eventually in metres born of literacy, and the success stories were undoubtedly the *fili* and *brithem*, whose early association with monastic literacy and learning brought high status and great rewards in its wake (ch. 1, 10-12).

The anticlerical stance of the *fían* in association with certain *áes dáno*, notably the *druí* and *cáinte*, and others stigmatized as pagans by the Christian establishment makes this the obvious place to expect the relatively unsullied survival of non-Christian oral traditions. In view, however, of the demonstrable dependence of such traditions upon their immediate social environment (ch. 1, 3) and of what Goody terms "the homeostatic organization of the cultural tradition in a non-literate society" whereby "what continues to be of social relevance is stored in the memory while the rest is usually forgotten" (1968, 30-1), it would be surprising if the corpus in question were not rather radically affected by the shrinkage and increased marginalization of the social base to which it referred. Those traditions geared most closely to the institution least shaken by the change in religion, the *fían* itself, would be expected to survive best, and the comparative evidence presented earlier indicates that this was indeed the case.

A further 'distorting' factor for the oral purist must also be recognised. Since the literate have no difficulty communicating orally with the illiterate, even limited literacy has resulted in "cultures which were influenced to some degree by the circulation of the written word, by the presence of groups or individuals who could read or write. They lived on the margins of literacy, though this is a fact that many observers have tended to ignore" (Goody, ibid., 4-5). In early Christian Ireland an obvious case in point is the illiterate bards' adoption of metres developed by the literate from Latin models (10 above).

Nevertheless, interesting though snippets of evidence in the written record for the survival of paganism on the fringes of medieval Irish society may be to the social historian, this phenomenon can be of little or no relevance to our assessment of the ideology underlying an extant literature known to have emanated from the monasteries. Indeed, the prejudice and antipathy consistently displayed towards the *fían* and its satellites by these selfsame sources show just how hostile the authors of our texts were to practices and beliefs they perceived as pagan. Like it or not, the early Irish literature available to us is "the thoroughly processed product of a monastically oriented literate learned class whose material and intellectual interests extended far beyond the confines of the cloister". (McCone, 1989, 134).

12. It has already been pointed out (ch. 1, 9) that the post-war nativist notion of the *fili* as the old druid 'protectively metamorphosed' or the like by superficial Christianization is no more than wishful thinking. Hard to square with the attestation of both in the early Christian (9 above) and, arguably, the pre-Christian period (ch. 4, 1 and ch. 7, 4)), it is quite at variance with the early medieval Irish sources' determined but possibly tendentious denial of any such relationship between the two. This ideological point is particularly well made in Muirchú's Life of Patrick, which consistently depicts *magi* or druids as virulent and inveterate opponents of the Christian mission (e.g. I 10, 15-17, 20 in Bieler, 1979) in marked contrast to the judge Erc and poet Dubthach, who adopt the new faith with alacrity as prime representatives of their respective professions (ch. 4, 3). Tírechán, on the other hand, brings out the incompatibility of druidry with Christianity by stressing the need to abandon it as a prelude to conversion in the episode of two initially hostile

druid brothers who finally believe in Patrick's God, do penance and accept a new tonsure in token of entry into the Church (26 (17-19), ibid.). Whatever the truth about the missionary period itself, this view is doubtless first and foremost a reflection of the contemporary seventh-century druid's actual paganism.

With greater apparent justification Gerard Murphy had already offered the early medieval Irish *fili* an alternative pagan Celtic ancestor scarcely less attractive than the beloved druid. "*Fili* according to its etymology might mean 'seer' (cf. Welsh *gwel* 'see'), and ninth-century Irish tradition tells us that *filid* were indeed considered capable of attaining mystic vision by the method of divination known as *imbus forosnai* (*Sanas Cormaic*, ed. Meyer, *Anecdota*, IV, p. 64, 756). Poetry, which in medieval Ireland was the special function of a *fili*, might formerly have been called *gwawd* in Welsh, and Welsh *gwawd* is etymologically akin to Irish *fáith*, 'a prophet'. *Fáidsine*, the function of a *fáith*, is attributed to *filid* by an ancient law-tract (Laws III 30, cited in translation by Professor MacNeill, R.I.A. Proc., XXXVI, C, p. 273, n.2). Moreover, a *fili* is called a *fáith* in the *Colloquy of the Two Sages* (par. 272), and Fedelm, the *banfháith* of the *Táin*, is sometimes called *banfhili* (Professor and Mrs. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, I, 613). There is therefore reason for believing with Professor and Mrs. Chadwick (*l.c.*) that *filid* and *fátha* were originally the same. If that is so, they represent an Irish order identical in origin with the Gallic learned and mantic order known to the Romans as *vates*" (1940, 200).

