RÍOCHT NA MIDHE

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Pagan monuments and Christian legal centres in early Meath

CATHY SWIFT

My purpose in this paper is to put forward an argument for the possible usage of prehistoric mounds as areas in early medieval Ireland where the exposition of law and its enforcement could take place. I begin by outlining the archaeological evidence for ceremonial activity at the two sites of Newgrange and Knowth in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. Some of this material includes ritual deposits of Romano-British artefacts and here I stress the possibility that these may have been votive offerings by a native and aristocratic warrior class. I then look at the vernacular traditions about prehistoric mounds as recorded in the sagas. These suggest a variety of different possible origins for mounds which I interpret as indicating medieval curiosity about man-made features in the landscape whose original purpose was unknown. One such monument appears to have been the site of *Fertae fer Féic* which two seventh-century writers about St. Patrick represent as being the location for many of the activities connected with the celebration of the first Easter in Ireland. I suggest that the traditional location of this site on the hill of Slane may be unsustainable but that the information recorded allows one to identify it as the burial place associated with a prestigious ancestor of the community and as a location where law could be expounded. I conclude the discussion with the proposal that man-made mounds, often prehistoric, were a common landscape feature in early medieval Irish communities and that these mounds could be used for the hearing of law-cases.

1. Ritual activity at Newgrange and Knowth

One of the very few pagan centres for which we have good evidence in the first four centuries of our era is the famous site of Newgrange. The core of the monument is a Neolithic passage tomb, built by farmers using only stone tools c. 3000-3200 B.C. Almost a millennium later, on the south-eastern side of the site, we find traces of Bronze Age dwellings and associated in some way with this two large circles, one marked by posts and pits and

only visible through excavation; the other marked by large, rough-hewn standing stones. This Bronze Age activity is thought to be centred on the period around 2500 B.C.[1]

Since the mid nineteenth century, there have been a number of finds dating to the initial centuries of the first millennium A.D. at Newgrange. According to Claire O'Kelly, the mound itself would have undergone a degree of slippage by this date so that Iron Age visitors would have seen a great grass-covered mound surrounded by standing stones. Around this mound, and particularly in the vicinity of the three tall standing stones by the entranceway, various coins, gold ornaments and other objects have been found buried in what O'Kelly suggested were probable votive deposits. These finds included bone dice, pin-head glass beads, gold finger rings, two glass-centre boss brooches, melon beads, a gold chain and bracelets, the remains of penannular brooches and a gold torc end with Roman lettering.[2]

A number of these finds from Newgrange can be paralleled at other sites in Ireland and Britain. Pinhead glass beads were also found at Tara, in Cairn H from the passage-grave cemetery at Loughcrew and in three Iron Age burial sites from Co. Galway. Melon beads, bone dice and penannular brooches have also been uncovered in the course of the excavations at Knowth.[3] At that site, these finds are found in association with a cemetery of inhumation graves, located around the outskirts of the largest passage tomb which occupies the central position in a group of smaller passage-tombs. C_{14} dates from these inhumation burials date them to between 190 B.C. and A.D.250. One particularly interesting burial has two decapitated males, lying neck to toe and accompanied by bone dice, beads and other grave goods; this burial has a calibrated C_{14} date of 40 B.C.-A.D. 100.[4] The chopping off of the individuals' heads, the neck to toe method of interment and the similarity of the grave-goods to those from the ritual deposits at Newgrange, all suggest that, as at Newgrange, this site was regarded as a ceremonial centre by the Iron Age inhabitants of this region. By combining the evidence from Knowth and Newgrange, one can say with some certainty that Iron Age dwellers of Meath viewed these two mounds covering passage tombs as important ritual centres. On one they buried what appear to have been votive deposits of coins and goods while the other was the focus of burials.

Some of the Newgrange finds indicate that this veneration of the site continued into the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. for rather than being specifically Iron Age in date, they belong to a

late Roman and post-Roman cultural context. These finds include two disc brooches (or more precisely, glass centre-boss brooches) dated by a recent authority to the third and fourth centuries A.D., two finger rings with oval bezel thought to date to the fourth and fifth centuries and the postulated remains of penannular brooches from some period between the fourth and the sixth centuries.[5]

The identified parallels for these pieces of jewellery are nearly all from Roman Britain but the coins come from rather further afield. There are 25 coins in all, ranging in date from Domitian in A.D. 81-95 to Arcadius A.D. 385. Some of the coins were of bronze and silver but there were also a number of gold coins, for the most part belonging to the fourth century A.D. The majority are from the Roman mint of Trier, the centre of western Roman administration until the beginning of the fifth century and the main mint for north-western Europe. This does not necessarily mean the coins came directly from the Continent; coin production was pre-eminently directed towards the payment of troops rather than general commerce and the Trier mint was the major supplier of coin in Britain for much of the fourth century.[6] It is, therefore, impossible to tell whether the Newgrange pieces are from Britain or Gaul. Given the strong links with Britain indicated by the jewellery, however, it seems most plausible to assume that this was the origin of the coins as well. The worshippers of Newgrange thus included people who had some contact with the western Roman provinces, most likely the island of Britain.

As at Newgrange, activity at Knowth appears to have continued without a visible break up to the middle of the millennium. At some point between the late first and the fourth centuries, two deep ditches were dug around the perimeter of the main mound, transforming its summit into an enclosed area about forty metres in diameter. The excavator has suggested that houses may have been built in this section of the site but the removal of most of the surface by stone-quarrying in the nineteenth century has destroyed any possible remains.[7] There are unassociated Romano-British objects which appear to belong to this phase but the majority cannot be closely dated within the Roman period. The exceptions are the three penannular brooches which appear to correspond to those found at Newgrange.

