

## HOW RELIABLE ARE THE ANNALS AS A SOURCE FOR THE HISTORY OF THE UÍ NEILL?

by the Uí Néill Study Group (1995)

### Introduction

The Uí Néill are one of the best documented royal powers in early medieval Europe. The range of texts referring to this group is extremely wide, varying both in the nature of the sources involved and in the dates at which they were produced. For the political chronology of the period prior to the Vikings, the most important of these texts are the annals and it was decided, therefore, that in 1995 the Uí Néill Study Group would concentrate on the nature of the annalistic coverage of the Uí Néill in the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Annals of Tigernach*.

In 1995 the Uí Néill Study Group consisted of the following individuals:

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### Historiographical survey

[1.1] **Kelleher 1963:** Everything up to c. A.D. 590 in the annals and a large number of entries from A.D. 590 to 735 is either freshly composed or wholly revised at a point not earlier than A.D. 850-900. Particularly suspect are references to the kingship of Tara, the rise and identity of the Uí Néill and the history of Armagh & Clonmacnoise.

*Conclusions:* (i) This suggestion does not appear to accord with the varying titles given to Uí Néill kings as outlined in [3.4] or with the minimal (and inconsistent) coverage of the sixth century as indicated by the bar-diagram in [3.1]. On the other hand, the concentration on the key ancestor-figure of the Southern Uí Néill on the one hand (Diarmait mac Cerbaill) and that of the Cenél nEógain (Muirchertach Mac Ercae) on the other, may indicate a desire on the part of the core-text compiler(s) to outline the "national" origins of the Uí Néill.

[1.2] **Bannerman 1968, 1974:** has identified an "Iona chronicle" which lies behind the *Annals of Ulster* (henceforth AU) and the *Annals of Tigernach* (henceforth AT). Many of these entries occur in both AU and AT but others are limited to one of the two compilations. Some of these

unique entries may also derive from the "Iona chronicle". There are 11 Scottish references in AT which are not in AU, for example and 46 Scottish references in AU which are not in AT.

Certain characteristics distinguish Scottish entries from those dealing with Ireland: Scottish forts and strongholds are frequently mentioned as are drowning accidents and shipwrecks and the exact length of the reign of kings of Dal Riata is often specified. (This is not done consistently for Irish kings.)

Bannerman identifies Iona as the probable location for the recording of this Scottish material on the grounds that there is a careful records of events at Iona (including death-notice for the leaders of the Iona community). There are also known contacts between Bangor and Iona which would explain what he saw as the later connections of the chronicle with Bangor.

There is evidence for the contemporary nature of Scottish entries between A.D. 686 & 740 when many entries give precise dates for events.

*Conclusions:* (i) This article outlines one possible methodology for the identification of earlier annalistic texts which might lie behind the present compilations.

(ii) The existence of an "Iona chronicle", possibly recorded contemporaneously in the period A.D. 686-740, appears to be beyond question.

[1.3] **Smyth 1972:** The earliest annals are ecclesiastical, drawing from material written into tables for the calculation of Easter. Prior to A.D. 550, there are 26 ecclesiastical obits in AU of which 16 are in the north-east. Marked expansion in the political coverage of north-east Ireland occurs from A.D. 500 onwards. This includes coverage of Ulaid kings. Smyth suggests that there may, therefore, be a joint Iona/Ulaid chronicle.

c. A.D. 740 this chronicle expands its coverage of Ireland as a whole. Smyth suggests that this expansion may be due to the removal of the chronicle from Iona to the Ulster mainland.

There is hostility between the Ulaid and the Uí Néill in this period and there are thus very few monasteries in the lands of the Ulaid who would keep a pro-Uí Néill chronicle. We know that there was an ecclesiastical alliance between Iona (which was pro-Uí Néill) and Bangor (which was in Ulaid territory.) Smyth suggests, therefore, that Iona is the most likely setting for a pro-Uí Néill, pro-Ulaid chronicle.

