hospitaller and warrior are required in a somewhat less concentrated form by the landowning citizen or *fer tuaithe*, to whom the need for *enech* "face", *folud* "good standing" and *cenél* "breeding" applies with particular force. As the integrating pinnacle of this social and ideological system, the king should not only manifest the whole range of these features but also mirror them in his own person viewed under three main headings of physical appearance (*delb, cruth* etc.), social and martial eminence (*allud, ordan* etc.), and judgement or discernment (*mes, érgnae* etc.). Each term in this trio incarnates the matrix of functions and attributes in the material, martial (capable of being expanded to social) and mental columns respectively, the whole constituting the *fír* or "truth" essential for the successful exercise of the monarch's *flaith[ius]* or "sovereignty". As Alden Watson has recently put it, "sovereignty must create order in all things. This is why the king's truth is seen as so all important in early Irish society. Schematically, the king is viewed as someone whose truth and person must be flawless, for it is by upholding his own honour that he upholds the honour and face of his tribe. The monarch creates order in society by himself being a personification of order. If the king cannot embody these concepts, then disaster can befall the tribe which he rules" (1986, 133).

Thus the main divisions of society integrated by the king follow the same ideological lines as the sovereign's principal personal qualities and the cosmic aspects mediated by sovereignty itself (see 10 below). In this way a triple parallelism on several different levels is established by means of a classificatory scheme to which Lévi-Strauss's generalizations about what is ironically termed 'the savage mind' are eminently applicable insofar as it allows "the natural and social universe to be



grasped as an organized whole" (1972, 135). Rather like the 'totemic operator' posited by the famous French anthropologist in a South American Indian context "the whole set thus constitutes a sort of conceptual apparatus which filters unity through multiplicity, multiplicity through unity, diversity through identity, and identity through diversity" (ibid., 153). A characteristic of such 'pre-scientific' thought is the belief that a particular constellation of features on one level such as the individual may influence and be influenced by similar constellations of comparable features on other levels like human society, nature or the world at large. In such cases the establishment of classificatory parallels between microcosm and macrocosm, nature and society and so forth implies links of causation that modern science would frequently reject (cf. McCone, 1980, 152-5). Hence, for example, the at first sight bizarre notion that a king's physical, social and mental attributes have a direct bearing upon the workings of nature, society and the human disposition in general.

10. It is hardly a coincidence that these should be precisely the three personal aspects identified by Mac Cana as being prone to transformation in literary representations of the goddess or woman of sovereignty: "we have a number of instances falling into three distinct categories, namely those depicting the goddess as (i) an ugly hag transformed into a beautiful lady by the embraces of the hero destined to become king, e.g. the Niall Noígiallach and Lugaid Laigde tales, (ii) a wild wandering female who is restored to sanity and beauty through union with the rightful king, e.g. the tales about Mór Muman and Mis, and (iii) a girl of royal birth brought up among cowherds and elevated again to her due dignity through marriage to the king, e.g. the story of Ethne, the fosterling of Buchet . . . , and that of Mess Buachalla, who was reared among cowherds and eventually became the wife of Eterscélae, king of Tara" (1958, 63-4).

Abstract or non-personal representations of the sovereignty similarly tend to focus upon prosperity or disaster, as the case may be, in the spheres of nature, society and morality. For example, a rather comprehensive list of the benefits of *fír flathemon* or "ruler's truth" in *Audacht Morainn* (par. 12-21) comprises the warding off of great lightnings and plagues, the acquisition of territory and riches, the blessings of peace, tranquillity, happiness, comfort and health, success in war, continuity of inheritance, and abundance of mast, dairy produce, cereals, fish and offspring.