2. Contacts between Ireland and the late Roman world

Can we say anything else about these people? In the first century A.D., at the height of Roman expansion into Britain, the

historian Tacitus referred to Ireland saying:

> That island compared with Britain is of smaller dimensions but it is larger than the Mediterranean islands. In regard to soil, climate and the character and ways of its inhabitants, it is not markedly different from Britain – we are better informed, thanks to the trade of merchants, about the approaches to the island and its harbours.[8]

In other words, there were Romano-British traders in operation in Ireland at this period. Tacitus' words, allied to the existence of a probable burial of a middle-class Roman at Stoneyhurst Co. Kilkenny have led archaeologists such as Charles Thomas to emphasise the possibility of mercantile contacts between Romano-British traders and the inhabitants of Ireland in the years after the death of Christ.[9] For Thomas, the most likely explanation for the Newgrange deposits is as gifts from Romano-British *negotiatores* or traders, showing homage to the local gods.[10] In contrast, Richard Warner has increasingly stressed the possibility of Roman military expeditions to Ireland in the first four centuries A.D. by Romano-British, Gaulish or expatriate Romanised Irish warriors.[11] In his most recent article, he would interpret some, if not all, of the Newgrange material as representing a military intrusion into the Midlands in the half-century on either side of A.D. 300.[12]

A single explanation for all Roman material in Ireland or even for the fourth and fifth-century artefacts is obviously unlikely. Much of the contemporary literary evidence, however, appears to focus on an alternative mechanism by which Ireland was Romanised; that is through journeys by important Irish natives to imperial lands. The aims of such travellers were probably diverse but sources from the fourth century and later stress the existence of military raiding parties. In Ammianus Marcellinus' *History* (written between A.D. 380-395), the soldier-historian speaks of *Scotti* who laid waste the lands near the imperial frontier in the 360s.[13] In an early fifth-century panegyric written in honour of the imperial commander of the west, Flavius Stilicho, reference is made to the fact that the Irish had raised all Ireland against Britain and that "the sea foamed to the beat of hostile oars".[14] In both his *Confessio* and the *Letter to Coroticus*, the fifth-century St. Patrick speaks of raids by the Irish on Britain in which "thousands" of Britons were captured or killed.[15] Ogam inscriptions on memorial stones from south-west Britain as well as Irish names on inscriptions in the Latin alphabet, point to

conquests and subsequent settlement in western Britain by Irish colonists in a period around the fifth century.[16] In a sixth-century British text, which may refer retrospectively to such expeditions, "foul hoards" of Irish and Picts are said to have crossed the sea to Britain in coracles and conquered lands there.[17] Thus, the emphasis which both Thomas and Warner place on Roman incursions into Ireland is not reflected in the documentary sources for the later Roman period which indeed stress movement in the opposite direction.[18] Such movement may not have always been inimical to the imperial authorities: as J.D. Bateson, Harold Mytum and Barry Raftery have pointed out, it is likely that some Irish warriors went abroad to serve as auxiliaries in the Roman army.[19]

A small number of linguists have examined the evidence for the impact of Latin on the Irish language but this type of evidence has not been widely investigated by historians since the days of Eoin MacNeill in the early years of this century.[20] He took it that there were two groups of Latin loan-words: the first, introduced by the Patrician mission in the mid fifth century while the second was influenced by British pronunciation of Latin and reflected the close links between the monasteries of Ireland and Wales in the sixth century. Minor tinkering with this two-tier interpretation can be seen in articles by Kenneth Jackson, T.F. O'Rahilly and David Greene but it is only recently that Damian McManus has undermined this entire historical model by pointing out that the borrowing of Latin loan-words appears to have taken place piecemeal over a long period of time.[21] In the interim, Seán de Búrca has identified some loan-words which he interprets as reflecting trading links while James Carney has pointed to a number in some early Leinster poems which appear to be military in nature, such as *trebun* or tribune, an officer in the Roman army or *legión* meaning legion.[22] He would view these as providing evidence for "a non-Christian Ireland having very close contact with and knowledge of the Roman empire". The long continuum outlined by McManus and the wide variety of semantic meanings behind the various Latin words borrowed suggest that the linguistic evidence cannot be used to support a single or simple explanation of Roman contacts with Ireland.

An appreciable percentage of the archaeological evidence for contacts between Ireland and Roman Britain in the later period can be interpreted as reflections of Irish military activity. The huge silver hoard from Ballinrees Co. Derry, deposited some time in the early fifth century, contained over 1506 coins and 200

ingots and cut plate while another find of approximately the same date from Balline Co. Limerick has produced 2 hide-shaped silver ingots marked with an official stamp, indicating an association with the Roman military base at Richborough in Kent.[23] It is possible that such finds represent the caches of merchants or metal-workers but they fit well into the context of Irish warriors operating in Romano-British territories as identified in the documentary sources.

Similarly, a number of settlement sites which were ceremonial centres in the early medieval period have also produced evidence for Roman artefacts. Such sites include Tara, Co. Meath, Uisneach, Co. Westmeath, Knockaulin, Co. Kildare, and Clogher, Co. Tyrone. This material belongs to varying periods but a coin found at Freestone Hill, Co. Kilkenny is of mid fourth-century date while another at Uisneach belongs to the early fourth century.[24] Interestingly, the finds from the two sites of Clogher and Tara both appear to be rather earlier and in both cases are said to be unaccompanied by native Irish artefacts.[25] The significance of this is unclear given that both sites remain unpublished and that specialists in this period postulate the existence of a non La Téne Iron Age with a largely unknown material culture.[26] Overall, however, the wide distribution of these centres throughout Ireland and their political importance in the first period for which we have documentation can both be interpreted as implying the existence of native Irish dignitaries who had gone abroad in search of profit and who returned home with Roman goods.

In conclusion, then, the old story that Níall of the Nine Hostages, ancestor of the Uí Néill kings of Tara, built his career through raids into Britain is not supported by any obviously early documentary sources[27] but what material we do have indicates that the story reflects the reality of some (though not all) Hiberno-Roman contacts. Moreover, such a process matches the experience of other lands bordering the empire; the Romanisation of important people and in particular, high-status warriors in communities just outside the official frontiers was a common phenomenon in the late fourth and fifth centuries. The increased use of barbarian troops in the Roman army of the period, often paid with land grants rather than in cash and based for the most part in the outlying parts of the empire meant that semi-Romanised barbarian warriors who alternated between raiding and holding down official imperial posts were the norm rather than the exception.[28] Thus, the worshippers at Newgrange, who deposited Roman coins, pendants and necklaces as offerings

before the ancient mound, appear most likely to have been members of a noble Irish warrior-caste who gained wealth through fighting. Evidence from Knowth, though apparently slightly earlier in date, may indicate that the mounds where these people worshipped could also be surrounded by burials and may have been located in the vicinity of Iron Age settlements.