We know from Adomnán's *Life of Columba* that Iona had contacts with areas as far away as Leinster. There are, for example, references to two clerics from Taghmon, Co. Wexford. The obits of these same men occur in AU and, therefore, presumably, in the Iona chronicle. Smyth concludes, that the Iona chronicle was not limited to areas or peoples close to Iona and could include at least some entries dealing with areas far away.

Conclusions: (i) The source which tells us of the alliance between Iona and Bangor - Adomnán's Life of Columba (I 49) - mentions it specifically in the context of a fight between the secular powers of Ulaid and Uí Néill. Iona's ecclesiastical alliances, therefore, cannot be used as evidence for political alliances between secular powers.

(ii) The guarantor list to Cáin Adomnáin (drawn up c. A.D. 697) identifies many of the leading kingdoms of Ireland as well as the Scottish king of the Picts as signatories to a law tract which benefits Iona. At the end of the seventh century, therefore, Iona had national Irish interests. If the number of entries dealing with Ireland as a whole increases, this does not necessarily mean that the chronicle has moved from Iona.

(iii) The bar diagram of Uí Néill entries in [3.1] shows no obvious change in direction in 740. If there is a change in the nature of the core-chronicle at this date, it is not one which affects the coverage of the Uí Néill.

[1.4] Hughes 1972: Hughes underlined the unique passages in both AU & AT, exposing the substantial number of entries which are common to both. As a result of this exercise, she concluded that both AU & AT went back ultimately to an original core-text which she called the "Chronicle of Ireland". Both AU & AT were independent recensions of this core-text. On the question of whether one could identify core-text entries which now only occur in AU or AT (i.e. they do not occur in both), Hughes suggests that we will never be able to do this in all cases; we will only be able to note general tendencies.

Hughes' method of identifying an annalistic chronicle was to isolate a concentration of entries over a long period from a particular area, indicating the keeping of local records. Thus, in order to identify an earlier annalistic text incorporated into the present compilations, one must be able to map the distribution of sites and identify the peoples involved.

Between A.D. 740 & A.D. 775 an Uí Néill chronicle was compiled from two chronicles kept at Iona and Bangor. From c. A.D. 800, contemporary entries were being added to this chronicle which shows a fusion of Uí Néill interests with those of Armagh. Minor chronicles which fed into this were Lismore annals from A.D. 700 and annals kept at Clonmacnoise.

Core-text entries cover all of the northern half of Ireland in geographical extent: the Uí Néill were the most likely power to be interested in such a wide range. There also appears to be a particular concentration on the peoples and ecclesiastical settlements of Mag mBreg. By examining the formula relating to burning there was also a contemporary Uí Néill annalist working between A.D. 749 & A.D. 757 and another between A.D. 775 & A.D. 790.

Conclusions: (i) Hughes' method of identifying a local chronicle differs from that of Bannerman in that he based his analysis on unique type of events covered while she was concerned with the geographical areas covered by the entries.

(ii) Hughes identifies a contemporary Uí Néill chronicle compiled with additions from Iona and Bangor in period between A.D. 740 and A.D. 775 and marked in the eight years A.D. 749-57 by specific formulae relating to burning. This is apparently different from the contemporary Uí Néill chronicle which she sees as being kept from c.A.D. 800 onwards, which shows a fusion of interests between the Uí Néill and Armagh.

#### Unique entries in AU & AT

[2.1] Gwynn 1958: Cathal mac Maghnusa wrote the text of the Annals of Ulster prior to 1498. Of the two manuscript copies which survive, the major portion of MS. H.8.1 (=A) and all of Rawlinson MS B 489 (=B) were copied by Ruaidhrí Ua Luinín who died in 1528. We do not know from which sources Cathal compiled his annals or to what extent Ruaidhrí may have added new material.

The original texts were copied by Cathal mac Maghnusa with the utmost fidelity so that one can trace the development of Old Irish forms through the centuries.