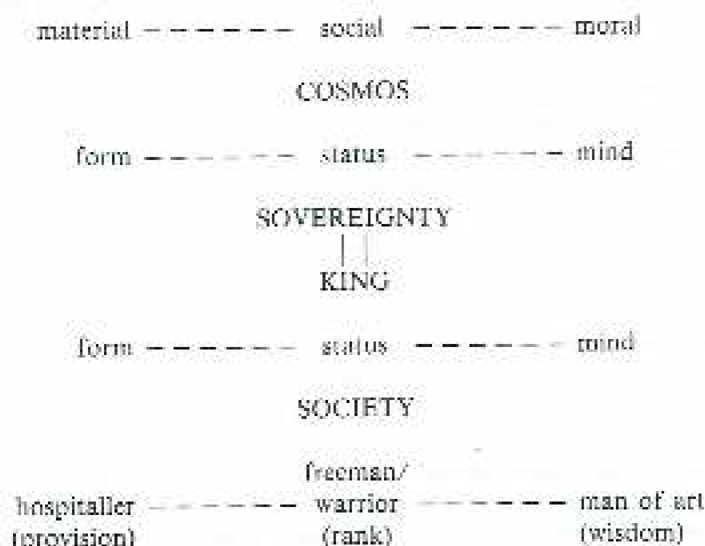
From the milieu of saga *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* offers two fine descriptions along similar lines. "There were great benefits in his reign (*flaith*), namely seven ships putting in every month of May at Inber Colbtha, and mast to the knees every autumn, and great knowledge (*imbas*) on the Bush and the Boyne in the middle of the month of May every year, and an abundance of pleasant intercourse so that no one was against the other in Ireland during his reign (*flaith*) and everyone thought the voice of his fellow in Ireland during his reign (*flaith*) as sweet as the strings of lyres would be. The wind used not to disturb the tail of a cow from the middle of spring to the middle of autumn. His reign (*flaith*) was not thundery and stormy" (par. 17). "His reign (*flaith*) is good", said Fer Rogain." A cloud has not come over the sun since he took up sovereignty (*flaith*) from the beginning of spring to the middle of autumn, and drops of dew have not come from the grass until midday, and wind does not toss the tail of livestock until evening, and no wolf has trespassed in his reign (*flaith*) save for a bull calf from every byre from the end of one year to the next, and there are seven wolves in hostageship against the wall in his house to maintain that ordinance, and there is a back-up surety behind them, namely Mac Locc, and it is he who pleads on their behalf in Conaire's house. It is in his reign (*flaith*) that every man thinks the voice of his fellow as sweet as the strings of lyres would be on account of the excellence of the law and the peace and the pleasant intercourse that are throughout Ireland. It is in his reign (*flaith*) that there are the three top crops on Ireland, namely a crop of corn ears, a crop of blossoms and a crop of mast" (par. 66, cf. *LU* 7009-20).

A similar point is made more laconically at the beginning of *Scél na Fír Flatha*: "an exalted, eminent king once took the sovereignty and supremacy over Ireland, namely Cormac grandson of Conn. The world was full of every goodness in the time of that king. There was fruit of tree and earth and sea (*mes ⁊ clas ⁊ murthorud*). There was peace and ease and pleasure (*síd ⁊ sáime ⁊ subae*). There was neither slaughter nor reaving (*guin na díberg*) at that time, but everyone in his own ancestral place (*ina inad dúthaig fodéin*)". Social stability is emphasized in the validation of Conchobar's reign after his probationary year of sole dominion over Ulster in the saga *Mesca Ulad*: "the province was a well of plenty and propriety through Conchobar, so that there was not an empty and deserted former homestead . . . without a son in the place of his father and his grandfather serving his ancestral lord" (ll. 130-5).

The following are typical enough examples of the reverse effects of a king's unsuitability or misbehaviour. During the reign of the usurper Cairbre Cinn Chait and his plebeian followers "the earth did not then yield its fruit to the churls (*aithig*) after the great murder they had inflicted upon the noble lineages (*sáer-chlanna*) of Ireland, and there was a great famine among the men of Ireland so that there was neither grain in the earth nor mast in the wood nor fish in the inlets nor milk with

cows nor weather in its due order" (Thurneysen, 1917, 63, par. 11). After Lugaid Mac Con's false judgement in *Cath Maige Mucrama* "for a year thereafter he was in kingship in Tara, and grass did not come through the earth nor a leaf through trees nor grain into corn. Then the men of Ireland expelled him from his kingship because he was a false king" (par. 66; *an-flaith*, literally 'non-king'). In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* hostile incursions and mayhem signal the beginning of the end for Conaire after his unjust partiality towards his fosterbrothers (cf. O'Daly in Dillon, 1968, 113-5): "they made for Tara past Uisnech Midi and then saw their incursion from East and West and South and North, and they saw the bands and the hosts and the land of the Uí Néill about him was a heaven of fire. 'What is that?' said Conaire. 'Not difficult', said his followers. 'Namely, it is not hard to recognise that it is the law that has broken down when people have set about burning the land'" (par. 25-6, cf. *LU* 6741-6). King Bres reaps a fitting reward for his stinginess in *Cath Maige Tuired*: "neither service nor compensation by the kingdoms (*túatha*) continued, and the wealth of the kingdom (*túath*) was not being rendered through the tribulation of the whole kingdom" (par. 38). Finally, the outraged poet Cairbre ends his famous satire with the words "Bres's wealth is not, then" and it transpires that "that was true, indeed. There was only decay upon him from that time" (par. 39).

It thus emerges that the king (*flaith/emf*) and the woman of sovereignty (*flaith/fiusf*) mate and interact as respective representatives of human society and the divine powers manifested in nature or the cosmos as a whole. As individuals each is endowed with a similar threefold set of personal qualities that essentially replicates the basic arrangement of the constituencies they represent. The relevant details pertaining to the king and the society ruled over by him have been given in 9 above, while the foregoing should have demonstrated an analogous connection between the sovereignty herself and the cosmic order she embodies. The broad outlines may be conveniently summarised in diagrammatic form.