3. Man-made mounds in medieval literature.

This is the context in which we should examine the vernacular references to mounds and their function in early medieval Ireland. There are indications that large mounds visible in the landscape were the focus of a certain curiosity on the part of medieval writers. In the first recension of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, for example, (apparently in existence by the early ninth century A.D.),[29] the story is told of Cú Chulainn's first visit to Mag mBreg, roughly the land of modern Meath:

> The charioteer told Cú Chulainn that they should go to Emain to be in time for the feasting there. "No" said Cú Chulainn. "What mountain is that over there ?" Slíab Monduirnd" said the charioteer. "Let us go to it", said Cú Chulainn. Then they went to it and when they had reached the mountain, Cú Chulainn asked: "What white cairn is that over there on the mountain top?" "Finncharn" said the charioteer. "What plain is that yonder? asked Cú Chulainn. "Mag mBreg" said the charioteer; So he told him the name of every chief fort between Tara and Kells. He named moreover, their meadowlands and their fords, their renowned places and their dwellings, their forts and their fortified heights.[30]

This episode implies that cairns or mounds could be visible over wide areas and could be used by medieval man to orientate himself within a locality. A similar monument is described in Adomnán's late seventh-century *Vita Columbae* although in this case, the structure was a burial place:

> "...a little ship came to land at that harbourage and in its prow was carried a feeble old man, the leader of the cohort of Geon. Two young men lifted him from the ship and set him down in front of the blessed man. And as soon he had, through an interpreter, received the word of God from the saint, he believed and was baptized by him. And after the rites of baptism had been performed, he presently died in

> that place as the saint had prophesied and there his companions buried him, building a cairn of stones. It can still be seen today upon the sea-coast."[31]

The saga *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* gives a very different explanation for the erection of a cairn but reinforces the point that cairns were important features in the local landscape and ones which could be the subject of stories in their own right.

> "For two causes they built their cairn, namely (first) since this was a custom in marauding and secondly that they might find out their losses at the hostel. Every one that would come safe from it would take his stone from the cairn: thus the stones of those that were slain would be left and thence they would know their losses. And this is what men skilled in story recount, that for every stone in Carn Leca, there was one of the reavers killed at the Hostel. From that Cairn Leca in Húi Cellaig is (so called)."[32]

The importance of these three stories appears to lie, not in the specific function of each mound but rather in the careful explanation of their presence given by the author. All three mounds were erected at some point prior to the compilation of the texts: there is no implication that mounds of this kind were still being built when these accounts were being written. Instead all three appear to describe varying responses by the story-tellers to the presence of monuments in the local landscape, monuments for whose original function there was apparently no single explanation in the early Middle Ages.

4. *Fertae fer Féic* in the story of Patrick's mission

For the earliest accounts of the arrival of Christianity in Ireland, (apart, that is, from Patrick's own writings), we are largely dependent on two texts from the second half of the seventh century: Muirchú's *Life of Patrick* and Tírechán's *Collectanea*. The first is a saga text concentrating on Patrick's initial activity in Ireland; the second a collection of traditions and origin legends about churches which claimed, in the third quarter of the seventh century, to have been founded by Patrick. Thirty years ago, Daniel Binchy emphasised the point that these texts post-date Patrick's mission by some two hundred years and thus cannot be used to provide historical explanations for fifth-century events.[33] As seventh-century accounts, however, they are some of the earliest textual sources for Irish history which we possess

and their information about the role of the church in Irish society remains crucial.

According to Muirchú, the first major missionary activity undertaken by St. Patrick after his return to Ireland was in Co. Down where he stayed at the home of a noble pagan who was the first man to be converted in Ireland, Díchu of Saul. While still in the north-east, however, a problem arose:

> In those days, Easter was approaching, for the first Easter in honour of God was to be celebrated in our Egypt on this island just as it once was celebrated in Goshen and they took counsel where they should celebrate this first Easter among the pagans to whom God had sent him and after many proposals had been made, at last holy Patrick was inspired from heaven and it was decided that this great feast of the Lord, as the most important of all feasts, should be held in the greatest plain, Mag mBreg, because it was there that there was the greatest kingdom amongst these peoples.[34]

The missionaries are then said to have left Co. Down and sailed down the coast till they came to *hostium Colpdi* or the port of Colp, outside Drogheda. This harbour is mentioned in other early medieval sources and an early medieval cemetery, overlying an enclosure, has recently been excavated there by Margaret Gowan.[35] There they left their boat and travelled by foot to the *campus maximus* or the greatest plain:

> In the evening they at last arrived at the burial place of the men of Fíacc which, as stories tell us, the men (that is the servants) of Fíacc had dug – says Ferchertne who was one of the nine druid-prophets of Brega. There they pitched their tent and Patrick with his followers gave the obligatory offering of Easter and the sacrifice of praise to God the most high with the utmost spiritual zeal, according to the words of the prophet.[36]

5. The location of *Fertae fer Féic*

The location of *Fertae fer Féic*, which Muirchú represents as the choice for Easter after long negotiation, is not clear. Muirchú himself gives no further details than that it was in the greatest plain, which he elsewhere associates with Tara and that Patrick's

enemies fled from it to *Mons Monduirn*.[37] This hill is probably that on which Cú Chulainn stood with his charioteer to have the monuments of Meath pointed out to him. It is otherwise unknown except for a reference in the *Annals of Ulster* under the year 875 which states that Muiredach m. Brain, king of the Uí Dunchada and ruler of Kildare could raid as far as *Mons Monduirn* and return to his own territory on the same day. This suggests that *Mons Monduirn* may have been in southern Meath, close to the border with Kildare.

On the other hand, Cú Chulainn is said to have travelled to *Slíab Monduirn* from the area of Newtown Hamilton in Co. Armagh in order to look over Mag mBreg and this might suggest a northern location for the hill. In some ways this seems more plausible in that a raid by a Kildare dynast into the lands immediately adjacent to his own would not be as spectacular an achievement as one which covered the entire neighbouring kingdom. One could thus interpret the annalist's remarks about Muiredach m. Brain as propaganda rather than being necessarily realistic; he was such a powerful king he could go to the northern borders of Meath and return in a single day. Thus, though all three references to *Slíab Monduirn* would seem to imply a border location – Patrick's enemies flee to it, Muiredach raids as far as it and Cú Chulainn travels there to observe an unknown kingdom – the exact location remains uncertain.

The number of specific references to the whereabouts of *Fertae fer Féic* itself are so few in number that it is possible to cite them all here. Apart from the Patrician authors such as Muirchú and Tírechán, the earliest mention of *Fertae fer Féic* occurs in Old Irish glosses to an Old Irish law-tract, *Di Cetharslicht Athgabála*, which deals with the formal seizure of property owed by debtors. The gloss states that a *fertae* lay to the south of the Boyne while a second gloss, possibly later in date, identifies this as *Fertae Féic* located on the bank of the Boyne in an area alongside *Craeb Pátraic* or the tree of Patrick.[38] What is probably a late insertion into an eighth-century legal tract, *Corus Béscnai* agrees that the *Fertae fer Féic* was on the bank of the Boyne.[39] A gloss from a fifteenth-century manuscript of an early martyrology, *Félire Óengusso*, indicates that *Fertae fer Féic* lay to the west of the slopes of a hill known as *Síd Truim*.[40] Finally, notes on place-names written into a sixteenth-century manuscript state that *Fertae fer Féic* was in the vicinity of a hill known as *Brí Graige* or *Brí Graidhe* which the author of the note interprets as hill of the horses.[41] Unfortunately, to date, there is no further information

on any of these three place-names: *Craeb Pátraic*, *Síd Truim* or *Brí Graige* and it is thus impossible to locate the site with any more precision. It is worth noting, however, that all four references are later in date than the seventh century while the last two appear to be very much later and there is no guarantee that the writers of these notes were any better informed than we are.