#### [2.2] Uí Néill entries unique to AU

There are 23 entries which occur in AU but not in AT; these include 10 entries which cover the same matter as entries in AT but there are no obvious parallels between the entries in the two compilations. Some of these refer to a specific source:

e.g. of the 13 entries in the first hand of the manuscript which cite Book of Cuamu as a source, (running from 467 to 599), entries in AU 467, 468 & 471 imply that Ailill Molt (of Connacht) is king of Tara. In an entry from the same source under 482, reference is made to prehistoric figures of the Uí Néill line.

Conclusions: (i) References to the Book of Cuamu show that a number of different texts went to make up the Annals of Ulster. This may not have been done by Cathal himself but by a predecessor on whom Cathal drew.

(ii) Since Cathal could draw on texts with good Old Irish forms, there must have been some medieval annalists from Old Irish period up to the fifteenth century who copied texts absolutely faithfully without modernising forms. Since the compiler of the Annals of Tigernach did

modernise forms (see [2.3]), as well as translating much Latin material into Irish, there are at least two different approaches to the creation of annals in early medieval Ireland.

(iii) The entries from the *Book of Cuana* refer to the very early period.

(iv) Later annalists appear to have interpolated entries under wide variety of dates, i.e. they did not simply copy blocks of entries covering a span of years.

(v) Entries in AU & AT which show no obvious verbal parallels but which cover the same events are concentrated in the fifth and sixth-century sections.

**[2.3] MacNeill 1914:** Under the year AT 1088, there is a sentence which attributes the compilation of the source to Tigernach, an individual who has been identified with Tigernach Ua Brain, *airchinnech* or lay-ruler of the church of Clonmacnoise and member of the *Síl Muireadaig*, the ruling dynasty amongst the eleventh-century Connachta. MacNeill would argue that the lack of unity in the text, together with the wide variety of sources quoted, indicates that Tigernach's role was confined to the compilation of a number of extant chronicles. Such earlier texts, if they existed, are not named in AT.

The language of AT has been extensively modernised and one cannot, therefore, trace the development of Old Irish through an examination of its entries.

#### **[2.4] Uí Néill entries which are unique to AT**

There are 38 entries concerning the Uí Néill which occur in AT but not in AU; these include 10 entries which deal with matter which is also covered in AU but there are no obvious verbal parallels between the entries in the two compilations. No specific text is cited as the source for these unique entries (but see [2.3]).

Conclusions: (i) In this collection of entries there are 11 victories for the Uí Néill and 4 defeats; 9 deaths of Uí Néill dynasts and 11 references to Uí Néill figures who reign, usually as king of Ireland. These figures imply that the unique entries in AT display partisan interest in the Uí Néill.

(ii) The core-text states that Áed mac Aimmirech died in AU 598. AT states that Áed mac Aimmirech was in his 19th year as king when he died but also states that he assumed kingship in AU 586, i.e. AT contradicts itself. This fact supports MacNeill's conclusion that AT is a compilation of different sources.

(iii) The pattern of unique AT references does not parallel the pattern of Uí Néill entries in the core-text, as illustrated in [3.1]. Instead, there are a relatively large number of fifth and early sixth century entries among the unique AT corpus.

(iv) Entries in AU & AT which show no obvious verbal parallels but which cover the same events are concentrated in the fifth and sixth century entries.

#### **[2.5] There are a number of instances where AT adds verse to core text entries:**

e.g. AU 561: 3 verses on battle of Cúl Dreimne. Details which occur in verse but not in text include presence of Baetán (son of Conn in a core-text entry under 563, but a son of Ninnid of Cenél Conaill in a core-text entry under 586); 2 verses are Christian prayers, 1 verse is in praise of Baetán.

e.g. A.U. 563 verse on battle of Móin Daire Lothair. Verse gives names of Uí Néill participants which is not included in prose. Verse is description of battle.

e.g. AU 573: on death of Colmán Bec son of Diarmait mac Cerbaill. Verse is eulogy of deceased.

e.g. AU 597: on death of Cumscach son of Áed. Verse is prayer that Áed son of Aimmire (Cumscach's father) should be killed in vengeance - this appears to contradict sense of prose.