The remarks about the diagram in 9 above with reference to Lévi-Strauss's totemic operator apply with even greater force to this scheme, which provides a

classic stratagem enabling "the natural and social universe to be grasped as an organized whole" by means of configurational parallels between various parts repeatedly classified on a "three in one" basis. The upshot is a flexible framework in which social and natural forces can be embodied in an individual, a system of a common type described by Mary Douglas as one in which "the cosmos is turned in, as it were, on man. Its transforming energy is threaded on to the lives of individuals so that nothing happens in the way of storms, sickness, blights or droughts except in virtue of these personal links" (1966, 85). This capacity to personalise or otherwise particularise broader concepts or issues, thus focusing them upon a specific symbol or set of symbols, is crucial to mythical discourse in general since, in Vernant's words, "thought takes shape by expressing itself symbolically in and through myth as it does in and through language" (ch. 3, 4).

11. In this respect the woman's mythical role as the embodiment of sovereignty is crucial as an adaptable device for the narrative treatment of kingship in both general and particular aspects. For example, it has already been seen towards the end of 4 above how *Cath Bóinde* and *Aided Meidbe* express the sovereignty's tripartite nature, threatened disintegration, ultimate reintegration and retention within the family, so to speak, in an account of Lugaid Réo nDerg's conception through a sister's incest with her three brothers in order to thwart their rebellion against a royal father. Conversely it emerged that *Esnada Tige Buchet* uses Eithne's abandonment of her feeble father and greedy brothers for Buchet and Cormac Mac Airt to depict the passage of the Tara monarchy from the Laigin to the Síl Cuinn forebears of the Uí Néill.

As Mac Cana points out, "the underlying tradition envisages the goddess espoused to the rightful king, but it also regards her as the mother of such a king and the ancestress of a royal line" (1957, 88). Thus towards the end of *Esnada Tige Buchet* Eithne bears Cormac a son Cairpre Lifechair to continue the line of Síl Cuinn kings descended from him, while Mes Búachalla's union with the hitherto childless king Eterscél of Tara duly provides the son and heir promised to him, namely Conaire, in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (pars. 6-8). Such literary reflections of a real enough queenly function can endow a woman of this type with considerable significance in the genealogical record cultivated by early Christian Ireland's monastically educated *senchaidi* (ch. 1, 10-11), and her various relations with the traditional founders of one or more lineages can serve to define their respective political fortunes or aspirations.

Two striking examples ably discussed by Ó Corráin (1985, 74-80) and Sproule (1985, 18-21) deserve brief mention here, pending a fuller treatment of the political aspect in chapter ten. A short narrative insertion into a genealogy of the Munster Eoganacht describes a dream by king Conall Corc of Cashel's wife Ofbfind concerning her four sons, from whom a central group of these dynasties claimed descent, and a fifth half-brother Cairbre Cruithnechán, ancestor of their more distant and bitter rivals the Éoganacht Locha Léin: "this is the Ofbfind who saw the vision the first night she had slept with the king in Cashel. That is, she saw that she had begotten four whelps. She bathed the first whelp in wine, namely Nad Froích, she bathed the second in ale, namely Mac Cas, she bathed the third in new milk, namely Mac Bróc, she bathed the fourth in water, namely Mac Iair. The fifth whelp reached her from outside as she lay, and she bathed that one in blood. He is Cairbre

Cruithnechán and he turned on her and ate her breasts from her bosom etc." (*Corp. Gen.*, 196 = 148a33-9). Obviously this politically biased tale seeks to exclude the Éoganacht Locha Léin from a claim upon the provincial kingship by portraying their ancestor as a vicious intruder consequently devoid of legitimacy.

In the genealogically oriented saga *Echtra Mac nEchach Muigmedóin* (3 above), by contrast, the woman of sovereignty is cast as actual or would-be lover rather than as mother or stepmother of the principals, and it is the illegitimate Niall Noígiallach who sleeps with her, thereby securing the Tara kingship for himself and his Uí Néill descendants to the almost complete exclusion of his royal father's legitimate sons. Eponymous ancestors of the Uí Ailella, Uí Fiachrach and Uí Briúin, their rejection of her effectively restricts their and their descendants' dynastic pretensions to Connacht.

It has already been seen (10 above) that changes in the physical, social or mental condition of the woman on contact with her destined royal mate serve to personalise for narrative purposes the natural, social and spiritual benefits thought to accrue to a kingdom under a *fír-flaith* or "true king" in the sense already defined (see 6-7). Conversely, she can also function in a number of ways as a narrative index of failure or unsuitability on the part of a king or would-be king.

Bruiden Da Choca is the story of the rather contentious election of the exile Cormac Conn Loinges to succeed his father Conchobar as king of Ulster and of his death at Da Choca's hostel on a journey from Connacht to Ulster that is beset by tokens and prophecies of doom. The prize of sovereignty over the Ulaid thus tantalisingly eludes him when almost within his grasp, a fate poignantly portrayed by his brief encounter with a fair and shapely maiden (*ingen chóem chruthach*) who approaches and gives the following reply to his question as to whether she will stay and accompany him: "no, and I would prefer it that you should not go, for the cutting short of your life has come. Malevolent is the man who reached you this morning, Craiptine the harper, when he played his hole-headed lute to you. The reason he came was to violate your taboo (*geis*), so that it may be a short life for you in order that we may never meet again. I am gone now, since we shall not meet henceforth" (pars. 19-21). Thereupon she leaves him.