As Murphy's own diffidence implies, the etymological case for tracing the Christian *fili* back to a pagan *fáith* is too weak to be taken seriously. Moreover, equations of *fáith* with *fili* in the literature are similarly inconclusive, since Old Irish *fáith* is commonly applied to biblical prophets (see *DIL*) and Ireland's righteous pre-Patrician poets had been deliberately correlated with prophets of the Old Testament in the native typology devised by early Irish *literati* (ch. 4, 3-5).

Earlier still, Thurneysen had ventured the shrewd, if unromantic, opinion that the *filid* were a pre-Christian outgrowth of the bardic order that entered into a close relationship with monastic learning particularly soon after the introduction of Christianity (1921, 66-7). Quite recently, solid textual evidence has been adduced for a considerably later differentiation along these lines. Arguing that the poetic grades were modelled upon a system of seven ecclesiastical grades hardly established before the seventh century, Breatnach concludes: "the earliest text we have which sets out the seven grades of *filid* is the eighth century *Bretha Nemed*. The version of BN in *Ériu* xiii also has eight and seven grade systems for the bards. In two passages in the Nero Avii *Bretha Nemed*, however, we have a different system, viz. the six grades of *fili/deán, lethcherd, admall, bard, drisiuc*, and *dul* . . . I would suggest, then, that in these two passages we have a trace of an earlier state of affairs where the the *bard* and *fili* were not so sharply distinguished, and that the seven grade system of *filid*, which cannot be much earlier than the eighth century, reflects a reorganisation of the system on the basis of scholarship, which is the essential feature which distinguishes the *fili* from the *bard* (see pp. 97-8). This hypothesis would fit in well with what we know of the close co-operation between the secular and ecclesiastical learned orders at this period, and with the fact that writing in Irish, to any significant extent, is hardly much earlier than the seventh century" (1987, 99-100).

13. As has already been seen, portrayals of recalcitrant post-Patrician druids in the literature tend strongly to be negative. Harsh treatment in penitentials or the like and diminution of status in the laws (9 above) were obviously due to their continuing paganism in the face of Christianity, an authoritative aetiology for this rejection by the Church being supplied by Muirchú's depiction of the leading druids' vicious hostility towards St. Patrick and his message in king Lóegaire's day (12 above).

A further typical enough instance occurs in the Latin Life of St. Berach, which recounts a protracted and royally adjudicated conflict between the saint and a powerful local druid anxious not to be supplanted by him (Plummer, 1910, I, 80-5). To the druid's expostulation that he should not be deprived of his native territory the saint replies "your father Satan, having been cast out of heavenly inheritance, wretchedly plummeting to the bottom, sought the depths of hell. You, therefore like your father are not fit to possess this land dedicated to God; rather shall you share an infernal inheritance with your father the devil" (par. 13). In view of evidence already presented for druidic connections with the *fían* of mostly young aristocrats, some significance attaches to the the druid's incitement of noble youths (par. 14, *iuvenes nobiles*) against the saint, an assault duly foiled by their miraculous immobilization. When the druid (*magus*) proved unable to save the youths, the king sent his soothsayer (*ariolus*, see below) to discover the cause of their misfortune, and then begged the saint's forgiveness (par. 15). The continued intransigence of the druid "full of treachery and malice" (*perfidia atque invidia plenus*) in the face of St. Berach's further miracles eventually led to his own destruction as well as that of the descendants who sought to avenge his death (par. 23).

Clear evidence for the influence of biblical models upon clerical thinking about and literary representation of the druid is provided by the consistent employment of *magus* as a Latin equivalent of Old Irish *druí*, a usage already well established by the mid-seventh century on the evidence of our earliest extant saints' Lives, penitentials and so on. The Book of Daniel has already been identified as the source for the evil *magi, incantatores* and *auruspices* at Lóegaire's Tara court in Muirchú's narrative (ch. 2, 3), and the general incompatibility of *magi* or *arioli* with true religion is uncompromisingly expressed by God's commandment *ne declinetis ad magos, nec ab ariolis aliquid sciscitemini, ut polluamini per eos* "do not turn aside towards magicians, neither inquire aught of soothsayers to be defiled by them" (Lev. 19:31).