e.g. AU 598: on death of Áed son of Aimmire. 1 verse is prophecy by wave of his death; 1 verse is lament attributed to his wife.

e.g. AU 604: verse on death of Colmán Rímid, describing who killed him.

e.g. AU 604: verse on death of Áed Sláine, describing events. Verse refers to involvement of Tuath Tuirbe which is not mentioned in prose.

e.g. AU 612: verse on death of Conall Laeg Breg, apparently nature's lament for deceased.

e.g. AU 618: verse on death of Fergus son of Colmán Mór, describing reactions to death. Verse adds detail of association of this event with Cuilline which is not found in prose.

e.g. AU 629: verse on battle of Dún Ceithirn describing appearance of dead on battle-field.

e.g. AU 651: verse on death of two sons of Blathmac son of Áed Sláine which describes circumstances of death. Verse identifies deceased as descended from Cerball, a detail not given in prose.

e.g. AU 671: verse on death of Sechnusach son of Blathmac. Verse identifies wealth of deceased.

e.g. AU 695: on death of Finsnechta. 2 verses attributed to Moling, 1 = prayer for Finsnechta. 1 = eulogy for him (?); 1 verse attributed to Adomnán: describing generosity of Finsnechta.

e.g. AU 716: verses on battle of Almain. 1 verse attributed to Cù Bretan son of Congusa = prophetic description of events which led up to battle (these are not given in prose); 1 verse attributed to Nuadu which gives grandiloquent account of victory. This last appears to reflect Laigin interests rather than those of Uí Néill.

AU 738: Verse attributed to Samthann = prophecy of royal deaths; 1 verse by someone apparently anti-Laigin and pro-Uí Néill.

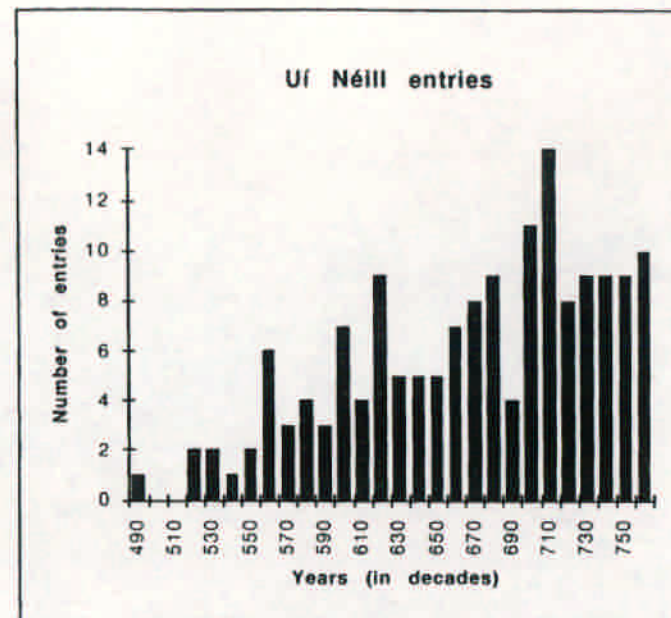
Conclusions: (i) In 6 cases out of 15, the verse gives details which are not found in accompanying prose text. One might conclude that the annalist(s) often draw(s) on verse to provide himself with extra details but on occasion, verses are added without adding the relevant material to the prose.

(ii) Prophecy is said to be one of the functions of the filid and a number of the verses are written as prophecies. Other verses are laments for dead or descriptions of battles, normally written in support of Uí Néill. It would not appear that the verses added by the annalist(s) were written specifically for inclusion in an annalistic text, but rather that the verses are an independent genre, which has been exploited by later compilers.

#### Core-text entries

[N.B.: Core-text is here limited to those entries which occur in both AU & AT.]

[3.1] The following is a bar diagram showing the distribution of Uí Néill entries in the core-text:



The bar diagram shows relatively few entries in the sixth century, a slight increase between 600 & 630, followed by a lull in 630s & 640s. A steady rise between 650 & 700 is followed by a more or less constant coverage between 700 & 763.

