

## **Brian Boru Lecture Series**

# **Brian Boru growth to kingship of Ireland: the accruing of power through various strategies**

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# Strategic planning of Brian's family

## 1) relationships with the church

- As part of their climb to dominate north Munster and beyond, Brian's dad Cennétig, his brother Mathgamain and he himself appear to have had strategy of getting family relatives appointed to leadership of important local churches.
- The career of Brian's brother Marcán is particularly instructive.

Emly was a key church for the Eóganacht Cashel (traditional rulers of Cashel).

Mathgamain (Brian's brother) is king of Cashel by 964

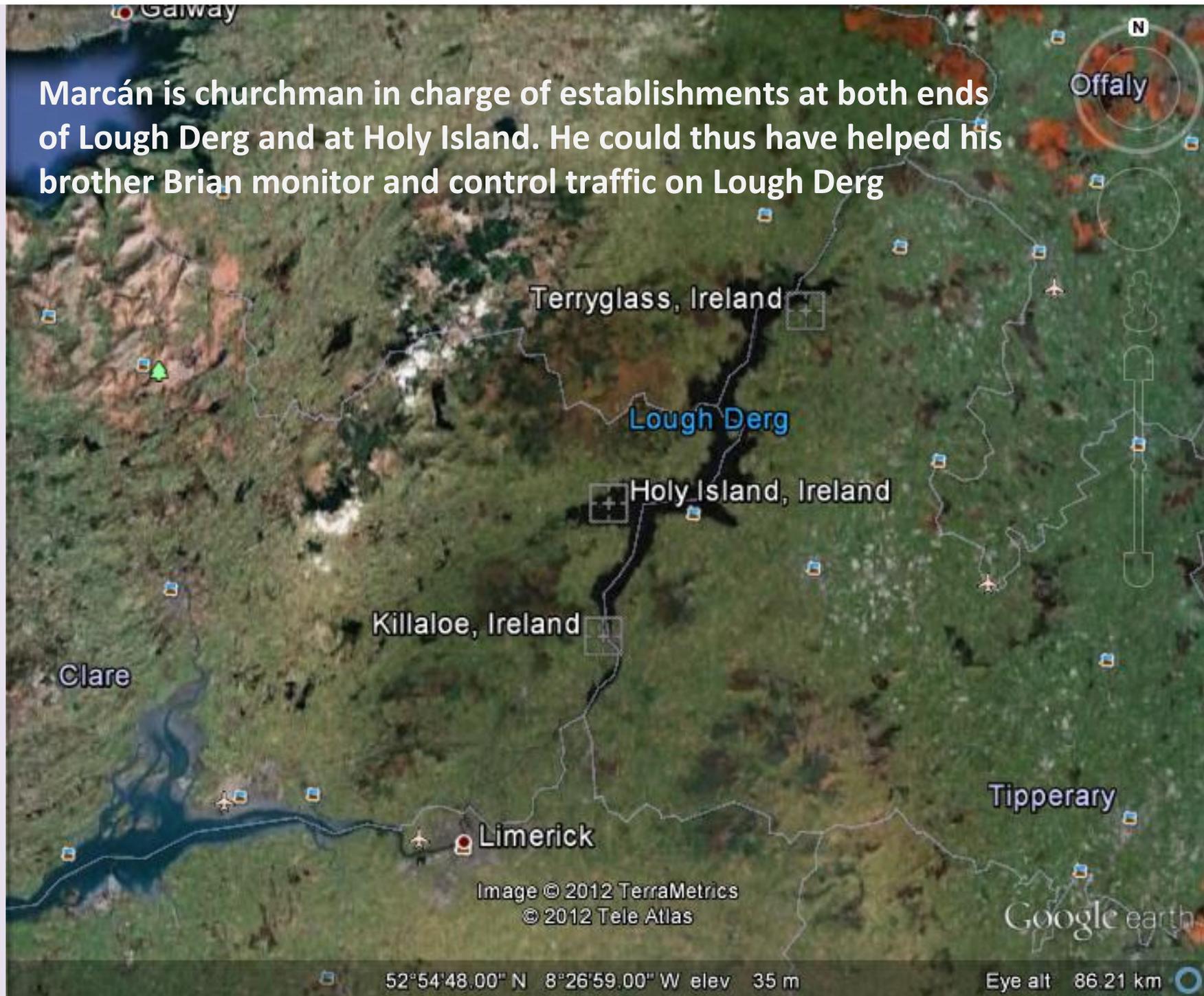
Brian, working first with his brother and then inheriting his throne after Mathgamain died in 976, took hostages from Emly in 987.

