

would surely expect him to attribute the prosperity of the territory not only to the king's justice (*fir flathemon*) but also to divine favour" (1988, 236).

Arguably, however, that is precisely what is conveyed by the highly significant reference to *dúillem*, an obvious calque on Latin *creator: ad:mestar dúill dúillemon do-da:rosat amal do:rosata* "let him estimate the creatures of the creator who has created them as they have been created" (par. 32). This precept is undoubtedly based upon the Christian Irish conceit (ch. 3, 10) that the ideal king Cormac mac Airt was a notable exception to the Pauline rule that prior to the coming of Christianity gentiles had missed the opportunity of worshipping God aright through his creation. As such, it is a product of learned ecclesiastical sophistry implying clerical authorship for *Audacht Morainn* as well as a concept of ruler's truth bound up with due regard for the Almighty. The A version remarks of kinslaying (*finéal*) that "it is avenged by God to the ninth man" (par. 38). Given that the three- or four-generation extended family termed the *derb-fine* comprised nine degrees of consanguinity (*derb-fine co nóibor*, *CIII* 430.5), presumably reckoned inclusively from a member of the younger generation, this is probably an echo of Exodus 34:7 (cf. Deut. 5:9): "(Thou) who visitest the iniquity of the fathers on the sons and grandsons unto the third and fourth generation". The same recension also enjoins Christian orthodoxy on the king by warning "let him not sell the old (aith for a new faith" (par. 43, *núria sen-iris ar nua-iris*) and "let him not trust in false prophets, let him trust in the truth" (par. 51, *nú:n-erbha do sóeh-fáthib, n-a:n-erbha do fírinni*). Moreover, the oldest extant manuscript version of A, or at least of a recension very close to it, in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster (I in Thurneysen, 1917, 88) concludes with the precepts "let him not trust in paganism, let him trust in truth - it will sustain him" and "let him not trust in idols, let him trust in the God who is the best of gods, the God of heaven" (pars. 56-7: *na-ch:n-erbbad i ngentliucht, n-a:n-erbbad i fírinne, co:t:n oobu . . . na-cha:n-erbbad i n-idlu, n-a:n-erbbad i nDía as dech deib, Día nime*).

This notion of the king's faith in and obedience to God as the linchpin of his truth and the benefits that flow from it is, of course, essentially biblical, being beautifully expressed by Psalm 71, for example: "give the king Thy judgement (*iudicium*), O God, and Thy justice (*iustitiam*) unto the king's son, to judge Thy people in justice and Thy pour in judgement (*iudicare populum tuum in iustitia et pauperes tuos in iudicio*). Let the mountains take up peace for the people and the hills judgement. He shall judge the poor of the people, and shall make safe the sons of the poor, and shall humble the disparager. It shall endure with the sun before the moon for generations of generations. It shall descend like showers upon a fleece and like rains dripping over the earth. Justice shall arise in his days and abundance of peace until the moon be removed, and he shall rule from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the world" (vs. 1-8).

Since the perfect justice and concomitant success of that paragon of pre-Patrician Irish kingship Cormac mac Airt are likewise ascribed to his "faith in the one God according to law" by *Senchas na Ríte* (ch. 3, 10) and to the "judgements of the law of Moses" that he used to deliver by *Scél na Fír Flatha* (ch. 4, 7), it is hardly surprising that the gnomic tract fathered upon him, *Tecosca Cormaic*, opens with an unambiguous statement that the benefits accruing under a good and pious king ultimately flow from God: "O grandson of Conn, O Cormac", said Cairbre, "what is best for a king?" "Not difficult", said Cormac, "best for him (is) steadiness

without anger, patience without strife, affability without arrogance, concern for lore (*senchus*), reciprocation of truth, hostages in fetters, hosting with just cause, truth without venality, mercy with consolidation of law, peace to kingdoms, diverse sureties, true judgements, fasting on boundaries, exaltation of inviolate persons (*mórad nemed*), honouring of poets (*airmitiu filed*), worship of great God (*adrad Dé móir*), produce in his reign (*torud ina flaith*), regard for every unfortunate, many alms (*almsana ile*), mast on trees, fish in inlets, fruitful earth, ships putting into port, importing of riches, forfeit flotsam, silken raiment, a sword-smiting troop to protect every kingdom, attacks over borders, let him minister to the weak, let him cherish the strong, let him possess truth (*fír*), let him reprove falsehood (*gó*), let him love truth (*fírinné*), let him quell fear, let him suppress criminals, let him give true judgements (*fír-breitha*), let him feed everyone, let him consolidate every peace (*síd*), let him buy treasures, let him improve the soul (*lessaiged annain*), let him recount every clear judgement, abundance of wine and mead, let him utter every truth. For it is through his ruler's truth that God gives all that (*ar is tria fír flaitheman do:beir Dia in sin uile*)".

In the scheme of things worked out by early medieval Irish *literati* the ascription of Christian or biblical sentiments to Morann and Cormac well before Patrick's mission is not, of course, an anachronism but reflects their acknowledged status as pre-Patrician figures who believed in the one God and had access to basic divine truths such as Mosaic Law and Paul's teaching (ch. 3, 10). It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the three most comprehensive extant wisdom texts (see Kelly, 1988, 284-6) purporting to belong to the pre-Christian period in Ireland should be ascribed to such precocious believers or their close associates as Morann (*Audacht Morainn*), Cormac (*Tecosca Cormaic*) and Fíthal (*Senbriathra Fíthail*), who is presumably to be identified with the man named as Cormac's chief poet and judge in the passage from 'Cormac's dream' near the end of the previous section. These very ascriptions indicate that their authors regarded the texts in question as fundamentally compatible with Christian teaching, and there is little to commend Roland Smith's view of them as "a distinctly pagan tradition; wherever Christian elements have crept in, as they have in several cases, they must be considered late additions due to the desire on the part of Christian scribes to overcome the pagan traditions by tempering them with Christian motives" (1927, 412-3). Instead of asking what is specifically Christian about extant vernacular instructions for princes and the like, one might equally or more appropriately ask what they contain that is specifically pagan or unapplicable to early Christian Irish society. The answer is, little or nothing.

Although they cannot, of course, be absolutely disproved, claims that "clearly the genre was traditional and pre-literate and an integral part of the pagan liturgy of sovereignty" (Mac Cana, 1979, 448) are pure speculation, and it seems quite likely that a foundation provided by biblical wisdom texts was adapted to existing Irish ideas and institutions. Be that as it may, the texts available to us indicate that pre-Christian sacral principles had been assimilated at least as early as the mid-seventh century to a biblical concept of kingship by divine grace that belongs firmly in the mainstream of medieval Christian European thought. As Neil McLeod has pertinently remarked, "breaches against the inherent truth comprised in natural order could only bring disorder. Therefore, Truth could be revealed in a tradition of rulings which had proved to preserve harmony. To this Christianity added the element of the divine author" (1982, 362). This neat and economical approach apparently

made it possible to preserve many features of traditional kingship doctrine with a modicum of ecclesiastically sanctioned additions and subtractions that may have been limited enough in volume but had enormous ideological implications. In effect, a typical enough sacral kingship with pagan foundations was converted into a Christian monarchy under God's auspices at a stroke.