It is also notable that none of these specifications for *Fertae fer Féic* make any reference to Slane, the traditional site for the location of the first Easter. This identification first appears in the work of John Colgan, a seventeenth-century antiquarian who edited a number of saints' lives while working in the Catholic university at Louvain in Belgium. Colgan was interested in place-name identification but in many ways he was dependent on the good-will and interest of the local bishops in Ireland; the more enthusiastic would send him lists of current church dedications and local folklore; the less enthusiastic sent him nothing at all.[42] His source for the identification of *Fertae fer Féic* with Slane appears to be the compilation of the *Annals of the Four Masters* in 1634 by a group of Franciscan scholars. Under the year 512, there is an entry which states that Erc of Slane was bishop of *Lilcach* and of *Fertae fer Féic* to the west of *Síd Truim*. Eight years later, Colgan had amalgamated these place-names and referred to Erc as "bishop of *Lilcach* and *Fertae fer Féic*, that is bishop of Slane". In the following three years, Colgan justified this process with the argument that the relics of Erc, who rose before Patrick at *Fertae fer Féic* were known to be located at Slane in the seventh century.[43] That this was an illogical conclusion on Colgan's part can be shown through a second example of the same process; in a doublet of the Erc episode, Dubthach maccu Lugir, accompanied by the poet Fíacc rose before Patrick at Tara although Fíacc's relics were kept at Sleaty on the Laois/Carlow border.[44]

An early nineteenth-century antiquarian, Dr. Charles O'Connor, suggested that *Síd Truim* which was said to be to the east of *Fertae fer Féic* was to be linked to the modern town of Trim, where a settlement is known to have existed at the beginning of the eighth century.[45] The great onomastic scholar John O'Donovan dismissed this suggestion, on the grounds that the legend required the palace of Tara to be within sight of the *fertae* and he agreed with Colgan in plumping for Slane. It seems to me that O'Donovan is here being slightly unfair to O'Connor who merely suggested a location in the general vicinity of Trim. But this is an area in

which the scholar's personality may have interfered with his evaluation of an idea: O'Donovan found it difficult to tolerate O'Connor whom he felt was a bad scholar, who didn't have the linguistic skills to work on early Irish sources.[46] O'Donovan's frustrations can be seen in his assessment of some of his predecessors:

> Lanigan was a most unmerciful clear-minded pedant but Dr. O'Connor was a fool or very nearly a fool though a very learned man but a man may be very learned and at the same time a very great Amadawn. I never can take up any book upon Irish history or topography, without being excited to such a degree of madness as to pitch it either in the fire or violently against the floor but let me except with honor the works of Ussher, Ware and Colgan, for the two former were men of learning and honesty and the latter a sincere believer in Christian miracles and a most honest but not profound investigator of ancient history.[47]

Given this attitude to both O'Connor and Colgan, it is perhaps understandable why O'Donovan tended to dismiss the suggestions of the former in favour of those by the latter. On this occasion, however, I would argue that O'Connor's location of *Fertae fer Féic* in the vicinity of Trim is logically more defensible than that of Colgan's who viewed it as having been situated by Slane.

In support of O'Connor's identification one can cite the evidence for the location of *Lilcach* which is associated with *Fertae fer Féic* as the second topographical element in Bishop Erc's title. This place-name is associated with the Uí Faeláin of north Kildare in a manuscript dating to the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries[48] and with an area south of *Fid Gaible* in northern Kildare in the fifteenth-century *Book of Lismore*. Basing his work on these two references in particular, Edmund Hogan has suggested that the site was the parish of Lullymore in eastern Kildare.[49] This would tie in with the tradition that refugees from the defeated Uí Néill forces at the battle of Allen (north-eastern Co. Kildare) in A.D. 722 fled to the church of *Lilcach* because that church was under the patronage of the Uí Néill and the Connachta.[50] The probable location of *Lilcach* would imply that Erc had some authority in northern Kildare despite the fact that his relics were kept in Slane. If O'Connor's identification of *Fertae fer Féic* in the area of Trim is accepted, Erc would be associated with three sites in a territorial unit stretching from just north of the Liffey valley to the Boyne.

There is one more possible item of information which might contribute to the problem of *Fertae fer Féic*'s location. In the saga text *Cath Ruis na Ríg*, apparently of Middle Irish date,[51] a story is told of an Ulster hero, Fíacc mac Follomain meic Fachtna Fathaig, a descendant of the prehistoric progenitor of the Dál nAraidi, who accompanied an Ulster army on a raid to the Boyne.[52] During this raid he fell into the waters of the river and was drowned at *Lind Féic* or the pool of Fíacc. In the late twelfth or early thirteenth-century text, *Acallamh na Senórach*, this pool is located to the south of Tailtiu or Teltown and to the north of Cnoc Tlachtga or the Hill of Ward.[53] If one could assume that this name refers to the same Fíacc who is commemorated in *Fertae fer Féic* and that the pool is in the vicinity of the *fertae*, this would imply a location in the middle Boyne region, centred on Navan.

What can one conclude from this litany of fairly unspecific citations? In my opinion (and the nature of the material means that interpreting it is very much a matter for individual assessment), we have to focus on the earliest references even if these appear less detailed than some of the later material. This leaves us with Muirchú's statements that *Fertae fer Féic* was visible from Tara, "in the greatest plain" and that the latter was bordered by *Slíab Monduirn*. There are also the legal references to the south banks of the Boyne and rather later associations of the site with *Lilcach* in northern Kildare and with *Síd Truim* as well as a possible association with the Navan region. My conclusion, therefore, is that a location for *Fertae fer Féic* south of the Boyne is more likely than the traditional site at Slane despite the fact that this has been accepted as the setting for the first Easter celebrations in Ireland since the seventeenth century. However, it should also be accepted that none of the references to *Fertae fer Féic* are detailed enough to make a firm identification and that, unless more information comes to light, it is probable that the site which the seventh-century Patrician clerics thought of as the location of the first Easter in Ireland has now been lost to us.