12. Máire Bhreathnach (1982) has argued with particular reference to *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca* that the goddess of sovereignty may revert to a malign or hideous aspect in order to portend or encompass the death of a king who has done wrong. In the former tale this feature is chiefly exemplified by the hideous hag Cailb, who foretells Conaire's slaughter while seeking admission to his company in Da Derga's hostel after sunset in breach of one of his taboos or *geisi* (pars. 61-3). One of the many aliases she intones on one leg is Badb, probably a pagan war goddess in origin (e.g. de Vries, 1961, 137-8) and commonly depicted in the literature as a gruesome haunter of the battlefield and harbinger of carnage. In the generically related *Bruiden Da Choca* the fleeting encounter described above between Cormac and the beautiful woman of sovereignty is preceded by a quite different confrontation with the bloody Badb, who like her *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* counterpart prophesies the king's impending doom on one leg, this time with one eye closed too (pars. 15-8). This juxtaposition seems to vitiate Bhreathnach's equation of the latter type with the sovereignty, and in any case retribution for regal wrongdoing is hardly the motive for Badb's appearance to Cormac, who has yet to assume the kingship promised him.

The patently Christian message of *Aided Muirchertaig* will be discussed below (ch. 6, 4), but the beautiful Sín undoubtedly functions in it as a diabolical sovereignty woman who bewitches the Tara monarch, causes him to abandon his former wife, and leads him to conflict and death. However, far from punishing any previous misdemeanour of the king's, Sín leads a hitherto flawless sovereign astray out of personal malice.

In *Echtra Airt meic Cuind* and *Fingal Rónáin* the fate of the kingship is bound up with tensions that arise when a royal father's new bride comes between him and the son who is his heir apparent. Although the language of the extant version of the former is early Modern Irish, the title appears in all three surviving manuscripts of the roughly eleventh-century saga list B (Mac Cana, 1980, 33), and linguistic modernization need not have significantly affected the basic framework of an old tale. At any rate, *Echtra Airt* combines various narrative stereotypes and supernatural features with some palpable Christian allegory to be discussed below (ch. 6, 8), whereas social and psychological realism pervades much of *Fingal Rónáin* despite linguistic features pointing to an Old or early Middle Irish date of composition.

Echtra Airt begins with a reference to the benefits of Conn Cétchathach's rule in Tara with his beloved wife Eithne Tháebfata at his side, and then tells how Eithne's death so dejected him that he lost the will to govern. One day, while Conn was alone on Howth Head lamenting his wife, the Túatha Dé Danann assembled in the land of promise (*tír tairngiri*) to expel the adulterous Bé-cuma Cneis-gel ("Woman-shape Skin-fair") to Ireland, home of their hated Milesian successors (ch. 3, 8). "She had a lover in Ireland, namely Art son of Conn Cétchathach and it was not known to her that Art was her lover". Her dress, looks and accomplishments as she voyaged to Ireland are lavishly described as perfect "but for one thing, that a woman was not fit for a high king of Ireland after her banishment for her own misdeed" (par. 5). Meeting Conn at Howth, she declares that she has come from the Land of Promise to seek Art son of Conn, to whom she had given "love in absence" (*grád écmaise*; 3 above), and introduces herself as Delb-cháem ("Form-fair") daughter of Morgan. Announcing that "I see no defects in you for which it would be right to refuse you, unless they are concealed in you", Conn allows her her own choice between himself and his son (par. 6). Having chosen the old king, she secures Art's banishment from Ireland for a year to the chagrin of Conn and his subjects, and "there was neither cereal nor dairy produce (*ith ná blicht*) in Ireland during that period" (par. 8). His druids' revelation that his wife Bécuma's defilement (*corbad*) and lack of faith (*creitem*) are responsible induces Conn to seek a remedy for this scarcity that proves only partial and will be discussed later (pars. 8-14; ch. 6, 8).

After his return to Tara, Art and Bécuma play *fidchell*. Bécuma loses the first game and carries out the feat imposed upon her (pars. 15-17), but unfairly wins the second and sends Art on an exceedingly difficult quest to bring Delb-cháem daughter of Morgan to Ireland from a distant island in the sea, where she is guarded by various obstacles and her grim parents, all of which Art duly overcomes to win her (pars. 17-28). "And he took the maiden with him to Ireland, and the place they landed was at Howth Head. And when they had reached the shore the maiden said 'go to Tara and say to Bécuma daughter of Éogan that she should not tarry in Tara but should go from it forthwith and that it would be a bad portent if she were ordered to leave Tara'. And Art went on to Tara and welcome was given him and

there was no one in Tara whom his progress did not please except for the wanton and grievous Bécuma. Nevertheless, Art ordered that sinful woman to leave Tara. And she arose quickly in dudgeon from the presence of the men of Ireland without conversation or farewell until she reached Howth Head" (pars. 29-30).