King Lóegaire of Tara is forewarned of the victorious coming of Patrick and Christianity by two druids or *magi* in a poem, given in Latin by Muirchú (I 10), who makes it clear that the composition was not his own, and in Irish by the Tripartite Life (Mulchrone, 1939, 22). Any doubts that this scenario is based upon the disturbing message of the *magi* to Herod concerning the advent of the King of the Jews in Matthew 2 are dispelled by the unmistakable verbal echo of that very episode at Muirchú I 16, 1 after his druids' second warning to Lóegaire about the new faith (see ch. 2, 3).

14. The unrepentant druid's representation as a devilish anti-Christian reprobate worthy of death from the coming of Patrick onwards inevitably raises the question as to why monastic writers were prepared to represent him as an awesome figure of great dignity in sagas and other narratives set in the pre-Patrician past. Are we dealing with the uncritical preservation of genuine 'pan-Celtic' pagan traditions

reflecting the druids' erstwhile high priestly status before Christianity knocked him from his perch, as nativists are prone to claim (e.g. Mac Cana, 1983, 14)? If so, the clerks responsible for propagating this favourable image while inveighing against the surviving druid's diabolical paganism can only have been stupid, schizophrenic or both. Since the evidence accumulated in preceding chapters strongly suggests they were neither, a more rational explanation for this clearly deliberate distinction between the pre- and post-Patrician druid is called for.

Given the druid's apparently continuing, if shrinking, role as a pagan priest in the Christian period, the basis of this dichotomous perception presumably lies in the change of established religion mythologised as Patrick's conversion of Lóegaire and his minions. An extremely obvious precedent for a priesthood lapsing from somewhat patchy virtue into outright villainy through murderous hostility towards the bringer of Christianity is, of course, provided by the climactic Gospel narratives of Jesus' rejection and arraignment by the priests and scribes of Israel, who thus forfeited their privileged status. However, this dramatic transformation did not prevent the Church's exegetes from forging typological and allegorical links that made the Old Testament Jewish priesthood serve as a justificatory model for its Christian successor. Thus the Irish Canons, citing Isidore, urge contemplation of the fact "that Aaron was the archetype of the high priest, i.e. the bishop, and that his sons foreshadowed the type of the (Christian) priests (*Aaron summum sacerdotem, id est episcopum figurasse,et filios eius prespiterorum figuram praemonstrasse*)" (*Can. Hib.* I, 4).

Since scriptural patterns and current exegetical techniques were undoubtedly exploited in abundance by early Christian Irish *literati* to present the history of their island and people as a microcosm of a world history centred upon the Bible (e.g. ch. 3, 7-11), the druid's incorporation into this scheme would be almost inevitable. From the Church's standpoint the highly desirable corollary would be that pre-Patrician druidic privileges and endowments could be claimed by clerics, just as the Old Testament priest's mantle had descended upon his New Testament counterpart.

The episode of Berach and the druid (13 above) revolves round the latter's hereditary claim to the land miraculously granted to the saint. Berach's retort, quoted in the previous section, amounts to a blanket assertion of clerical rights to the patrimony forfeited by druids on account of their diabolical paganism, just as Satan was justly deprived of his heavenly inheritance.

The three groups represented by the *Senchus Már* prologue and *Uraicecht Becc* as major contributors to the Patrician legal settlement were clerics or bishops (*ecalsa/epscuip*), poets (*filid*) abetted by judges (*brithemain*) and kings (*flaithi*) (ch. 4, 6), but the great pre-Patrician lawmaking assembly held by Cormac mac Airt according to *Scél na Fír Flatha* (ch. 4, 7) sought "to arrange his proper due to each in the drinking hall (*a dliged díles d'ordugud do chach áen i tig midchúarta*)" according to the portions of meat that came out of a cauldron over which an "incantation of king and poet and druid (*díchetal flatha ⁊ filed ⁊ druad*)" had been sung (par. 8). Both sets of guarantors correspond not only to the three Old Testament orders of *reges* "kings", *prophetae* "prophets" and *sacerdotes* "priests" (or alternatively kings, judges, priests; see Ó Néill, 1979, 154) recognised by early Irish exegesis (ch. 4, 6) but also to each other, due allowance being made for the paradigmatic interchangeability of cleric and druid. This, of course, leaves little doubt that *Scél na Fír Flatha* deliberately equates the two as the pre- and

post-Patrician occupants respectively of the *sacerdos* slot in biblical typology.