Marcán, as another brother, is a career churchman and is recorded as head of church of Emly by 989/990 although by 995 Marcán had lost the headship to a member of the Eoganacht Áine – a family centred on area around Bruff.

Marcán may have simply moved on. In 991, the abbot of Killaloe, Scandlán mac Taidc dies and his successor was apparently Marcán. This church is beside Dál Cais centre of Cenn Corad (Kincora). When he died in 1010 Marcán was abbot of Terryglass, Inis Cealtra and Killaloe and he was remembered as a cleric with over-arching authority within Munster:

Chronicon Scotorum 1010: Marcán son of Cennétig, **head of Mumu (Munster) on the part of the clergy**, rested.

Marcán is churchman in charge of establishments at both ends of Lough Derg and at Holy Island. He could thus have helped his brother Brian monitor and control traffic on Lough Derg



# To what extent was this new?

- 8 abbots of Killaloe were all part of wider Dál Cais family network. (Marcán is succeeded by the son of a first-cousin).
- **Muccinis** (Pig Island) – the patron saint Riaguil of this church was a member of a Dál Cais dynasty
- On **Inis Cealtra/Holy Island**, bishop Diarmait (who died in 953) and Mael Gorm mac Mail Chellaig who died in 969 were both members of Dál Cais.
- In **Scattery Island**, there were Dál Cais leaders in the 100 years after Brian's death at Clontarf but prior to that, of the 17 abbots whose obits are recorded in the annals between 797 and 1129, the associations of five are unknown, three belong with certainty and three others with probability to Ui Fidgente, one is certainly and two others are probably Ciarraige Luachra, one may be Corcu Baiscind.

In other words, churchmen from the Dál Cais dynasties were very prominent in lists of heads of Lough Derg churches but down at the mouth of the Shannon, local families of either side of the estuary dominate leadership of Scattery Island. This pattern of powerful local families seeking to control churches as well as kingdoms appears to be common throughout Ireland.