5. The role of *Fertae fer Féic* in medieval Meath

Even given this problem, however, it should be possible to say a certain amount about the site of *Fertae fer Féic* from the clues given in the early documents. In the first place there is its name which means "the *fertae* of the men of Fíacc". The word *fertae* is a

feminine *-ia* stem noun which is linked in the *Dictionary of the Irish Language* with a neuter *-o* stem *fert* but which has now been identified as having a different history and probably a different meaning. Both words refer to burials but the exact meaning of the word *fertae* can only be extrapolated from a study of the contexts in which the word was used.[54]

Among the earliest instances of *fertae* in the textual sources, Muirchú himself identifies a second *fertae* which had once been an area of habitation but which was subsequently associated with martyrs; this site, known as *Fertae Martyrum*, lay close to the ecclesiastical settlement of Armagh. At Cruachu, Muirchú's contemporary, Tírechán, identified a *fertae* which was used for the burial of two daughters of King Loíguire. This was a monument surrounded by a round ditch and Tírechán associates it explicitly with paganism.[55] In the *Annals of Ulster sub anno* 504 there is an obit for a Cerpán who was bishop of *Fertae Cherpáin* at Tara.[56] In the first recension of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* Cú Chulainn killed a son of King Ailill and Queen Medb of Connacht whilst standing on a *fertae*. On another occasion, Cú Chulainn was standing on a *fertae* during his epic defence of Ulster when his father from the Otherworld came to visit him and heal his wounds.[57] In the collection of Patrician traditions put together before the tenth century and known as *Bethu Phátraic*, a bishop Cethiachus who used to spend every Easter in Kells, was said to be buried in a *fertae* by his church at Oran in Co. Roscommon.[58] In other words, these references imply that a *fertae* was used for the burial of people of high status, both secular and ecclesiastical, and that, on at least some occasions, it could be found in the close vicinity of a settlement. In the three seventh-century texts, it represents a collective interment; these were communal rather than individual graves. Muirchú's identification of *Fertae fer Féic* as the site of the first Easter celebrations implies that some seventh-century Irish Christians thought that this ceremony had taken place on an important monument used for burial.

Muirchú states that stories were told of *Fertae fer Féic* and he associates these with the name of Ferchertne, one of the nine *magi profetae* (druid-prophets) of Mag mBreg. In Irish sources, the Latin word *profeta* could be translated, on occasion as *fáith* or seer and on other occasions as *file*. According to the eighth-century law-tract *Corus Béscnai*, the *file* Dubthach maccu Lugir recounted the law of prophecy to the newly arrived missionaries while other law tracts suggest that *fáidsine* or prophecy was one of the tasks of a *file*.[59] In the first recension of the *Táin Bó*

Cúailnge, a female seer is alternatively known as *bánfáith* and *bánfili*.[60]

Whitley Stokes argued that there were four poets named Ferchertne in the Irish sagas associated with Leinster, Munster, Ulster and the Shannon respectively.[61] The majority of extant references, however, appear to refer to a single figure: Ferchertne, the poet of the king of Ulster who is said to have been "the master-poet of Ireland" (*ollam hErenn*) and to originate from the streams of Leinster and from the vicinity of the Boyne.[62] The text in which this reference occurs is as yet undated but the title of the text is given in the Old Irish "Pseudo-historical Prologue" to the *Senchas Már* where it is also stated that Ferchertne was one of the two poets who laid down the principle of Irish law that legal decisions must be made by experts in their respective fields.[63] There is a genealogical text from a twelfth-century manuscript which identifies the *file* Ferchertne mac Oengusa Béldeirg m. Fir-filed m. Glais as an early descendant of Rudraige m. Sittride who in turn was the prehistoric progenitor of the Dál nAraidi as well as the ultimate ancestor of saint Finnian of Clonard and of the Ulster hero reputed to have fallen into the Boyne, Fíacc mac Follomain.[64] Finally, a Ferchertne is also credited with having written two poems on the destruction of the fortress of Dind Ríg. This story, which exists in both prose and verse form, describes how the ultimate ancestor of the Leinstermen fought Cobthach of Mag mBreg to become king of all Ireland.[65] There are thus a variety of sources which purport to tell of a prehistoric poet Ferchertne who appears to have been simultaneously connected with Ulster, Leinster and the Meath region and it seems likely that it is to some version of this tradition that Muirchú was referring when he talked of Ferchertne the *magus propheta* of Mag mBreg. The man who is represented as telling stories of *Fertae fer Féic* appears to have been remembered in the vernacular tradition as a poet who told of the very remote past, of great kings and fundamental legal principles, of important battles and fortresses.[66] *Fertae fer Féic* was thus not only the place of burial for men of high status; it was also remembered in the seventh century as the subject of compositions by a famous mythological poet. The scene of the first Easter celebrations, according to the seventh-century writers, appears to have been a site of ancestral and secular importance.

It would also seem to be remembered as the setting for the exposition of law. As noted, Ferchertne is identified in the "Pseudo-historical Prologue" as one of the ancient poet-judges of Ireland.

In the opening lines of the law text, *Di Cetharslicht Athgabála*, a *fertae*, identified in the glosses as *Fertae fer Féic*, is the location for the first distraint which ever took place in Ireland where three cows were seized from the king of the Ulaid by the king of Tara. As a result of this seizure, a border meeting was said to have taken place where the rules governing distraint were laid down.[67]

In view of these legal connotations, one should also note that both Muirchú and Tírechán describe a figure Erc who stood in honour of Patrick at *Fertae fer Féic*. This Erc is identified by Muirchú as a man whose relics were kept at Slane. Slane is described as a *civitas* or city, the same word which is used to describe Tara and Armagh, indicating that it was probably a site of high status at the period in which Muirchú was writing.[68] In the ninth-century *Triads*, it is remembered as a centre for legal learning.[69] In *Bethu Phátraic*, Erc is also described as a bishop and Patrick's lawyer and there is a poem attached to his obit in the Clonmacnoise group of annals, describing his qualities as a judge.[70]

George Eogan has recently suggested that Slane was not an important place in the seventh and eighth centuries although it grew to be the main church site of the kings of Knowth in the ninth and tenth.[71] I would respectfully disagree here: on the one hand, there are the references to Erc, one of a very select body of men whose conversion is described in both Muirchú and Tírechán and whose relics are kept in the *civitas* of Slane. On the other, the seventh-century life of St. Columba of Iona describes a prophecy made by that saint to a ruler of Slane, Aid Sláine, whose father is identified as king of all Ireland.[72] Aid Sláine himself was remembered as the ancestor of all the kings of Tara from A.D. 654 to 695 – the very period in which Muirchú was writing.[73] Slane appears, therefore, to have been closely associated with a powerful royal dynasty in the later seventh century. The fact that a high-ranking cleric of such an important settlement was remembered as having acknowledged Patrick's supremacy at *Fertae fer Féic*, is an indication of the political importance of the latter site.