Conclusions: (i) The core-text did not cover the sixth century in detail and concentrates on the figures of Diarmait son of Cerball and Muirchertach Mac Ercae.

(ii) There is no obvious break in Uí Néill coverage c. A.D. 740 where a change in the nature of the core-text has been postulated by Smyth and Hughes.

[3.2] The core-text has entries which are clearly non-contemporary:

- e.g. AU 628: the killing of two sons of Áed Sláine. Congal king of Mag mBreg & Ailill the Harper ancestor of Sil Dluthaigh  
AU 643: here it is uncertain who reigned after Domnall.

(b) Core-text has entries which are probably non-contemporary:

- e.g. AU 733: Birth of Donnchad son of Domnall

*Conclusion:* The core-text is itself a compilation, drawing on a variety of earlier materials.

[3.3] The language of the core-text: AT only uses *filius* once in its version of a core-text entry; in all other cases, it uses the Irish equivalent *mac*. In the AU version of a core-text entry, *filius* is used 5 times in the sixth century, 14 times in the seventh century and 11 times in the eighth century. There are also 7 examples in the AU versions of core-text entries of the formula *filius...filius* (son of X, son of Y) and 5 examples where the genealogical background of an individual is given in a form which uses both *mac* and *filius*. Very frequently, however, AU uses the word *mac* to describe an individual in what is otherwise a Latin entry (16 times in the sixth century, 40 times in the seventh and 39 times in the eighth). In comparing *uí, cenél síl* (Irish) with Latin *nepos, genus*, AU tends to use Latin while AT uses Irish when reporting core-text information. There are, however examples of AU using Irish in core-text entries e.g.

- uí/húa*: used in AU in 572, 590 ... 714, 718, 724, 738.  
*cenél*: used in AU in 742, 755, 762.

In comparing *tí* with *rex*, AU normally uses the Latin form while AT normally uses the Irish form. There are however, three occasions when AU uses Irish *tí*:

- e.g. 572 ... 743, 743

In core-text entries, AU never uses Irish *cath* while AT uses Latin *bellum* only twice.

AU occasionally uses Irish prepositions:

- i*: 520, 562, 597 ... 600, 604, 628, 635, 681, 681, 698 ... 739, 742  
*for*: 528, 535, 561, 562, 563, 590 ... 600 ... 704, 707, 718, 764  
*re/ria*: (533, 535 = Middle Irish *ria*), 562, 563, 590 ... 612, 635 ... 764  
*eter*: 535  
*la*: 558, 568, 597, 598 ... 628, 676, 681 ... 717, 753, 765  
*oc*: 586  
*o*: 604  
*da*: 666 ... 721, 755

AU uses Irish definite article *na* (the Middle Irish form) in 563.

AU uses Irish conjunction *ocus* in 520.

AU occasionally uses Irish nouns (apart from *mac*):

- tech*: 635  
*muintir*: 739

AU uses Irish ordinal number *da* in 561, 572.

AU occasionally uses Irish phrases:

(NB! Prepositions etc. which occur in the following phrases are not listed in the entries given above):

- AU 563: *co ndib Cruithnibh nod.fich fri Cruithniu.*  
AU 604: *i faethgi m. Meccnaen.*  
AU 628: *ecc Loch Threitni ar Fremuin .i. Congal ri Breg ocus Ailill Cruidire senathair Sil Dluthaigh.*  
AU 714: *(Bellum) imesech (in Campo) Singitte uc Bili Thenedh i nAsal*  
AU 714: *Coscrad .i. Garbsalcha i mMidiu.*  
AU 721: *Innred Laighen la Fergal ocus maidm inna Boraime ocus maidm n-aggiallne Laghen fri Fergal.*  
AU 751: *(Fergal filii Fogartaigh regis) deisceird Breg.*  
AU 756: *Slogad Laighen la Domnall fri Niall co rabadur i Maigh Muirtheimne.*

*Conclusions:* (i) The AU annalist reports core-text entries predominantly in Latin while AT reports them predominantly in Irish. Since there are relatively frequent examples of Latin words in AT and relatively few examples of Irish words in AU, one concludes that much of core text was probably in Latin. However since both AU and AT use a wide variety of Irish words in the sixth century it may be that more of the entries for the sixth century were written in Irish in the original core-text.