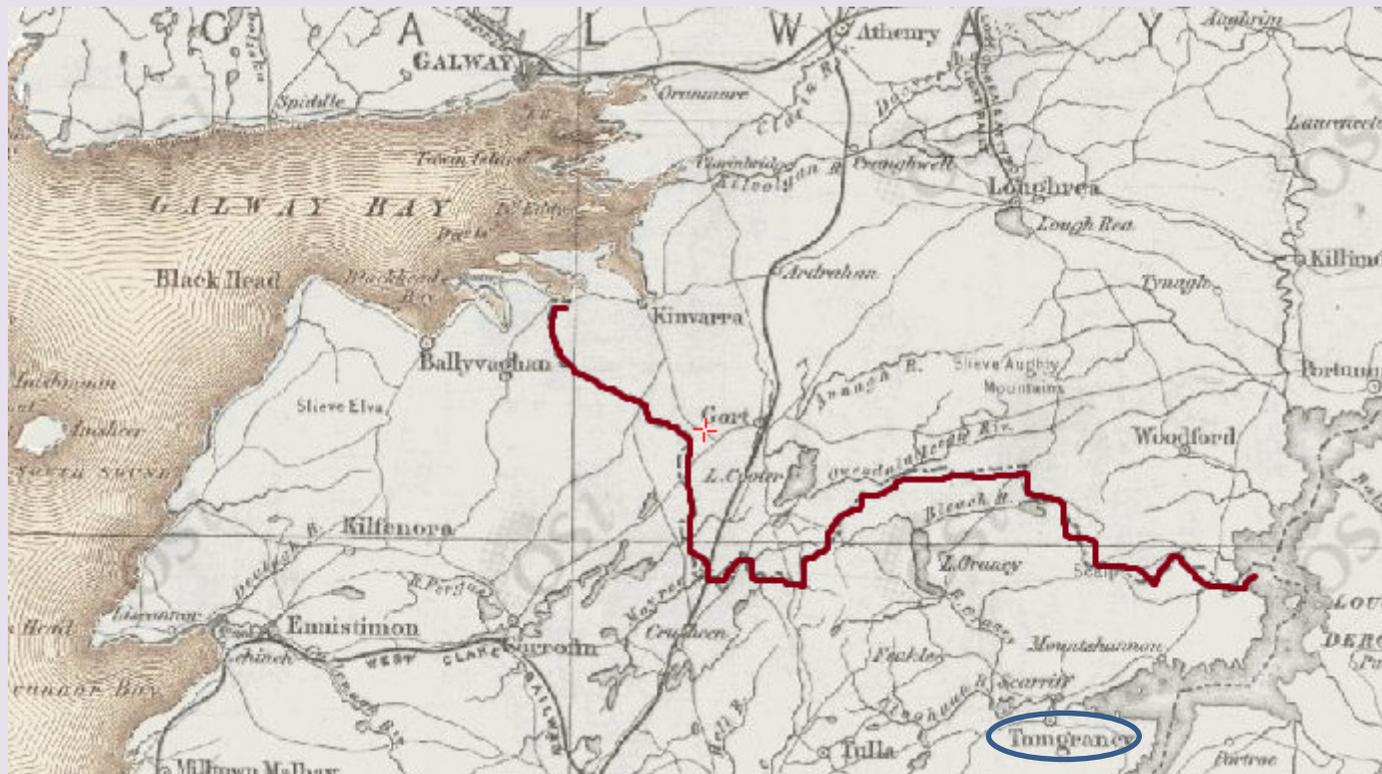


# Tuamgraney

- Church leaders at Tuamgraney have close connections with Uí Fhiachrach Aidne of Kilmacduagh (South Galway bay); approximately 8 of its 14 known leaders between AD 752 and AD 1100 belong to Uí Fhiachrach Aidne families.
- Rebachin mac Mothlai, 'abbot of Tuaim Greine and king of Dál Cais' died in 937. His name is listed in the Dál Cais regnal list but no genealogy for him survives.
- Other Dal Cais clerics and abbots of Tuamgraney were:
  - Donngal mac Beóáin (ob. 1003) belonged to Ui Sallamain, - a branch of the Uí Blait but only remotely related to the Uí Thairdelbaig (Brian's family).
  - Grandson of Donngal, Cormac mac Meic Bethad meic Donngaile, died as abbot of Tomgraney in 1078.
- NB! 4 abbots of Tuamgraney from Cormac Ua Cillin (ob. 966), Conall Ua Cillin (ob. 1026), Loignsech Ua Flaithneain (ob. 1042) and Mac Craith Ua Flaithneain (ob. 1100) were abbots of both Clonmacnoise and Tuamgraney.

**A linkage between Clonmacnoise and Tuamgraney would seem to pre-suppose ability to travel the Shannon freely.**
- The early record for Tuamgraney church leaders ceases after 1100 and only at a much later date did a Dal Cais dynastic family, the Uí Grada (O'Grady), monopolise the headship once again.

The kingdom of Uí Fhiachrach Aidne is based around the medieval diocese of Kilmacduagh (west of Gort) and contains the modern towns of Kinvarra, Gort and Clarinbridge



NB. The modern diocese of Kilmacduagh is rather different because of the development of Galway city and amalgamation with the medieval diocese of Kilfenora