A further striking example of such assimilation is provided by the ordeal of *airisem oc altóir* or "waiting at an altar" described as follows in the same text: "i.e. a proof that they used to have at that time to distinguish between falsehood and truth (*etir gaí ⁊ fír*), i.e. waiting at an altar, i.e. going nine times around the altar and afterwards drinking water with a druid's incantation on it (*tria díchetal druad fair*). Now, the sign of his sin was manifest upon him if he were guilty. No harm was done to him, however, if he were innocent" (par. 24). The subsequent claim (loc. cit.) that this ritual had been brought from Israel by the righteous pre-Patrician judge Caí Caínbrethach (ch. 4, 7) is a clear indication of adaptation from an Old Testament original, the obvious candidate being the divinely sanctioned ordeal in Numbers 5:11-28 to determine whether or not a woman has committed adultery: "the priest (*sacerdos*) shall offer it and set her before the Lord and shall take holy water in an earthen vessel and shall put a little earth from the floor of the tabernacle into it . . . and thus let him give the most bitter waters to the woman to drink. When she have drunk them, if she is defiled and is guilty of adultery in her husband's despite, the waters of malediction shall pass through her and after her belly hath swollen her thigh shall rot and the woman shall be as a curse and an example to the whole people. But if she be not defiled, she shall be innocent and shall bear children" (vs. 16-7, 26-8). One wonders if this could have been the source for the saga motif in *Compert Con Culainn* and elswhere of miraculous pregnancy from a small creature in a drink (ch. 8, 9), but the essential point for present purposes is rather that the priest's officiating role in the Old Testament ceremony is taken by a druid in its ostensibly pre-Patrician Irish adaptation.

It was argued earlier that the depiction of saints in early Irish hagiography owed more to biblical, particularly Old Testament, models than to alleged druidic prototypes (ch. 8, 8). Indeed, some similarities may well have arisen because the druid's literary image, too, probably reflects biblical and other ecclesiastical influences. In other words, the druid of Latin and vernacular early Irish sources, particularly those pertaining to the pre-Patrician period, may best be seen as the largely artificial creation of monastic *literati* concerned with historical typology. This would not, of course, preclude the incorporation of genuine druidic attributes into a hybrid construct concocted when druidry still continued to exist on the fringes of Christian Irish society, albeit probably in a somewhat adulterated form. Nevertheless, the idea that the medieval monastic literature preserves anything approaching a reliable record of the pre-Christian druidic establishment must be dismissed as naive.

The basic issue here can be illustrated by the well known motif that the men of Ulster were forbidden to speak except in reply to their king Conchobar, while Conchobar himself could only speak in reply to one of his three druids (e.g. *Táin*[1] 3428-9; *ba airmert di Ultaib ní:labrad nech díb acht fri Conḟobar, ní:labrad Conchobar acht ressna tríb druídib*). Even if this should be a literary survival of the pagan druid's exalted pre-Christian status as his king's social equal or even slight superior, one must still ask why such a tradition was deliberately perpetuated in writing by representatives of a monastic interest otherwise demonstrably determined to undermine the position of actual druids. The answer, surely, lies in the typological divorce of the post- from the pre-Patrician druid to make way for the latter's association with the Christian priest or bishop. In that case the pre-Christian chief druid's high standing in relation to the king would constitute a useful historical

precedent for that claimed by monastic lawyers for his Christian successor. Thus *Críth Gablach* grants the bishop a retinue predictably equal to that of a king (cf. ch. 1, 10) before posing its final question: "which of them is more venerable, the king or bishop? A bishop is more venerable because the king rises before him on account of the faith (*fo bíth creitme*). A bishop, however, (only) raises his knee before a king" (par. 48).

The final major piece of the typological jigsaw has now fitted into place. Through being correlated with the law and the prophets that reached fulfilment by foretelling Christ and paving his way in the Bible, the monastically oriented jurist (*brithem*) and poet (*filí*) could be accorded a similarly positive role in relation to Patrick and the coming of Christianity to Ireland. The recalcitrant pagan druid (*druí*), by contrast, invited comparison with the priests (*sacerdotes*) of Israel, who became unredeemedly degenerate through rejecting Christ and thus left the way clear for the Christian clergy to become the true successors of their generally admirable Old Testament precursors. It is to be stressed that early medieval Irish ideology treats the *filí*'s godly prophetic role as a historical constant and accords him no share in a priesthood or *sacerdotium* seen as the exclusive preserve of the pre-Patrician druid and the post-Patrician cleric successively.