If this transpires that, far from being a bizarre 'Celtic fringe' repository of barely adulterated pagan notions, early Christian Irish kingship theory had acquired a relatively unobtrusive but nevertheless pervasive biblical dynamic. This helps to explain the significant contribution it seems to have made to the moulding of the Carolingian *speculum regis/principis* or "prince's mirror" (cf. Anton, 1982, 568-617). The latter has been described as tending "to deemphasize the Augustinian concept that secular rule is a necessary evil imposed by God on the sinful nature of fallen man and to emphasize instead the Christian ruler's high moral responsibility to his people and to God", the basic assumption being "that good government will follow from the rule of a morally good man" (Fherle, 1987, 434). For instance, the description of Smaragdus' early ninth-century continental *via regia* as "a guide to Christian ruling. The king should be unequalled in wisdom, justice, prudence, humility, mercy, detachment, patience, receptiveness to counsel, and the love of God and neighbour" (Renna, 1986, 261) would be quite applicable to medieval Irish texts like *Audacht Morainn* or *Tecosca Cormaic*.

3. As McLeod further points out, the welfare of a people preeminently dependent upon their monarch's behaviour and qualities was explicitly linked by monastic lawyers with general uprightness and proper dues to God's Church. "There is a passage in the tract 'On the Confirmation of Right and Law', which emphasises the connection between law and the order of the universe, and in which the influence of Christianity is most explicit in the insinuation of the Church's right to alms" (ibid., 364). This runs as follows: "what are the three times in which his produce (*torad*) perishes for every ruler (*flaith*) so that there be loss in grain, dairy produce and mast (*ith 7 blícht 7 mes*)? An annulling of oblations, a freeing of serfs, a dissolution of tithes (*dechmad*), a release for slaves. There are three calamities which befall the world that are hardest: the coming of famine upon a people, bad contract, a plague coming upon them. There are three remedies which cure them: observance by judges lest they pass false judgement, alms from everyone from each produce (*almsana ó chách di chách thorad*), no statement of falsehood or false eyewitness in the kingdom (*ziath*)" (CIH 231.15-31).

McLeod continues, "the imprint of the Church in regard to its financial affairs is still more distinct in the *Córus Bétena*, where this triad appears to occur in a more complete, and more successfully reworked, form: 'there are three times in which the world is disordered (deranged): the visitation period of an epidemic, the onslaught (?) of war, the dissolution of contracts. There are three things which cure them: 'tithes and firstfruits and alms which hold back the visitation period of an epidemic; The subduing [influence] of pacts [made] with king and kingdom which holds back the onslaught (?) of war; Everyone's holding to his good contract and his disadvantageous contract which holds back the derangement of the world'" (ibid., 365).

The Old Irish legal tract *Din Techtugad*, moreover, explicitly places an offence against the Church at the head of the seven major indications of a king's disqualificatory falsehood, and is in no doubt that retribution upon a people for their

or their king's mendacity stems ultimately from God: *a:taat .iii. fiadnoisi for:gellat gat cach rig: senad do soud asa n-airlisi cen fir cen dligeid, détiu uire inge mad tar cert, maidm catha fair, nína ina flathius, díisce mílehta, milliud mesa, wól n-etha. It é .iii. béochaindlea and-so for:asnat gat cach rig. Teora gua ata moam do:fich Dfa for cach síaith: fulllem gúnadmae, forgell gúfadnoise, gábreath ar fochnraic* "there are seven testimonies that attest the lie of every king: turning a synod (glossed "of the Church") out of their precinct without truth (and) without right, suffering of satire unless it be in spite of granting the claim, his defeat in battle, famines in his reign, drying up of dairy produce, ruin of mast, blight of grain. These are the seven living candles here which expose the falsehood of every king. The three greatest lies that God avenges on every kingdom: interest on a false surety, the bearing of false witness, a false judgement for reward" (CIH 219, 16-30).

The biblical ethos of this doctrine is unmistakable, given the Old Testament's insistence that Israel's fortune depends upon God's reaction to her success or failure in righteousness, observance of the law and the performance of religious duties such as the offering of tithes and firstfruits to God's house (e.g. Nehemiah 10:35-8). The connection between God-given calamities and the people's misbehaviour is repeatedly stressed as, for instance, in king Solomon's blessing upon Israel: "when heaven is shut up and it does not rain on account of their sins and they pray in that place and perform penitence in your name and turn from their sins on account of their affliction, hear them in heaven and remit the sins of Thy servants and of Thy people Israel, and shew them the good way on which they may walk and give rain upon Thy land which Thou hast given to Thy people for possession. If famine (*fames*) arise in the land or pestilence (*pestilentia*) or foul air, mildew, locust, rust and an enemy besieging her gates, . . . if any man shall recognise the plague of his own heart and spread out his hands in this house, Thou shalt hear in the place of Thy habitation and shalt be propitiated again and shalt so do that Thou give to each according to all his ways" (1/3 Kgs. 8:35-9).

Needless to say, under the kings the monarch's role assumes central importance in this equation. Thus the great summary of the Law in Deuteronomy urges that a future king "learn to fear the Lord his God and to preserve the words and ceremonies that are enjoined in the law" (17:19). Medieval Irish concern with looks, martial leadership and judgement of the king or his heir apparent (see 6 above) likewise have Old Testament analogues. For instance, in demanding a king the Israelites state "and we too shall be like all nations, and our king shall judge us and shall go forth before us and fight our battles for us" (1 Sam./Kgs. 8:20), while the young David's beauty is duly emphasised at his royal anointing by Samuel (1 Sam./Kgs. 16:12) and it is said of his eldest son that "there was no man in all Israel exceedingly beautiful and fair like Absalom - from the sole of his foot up to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him (*non erat in eo ulla macula*)" (2 Sam./Kgs. 14:25). As in Ireland, the king and his justice have wider cosmic repercussions determined by his relationship with Almighty God. David laments the death of king Saul with the words "mountains of Gilboa, let neither dew nor rain come upon you, and let there not be fields of firstfruits", while the Lord's prophet Elijah swears in God's name that there will be neither dew nor rain in wicked king Ahab's reign unless he says so (1/3 Kgs. 17:1). A natural metaphor closely akin to the mainspring of early Christian Irish notions of sovereignty occurs in David's "last words": "the just ruler of men, the ruler in fear of God, as the light of dawn

gloweth when the sun riseth in the morning from the clouds and as the grass sprouteth from the earth through rain" (2 Sam./Kgs. 23:3-4).

4. Such insistence upon the Church's relevance to a kingdom's overall welfare and the closely related ruler's truth or its opposite was an obvious legal reaction to the kind of polity presided over by early Christian Irish kings. Since this was founded upon *comitium n-ecalsa fri tuiath* or "the sewing together of Church onto State" (ch. 1, 11), it is hardly surprising to find a corresponding narrative response in a couple of sagas set in the post-Patrician period, namely *Aided Diarmata meic Fergusa Cerrbóil* (O'Grady, 1892, 72-82) and *Aided Muirchertaig meic Ercá*. Both are concerned with Uí Néill dynasts supposed to have held the Tara kingship in the sixth century A.D. and, in their rather different ways, stress the importance of maintaining or restoring the connection between Church and State by portraying the negative effects of a rupture.

The former begins with Diarmait's exile from the Tara king Túathal Maelgarb and cooperation with St. Ciarán of Clonmacnois in the founding of his church. In return for this he is promised the kingship, a prophecy soon fulfilled on Túathal's death. Thereafter king Diarmait offends Ciarán by burning, wounding and drowning an enemy on land he has just granted the saint. Although not prepared to jeopardise the king's salvation, rule or dynastic prospects, Ciarán does curse him to a similar threefold death in due course. Thus, after opening with an obvious instance of *comitium n-ecalsa fri tuiath* and its benefits to king and churchman alike, this tale introduces its major theme, the harm resulting from a breach in this essential relationship owing to royal failure to respect due rights of sanctuary on Church property (see ch. 4, 2 on the monastic "city of refuge").