# Strategic planning of Brian's family:

## 2) marriages of Dál Cais sons with daughters of important surrounding families

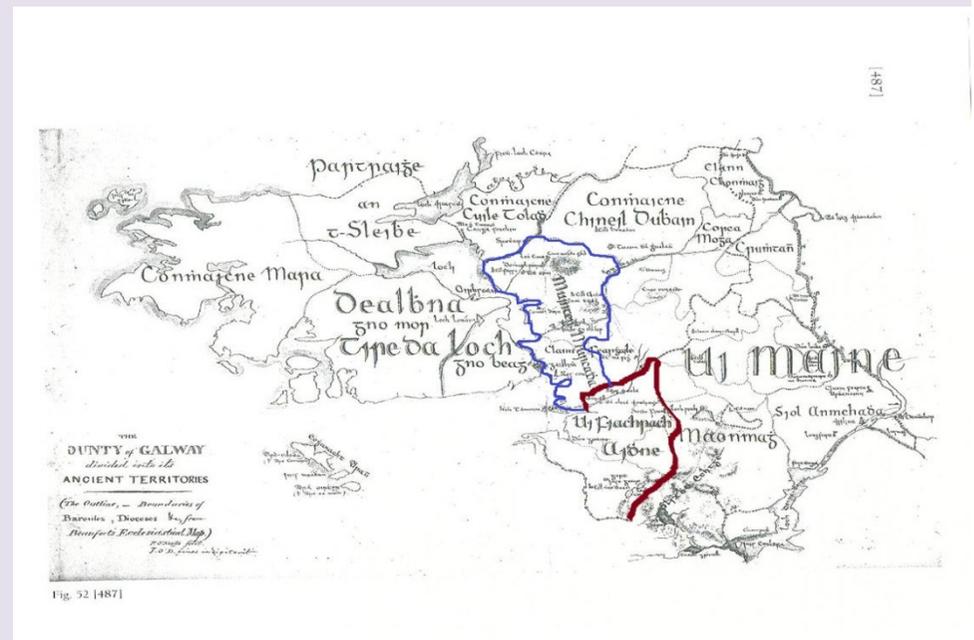
### Banshenchus:

“The daughter of Erchad, a blooming woman, Bé Bind, was mother of Brian of the verdicts. Erchad son of steady Murchad was king of South Connacht of the raids.”

### Annals of Ulster 945

Aurchath (alternative spelling of Erchad) son of Murchad, king of the west of Connacht, died. *(land in blue)*

Brian's **first** wife: Mór daughter of Éidegéan / Édend Ua Cléirich of Uí Fhiachrach Aidne *(land in red)*; Another wife of Brian: Dub Cablaigh, daughter of the king of Connacht, Cathal mac Conchobair, who died in 1009 and may have married Brian around the year 1000, was of the more powerful Uí Briúin Aí of Roscommon.



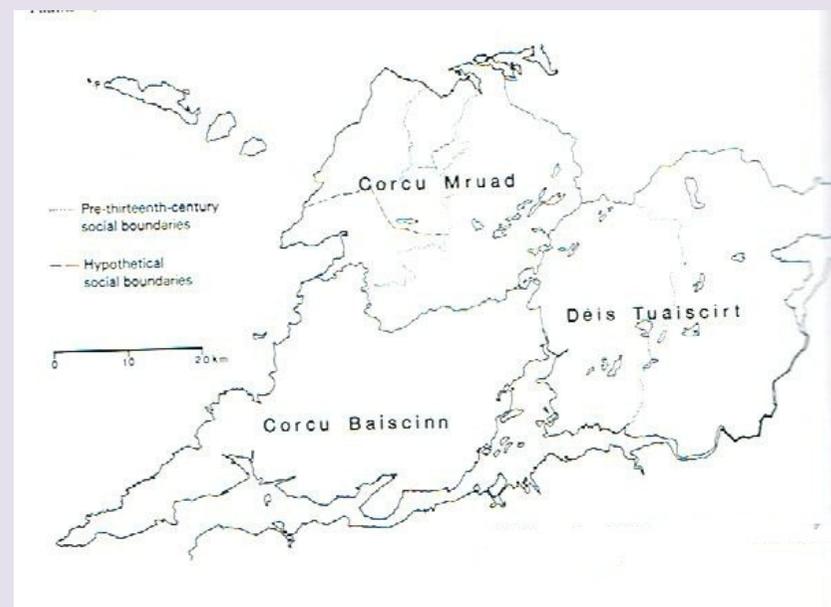
# Strategic planning of Brian's family

## 3) putting close relatives in charge of neighbouring lands

- Cennétig = brother of Coscrach (who = thus Brian's uncle)

Mael-Sechnaill m. Coscraich and his son Lochlainn “candidate for kingship of Corcu Mo-Druad” both died while fighting in Brian's army on raid into Connachta lands in 983 (Annals of Inisfallen); Conchobar son of Máel Sechnaill died as king of Corcu Modruad in 993.