Like Sin in the *Aided Muirchertaig*, Bécuma in this tale proves to be a beautiful but morally defective successor to a king's previous wife, with disastrous consequences for the monarch's reign. However, the above synopsis should have shown that *Echtra Airt* has a further central narrative thread in the form of two related ambiguities affecting Bécuma, the significance of which has been well appreciated by Brendan O Hehir (1983, esp. 169-70). The first is her love-hate relationship with the king's son Art, and the second her status as Delbcháem's flawed *alter ego* and ultimately rival, the Hyde to Delbcháem's Jekyll, so to speak. On arrival in Ireland as Art's intended lover she actually identifies herself as Delbcháem before marrying Conn and insisting, as Bécuma again, upon Art's temporary banishment. Similarly, in the second half of the story it is she, Bécuma, who actually forces Art to search for the very Delbcháem who, as Art's spouse, will supplant her in Tara at the end of the tale.

The symbolism here seems fairly clear. The death of his first wife Eithne and Conn's resultant loss of desire to rule function as an indication that it is time for him to relinquish the kingship to his heir (cf. end of 6). A new sovereignty figure duly appears with the potential to be a success as Delbcháem if joined to her destined lover Art, the king's son, but instead perversely opts, as the wicked Bécuma, for the outgoing monarch, who thus obtains a rather unpropitious extension of a hitherto beneficent reign. This unsatisfactory state of affairs can only be remedied by Art's arduous winning of the true Delbcháem in conformity with the dictum in *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* concerning the sovereignty (*in flaithius*) that "it is seldom it is obtained without battles and conflicts" (par. 16). This, of course, stands in marked and deliberate contrast to the casual way in which Bécuma fell into his father's arms, and the basic moral of *Echtra Airt* is that it is folly for an ageing ruler to hang on beyond his allotted span.

Whereas the literary or mythical significance of a king's spouse as an indicator of his rule appears essential to this narrative, in *Fingal Rónáin* this aspect is somewhat marginal in relation to more mundane motives ably brought out by various critics (Greene in Dillon, 1968, 162-3; Charles-Edwards, 1978, 130-41; Ó Cathasaigh, 1985). Nevertheless, the two sagas do share some significant similarities despite *Fingal Rónáin*'s relentless verisimilitude. As O Hehir puts it, "in the almost completely demythologized *Fingal Rónáin*, it is Rónán's nameless replacement wife who brings about his catastrophe" (1983, 168).

Thus we are told that king Rónán mac Áeda of Leinster remained single for a long time after the death of his wife Eithne, who had borne him his wonderful son Máel Fothartaig, popular with his own and adored by the opposite sex of the province. Eventually Rónán decided to marry the young daughter of the northern king Echaid despite his son's warning that an older, steadier woman would be more suitable. The marriage duly took place, but the attentions of his father's new wife forced Máel Fothartaig into virtual exile, from which he was soon recalled at the behest of the Leinstermen. Original matrimonial intentions were made abundantly clear during a visit to his stepmother's father on the way home: "it is bad for you that you did not sleep with our daughter. It is to you we gave her and not to that old man"

(ll. 66-7). Here too, then, it can be argued that an undue prolongation of his reign is implicit in the aged Rónán's decision to take a wife otherwise destined for a son whose obvious qualifications for kingship are repeatedly dwelt upon. This time the catastrophic consequences are dynastic, encompassing the tragic deaths of all the principal characters – Máel Fothartaig, his friends and assassin, the woman's parents and brother, and finally Rónán himself – rather than crop failure.

It thus appears that the woman of sovereignty can indeed serve as a harbinger of royal death but typically does this in her young and beautiful guise as the heir's intended rather than by reversion to a hag in her capacity as the old king's original spouse.

It remains to note that the loss of kingship brought about by such a woman's behaviour is not invariably final. For instance, according to an early tale conventionally called 'Cormac's dream', after Cormac mac Airt had become king of Tara and Eochu Gunnat king of Ulster, "one night as Cormac slept he saw a vision and a dream, namely Eochu Gunnat having come to Tara and the lifting of the hostages' pillar out of Tara by him and its carriage to Crúachu and setting up by him in Ráth Crúachan. Moreover, he sees his own wife, namely Eithne Thóebfata, sleeping with Eochu Gunnat and fornicating with him repeatedly and coming (back) to him (Cormac) after that . . . He saw the province of Connacht come to Tara and set the hostages' pillar in its own place in Tara. Furthermore, he sees their heads being cut off the women of Ulster by the Connachtmen and Lugaid son of Lugna striking the head off the wife of Eochu Gunnat, namely Cacht daughter of Fergus (par. 5). The king arose terrified, and his druids and sages are brought to him and he relates the dream to them, namely Melchend the druid and Óengus mac Bolcadáin and Ailbe mac Delind and Fithal, the latter being Cormac's poet and judge (*fili ⁊ brethem Cormaic éisside*). That group then had recourse to their knowledge (*fius*) and told him the interpretation of the dream (par. 6). 'The hostages' pillar being put out of its place', they said, 'what it signifies is your being put out of the kingship of Tara, for it is you who are the hostages' pillar there, and you shall be put among the Connachtmen and you shall be king over Crúachu as long as Eochu be in the kingship of Tara . . . Moreover, your wife sleeping with him, what it signifies is that your kingship (*ríge*) will sleep with him and he will be but one year in the sovereignty (*flaithius*) of Tara. Moreover, the striking of her head from the wife of Eochu Gunnat, what it signifies is that the Ulstermen together with their king will fall at your and the Connachtmen's hand on the day of battle, and it is Lugaid son of Lugna of the Connachtmen who will behead the king himself. For it is the Connachtmen who will take that battle along with you and it is they that will place you again in your kingship. And that', they said, 'is the interpretation of the dream' . . . Three kings of Ireland unite with Eochu Gunnat to depose Cormac . . . (par. 7)" (ed. Carney, 1940, 192-3).