After submitting himself and his descendants to Ciarán, Diarmait rules prosperously, but his peculiar end is foretold by the *fáid* or prophet Becc mac Dé. There follows a long episode about a further breach of sanctuary by Diarmait, who this time seizes an enemy being sheltered by St. Rúadán of Lothra and so incurs a year-long cursing of Tara by him and St. Brendan. The king capitulates and peace is made, but he predicts that Ireland and her churches will never be as well off as in his reign. This is followed by a highly significant vision.

"When Diarmait was there one night, (And) he saw a pair approaching him. It seemed to him there was a cleric's attire (*écose cléirig*) on the one man and a layman's attire (*écose laích*) on the other. They come towards him and strike his king's diadem from him and make a diadem for each of them. And each man had a half of it and they divide it between them thus. They go from him then. Diarmait awoke from his sleep after that and recounts his vision. 'True', said Becc mac Dé and Cáríd mac Fíandháeme, Diarmait's poet, 'we have the interpretation of your dream. Your sovereignty (*flaithius*) has come to an end', he said, 'and it is an end to your kingship (*ríge*) and Ireland has now been deprived of your grip of sovereignty, i.e. division between Church and State (*roinn etir chll ocus tuiath*), that is what there shall be henceforth. And that is what the division of your royal diadem foretells to us, namely division of the sovereignty of Ireland between State and Church (*roinn flaitheas Éirenn etir thuiath ocus eclais*). But besides', he said, 'there will come a time when Church will be in thrall to State (*bus dóer eclais do thuiath*) so that there shall not be privilege of Church (*neirtheas ecalsa*) but her being billeted upon by everyone. Moreover, evil will then come to lay society (*don tuiath*) with

joint slaughter by the son, the father and the brother against each other so that everyone's arms will be red from their blood. The ground shall perish and the mast of trees and the produce of water through everyone's untruth (*ainfir*)" (78-9).

The antidisestablishmentarian author of this linguistically late Middle Irish text is presumably basing this prophecy on evils of his own time, a clue to the likely date of composition being supplied by the fact "that sanctuary rights were a major issue in Church-State relations in Ireland in the eleventh century" (Radner, 1983, 193). In this way a current crisis can be unfavourably contrasted with conditions in an earlier golden age, when Church and State were beneficially interlocked under a true king despite the odd threatening hiccup.

The saga's finale is introduced when Diarmait executes a miscreant son of the king of Connacht despite his being under the protection (*comairce*) of Muirchertach mac Erca's two sons and St. Colum Cille alias Columba. This further breach of sanctuary causes the Gonnachtmen to turn against Diarmait and induces Colum Cille to assemble the Northern Uí Néill against the Southern Uí Néill monarch, who is defeated, returns to Tara and asks Becc mac Dé about the manner of his death. Becc himself then meets Colum Cille, accepts Christianity and dies, the epitome of the true prophet paving the way for Christianity. Diarmait is now left with his druids, who similarly foretell his peculiar death. Later, when a royal circuit of Ireland brings him to Ulster, he accepts an invitation to Banbán's hostel. Significantly, his wife Mugain refuses, leaving Diarmait free to accept the favours of Banbán's daughter. The various prophecies concerning his end are then fulfilled and the king duly perishes.

This lively tale represents Diarmait as a somewhat ambiguous figure in relation to the Church and Christianity. Although he cooperates with Ciarán, receives the saint's blessing and endows his church, as king he continues to associate with druids and the like too. The main blocks of the subsequent narrative are an escalating alienation from the Church triggered by three successive breaches of sanctuary. Relations with Ciarán after the first are soon mended by the king's submission to clerical authority, but the feud with Rúadán and company after the second lasts for a whole year until Diarmait eventually yields. The third and final delinquency against Colum Cille entails the king's defeat, and throws him back upon the druidic establishment, the best of whom, Becc mac Dé, is lost to the Church's side. Finally, Diarmait loses his wife's company as a prelude to the termination of his life and sovereignty at the hands of Banbán's beautiful daughter.

The steady decline in Diarmait's royal fortunes culminating in his death obviously correlates with his cumulative offences against and increasing isolation from the Church. As the Irish Canons remind us, "for Maximian, the king of the Romans, fell in war through laying heavy hands on God's churches" (*Can. Hib. XXV, 15; Maximianus namque rex Romanorum adgravans manus in ecclesiis Dei cecidit in bello*).

Although discussions of *Aided Diarmata* and *Aided Muirchertaig* by Byrne (1973, 97-104) and Bhreathnach (1982) have effectively blotted out the Christian and ecclesiastical considerations that pervade both tales by concentrating upon the allegedly pagan motif of the king's threefold death, these narratives share with the legal maxims cited in the previous section an insistence that in post-Patrician Ireland there can be no ruler's truth without Christian faith in God and a proper respect for the Church. This aspect has, however, been duly emphasized in an admirable

recent study of these two stories by Joan Radner (1983, 191-8), who argues persuasively that "the threefold death . . . is in Celtic tradition an explicitly Christian narrative device" and that "tales of mysterious death reinforce their audiences' awareness that God is attending, that God is in control, and in the specific case of the threefold death tales, in which events are triggered by a human offence, that God will punish and purge significant wrongdoing" (ibid., 187). The moral is that "the power of the king and the power of the Church cannot coexist in opposition to one another. Concentrated in the story of the death of Diarmuid, and carried strongly by its use of the threefold death plot, is one of the great themes of the Irish Church in the eleventh century: that peace and social stability are possible only through cooperation and alliance between secular overlords and the churches" (ibid., 194-5).

That said, we may turn to what O Hehir rightly terms "the highly Christianized *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca*" and sees as "an anti-goddess story, reversing the pagan polarities" (1983, 168). However, the fact that this text happens to survive only in a late Middle or even early Modern Irish recension falls well short of proof that an unattested "genuine original" has been tampered with later "by a Christian redactor bent on discrediting otherworld goddesses as queens" (ibid., 178). Its central Christian message might well have been there from the beginning, whenever that was – perhaps the eleventh century as suggested by Radner (1983, 198).

The story begins with the Tara king Muirchertach encountering the beautiful Sin and being so infatuated with her that he agrees to a liaison on her terms. Rejecting the usual valuable gifts, she insists "my name is never to be uttered by you, and Duaiibsech, the mother of your children, is not to be in my presence, and clerics are never to come into the same house as me" (par. 4). They go to Tech Clitig on the Boyne, the excellence of whose Uí Néill denizens is stressed, whereupon Sin has Duaiibsech, her children and the Uí Néill magnates expelled (par. 8). Duaiibsech flees to her confessor (*anmchara*), the saintly bishop Cairnech of Dulane, who brings the Northern Uí Néill to Tech Clitig, is rebuffed by Sin and angrily curses the place and its king while blessing the rest of the Northern Uí Néill (pars. 9-12). The conflict continues with Muirchertach vacillating between the cleric and Sin, who uses various magical devices of inebriation and delusion to keep a grip on him as "the black parody continues with a lavish Samain feast – simultaneously a pastiche of the goddess's ale-feast, the Biblical wedding at Cana, and the Christian communion ritual – in which Muirchertach consumes wine and flesh magically produced by the *sáid*-woman from Boyne water and bracken. In her power his sovereignty is not assured, but destroyed; he is poisoned, weakened, doomed. Phony goods all along the line: and he has taken these extinct symbols of the pagan sacral kingship in preference to his own earthly lineage, his confessor St. Cairnech, and the Church" (Radner, 1983, 197).

Finally, Muirchertach is put to death by burning, wounding and drowning in accordance with Cairnech's curse, but is given a Christian burial in Dulane. Duaiibsech dies of grief and is buried with him (par. 46). Sin then appears to the cleric and reveals that she acted to avenge Muirchertach's slaughter of her parents and sister in a crushing victory over the *sen-riatha Temrach* or "old (i.e. vassal) tribes of Tara" (par. 49). In the end she too makes confession, dies and is buried, and Cairnech eventually succeeds with considerable difficulty in rescuing Muirchertach's soul from hell.