To date we have concentrated on Muirchú's testimony as to the nature of *Fertae fer Féic*. It is important to note that Tírechán also referred to the *Fertae* in his account of the first Easter. His syntax makes Tírechán's precise meaning in this passage somewhat obscure but it seems clear that part of the Easter celebrations included the consecration of a bishop:

> Bishop Kannanus, whom Patrick ordained on the first Easter at *Fertae fer Féic* and who carried with him the first blessed fire and who carried the first lighted candles from the hands of Patrick to the lord so that blessed smoke rose into the eyes and nostrils of the pagan men and of King Loíguire and his druids.[74]

This episode should be seen in the context of another reference to clerical ordination in the *Collectanea*. A site mentioned by Tírechán as the location for the ordination of a priest and the baptism of a future bishop is *Tumulus Gradi*, located in a region immediately west of the Shannon. In *Bethu Phátraic*, which is heavily dependent on the *Collectanea*, the Irish equivalent of *tumulus* is given as *dumae*.[75] Both words, *tumulus* and *dumae*, are generalised words for mounds without very specific meaning: *dumae*, for example, is used on one occasion to describe embankments for defence against canons in sixteenth-century Lifford. In the sagas it is used to describe mounds for hunting (*dumae shelga*) and the homes of Otherworld figures (*dumae shídha*)[76] and significantly, for the purposes of this paper, as a burial mound:

> A grave was dug for Ferbe then and his stone was raised and his name in ogam was written and a d*umae* was made around his stone then, so that *Dumae Ferbe* is the earlier name of Ráth Ini.....[77]

Given the generalised meaning attached to *dumae* it is important not to over-state the significance of this passage but in the context of the Iron Age veneration of prehistoric mounds such as Newgrange and Knowth, it is interesting to note that *dumae* is also used to qualify the name of a settlement at *Dumae Selcae* in *Bethu Phátraic*. This site, which Tírechán merely calls *Selca*, is described in the seventh-century text as the location in which are found the halls of kings and assemblies of bishops.[78]

To conclude, therefore: the name *Fertae fer Féic* indicates that the site was identified as a burial place associated with persons of high status and that it probably consisted of a mound surrounded by a ditch. In the seventh century, it was said that a poet from the remote prehistoric past, who was credited with formulating important legal principles as well as writing stories about battles between the ancestors of the Leinstermen and the Uí Néill, had made *Fertae fer Féic* the subject of some of his work. It was also said in the seventh century that a cleric from the

royal settlement of Slane stood in honour of Patrick on this site. This man is said elsewhere to have been a judge and the site of the *fertae* is remembered in mythological tradition as the scene of important legal decisions. It was to celebrate the first Easter at this specific location that Patrick was believed to have travelled from Down and at least one seventh-century author believed that part of the ceremonies which took place on that occasion included the consecration of a bishop. In the same text, there are other references to clerical ordination taking place on mounds and there appears to be a possible link between a mound and an assembly site for kings and bishops.

6. One possible function of mounds in early medieval Ireland

Given the information which can be gleaned about *Fertae fer Féic* from the early sources, remarks by Warner on the royal site of Clogher in Co. Tyrone appear significant. He points out that, at Clogher, one finds a combination of mound, fort and church in close conjunction and he suggests that the prominent prehistoric mounds at the ceremonial centre of Tara should be considered as a parallel.[79] A similar suggestion could be made of the important site of Tailtiu or Teltown, located on the Blackwater between Navan and Kells. We know from documentary sources that in the seventh century, Tailtiu was the location of a royal fort, a royal *óenach*, regional assemblies and an important church. In a mythological text of rather later date, it is also described as one of the most important prehistoric cemeteries of Ireland.[80] No detailed survey of this site has been published in recent years but work by the Ordnance Survey in the middle of the nineteenth century stressed the existence of mounds as an important part of the complex.[81] It seems likely that this site provides another example of the link between royal site and prominent mound which Warner has noted at Clogher and Tara and which one can infer from Tírechán's description of (*Dumae*) *Selcae*. In the absence of any firm location for *Fertae fer Féic* and given the social context of that site outlined above, it also seems a possibility worth considering that the site of the first Easter was thought to have been a mound which was equally closely linked to an important settlement.

Whether or not this guess can be sustained, the undoubted incorporation of prehistoric mounds into the structures of some royal ceremonial centres of medieval date has still to be explained.

Current work by Elizabeth Fitzpatrick on the archaeological evidence for royal inauguration sites in Ireland may provide some answers to this question as may the work of the Discovery Programme on Tara. In view of the legal significance attached to *Fertae fer Féic*, however, one suggestion could be that they functioned as areas where law was expounded and enforced on behalf of the local community. A reference to the use of mounds in such a context occurs in a description of a medieval Irish *brithem* or judge:

> If he be a layman, he sits with the king or lord who employs him, if a cleric he sits with the noble abbot. He is entitled to [demand] attendance by all at the mound [of judgement] (*tulach*) and listening in silence to his exposition of law, his day's ploughing, his day's reaping, his day's fencing, his day's military assistance, immunity from distraint, his ten days' conferring of protection; these are the considerations of a judge who serves king and kingdom, apart from whatever his nobility in the matter of wealth and clients adds.

Liam Breatnach, who has edited and translated this text,[82] stresses that this means that a judge could be an official appointed either by church or state. For our purposes, the interesting item is that this judgement took place on a mound, at which law cases were heard and where attendance could include ecclesiastics, aristocrats and kings.

A second text, which has been dated to the later eleventh century, describes the ceremonies involved when the local community had decided to publicly curse its ruler. This could only be done, so it was said, after consultation with thirty laymen, thirty clerics and thirty *filid* or poets. Members of the seven different grades of poets would then climb a hill (*tulach*), specified in the text as a location where seven boundaries met. There they would gather before sunrise with their backs to a whitethorn bush and a thorn from the bush in each one's hand and they would chant the curse. If the king was guilty as charged, the ground would swallow him up, together with his wife, his son, his weapons, his horse and his dog.[83] Though some of the details may be fantastical, this text links a mound with poets who were carrying out the wishes of the community at large. As such, it provides further corroboration for the suggestion that such mounds had specific ceremonial functions in early medieval times. There is, of course, no evidence that these *tulach*-mounds were necessarily burial mounds or prehistoric monuments but in the

light of the evidence from Tara, Clogher and Knowth, it would seem perverse to exclude such a possibility. Moreover, if "mounds of judgement" were prevalent in early medieval Ireland, it seems plausible to infer that the first celebration of Easter was envisaged as having taken place in just such a location.