The precise and detailed correspondences between the dream's imagery, its interpretation and what actually happened have a distinctly biblical ring (cf. Ó Hehir, 1983, 174), being reminiscent of Joseph's interpretation of the dreams of the butler, the baker and Pharaoh himself (Gen. 41-2), for example. Such allegorical application of mantic technique is, of course, by no means confined to the Bible (e.g. Iliad 2. 308-32) and provides, as it were, a commentary on the intended values of the symbols employed. A non-oneiromantic situation analogous to that in 'Cormac's Dream' is presented more allusively near the end of *Esnada Tige Buchet*, which tells

how Cormac seized Eithne by force, lost her to the Leinstermen and then recovered her permanently with proper marital arrangements (see Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 75-6).

13. A further factor liable to figure in the literature as a portent of death is the breach of *geisi* or "taboos". As A. and B. Rees put it, "the violation of *gessa* is such a sure omen of approaching death that it might almost be inferred that a hero is safe from harm while his *gessa* remain inviolate. Then, as his time approaches its end, he finds himself in situations where he cannot avoid breaking them" (1961, 327). Although such taboos are by no means confined to kings in medieval Irish material, their significance and accumulation do tend to be greatest in the case of major monarchs by virtue of Sjoestedt's principle that "the more important a person is and the more sacred he is, the more *gessa* he has. The king's person is thus hedged around with prohibitions" (1949, 71). Although there does not seem to be any compelling evidence for an Indo-European institution of regal taboos, this apparently widespread concomitant of priesthoods and sacral kingships around the globe (cf. Frazer, 1922, 168-75) could have attached itself easily enough to the hierogamous monarchs of the pagan Celts or the pre-Christian Irish.

Whereas royal *geisi* in saga generally pertain to the individual destined to be king rather than to the office itself, an extant Middle Irish text edited by Dillon (1951) lists and describes the seven prohibitions (*urgarta*) and seven prerogatives (*buada*) of the king of Tara followed by the twin sets of five applying to each of the four provincial kings. It is difficult to gauge the relationship between such a synthetic historical scheme and current socio-political observances. However, the past tenses predominating in the prose seem to betoken a deliberately antiquarian orientation, and David Greene may well be right to caution in this connection that "in the case of sacral kingship . . . there was an enormous gap between the concept as preserved and elaborated by the literary men, on the one hand, and the realities of political structures in Early Christian Ireland" (1979, 19). As Kelly points out, although *Tecosca Cormaic* begins its list of a king's proper attributes by recommending *rop sogeis* "let him be of good (i.e. keep) taboos" (par. 6), "*geisi* are not mentioned in the surviving law-texts" (1988, 20). The fact remains, however, that even unreal or ostensibly outmoded features may provide a means of articulating very real contemporary concerns, as suggested by Philip O'Leary in a recent study (1988) arguing that in medieval Irish literature *geisi* are first and foremost a narrative index of such important considerations as honour and social standing. Moreover, whatever their pagan origins, taboos are not inherently inimical to Christian teaching. After all, in accordance with an angel of God's injunction the cutting of his hair was taboo for that great biblical leader of Israel Samson and duly caused his ruin at the hands of Delilah and the Philistines (Jud. 13-7).

In *Bruiden Da Choca* the offering of the kingship of Ulster to Cormac and his acceptance are followed by a list of the "determinations of his life (*érchoili a sáegail*)" or "taboos (*gesa*)" enjoined upon him at his birth by the druid Cathbad (par. 6). These are broken one after the other in the doom-laden narrative leading up to Cormac's premature death, which they thus portend. Like the woman of sovereignty mentioned in 11 above, maintenance of his *geisi* eludes him as he is on the verge of becoming king.