D. Blair Gibson also refers to a Mathgamain son of Brian who becomes king of Corcu Baiscinn (1995, 122) but I have been unable to trace such a person in the primary sources.



## Death of Mathgamain: Brian revenges himself on his brother's killers and absorbs their lands into his over-lordship

- Brian succeeded to kingship upon death of Mathgamain in 976 (who is killed by alliance of Mael Muad of Des-Mumhan, Donnubán of Uí Fidgente and Ímar of Viking base at Limerick)
- Brian attacks Ivar/Ímar in 977 and kills him and his two sons on Scatterry Island (Inis Cathaig).
- In same year Brian attacks the Uí Fidgente of Co. Limerick
- In 978 Brian attacks Mael Muad of Desmond and kills him at battle of Belach Lechta – identified by Diarmuid Ó Murchadha as between Kilmallock and Kildorrey (Limerick/Cork border). Brian takes the hostages of Mael Muad's kingdom.
- (NB! Brian marries his daughter Sadb (who dies in 1048) to Mael Muad's son, Cian. At some point, therefore, Cian becomes Brian's ally but whether in the immediate aftermath of killing of Mael Muad might be considered doubtful.)

# Strategic planning of Brian

## 4) Use of Viking wealth (to hire men) and Norse military allies

### Annals of Inisfallen 983

A large fleet was brought by Brian son of Cennétig into the territory of Connachta .. His *suatrich* (svart-leggja = Norse for black legs - mercenaries) went across land into Uí Briúin.

### Annals of Inisfallen 984

A great naval expedition by the sons of Aralt (=Harold) to Port Láirge and they and the son of Cennétig (Brian Boru) exchanged hostages there as a guarantee of both together providing a hosting to attack Áth Cliath.

**NB – see Kingdom of Limerick powerpoint for link between sons of Harold and Viking base at Limerick**

The men of Munster assembled and proceeded to Maing Laigen (Slievemargy in Laois/Kilkenny) and the foreigners overcame the Uí Chennselaig (in Wexford and south Carlow) and went across the sea.

### Annals of Inisfallen 985

The Déisi (of Waterford county) raided the *amsu* (hired mercenaries) of Brian and took 300 cows. And Brian harried the Déisi to avenge that...



Sea Stallion of Glendalough -  
replica of boat built in south-  
east Ireland c. 1030  
e.g. 16 years after Clontarf.

**Ship building by Brian's family –  
at Kilaloe or Limerick?  
Such building is visible on a  
massive scale in the century  
after Clontarf in poems  
produced for Brian Boru's  
descendants; was it also a  
feature of Brian's own reign?**



# Brian fights with Mael-Sechnaill of Mide – the strongest king of the eastern half of Ireland

- Mael – Sechnaill of Mide had been the strongest king in the east since AD 980 when he won the Battle of Tara versus the Dublin Vikings
- In 982, Mael Sechnaill invaded territory of Dál Cais in Clare and cut down the *bile* (sacred tree) of Mag Adair, the assembly area and inauguration site of the Dál Cais (in parish of Cloney, Co. Clare).

## Annals of Inisfallen 984:

A great naval expedition(?) by the sons of Harold to Port Láirge (Viking base at Waterford), and they and the son of Cennétig exchanged hostages there as a guarantee of both together providing a hosting to attack Áth Cliath. The men of Mumu (Munster) assembled and proceeded to Maírg Laigen (Slieve Margy hills) , and the foreigners overcame the Uí Cheinnselaig (of Wexford and south Carlow) and went by sea; and the men of Mumu, moreover, devastated Osraige (Ossory: Kilkenny and Laois) in the same year, and its churches, and the churches of Laigin (Leinster), and the fortifications of both were laid waste, and Gilla Pátraic, son of Donnchadh, was released.