7. Conclusions

In the period under discussion, there are relatively few sources of historical information and the material which exists is often highly obscure. Thus, to move from the evidence available to an interpretative model almost invariably demands an imaginative leap of a kind which would be condemned in historians of better-documented periods. Early medieval historians are rarely in the fortunate position where they can state flatly that their conclusion is the only possible one and as a consequence, discussion tends to focus on the plausibility of an explanation rather than on its inherent truth. The proposals put forward in this paper are proposals and nothing more and the logical gaps in the argument are acknowledged.

From the evidence laid out above, I would conclude that there is good reason to believe that Iron Age dwellers of Co. Meath used large prehistoric mounds in their ceremonial activities in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. At least some of the worshippers had access to goods produced in the Roman world, probably from Britain and I would suggest that what information we have for Irish contacts with the empire in this period implies that these worshippers included native Irish warriors of high status. When one moves to the situation in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D., there are literary references to mounds, apparently constructed in the past, whose origins form the subject of early medieval tales. Some of these mounds were viewed as burial mounds and in a number of cases, they formed important landmarks in a local region.

We have a relatively large corpus of references to a specific mound, the *Fertae fer Féic*, in two texts of seventh-century date. In both the mound is stated to be the scene for some of the celebrations associated with the first Easter in Ireland, celebrations which took place in the presence of King Loíguire. From its name, we can infer that it was a burial place associated with men of high status and we are told that stories were told of it by an important prehistoric poet. There are undated references to the site as the scene of significant legal decisions and the seventh-

century texts state that one of the men who attended the first Easter celebrations was a man who is elsewhere identified as an important lawyer.

This site has traditionally been located on the Hill of Slane since the seventeenth century but there seems little concrete evidence to support such a view. Instead, the information which we can glean from a small number of relatively unspecific sources implies that the site is more likely to have been located south of the Boyne, possibly in the area around Navan and Trim. In the absence of a firm identification, it is suggested that one should look on the site as a putative representative of a class of prehistoric mounds incorporated into royal ceremonial centres of medieval date. Monuments of this type have been identified archaeologically on independent grounds. A possible function for such mounds is put forward on the basis of a medieval description of a "mound of judgement" where ecclesiastics and aristocrats would assemble in the presence of a king, where poets would satirise the enemies of the community and where exposition of law could take place. The suggestion that *Fertae fer Féic* could have been a mound of this type means that instead of envisaging the site of the first Easter celebrations in a political vacuum, one can posit its existence as one element in a loosely clustered pattern of settlement associated with royal power in early medieval Meath.

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18. In their earlier publications both Thomas and Warner are careful to stress

the variety of possible mechanisms by which Ireland may have been Romanised but where dates are given, these models tend to refer to the period prior to the fourth century.

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Togail Bruidne Da Derga (Medieval and Modern Irish series 8, Dublin 1936), ix-xi.

33. D.A. Binchy, "Patrick and his biographers ancient and modern", *Studia Hibernica* 2 (1962), 7-173, esp. 55-69.
34. *Adpropinquauit autem pasca in diebus illis quod pasca primum Deo in nostra Aegipto huius insolae uelut quondam in geneseon celebratum est et inuenierunt consilium ubi hoc primum pasca in gentibus ad quas missit illum Deus celebrarent, multisque super hac re consiliis iectis postremo inspiratio diuinitus sancto Patricio uissum est hanc magnam Domini sollempnitatem quasi caput omnium sollempnitatum in campo Breg maximo ubi erat regnum maximum nationum harum... liber[ar]i.* The text is from L. Bieler, *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh*, (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 10, Dublin 1979), 82:12-19. The translation, as in subsequent citations from this text, is based on Bieler's but I have made some changes.
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36. *Donec postremo ad uesperum peruenierunt ad ferti uirorum Feec quam, ut fabulae ferunt, foderunt uiri (id est serui) +feccol ferchertni+ qui fuerat unus e nouim magis profetis Bregg, fixoque ibi tentorio debeta pascae uota sacrificiumque laudis cum omni deuotione spiritus Patricius cum suis Deo altissimo secundum profetae uocem reddidit*, Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 84:8-13. According to Carney, "Three Old Irish accentual poems", 67 n. 3, *feecol ferchertni* should be *Feec ol Ferchertni* and translated "of Fíacc according to Ferchertne" and that is the position adopted here.
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39. Binchy, *Corpus,* 528:3 and note a.
40. *Félire Óengusso Céli Dé: the martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*, ed. W. Stokes (Henry Bradshaw Society 29, London 1905), 238.
41. "Brí Graige" in *The Metrical Dindshenchas: Part IV*, ed. E. Gwynn (Todd lecture series 11, Dublin 1924), 296-7; the date of the manuscript is given in *id.*, *The Metrical Dindshenchas: Part V* (Todd lecture series 12, Dublin 1935), 7.
42. C. Mooney, "Colgan's inquiries about Irish placenames", *Celtica* 1 (1946), 294-6.
43. Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 88:14-18; *Annála Rioghachta Éireann: Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters*, ed. and trans. J. O'Donovan, 7 vols (Dublin 1851), i, 167 (fn.k); *Acta Sanctorum Veteris et Maioris Scotiae seu Hiberniae* ed. J. Colgan (Louvain 1645), 190; *id.*, *Triadis Thaumaturgae* (Louvain 1647), 20 fn.60.
44. Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 92:7-12.
45. See *Additamenta* in Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 166:30-170:2. This text is dated on linguistic grounds to *c.* A.D.700, see Fergus Kelly in *ibid.*, 246.
46. See O'Donovan, *Annals of the Four Masters*, xxxi-ii, xxxvi.