In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* there is a still more obvious link between the maintenance of such taboos and the fortunes of the sovereignty itself. Upon being made king

of Tara, Conaire promulgates the prohibitions revealed to him by the supernatural father (par. 16) who had shown him how to qualify as king (par. 13). After unjust failure to enforce one of these, "let not plundering (*díberg*) be taken in your reign", against his beloved fosterbrothers (pars. 18-21), Conaire breaks his remaining taboos at an accelerating rate as a prelude to death, remarking at one climactic moment *ro-m-gabsat-sa mo gessi uili innocht* "all my taboos have caught me tonight" (par. 36 = *LU* 6814). As manifestations of the ruler's contract with the divine or supernatural order, the state of his *geisi* is here symptomatic of the health of his kingship and thus performs a narrative function analogous to that of the woman of sovereignty's condition and conduct in some other tales.

14. The preceding sections have sought to highlight the close correlation between narrative and more abstract accounts of the proper or improper attributes of sovereignty, the corollary being that myth and story accurately reflect contemporaneous ideology in this crucial area. However, the next chapter must address the question of how far this ideology and its mythological or narrative reflections were in tune with the Christian tenor of the Patrician settlement held to govern early medieval Irish law and society as a whole (ch. 3, 9; ch. 4, 3-9).

CHAPTER SIX

Sovereignty and the Church

1. In view of the comparative evidence adduced in the previous chapter for the quite extensive pre-Christian roots of many basic ingredients concerned, one might be forgiven for thinking that a fundamentally pagan ethos of sacral kingship had survived the establishment of Christianity in Ireland with little or no significant change. This, for instance, appears to be Mac Cana's view: "the Church's organization adapted itself to the native social structure and evolved with it until the great ecclesiastical reform of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This native order was based upon the small tribal kingdom, or conglomeration of such kingdoms, each with its sacred king who was the focus and pivot of socio-political organization. By him stood his druid in pre-Christian times, later his learned poet ('fili') and judge, who were later joined by abbot or bishop. Because of its central role in traditional society the kingship generated a vast proliferation of myth, hero-tale and legend, which continued to be added to within the Christian and literate period . . . When the ritual of the 'hierogamos', the sacred marriage to the goddess which solemnized the inauguration of the sacral king, was trimmed of its more blatantly sexual elements, probably in the sixth century, its accompanying mythology continued unabated, because of the very centrality of the institution of kingship . . . Like all myths it had its stereotypes (was in itself, one might say, a stereotype), but never lost its social reference and function until the society itself was finally destroyed. Nothing demonstrates more clearly the continuity of mythological concepts in Irish thought and literature under Christianity" (1986, 43).

However, Mac Cana's own rather surprising strictures about "Irish scholars, who because of their strongly positivist philological formation, have disregarded the likely effects of a sweeping religious (and intellectual) change on the traditional corpus of mythico-religious texts" (ibid., 37) prompt the question whether the Christian and monastic moulders of this material really could have accepted at face value a sacrality vested in a goddess or goddesses, when the very acknowledgement of such status flagrantly contravened the First Commandment of their monotheistic creed: "thou shalt have none other gods in my sight" (Deut. 5:7 *non habebis deos alienos in conspectu meo*). If, however, they did have scruples about this fundamental matter, why did they exploit and even delight in these often unashamedly erotic symbols? Did they, perhaps, apply an allegorical or typological *interpretatio Christiana* (ch. 3, 12)?

2. To begin with, there can be no doubt that central tenets of this regnal ideology were fully attuned to clerical attitudes from at least the seventh century on. Thus the early eighth-century Irish Canons, here citing the seventh-century text *De XII Abusivis Saeculi* (Anton, 1982, 583-4), declare that "the iniquity of an unjust king disrupts peoples' peace, raises obstacles to kingship, removes lands' fruits, hinders the people's services, leads to dear ones' deaths, stirs up enemies' incursions into territories, works beasts up everywhere with the savaging of stock, gives rise to atmospheric storms, impedes the fecundity of lands and the bounties of the sea, kindles lightnings, burns up the blossoms of trees, casts down unripe fruits, not only darkens the countenance of the present rule but also obscures sons and grandsons so that they should not inherit the kingship" (*Can. Hib.* XXV, 3).

According to the same source "the justice, however, of a just king (*justitia vero regis justi*) is the following: to judge no one unjustly, to be a defender of strangers, widows and orphans, to check thefts, to punish adulteries, not to nurture the unchaste and actors, not to exalt the wicked, to destroy the wicked from the earth, not to allow parricides and murderers to live, to defend churches, to succour the poor with alms, to set just men over the kingdom's affairs, to have wise and sober old men as counsellors, not to heed the superstitions of druids (*magorum*), sorceresses and augurs, to defend the country bravely and justly against adversaries, to trust in God throughout, not to become haughty from successes, to bear all adversities patiently, to hold the catholic faith in God, not to allow his sons to act wickedly, to attend to prayers at regular times, not to take food before a suitable hour. The king's justice is peoples' peace, a country's protection, subjects' inviolability, a nation's defence, cure of diseases, men's happiness, clemency of weather, calmness of sea, fecundity of land, solace of the poor, sons' inheritance, hope of future felicity, abundance of crops, fertility of trees (*justitia regis pax populorum est, tutamen patriae, immunitas plebis, munimentum gentis, cura languorum, gaudium hominum, temperies aeris, serenitas maris, terrae fecunditas, solatium pauperum, hereditas filiorum, spes futurae beatitudinis, segetum abundantia, arborum fecunditas*)" (ibid., XXV, 4).