Muirchertach's sovereignty here disintegrates in a tussle symbolised by two consorts who stand for quite different values. On the one hand, there is his first wife Duabsech, a pious aristocrat supported by the Church and the main branches of the Northern Uí Néill, and on the other there is Sin, the anticlerical enchantress of vassal stock. All was well with Muirchertach's reign until he cast off Duabsech along with all she represented and allowed Sin to lead a revolution deeply offensive to the Christian Irish establishment on both religious and social or political grounds, favouring as it did paganism and the plebs. The results were predictably catastrophic, but the Church and her noble supporters ultimately triumphed and order was restored.

As Radner perceptively remarks, the author of *Aided Muirchertaig* "has structured it by careful manipulation of many traditional motifs and themes, including several especially characteristic of stories set in the pre-Christian 'heroic' era, in order to say that in Christian Ireland the very nature of traditional kingship has changed" (1983, 196). Indeed, this struggle for the king's affections and soul between a virtuous Christian woman and a wicked pagan witch of sovereignty can be seen as a narrative expression of the diverse origins of good and bad rule put thus by the Irish Canons: *omnis ordinatio a Deo, opera autem maligna a diabolo* "every good governance is from God, but wicked works are from the devil" (*Can. Hib.* XXV, 15).

5. The fact that the 'goddess' of sovereignty's various representations in medieval Irish literature undoubtedly owe a good deal to divine pagan antecedents does not, of course, necessarily imply anything like a one to one relationship between individual literary manifestations and presumed pre-Christian deities of this kind.

Women such as Medb or Eithne whose names occur repeatedly in appropriate contexts are the most likely to be directly rooted in earlier sovereignty goddesses (cf. ch. 5, 3), but even here the type may be so radically altered as to make such an ascription well nigh meaningless in some texts. This, for instance, is the basic point made by O'Rahilly regarding queen Medb's attributes in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and associated Ulster tales: "she is no longer a goddess but a masterful woman, with the inevitable result that her character has sadly degenerated, so much so that at times she is no better than a strong-willed virago with unconcealed leanings towards a multiplicity of husbands and paramours" (1943, 15-6). Conversely, historical or legendary human queens may attract mythico-literary sovereignty motifs like magnets, a possibility recently elucidated by W. Ann Trindade (1986) with reference to the literary reflexes of three historical Gormlaiths of the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries respectively. Since questions about origins are irrelevant to the present concern with attested narrative functions, it seems best to term such figures in the literature 'women' rather than 'goddesses' of sovereignty in order to avoid confusion.

The approach of pre-Norman Ireland's monastic *literati* to supernaturally endowed figures in their *senchus* was varied within the confines of a typical enough medieval western outlook. One obvious possibility was to doubt their actual existence, as when the twelfth-century scribe of the *LI-Táin* refers, in a famous postscript, to figments of the poetic imagination (*figmenta poetica*, l. 4923). An alternative was the so-called 'euhemeristic' notion of great men posthumously acquiring divine or semi-divine attributes.



This was the line adopted by that polymath prelate Isidore of Seville in the section on pagan gods in his *Etymologiae* entitled *de dis gentium*: "those whom the pagans declare to be gods are exposed as having once been men, and on account of their individual lives and deserts they began to be cultivated among their own people after death" (*quos pagani deos asserunt, homines olim fuisse produntur, et pro uniuscuiusque vita vel meritis coli apud suos post mortem coeperunt*; VIII xi 1). *Cóir Anmann*'s treatment of Manannán mac Lir constitutes an explicit medieval Irish application of such reasoning: "Manannan mac Lir, i.e. Oirbsen was his name, i.e. he was a marvellous merchant who was in the Isle of Man, i.e. he is the best steersman there was on the sea in the West of the world. He used to discover through his meteorology, i.e. through his observation of the sky's or the air's appearance, how long the good or the bad weather would last and when each of them would change into the other. And it is on that account that the Britons and the men of Ireland reckoned him to be the god of the sea and he was called Mac Lir, i.e. Son of the Sea" (par. 156).

A commoner approach, however, seems to have been the acceptance of non-human supernatural status and an explanation of this either in diabolical or in angelic terms, the only two such alternatives compatible with Christian cosmology. The postscript to the *LL-Táin* leans towards the former in speaking of *praestigia demonum* or "delusions of demons" (l. 4923; cf. Isidore, *Etym.* VIII ix 33, *dictum enim praestigium quod praestringat ueliam oculorum*), while the early twelfth-century main scribe of *LU* concludes his copy of the tale *Serglige Con Culainn* with the following strictures: "so that that is a destructive apparition (*taidbsiu aidmilti*) to Cú Chulainn by the folk of the *sid*. For great was the devilish power before faith (*in chumachta damnach ria creitim*) and its extent was such that the demons used to fight bodily with the people and that they used to show delights and secrets to them as if they existed. It is thus that they used to be believed in, so that it is those apparitions that the ignorant call *síds* and folk of the *sid*". That monastic debate on this topic was by no means one sided is indicated by the claim in an important passage at the end of *Scéil na Fír Flatha* (see 10 below) that the display of "wondrous apparitions" to kings of yore was regarded by ecclesiastical scholars (*ecnaidí*) as a godly and not a devilish ministration (*conid timthirecht diada . . . 7 conach timthirecht damnach*).

6. In Ireland, as in other parts of Christendom, a special version of the euhemerist line with considerable appeal was sanctification, a process which will be further illustrated in the next chapter. This made it possible for pagan deities or heroes and their more desirable attributes to be appropriated by the Church through transformation into saints, rather as the very word *nóeb* in Irish acquired the value "holy, saint" in a specifically Christian sense (ch. 1, 7). An interesting narrative combination of this approach with the diabolical assessment is found in the intriguing saga *Altram Tighe dá Medar*, the essential contents of which may be rather older than the extant Modern Irish version.

After some necessary synthetic historical preliminaries centring upon the *Túatha Dé Danann* (pars. 1-2), the tale begins with their king Manannán's machinations to expel his host Fleamar from Brug na Bóinne in favour of his fosterson Óengus. Manannán urges Óengus to accomplish this by means of "the charm (*seán*) whereby the angels came from the King of heaven and from the Lord of the universe and the

charm (*sén*) whereby we separated Ireland's sovereignty (*flaithes Fólla*) from the Fir Bolg and the charm (*sén*) whereby the sons of Mil separated the precedence over Ireland (*airechas Éirenn*) from us in turn" (par. 4). To Óengus's question "is there a god above our gods (*in fuil dúa ós ar ndeib-ne?*)" Manannán replies that indeed there is, the invincible Almighty God (*int áen-Dia uile-chumachtach*), Creator of heaven, earth, sea and the four elements. He then goes on to explain that this God "created ten orders of angels around him and, as to the lord of the tenth order, pride and vanity arose in his mind and they left the plain of heaven unnecessarily. God (banished) the tenth order from his territory . . . and formed men . . . and put the group that had arrogantly left his territory into the shapes of demons (*i ndelbaib deman*)". Men's fate is determined by whether they side with God or these devils (par. 4). Elcmar is then expelled from the Brug despite Óengus's feelings of guilt (par. 5).