CHAPTER TEN

# Politics and propaganda

1. Genealogy lay at the heart of early medieval Irish *senchus* and could, indeed, like law simply be referred to as *senchus* (e.g. Meyer, 1912, 295, 302, 317, 324) or its Latin equivalent *peritia* (ibid., 361; *Corp. Gen.*, 67 etc.). The sheer size of the extant written record bears abundant testimony to its assiduous cultivation and manipulation. In Ó Corráin's expert opinion, "the very bulk of the Irish genealogical materials is daunting. The published genealogies and origin-legends of the twelfth century and before contain the names of some 12,000 individuals. But this is by no means all. If we add the materials in unpublished tracts (and these are still, unfortunately, unindexed) the total should come to not less than 20,000 names. This covers the prehistoric or mythological period, proto-historic times, and the historic period proper which begins about AD 550 (and I have excluded the detailed genealogies of the later middle ages). I believe that the most – and certainly over two thirds – of the individuals named are historical personages. Thus, for a period of about 650 years (roughly equivalent to twenty-two generations), we have 12,000 individuals whose names, family connections and dynasties are given in the genealogical tracts. When we turn to collectives, the sources record some 2,500 tribes, families and dynasties – and that is a conservative estimate. It may be useful to indicate the degree of detail. For the Cianachta, a relatively obscure people, we have the names of over 100 individuals and eight lineages. For the Corcu Modruad, a relatively minor kingdom in Co Clare, we have the names of some 290 individuals and some 94 collectives. For the Uí Bairrche, an (un?)important Leinster people, we have the names of about 200 individuals and 80 lineages. For the tiny Meath kingdom of Lóegaire (whose dynasty claimed to be descended from Lóegaire mac Néill and whose genealogies were evidently kept at the monastery of Trim) we have the names of 552 individuals (amongst them those of some of the abbots of Trim and their wives) and 44 lineages" (1985, 55-6).

The prodigious scale and elaboration of what is, after all, a written corpus go well beyond the retentive capacities of actual oral traditions as observed by anthropologists, who regard even royal pedigrees some twelve to fifteen generations deep as remarkably long (e.g. Vansina, 1973, 153; Goody, 1968, 31) and northern Somali examples "sometimes consisting of more than thirty named ancestors" as quite exceptional (Lewis in Goody, ibid., 272). For an oral testimony to remain

manageable it seems that "the added depth of lineages caused by new births needs to be accompanied by a process of genealogical shrinkage; the occurrence of this telescoping process, a common example of the general social phenomenon which J.A. Barnes has felicitously termed 'structural amnesia', has been attested in many societies" (Goody, ibid., 32-3).

The best prospect, then, for an addict of orality confronted with an early Christian Irish record bearing all the marks of elephantiasis would be to argue that an enormous number of local oral genealogies had been gathered, harmonised and codified by *literati*, but even so improbably arduous and disinterested an undertaking would hardly have been technically feasible without significant doctoring of the raw data. Add to that the early linkage of Irish with biblical genealogies (ch. 2, 2; ch. 3, 7), plus the interweaving of ecclesiastical and secular figures (cf. Ó Corráin, ibid., 52; 1981), Latin and Irish in the older genealogical collections, and the case for a decisive monastic role in their compilation and maintenance becomes virtually unanswerable. Indeed, in a recent article in Irish Ó Corráin has argued cogently "that they are a historical source that is fully rooted in a written tradition, that there is no evidence to demonstrate an oral tradition later put into writing, and that it is Ireland's learned clergy who composed and preserved these same genealogies" (1986b, 71) by showing among other things that "there is usually a connection between the antiquity of the text and the amount of Latin in it: the older they are, the more abundant the Latin" (ibid., 73).

These claims are, of course, fully consonant with the monastery of Emly's fame as Ireland's main centre for *senchus* and with the known monastic affiliations of the greatest specialist in this field, the *senchaid* or "historian" (ch. 1, 10; cf. Thurneysen, 1921, 67).