47. M. O'Flanagan (ed.), *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the county of Meath collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1836* (Bray 1927), Navan July 25th.
48. Stokes, *Félire Óengusso*, 260.
49. E. Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum locorum et tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae* (Dublin 1910), 490.
50. *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, ed. J.N. Radner (Dublin 1978), 72-3.
51. *Cath Ruis na Ríg for Bóinn*, ed. E. Hogan (Todd lecture series 4, Dublin 1892), 34-5 (§25). For the date of the text see *ibid.*, xx-xxii; Á. de Paor, "The common authorship of some Book of Leinster texts", *Ériu* 9 (1921-3), 118-46.
52. *Corpus Genelogiarum Hiberniae*, ed. M.A. O'Brien (Dublin 1962), 276 (157, 4).
53. *Acallamh na Senórach*, ed. W. Stokes (Irische Texte mit Übersetzungen und Wörterbuch 4.1, Leipzig 1900), 66-7: 2345-9. For date of text, see R.D. Nuner, "The verbal system of the *Agallamh na Senórach*", *ZCP* 27 (1958-9), 23-310 esp. 230-7, 306-9.
54. See Royal Irish Academy, *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (Dublin 1983), F 93:69 - 94:60; D.A. Binchy, "Irish law tracts re-edited: I. *Coibnes Uisci Thairidne*", *Ériu* 17 (1955), 52-85, 83 (§11); J. Carney, *The poems of Blathmac son of Cú Brettan* (Irish Texts Society 47, Dublin 1964), 136; T. Charles-Edwards, "Boundaries in Irish law", in *Medieval settlement: continuity and change*, ed. P. Sawyer (London 1976), 83-90, 83 fn.3
55. Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 108:7-8, 144:23-9.
56. *The Annals of Ulster to A.D. 1131*, ed. and trans. S. MacAirt and G. MacNiocaill (Dublin 1983).
57. O'Rahilly, *Táin: First Recension*, 28:894-9, 65:2108-2113.
58. *Bethu Phátraic: the Tripartite Life of Patrick*, ed. and trans. K. Mulchrone (Dublin 1939), 66:1189-91.
59. K. McCone, *Pagan past and Christian present* (Maynooth 1989), 92, 228 quoting Binchy, *Corpus*, 528:16-20.
60. McCone, *Pagan past*, 228; O'Rahilly, *Táin: First Recension*, 2:41-49.
61. W. Stokes, "The colloquy of the two sages: *Immaccallam in dá thuarad*", *Revue Celtique* 26 (1905), 4-64, 6.
62. See *ibid.* 8 (§I, II). The association with Leinster and the Boyne occurs in the lines "*Iar srothaib Galion, iar síd mná Nechtáin, iar ríg mná Nuadat*", 18 (§X:32-8).
63. J. Carey, "An edition of the pseudo-historical prologue to the *Senchas Már*", *Ériu* 45 (1994), 1-32, 13 (§10).
64. O'Brien, *Corpus*, 272 (156b4) 120 (136a5); P. Ó Riain, *Corpus genealogiarum sanctorum Hiberniae* (Dublin 1985), 20 (§122).
65. H. Wagner, "The archaic *Dind Ríg* poem and related problems", *Ériu* 28 (1977), 1-16; D. Greene, *Fingal Rónáin and other stories* (Medieval and Modern series 16, Dublin 1955).
66. This is consistent with an eighth-century text about the duties of poets: the highest grade of poet was someone who not only knew approximately 350 compositions, he was also knowledgeable in historical science and in the jurisprudence of Irish law. See L. Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar: the poetic grades in early Irish law* (Early Irish law series 2, Dublin 1987), 77, 102-3 (§2).
67. Binchy, *Corpus*, 352:26-31; see also *id.*, "Distraint in Irish law", *Celtica* x (1973), 22-71, 28.

68. Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 88: 14-18; 132: 31-134: 6.
69. *The triads of Ireland*, ed. K. Meyer (Todd lecture series 13, Dublin 1906), 2-3 (§21); see also F. Kelly, *A guide to early Irish law*, (Early Irish Law series 3, Dublin 1988), 242.
70. Mulchrone, *Bethu Phátraic,* 155: 3125; *The Annals of Tigernach*, ed. W. Stokes (rep. Felinfach 1993) and *Chronicon Scottorum*, ed. W.M. Hennessy (Rolls series 46, London 1866), *sub anno* 504.
71. Eogan, "Prehistoric and Early Historic culture change", 119.
72. Anderson, *Columba*, 38 (I 14).
73. See F.J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* (London 1973), 275-6, 281.
74. *Kannanus episcopus, quem ordinauit Patricius in primo pasca hi ferti uirorum Feicc qui portauit secum ignem primum benedictum ac ceriales lucernas primas Patricii de manibus domi<ni> ut accenderet fumum benedictum in oculos ac nares hominum gentilium et regis Loiguiri et magorum illius*, Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 130:17-22.
75. Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 138:33 - 140:2; Mulchrone, *Bethu Phátraic*, 60:1095.
76. See RIA, *Dictionary of Irish language*, D 448:33-75; Lewis and Short's *Latin Dictionary* (Oxford 1879), 1913.
77. *Tochmarc Ferbe*, ed. E. Windisch (Irische Texte mit Übersetzungen und Wörterbuch 3.2, Leipzig 1897), 445-556, 516:756-8.
78. Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 146:26-30; Mulchrone, *Bethu Phátraic*, 66:1205-67:1210.
79. R.B. Warner, "The archaeology of early historic Irish kingship" in *Power and politics in early medieval Britain and Ireland*, ed. S.T. Driscoll and M.R. Nieke (Edinburgh 1988), 47-68, 57.
80. Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 132:3-8, Anderson, *Columba*, 184-6 (III 3); S. Connolly, "Vita Prima Brigitae: background and historical value", *JRSAI* 119 (1989), 5-59, 23 (§39); R.I. Best and O. Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin 1929), 128:4068-70. For a discussion of the *óenach Tailten*, see D.A. Binchy, "The fair of Tailtiu and the feast of Tara", *Ériu* 18 (1958), 113-38 and for a more generalised discussion of traditions relating to the site, M. Mac Néill, *The festival of Lughnasa* (Oxford 1962), 311-338.
81. See Mac Néill, *Lughnasa*, 316-8, maps 14-16.
82. L. Breatnach, "Lawyers in early Ireland" in *Brehons, serjeants and attorneys: studies in the history of the Irish legal profession*, ed. D. Hogan and W.N. Osborough (Dublin 1990), 1-13, 8.
83. *Mittelirische Verslehren*, ed. R. Thurneysen (Irische Texte mit Übersetzungen und Wörterbuch 3.1, Leipzig 1891, 1-182, 96-7 (§155); see also Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar*, 140. For date of text, see G. Murphy, *Early Irish metrics* (Dublin 1961), vi. I would like to thank Dr Colmán Etchingham of St. Patrick's College Maynooth, for this reference.