This doctrine presumably reflects the claim in Isidore's *Etymologiae* that there is scriptural support for nine orders of angels (VII iv 4; *novem autem esse ordines angelorum sacrae Scripturae testantur, id est angeli, archangeli, throni, dominationes, virtutes, principatus, potestates, cherubim et seraphim*) in addition to the wicked fallen angels turned devils (*ibid.*, 30; *hic est ordo vel distinctio angelorum qui post lapsum malorum in caelesti vigore steterunt*). Thus God's righteous expulsion of the fallen angels or devils to be a source of damnation for themselves and of temptation for mankind is misused as "druidry and devilry (*draidecht 7 diabolacht*)" by the king of the Túatha Dé Danann on earth to dispossess one of his subjects.

There follows the account of Eithne's birth and early life among the Túatha Dé with Óengus in the Brug until an insult from the latter's brother makes it impossible for her to consume food in their company apart from the milk of two special cows from holy India milked by her own hands. The cause is ultimately divined by Manannán, who says that as a result of Eithne's shaming "her guardian devil (*a deman comaitecta*) has gone (from . . .) her heart and an angel (*aingeal*) has come in its place, and that does not allow our food into her breast and she will not worship druidry or devilry (*ní aidéra sí draidecht na diabolacht*) henceforth . . . and it will be the three-personed . . . Trinity that shall be the God of worship (*Dia adartha*) for that maiden" (par. 8).

Eithne lived in this way for centuries until Patrick's arrival in Ireland and the banishment of druids and demons (*díchor druid 7 deman*) in Lóegaire mac Néill's reign. One day near the Boyne she left her Tuatha Dé Danann friends and began taking instruction from a cleric. Finally, Patrick himself intervened to prevent Óengus from recovering her. She then commended her soul to God and Patrick, died, released her spirit to heaven, was buried and gave her name to Cell Eithne or "Eithne's Chapel" at Brug na Bóinne (pars. 9-12).

As pointed out by Claire Dagger (1985), this tale obviously articulates a transition from pagan deity to Christian saint, the probability being that at least some of the known St. Eithnes, including the ten listed in *Comainmugud Náem Hérend* (Brosnan, 1912, 358; Ó Riain, 1985, 140-56), have roots in various local manifestations of the identically named sovereignty goddess best known as Eithne Thaeblata (ch. 5, 3 and 12). If so, the christianization of sovereignty itself would seem to be implied here, and it may be added that *Athram Tige dá Medar* offers a pointed and structurally central contrastive parallelism between the wicked angels' departure

from the holy company of heaven for damnation and Eithne's abandonment of her demonic Túatha Dé Danann kith and kin for salvation. The heroine's demise in such contexts is an obvious expression of her death to paganism and resurrection in Christianity.

Tírechán presents a striking analogue or even antecedent in his famous seventh-century description (par. 26; Bieler, 1979, 142-5) of Patrick's encounter at the well of Cliabach (cf. 3 above) beside the royal site of Crúachu with Eithne the white (*alba*) and Fedelm the red (*rufo*), both daughters of the Tara monarch Lóegaire, who remains a pagan in Tírechán's narrative (par. 12). These question the saint about his God and receive a lyrical reply concluding with the words "now, indeed, I wish to join you to a Heavenly King since you are the daughters of an earthly king (,if you wish) to believe" (par. 26, 12; *ego uero uolo uos regi caelesti coniungere dum filiae regis terreni sitis (,si uultis (?) > credere*). They duly believe, are baptized, take communion and die so that they may behold the Heavenly King forthwith. Their druid fosterers come to mourn and are both eventually converted. Moreover, the burial mound with the bones of the two holy virgins becomes the site of a church (par. 26, 21) and Eithne daughter of Lóegaire is listed as a saint (Ó Riain, 1985, 155).

7. Watson (1986) has recently made a good case for a thematic orientation towards sovereignty in *Echtra Nerai*. One might further suggest that this relatively old saga's distinctly unpleasant aura helps to highlight the unredeemed and malignant nature of a pagan otherworld source of kingship liable to destroy unless destroyed.

The setting is a feast held on Samain eve by Ailill and Medb at Crúachu the day after "two captives (*cimbid*) had been crucified (*ro:crochtá*) by them". In return for a prize a challenge is issued along the same lines as in the commentary on *gell fri saigid n-omna* "a pledge for facing fear" in a legal heptad (*CIH* 18.20-31). This entails placing a chain (*id*) on the foot of a captive on the cross (*issin chraich*), but all except Nerai are unnerved by the darkness (*dorchatu*) and awfulness (*grándatu*) of a night on which "demons (*demma*) used regularly to appear". In view of this text's penchant for sets of three the presence of only two crucified captives may be intended to hint at a missing third, perhaps Christ himself between the two thieves crucified on either side of him (e.g. Mark 15:27). Arguably, then, this grim opening (pars. 1-2) acts as a cue for the absence of Christian redemption and presence of malefactors and demons in the narrative about to unfold.

When one of the captives asks for a drink, Nerai takes him on his back. After passing two houses surrounded by fire and water respectively, they reach a third containing three vessels of dirty water. The captive drinks from each, kills the inmates by spraying them with the last draught, and is returned to his cross (pars. 3-6). This episode associating impurity and death with a drink elsewhere prone to symbolize kingship (cf. 3 above and Bhreathnach, 1982, 256-9) leads Watson, on the strength of a somewhat different analysis of the details, to the plausible conclusion that "the captive's search is a negative paradigm which indicates what sovereignty must not be" (1986, 133). Watson also rightly insists that it be taken in conjunction with two further episodes involving the carrying of burdens (*ibid.*, 132-7).

Having witnessed Crúachu's destruction by fire and the sword, Nerai follows the perpetrators into the nearby *áid*-mound of Crúachu, where the king gives him a

consort and sets him the daily task of bringing firewood to his fort (par. 6). The imposition of the same menial labour upon the heroic Ogmair was one of king Bres's infringements of propriety in *Cath Maige Tuired* (par. 37), and Watson is doubtless right in seeing the *síd*-king's behaviour as a sign of his inadequacy (*ibid.*, 134).

While carrying his own burden, Nerac saw every day a blind man hearing a cripple to a well to ascertain from him whether something was still there. When Nerac questions his wife, she informs him that the object in the well is a gold diadem worn on the king's head. She also assures him that the sack of Crúachu was a premonition of what would happen the following Samain unless prevented by destruction of the *síd*-folk (par. 8). This is ultimately accomplished with her help, and the "crown of Brión (*barr Briúin*)" is carried off from the well as she had promised along with "the mantle of Lóegaire (*cétach Lóegairi*) in Armagh and the tunic of Dúnlán (*enech Dúnlainge*) among the Leinstermen in Kildare" (par. 19, cf. 9).

Various other aspects of this elaborate story, such as those relating to its role as an explanatory prelude to the Táin, have been discussed by Watson and need not concern us here. What is clear is that Nerac and his captive passenger's deadly encounter with the house containing three vessels both correlates and contrasts with the visits of the blind man with the lame man on his back to the well containing the three great talismans of sovereignty over Connacht, the Uí Néill and Leinster respectively. Whereas murder of the house's harmless inmates brings the malevolent captive no gain, destruction of the *síd*'s baneful inhabitants yields its justified human perpetrators these three tangible benefits, emphasis being upon the *barr Briúin* in a tale centring upon Connacht's chief royal site. Equally significant is the information that at least two of these major emblems of kingship are now located in great monasteries. A central message of our text, then, is that they, and consequently the sovereignty embodied by them, have been released from a moribund and demonic pagan environment into proper Christian custody.