The basic dichotomy here is entirely in keeping with Proverbs 29:4 "the just king raiseth up the land; the greedy man shall cast it down (*rex iustus erigit terram vir avarus destruet eam*)". Furthermore, "a king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes" (Prov. 20:8, *rex qui sedet in solio iudicii dissipat omne malum intuitu suo*).

Narrative reflexes of these and similar principles are in good supply, but a few germane examples must suffice here. Regal injustice's hindrance of people's services is illustrated when "neither service (*fognam*) nor recompense by the kingdoms remained" as a result of Bres's meanness in *Cath Maige Tuired* (par. 38), probably a deliberate echo of Judges 9:38 "who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?" (see 11 below). The enfeebled Cathaer's failure to check his greedy sons' depredations on Buchet in *Esnada Tige Buchet* contravenes the injunction not to allow one's sons to act wickedly and causes loss of the Tara sovereignty rather as the venality of the aged Samuel's sons signals the end of their line of judges and a new line of kings (I Sam./Kgs. 8). In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* the people of Tara's initial reluctance to accept the youthful Conaire as king (par. 15) is eminently compatible with the Irish Canons' citation of Ecclesiastes 10:16: *vae tibi terra cuius rex est puer* "woe to thee, o land, whose king is a boy" (*Can. Hib.* XXV, 5). Conaire soon shows

himself ready to have wise and sober old men as counsellors by announcing "I will enquire of the wise that I may be wise myself" (par. 15, *imcoiemros sa do gáethaib corbom gáeth fo-deisin*), but then fails to check theft in his reign by his foster-brothers (pars. 18-9). Almost ineluctably his partiality for the latter leads him into a false judgement allowing them and their fellow murderous miscreants to live (pars. 20-21), with disastrous consequences for king and kingdom. Solomon, it seems, was right.

Moreover, the imbuing of the king's justice with obviously Christian elements and ecclesiastical concerns is also found in so-called "secular" wisdom texts in the vernacular. These typically blend a smattering of such specifics with many more neutral precepts that are, nevertheless, by and large perfectly compatible with the teachings of Church and Bible. Recognition of this feature led Thurneysen to moot the following possibilities about the author of what he regarded as the earliest recension (A) of the *Audacht Moraind* edited by him: "the author might well be a *fili* who was a *brithem* at the same time; he recommends the king to base his decisions on judgements reached earlier (19); naturally, only the professional *brithem* can provide him with these. On the other hand, he is quite unwarlike (32); his ideal is peace and comfortable quiet (13), and there is no word about the king's duties of looking after his army and being ready for battle, even though he is promised victory as a reward for his righteousness (52, cf. 11). Thus only one side of the Old Irish kingship is emphasized. One could almost think of a churchman as the author, if this were not contradicted by the drunkenness allowed at festive gatherings and in the king's drinking hall" (1917, 78).

Thurneysen's grounds for suspecting clerical authorship are typically perceptive, and such status need no longer be regarded as at all incompatible with that of poet or judge (ch. 1, 10-12). On the other hand, tolerance of drinking is no more cogent an argument against ecclesiastical authorship here than in the case of Saint Brigit's Old Irish Life, which refers to the monastic production of ale for consumption by visiting preachers and others on Church feasts (e.g., *Bethu Brigte*, pars. 21 and 28). Still more strikingly, a contemporary poem in praise of Áed Úa Foirréid, bishop of Armagh 1032-1056, edited by Gerard Murphy (1944, 140-64) flatters its recipient as "Áed, good bishop of Armagh, for whom maltings are brewed" (vs. 18, *Áed, epscop Aird Macha maith, dia ndéntar bracha do bruith*) presiding over "heavy drinking in his wattled house" (vs. 11, *ól 'na thig threbraid co trén*) and refers to his contemporary, the famous ecclesiastical scholar-poet Flann Mainistrech of Monasterboice, as "a magical mead-sage who quaffs ale" (vs. 31, *mid-suí síde sluges linn*).

The complex relationships between *Audacht Morainn*'s various extant versions have yet to be definitively clarified, but according to Binchy "there is a remarkable contrast between the A and B recensions of this text: the former, which Thurneysen mistakenly took to be older (see ZCP xiii.43ff., 298f.), contains a number of Christian loanwords as well as several counsels based on Christian teaching, whereas B has no loanwords (other than *clannaid* 'plants') and no specifically Christian sentiments" (1966, 3-4, n.3). Regarding the same B recension its most recent editor, Fergus Kelly (1976), asks "was *Audacht Morainn* composed by a cleric?" and replies "I would doubt this. Apart from a few Christian Latin loanwords (e.g. par. 59 *bendacht* 'blessing') and a reference to the Creator (par. 32 *dúilem*), *Audacht Morainn* seems devoid of Christian elements. If it were the work of a cleric, one