(ii) Of the Irish words used, the Middle Irish form of the definite article *na* rather than Old Irish *innu* was used in an entry under the year 563. Similarly, the later form of the preposition *ria* rather than the earlier *re* was used in entries under the years 533 & 535. It would appear, therefore, that at least some of the entries in Irish in the sixth century core-text are likely to have been composed at a late date. Since one of the most diagnostic changes in the Irish language are changes in verbal forms, the relative lack of verbal forms in the Irish extracts in AU make it difficult to determine whether the majority of Irish entries from seventh and eighth century strata are Old Irish and/or whether they pre-date the Middle Irish phrases entered under the sixth century. On the other hand, no evidence for the modifying of final unstressed vowels (as occurs in the Middle Irish period) was noted in the seventh and eighth century entries.

(iii) It may be that some of the Irish words in AU come from a desire to refer to the genealogy of Irish individuals or their titles by Irish forms eg. the use of mac (passim) and the title deisceird Breg in AU 751.

(iv) When AT adds information it is almost always in Irish. This would support the conclusion that there was a tendency to switch from an earlier usage of Latin to a later usage which is Irish.

[3.4] The title "king of Ireland" occurs in the core-text but it is rare:

AU 642: Death of Domnall son of Áed, king of Ireland

AU 703: Death of Loingsech son of Óengus, king of Ireland at the battle of Corann

(b) The title "king of Tara" occurs in the core-text:

AU 586: The killing of Baetan mac Nimid, king of Tara

AU 671: The killing of Sechnusach son of Blathmac, king of Tara

AU 710: The sudden death of Congal, son of Fergus, king of Tara

AU 763: The death of Domnall son of Murchad, king of Tara

AU 765: (Death of ?) Flaithbertach king of Tara in religious life

(c) There is one core-text entry to which the title "king of Tara" has been added in AU and "king of Ireland" has been added in AT:

AU 695: Finsnechta king of Tara and his son Bresal were killed by Áed son of Dluthach and by Congalach son of Conaing

AT: Finsnechta, son of Dunchad, son of Áed Sláine, king of Ireland....

(d) There are other titles in the core-text which also appear to imply an important political role for those so termed:

AU 621: Death of Aengus son of Colmán Mór, king of Uí Néill \*

AU 715: The killing of Murchad son of Diarmuid, king of Uí Néill

AU 747: The death of Áed Muinderg son of Flaithbertach, king of the North

\* This title is introduced by ḡ in AU, indicating its origin as a gloss.

(e) There are references to kingship in the core-text which are unspecific in nature but which apparently refer to some form of Uí Néill over-kingship:

AU 565: Death of Domnall m. Muirchertach (of Cenél nEógain) to whom Airmire son of Sétna succeeded.

AU 649: Here it is uncertain who reigned after Domnall....4 kings reigned in mingled rule

AU 672: Cendfaelad son of Blathmac begins to reign

AU 675: Finsnechta begins to reign

AU 689: Finsnechta returns to the kingship

AU 696: Loingsech begins to reign

\*\*AU 700: Aurthuile was expelled from the kingship and proceeds to Britain

AU 705: Congal son of Fergus begins to reign

AU 714: Fogartach descendant of Cernach was expelled from the kingship and proceeds to Britain

AU 716: Fogartach descendant of Cernach reigns again

AU 763: Niall Frossach begins to reign

\*\* Aurthuile is king of Cenél nEógain according to AT while another descendant of Crunnmael, Flann mc. Mael Tuile is also said to be king of Cenél nEógain in an addition by AT to a core-text entry under the year 700. There is also a core-text entry in 727 which refers to a Flann son of Aurthuile in the context of a battle between Cenél nEógain and Cenél Conaill. It would thus appear that this "kingship" is probably a Cenél nEógain kingship but not, so far as we can tell, an Uí Néill over-kingship.