8. In marked contrast to *Altram Tighe dá Medar*'s location of the Túatha Dé Danann in the diabolical Brug, *Echtra Airt mac Cuinn* places them on an insular *ísir tairngiri* or "land of promise" of the type encountered in *Inimram Brain* and *Echtrae Chontai* (ch. 3, 13). Bécuma's expulsion from this paradise for committing a sin and her subsequent mischief-making among men in Ireland (par. 3) can be seen as a microcosm of the behaviour and fate of the fallen angels alluded to at the beginning of section 6. Conn's reign of paradisaical plenty in Ireland, when "nothing was lacking" and "they used to reap the grain crops thrice every year" (par. 1), is blighted by his liaison with this beautiful but evil woman (see ch. 5, 12), a situation reminiscent of God's cursing of the hitherto bountiful earth after Adam's temptation by Eve (Gen. 3:17) and further reminiscent of Jeremiah's plaintive question: "how long shall the land mourn and the herbs of every region wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? The animal is consumed, and the bird?" (12:4).

After ascribing these misfortunes to his wife's depravity and lack of faith (*ar los corbaid mná Cuind 7 gan creitim aice*), Conn's druids tell of "the one from whom their remedy (*leiges*) will come, namely the son of a non-carnal couple (*mac lanamna nem-cholaidé*) to be brought to Ireland, killed at the entrance of Tara and his blood mixed with Tara's earth" (par. 8). Conn duly sets out across the sea on this quest and reaches a wondrous island where he is offered glorious hospitality by a couple

from the "land of promise" and the "land of wonders" who, like their parents before them, had only departed from their chastity once in order to produce their son Ségdae Sáerlabraid. Despite his parents' initial reluctance, Ségdae is allowed to assist Conn by coming to Ireland under the protection of various of her potentates (par. 11).

On Ségdae's arrival there is a contention between his protectors and the druids, who buy for his blood. In despair Ségdae declares his readiness to be put to death. However, a woman, who turns out to be Ségdae's mother, appears with a cow to sacrifice in his stead. When it is cut up, two bags are opened and found to contain a one- and a twelve-legged bird respectively. Surprisingly, the one-legged bird is victorious in a fight between them, the moral drawn by the woman for the men of Ireland being "you are the twelve-legged bird and the little lad the one-legged bird, since it is he who represents the truth (*dir is é a tá ar in sírindí*)". She goes on to command the seizure and execution of the druids before telling Conn that a third of Ireland's corn, milk products and meat will still be lacking as long as he retains the depraved Bécuma. When, however, he replies that he cannot put her away, mother and son depart. There ensues the final part of the tale, already discussed (ch. 5, 12), where Bécuma uses a game of *fidchell* to send Art in quest of her *alter ego* Delbháem.

The son of parents from paradise, the sinless Ségdae is ready to die in order to save others but is snatched back from the jaws of death to paradise, leaving the restoration of the men of Ireland's beatitude incomplete as long as the she-devil Bécuma is still in their midst. This obvious allegory of Christian redemption has been perceptively commented on by O Hehir, who also notes that "the substitution of the cow for the boy is modeled on (the sacrifice of Isaac)" (1983, 174). The victory of the bird with one leg over its twelve-legged rival presumably betokens the superiority of true belief in the one true God over pagan belief in a plurality of deities, a message hammered home by the contrast between Ségdae's survival and the destruction of his druidic would-be executioners. In the first half of this story the corrupted sovereignty's fate is in the balance between the redemption offered by the christlike Ségdae and his near-virgin mother on the one hand and the deterioration brought about by the demonic Bécuma on the other.

The upshot is a pre-Patrician or 'Old Testament' prefiguration of the Church's indispensable contribution to ruler's truth and its attendant blessings in the Christian period (3 and 4 above). Indeed, with due reservations about unprovable claims as to the lateness of its composition and addition to "the last half of the story" continuing "the essential substance of the lost older tale that is named in saga-list B" (see ch. 5, 12), one can hardly help agreeing with O Hehir's verdict that "the entire first half of the extant text of *Eachtra Airt naic Cuind ocus Tochmarc Delbháime ingine Morgain* can therefore be seen as a late and entirely Christian invention" (1983, 179).

9. Thus the woman of sovereignty may not only appear as hideous, lowly or deranged, pending the release of her glorious potential to the right spouse and his subjects, but conversely may also conceal beneath a glamorous exterior a malign or diabolical disposition destructive to her royal mate and damaging to his kingdom. The comparative evidence (ch. 5, 2-5) indicates that the pagan sovereignty goddess was something of a chameleon whose main attributes were merely symptomatic of

the presence or absence of a worthy royal consort rather than inherently good or bad. That being so, it looks as though the dichotomy between the essentially virtuous and the morally flawed royal bride in medieval Irish literature reflects the fundamental Christian cosmological duality neatly applied to kingship in the citation from the eighth-century Irish canons at the end of section 4 above: "every good governance is from God, but wicked works are from the devil", a theological principle manifestly connected with the same book's contrast between "the justice of a just king" and "the iniquity of an unjust king" (see 2 above).

It is, moreover, worth recalling that the Bible itself, perhaps as a distant reflex of the ancient Mesopotamian *hieros gamos* (ch. 5, 3), contains some striking images of women as royal spouses and territorial symbols.

The Apocalypse introduces a particularly obvious diabolical figure of this type in "the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication (*cum qua fornicati sunt reges terrae*), and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her harlotry (*de vino prostitutionis eius*) . . . , a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet and gilded with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication (*habens poculum aureum in manu sua plenum abominationum et immunditia fornicationis eius*) . . . And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus . . . And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdoms as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them" (Rev. 17:1-4, 6 and 12-4).

Representation of Israel or Jerusalem as a bride, widow or the like in various conditions is well attested in the prophets. For instance, a prediction of Israel's future greatness in Isaiah 54 contains the following striking passages: "praise, O barren one that dost not bear (1, *lauda sterilis quae non parit*) . . . For he who made thee shall be lord over thee; the Lord of hosts is his name . . . For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieving in spirit and a rejected wife of youth" (6, *quia ut mulierem derelictam et maerentem spiritu vocavit te Dominus et uxorem ab adolescentia abiectam*). The well-known opening of Lamentations likens the desolate Jerusalem to a once prosperous widow who has been deserted and has fallen on bad times: "how doth (the city (once) full of people sit solitary; the mistress of nations (*domina gentium*) hath become as a widow . . . She hath lamented dolefully in the night and her tears are on her cheeks; there is none to comfort her from all her lovers (*ex omnibus caris eius*); all her friends have despised her and are become her enemies". This basic image and idea may well have influenced the famous and similarly oriented Old Irish verse lament of the Old Woman of Beare (*caillech Bérrí*; ed. Ó hAodha, 1989), whose connection with the sovereignty has been most recently discussed by Ó Carhásaigh (1989, 33-8).

Ezekiel 16 offers what is, perhaps, the most sustained metaphor of this kind in the Old Testament in response to the exhortation "son of man, make known her abominations to Jerusalem" (2). God's word concerning her unpropitious birth and subsequent elevation to beauty and prosperity is reported as follows: "and when I passed by thee, I saw thee downtrodden in thine own blood and I said to thee when

thou wast in thy blood, Live . . . I have granted thee to be multiplied as the bud of the field, and thou hast been multiplied and made great, and hast entered and attained a woman's ornament (*mundum muliebrem*): thy breasts have filled out and thine hair hath sprouted (*ubera tua intumuerunt et pilus tuus germinavit*), and thou wast naked (*nuda*) and full of confusion. And I passed by thee and beheld thee and, lo, thy time was the time for lovers (*tempus amantium*), and I spread my mantle over thee and covered thine ignominy and I swore unto thee and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine (*et facta es mihi*). And I washed thee with water . . . , and clothed thee with different hues . . . , and clad thee with finery, and decked thee with ornament . . . , and I set a jewel above thy visage, and rings in thine ears and a crown of beauty upon thine head . . . , and thou becamest quite exceedingly beautiful and didst prosper into a kingdom (*et decoru facta es vehementer nimis et profecisti in regnum*). And thy name went forth among the nations for thy beauty, since thou wast perfect in my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God" (6-14). Thereafter, however, Jerusalem plays the harlot "as an adulterous wife who takes in strangers in addition to her husband" (32) and is duly threatened with retribution along with "thy sisters, who have abandoned their husbands and their sons . . . thine elder sister Samaria . . . thy younger sister . . . Sodom and her daughters" (45-6).