The comprehensive genealogical system was further tied to a prolonged chronology going right back via Noah to Adam, one in which major figures at least were liable to be given more or less precise dates, as in the Rawlinson B. 502 list of Irish kings accompanied by the length of their various reigns (*Corp. Gen.*, 117-22). As a result, early Irish genealogies were apparently more prone to expansion than to telescoping due to 'structural amnesia' in a strictly oral milieu, an undisputed instance of such 'farcing' being the substantial number of intervening ancestors required to link the Milesian pedigree to the biblical Gomer son of Japheth son of Noah (ch. 2, 2; see the table in Scowcroft, 1988, 16). This process was presumably applied quite liberally to the large part of the genealogical corpus covering the period prior to the later sixth and earlier seventh century, when a broadly reliable system of contemporary written documentation seems to have come into being as in the analogous case of the annals.

As well as sheer invention, favoured methods of farcing seem to have included duplication (O'Rahilly, 1946, 202-3), the abstraction of eponymous ancestors from a people's name (Mac Niocaill, 1972, 3) and the incorporation of euhemerised pagan deities such as Lug and Núadu (O'Rahilly, ibid., 262; see *Corp. Gen.*, index). However, it seems most unlikely that the presence of such divinities in a given pedigree served to "give explicit expression to the association between deity and tribal groupment" (Mac Cana, 1983, 20), a fundamental relationship commonly supposed to underly the names of certain 'archaic' population groups (Mac Niocaill, ibid., 3-4) as well as the oath formula *tongu do día toinges mo thúath* "I swear to the god to whom my tribe swear" in sagas (e.g. Mac Cana, ibid., following Vendryes).

A major prop of this interpretation has been undermined by Ruairí Ó hUiginn's recent careful study of this formula's syntax and textual development, from which he convincingly concludes that it must be understood as "I swear to God what my people swear" and that "the god in question is the God of christianity" (1989, 339). Similarly there is no need to suppose that the value of figures like Lug and Núadu for monastic compilers of genealogies went much beyond their usefulness as royal stuffing, and it seems quite inconceivable that they could have ascribed any legitimating function to the presence in a pedigree of pagan deities as such.

Be that as it may, endeavours to winnow fact from fiction, genuine pagan elements from inventive padding and so on in the earlier sections of extant genealogies seem largely pointless in the absence of proper controls. The real issue, surely, is the contemporary purpose of genealogies and the way in which this affected their transmission and manipulation.

2. It is a commonplace of modern anthropological studies of genealogy in so-called 'primitive' or 'traditional' societies, whether illiterate or, like early Christian Ireland, partially literate, that its primary function is to legitimise current socio-political relationships and concerns by mirroring them. As Vansina puts it in a purely oral context, "genealogies are sources in which distortions are very prone to occur, because they form the ideological framework with reference to which all political and social relationships are sustained and explained. Because of the functions they fulfil, they undergo many alterations, and are frequently telescoped" (1973, 153).

Goody provides an illuminating actual example from his own field work: "the state of Gonja in northern Ghana is divided into a number of divisional chiefdoms, certain of which are recognized as providing the ruler of the whole nation. When asked to explain their system the Gonja recount how the founder of the state, Ndewura Jakpa, came down from the Niger Bend in search of gold, conquered the indigenous inhabitants of the area and enthroned himself as chief of the state and his sons as rulers of its territorial divisions. At his death the divisional chiefs succeeded to the paramountcy in turn. When the details of this story were first recorded at the turn of the present century, at the time the British were extending their control over the area, Jakpa was said to have begotten seven sons, this corresponding to the number of divisions whose heads were eligible for the supreme office by virtue of their descent from the founder of the particular chiefdom. But at the same time as the British had arrived, two of the seven divisions disappeared, one being deliberately incorporated in a neighbouring division because its rulers had supported a Mandingo invader, and the other because of some boundary changes introduced by the British administration. Sixty years later, when the myths of state were again recorded, Jakpa was credited with only five sons and no mention was made of the founders of the two divisions which had since disappeared from the political map" (1968, 33).

Such factors making for rapid change mean that little credence can be attached by the modern historian to such 'genuine' oral genealogy as may be assumed to have found its way into the early Irish written record, even if these constituents could be isolated with any confidence. Thus Mac Niocaill remarks of the eponymous ancestor of the Uí Néill dynasties associated with the prestigious Tara monarchy throughout the early medieval period: "in all, Niall is credited with fourteen sons. In a period