*Conclusions:* (i) One explanation for the different use of titles is that they all may have a specific function i.e. that one could be king of Tara without achieving kingship of Ireland. "King of Tara" may be an intermediate form of over-king who has some connection with Tara and some jurisdiction over subordinate kings while "king of Ireland" may reflect the ambition to attain something higher, even if this was not achieved in practice. Alternatively, it may be that the "king of Tara" was a man who could draw on the legendary prestige of Tara while the "king of Ireland" reflected greater military might and/or the recognition of superiority by provincial kings.

(ii) (c) poses a problem with these suggestions in that the two titles appear to be interpreted as being synonyms.

(iii) Another explanation is that different titles reflect different strata in the text. It is noticeable that the two instances of "king of Ireland" both refer to Cenél Conaill kings while the title "king of the Uí Néill" refers to Clann Cholmáin kings.

(iv) All except one of the unspecific references to ruling and to kingship refer to what are known in other sources as "high kings of Ireland". The single exception is Aurthuile in 700 whose expulsion from "the kingship" appears to refer to a Cenél nEógain kingship.

(v) In at least two instances, (listed under [c] and [d.1]), the title of the ruler appears to have been added to the core-entry at some subsequent date.

**[3.5] There are entries in the core-text which reflect Uí Néill propaganda:**

AU 738: The battle of Áth Senaig where "the descendants of Conn enjoyed a tremendous victory when in extraordinary fashion, they rout, trample, crush, overthrow and destroy their Lagen adversaries".

**(b) There are entries in the core-text which probably reflect Uí Néill propaganda**

AU 738: Cernach son of Fogartach is treacherously killed by his own criminal adherents and the calves of cows and women long bewailed him.

Conclusion: (i) At least one element which went to make up the core-text was a document whose writers favoured the Uí Néill

Conclusions

The overall conclusion of the Uí Néill Study Group was that the annals have proven to be of less historical importance than we assumed, prior to undertaking this exercise. There is extensive evidence that the material on the Uí Néill which survives has been extensively edited by later generations of annalists although we did not agree with the specific conclusions of Kelleher whose argument appears to be too sweeping. Specifically, although individual entries may have been recorded contemporaneously, the collection of Uí Néill entries in AU & AT appears to have been compiled at a later date. This was indicated among other things, by the wide variety of titles given to Uí Néill kings and the preponderance of Irish in the fifth and sixth century entries.

The majority of Uí Néill entries in both AU & AT are what we have termed "core-text" entries; in other words, they occur in both compilations. Analysis of this core-text material has led us to the conclusion that it, in itself, was a compilation of earlier texts and that at least one of the sources consulted was propaganda written in favour of the Uí Néill.

Entries on the Uí Néill which are unique to AU show similar characteristics in that there is evidence that a number of earlier sources were consulted and unique entries include references to prehistoric dynasts of the Uí Néill line. Similarly, the unique Uí Néill entries in AT include both verse and prose written in favour of the Uí Néill. Contradictions noted in this unique material strongly implied that it too had been compiled from a variety of sources as did the fact that a number of the poems had clearly been drawn from more than one source.

As a group we find that this exercise has led us to concur with a sentiment expressed by Kelleher in 1963:

"If by comparison with what exists in other fields, we find that in ours the seventeenth-century job of scholarship was never done, that the eighteenth-century job was not more than faintly and occasionally attempted, that the nineteenth-century job was not even consecutively outlined and that the twentieth-century job still leaves much to be desired even within its own frame of reference, there is also the fact that we do not have to expend a large portion of our limited manpower in undoing the work of our predecessors. There is work for all more than enough for every recruit we can enlist and for the most part it can be work of sound originality. None of us will be forced to spend three-quarters of our working life checking other men's footnotes.

Anybody in the field, with a reasonable amount of imagination and enterprise, can make real discoveries, significant contributions. There is no corner where you can dig and not strike pay-dirt. We should always remember that we are the fortunate generation".

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