The Bible, then, individually equates various cities and countries, particularly Jerusalem and Israel, with women whose physical condition, prosperity and happiness depend upon the bestowal or withdrawal of God's favour, a relationship liable to be expressed in sexual terms. The woman may also take various earthly lovers, albeit usually at the cost of her divine husband's jealousy, and finally may become so wanton as to figure as an agent of the devil.

It can thus be seen that there was no lack of obvious biblical models to which inherited Irish concepts of the female embodiment of sovereignty could be at least partially assimilated. In effect, the condition of the Old Testament women in question serves as an index of God's satisfaction or dissatisfaction, as the case might be, with the rulers and people of the kingdoms symbolized by them. That being so, it would presumably have been easy enough for medieval Ireland's monastic men of letters to interpret the transformations undergone by their own women of sovereignty as comparable tokens of God's attitude towards a king and his kingdom. This approach would, of course, be applicable to the pre- as well as the post-Patrician period, given the early Christian Irish belief, already amply documented (e.g. ch. 3, 7-10; ch. 4, 4-9), in the role of divine providence and revelation from the very beginning of their history.

In that case, pre-Christian Irish kingship would constitute a typological anticipation of its Christian counterpart (cf. ch. 4, 9), and the woman of sovereignty, instead of being an antiquarian pagan anomaly, would have acquired a narrative role in keeping with contemporaneous Christian notions of a kingship *Dei gratia*, in which the benefits of the ruler's truth flowed ultimately from God (see 2-4 above). Their ascription of this insight to Cormac mac Airt himself (2 above) shows that monastic *literati* regarded this essentially Old Testament model of sovereignty as a feature of the pre- as well as the post-Patrician era.

10. Since even in the patriarchal period of the Old Testament prior to the Mosaic covenant God might speak to chosen individuals either directly or through the

medium of angels, it is no surprise that similar possibilities were envisaged in Ireland's ostensibly pre-Christian *senchus*. Mention has already been made of the wise giant Trefuingid's status as "an angel of God" or "God himself" appearing to the men of Ireland under their king long ago in *Do Suidigud Tellaich Temra*, but the conclusion of *Scél na Fír Flatha* referred to at the end of section 5 above is of particular interest: "but the ecclesiastical scholars say that every time a wondrous apparition (*uidbse ingnad*) used to be shown to the royal rulers (*dona rí-gflathaib*) of yore – as the Scél revealed to Conn and as the land of promise (*tír tairngiri*) was shown to Cormac – it was a godly ministrations that used to come in that guise and not a devilish ministrations. Moreover, (it is) angels that used to come to help them, since it is natural truth (*firindí aicnid*) that they used to follow and it is the commandment of law (*sinna rechta*) that served them".

There is an obvious allusion here to *Baile in Scéil* and to that part of *Scél na Fír Flatha* (pars. 25-54) commonly known as *Echtra Cormaic i Tír Tairngiri*, both texts primarily about sovereignty. In the former a mist descends upon Conn Cétchathach and his companions before clearing to reveal a fine house containing a maiden called *flaith Éirenn* "the sovereignty of Ireland" and the phantom or Scél himself, who prophesies concerning Conn and his successors in the Tara kingship with each drink that the maiden draws (ch. 5, 3). Interpretation of the Scél as God's agent surely places the woman of sovereignty associated with him firmly on the side of the angels, so to speak.

In the second tale Cormac is visited by a fair youth holding a musical silver branch with a trinity of fruits (ch. 3, 13) "from a land that has only truth . . . and neither age nor decay nor sorrow nor pain nor rage nor jealousy nor hatred nor pride" (par. 27). Cormac's acquisition of the branch by granting three requests enables his visitor to remove the trio of the king's daughter, son and wife Eithne Tháebfata in succession to this sinless paradise, whither Cormac sets off in search of them. On arrival in a fine palace there, he is given two striking lessons in the threefold nature of truth. Firstly, he encounters a pig that can only be cooked by the recitation of a truth over each quarter (pars. 37-52). Three truths relating to stock and crops are so uttered to render it three-quarters done, Cormac then recounting the fourth to complete the process in a manner obviously relevant to the tripartite structure of nature and society integrated and made whole by the king's truth (ch. 5, 4 and 9-10). Cormac's family is then restored to him and he is shown a cup which breaks in three when "three words of falsehood (*téora bríathra bréice*)" are uttered over it but becomes whole again with the speaking of "three true confessions (*téora coibsená fíra*)", an image not only equivalent to that underlying the tale of Lugaid Riabderg's conception (ch.5, 4) but also fully in keeping with the Augustinian doctrine that all truth is recognised by its threefold compatibility with nature, Scripture and informed conscience (ch. 4, 4). At any rate, the desired reintegration is accomplished when Cormac's host declares "that neither your wife nor your daughter has seen the face of a male phantom (*ferscál*) since they were brought from Tara until today and that your son has not seen the face of a female phantom (*hanscál*)" (par. 52) before revealing himself as Manannán mac Lir, king of the land of promise, and explaining that Cormac has been deliberately lured there to witness these wonders (par. 53). The king awoke on the morrow to find himself on the green of Tara with his family of three, the branch with its three fruits and the three-in-one cup "which used to distinguish truth and falsehood for the Gael" (*no:deitged firindí 7 gat i Gaedela*, par. 54) during Cormac's lifetime.



There can be no doubt that this tale functions in *Scél na Fíre Flatha* as an allegory of Cormac's attainment of the truth of God's law that was the bedrock of his regal excellence according to this and other texts (ch. 3, 10-11; ch. 4, 7). In effect, the sovereignty personified by his wife Bithne is briefly withdrawn from him only to be returned in a newly perfected form born of a sojourn in the sinless paradise that is the home of truth and angelic beings. The king of these, Manannán, can be seen as an allegory of God himself here as in *Imtráth Breatin*, in which the close of Manannán's great poem about paradise, the fall of man and Christ's redemptive incarnation draws a patent parallel between this and his own mission from the land of promise to the world of men in order to sire a remarkable son upon a mortal woman. What Cormac is allegorically vouchsafed in this tale is nothing less than a divine revelation about the three-in-one nature of the truth essential to the proper exercise of kingship. Whatever its pagan Indo-European and Celtic roots, a trinitarian concept of sovereign's truth linking the human and divine worlds had an obvious potential for Christian exploitation.

Furthermore, the notion of angelic guardians and revealers of sovereignty such as the Scál or Manannán in pre-Christian Ireland would conform nicely to Isidore's doctrine "that there is no place over which angels do not preside" (*Etym.* VII v 29 *nullum esse locum cui angeli non praesint*), itself explicitly deduced from the words of the angel to the prophet Daniel: "but the prince of the kingdom of the Persians withstood me one and twenty days: and, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes (i.e. of angels, *unus de principibus primis*), came to help me; and I remained there beside the king of the Persians" (Dan. 10:13).

In medieval Irish myth the beneficial woman of sovereignty mediates, as it were, between an otherworld susceptible to depiction as a sinless paradise presided over by the likes of Manannán and the sinful world of men governed by their kings. This status is both functionally and allegorically comparable to that of the biblical brides of God and earthly monarchs referred to in 9 above.

In early Irish literature such women symbolize the various destinies of individuals eligible for the kingship, being represented not only as bestowers but also as withholders or withdrawers of true sovereignty. The beautiful woman who fleetingly appears to Cormac Conn Loinges in token of the imminent slipping of the Ulster kingship from his grasp (ch. 5, 11) is a case in point, but death or incapacity were not the sole catalysts of failure to become king. For instance, in the Christian period it was common enough for scions of royal houses to embark upon ecclesiastical careers. The nobly born St. Laisrén's refusal of the kingship offered him for an eremitic existence in his *Salamanca Life* (par. 7; Heist, 1965, 7) and the pious clerical career of the sixth-century king of Connacht's son Cellach in *Cathréin Cellach* are obvious literary examples. Typical enough historical instances are provided by the archbishop Áed Dub and abbot Óengus of Kildare, brother and nephew respectively of the seventh-century king of Leinster Fáclán mac Colmáin (cf. McCone, 1982, 110).

It has been seen that monastic ideals are highly germane to *Echtrae Chonlai*'s account of the overseas woman's conflict with the evil druid to rescue the legendary Tara monarch Conn Cetchathach's son Conlae from secular mortality among his own people to everlasting sinless bliss in the Land of the Living. Insofar as she thereby decides both his fate regarding the succession and that of the future king of Tara, his brother Art, it seems legitimate to regard her as at least having

significant affinities with the mythical woman of sovereignty. However, this in no way detracts from the demonstrable role of Connlae's beloved as a symbol of the Church in accordance with an allegorical principle readily applied to Old Testament brides like Esther, the Persian emperor's consort "in the image of God's Church" (*sub figura ecclesiae Dei*; Isidore, *Etym.* VI ii 29) who struggled to save her people from Aman's wicked machinations (see ch. 3, 13).

If the wife or lover of a king or his heir apparent can be allegorized as the Church in *Echtrae Chonlae* as in standard medieval biblical exegesis, the possibility surely presents itself that this equation was applied more or less generally to the woman of sovereignty in her benign aspect by the monastic writers of early Irish sagas. If so, the successful liaison of such a figure with an actual or prospective king should be seen as a highly effective device for giving typological prefiguration and narrative realization to the cornerstone of successful rule in early Christian Ireland, namely *comúaim n-ecalsa fri tuath* or "the union of Church with State" (see 4 above). Clearly failure with or separation from a woman of this type or association with a diabolical counterpart would be similarly apt as a means of representing a breach in this indispensable symbiosis.

The early Christian Irish 'goddess' or woman of sovereignty, then, may well be the end-product of the ecclesiastical enrichment of potent native symbols with biblical concepts and exegetical insights to provide vital current concerns with appropriate historical justification and literary expression. At all events, her mythical attributes can only be fully squared with the monastic literary environment to which we owe their transmission by positing that her literary role of sexually symbolic mediation in tandem with the king between this world and the other, man and god, matched and foreshadowed that of Christ's bride the Church in medieval Christian ideology and allegory.

11. If, as has been argued in the preceding sections, a hierogamous pagan Irish sacral kingship and associated mythology had by about the seventh century A.D. been subtly but nonetheless comprehensively converted by churchmen into a Christian ideology of monarchy by God's grace with a marked Old Testament stamp, one might reasonably expect some influence from biblical prototypes upon the representation of great kings in Irish tradition.

A series of articles by Elizabeth Gray (1981-3) have done much to illuminate the manner in which *Cath Maige Tuired* draws on originally pagan mythical traditions to treat a wide range of social issues relevant to early medieval Ireland, the principal illustrative technique being to juxtapose positive and negative behavioural patterns. As also recognised by Ó Cathasaigh (1983b), a central contrast of this type is between Bres and Lug as bad and good paradigms respectively for accession to and stewardship of the kingship. Still more recently (McCone, 1989, 122-32) it has been suggested that contemporary clerical attitudes were fundamental to a further opposition of this type between *cúinte* or "satirist" and *filí* or "poet" (see ch. 9, 9-12) in the same text. Moreover, its monastic author may well have seen in the central conflict between the Túath(a) Dé (Danann) and Fomorians an Irish analogue of that between the Israelites and Philistines (*ibid.*, 136-7; see ch. 3, 8).

Although Lug is undoubtedly and Bres probably a pagan Celtic deity in origin, their representation in *Cath Maige Tuired* may still owe a good deal to biblical models. Thus Bres's improper succession through his maternal kin, unkingly

conduct duly subjected to formal public condemnation, and alienation of his former supporters are quite reminiscent of Israel's abortive first experiment with kingship in the person of Abimelech (Jud. 9). On the other hand, Lug's good looks, many talents, skill on the harp, valour, judgment and ability to slay a Fomorian giant with a slingshot bear an uncanny likeness to the attributes of that slayer of the Philistine Goliath and paragon of Old Testament kingship David that is hardly all due to coincidence (*ibid.*, 137-9).

As Ó Cathasaigh has pointed out (1977, 74-80), the tale *Esnada Tige Buchet* purports to give the moral and historical justification for the passing of the Tara kingship from the control of the Leinstermen symbolized by Cathair Már to that of the Síl Cuinn, later Uí Néill, symbolized by Cormac mac Airt. The basic idea was that for some time the Leinstermen held Tara and the Síl Cuinn resided in nearby Kells until Cormac mac Airt became the first of their line to establish his dynasty permanently in Tara and build there, as can be seen from the following two passages. "The Cathair Már, then, whose sons we have enumerated, fifty years to him in the kingship of Ireland, as Laideonn affirms. The occupation of Cathair (was) fifty years as above. Cathair and Conn Cétchathach were contemporary, Cathair in Tara and Conn in Kells, without battle or war between them both" (*Corp. Gen.*, 70 = 124a22-7). According to a crucial part of *Esnada Tige Buchet* mistakenly removed against all the manuscripts to an 'Appendix A' as a "clumsy interpolation" by its editor (Greene, 1955, 27), "Cormac grandson of Conn was in Kells before he took the kingship of Ireland, for Medb Lethderg did not let him into Tara after the death of his father, i.e. Medb Lethderg of the Laigin had been beside Art and she had enjoyed the kingship after the death of Art. Kells, then, was the dwelling of the kings, and it is after the taking of the kingship by Cormac that Tara was dug by him, i.e. that was the land of Odrán, i.e. a peasant of the Déssi Breg." (*ibid.*, 31). After Odrán's voluble protests Cormac agrees satisfactory compensation with him and is amicably confirmed in possession of Tara.

Whatever dim refractions of distant actual happenings it may or may not contain, this tradition's at first sight surprising generosity to the position of earlier occupants is most readily explicable in terms of Tara's comparability with Jerusalem (ch. 2, 3) and of Cormac's status as a pre-Patrician Irish counterpart of Solomon (see Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 59-60) or David. Famed like this pair of preeminent Old Testament sovereigns for wisdom, justice and gnomic instructions (cf. ch. 2, 2), Cormac also shared with both, especially David, privileged royal access to God's truth and support (2 above and ch. 3, 10-1; cf. ch. 4, 7). Cormac was also comparable with David in that *Genemain Chormaic* depicts him as a pre-ordained king spending his youth hiding in the wilderness from his enemies. Moreover, rather like his biblical counterpart, who fled Jerusalem during Absalom's short-lived rebellion (2 Sam./Kgs. 15-8), he is represented as temporarily losing the Tara kingship for a brief spell (ch. 5, 12).

In line with these analogies Cormac's move from Kells to Tara can be plausibly put down to a deliberate evocation of David's move from Hebron to Jerusalem, which was likewise associated with building activity: "David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah. And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusite, the inhabitant of the land: which spake unto David, saying . . . 'David