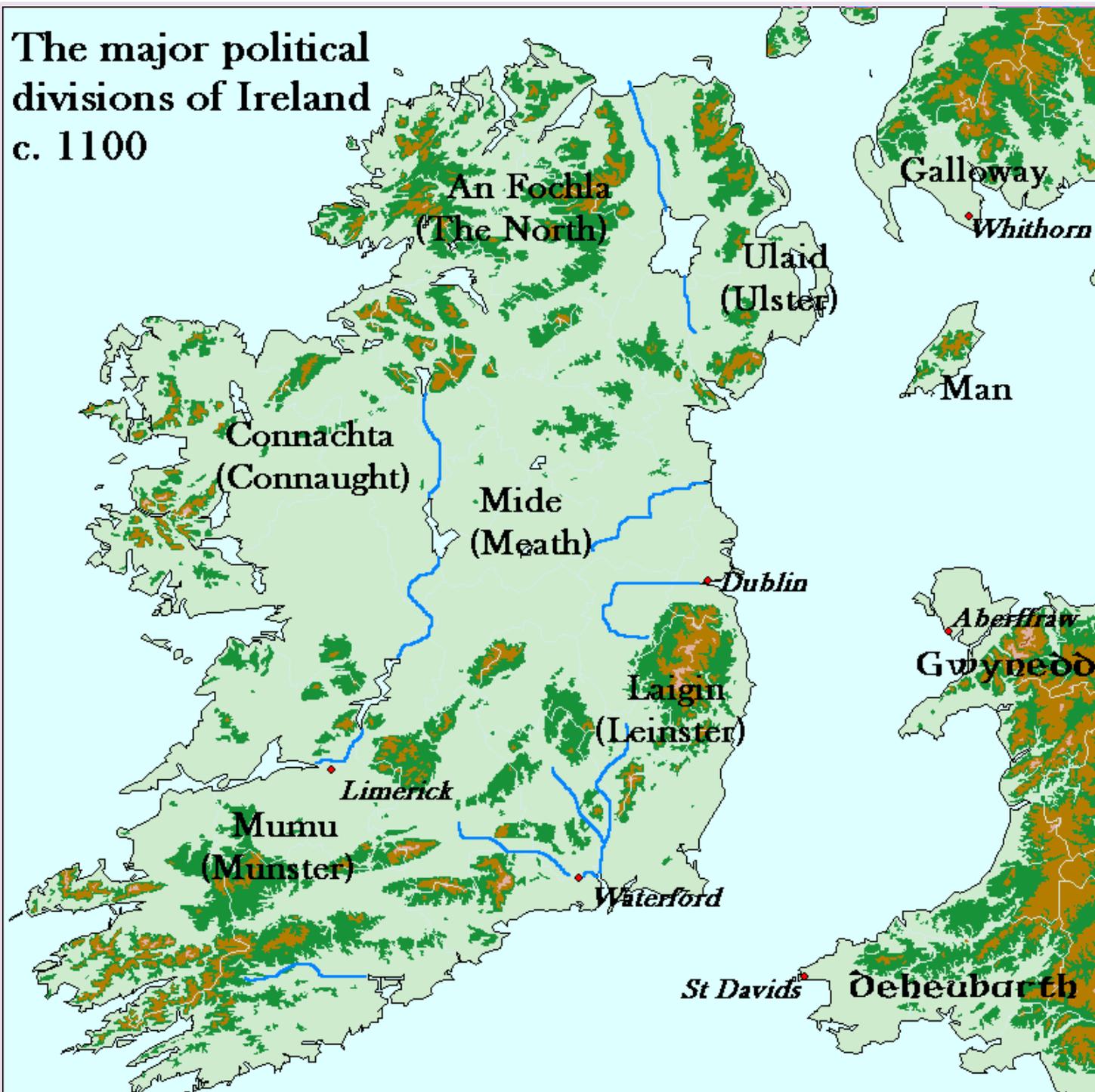
Gilla Pátraic son of Donnchadh, king of Osraige, had been captured by Brian the previous year.

The assumption must be that he paid a ransom and was released.

The attack on the Uí Chennselaig by Brian's Waterford allies should be seen in the context of an attack on the leading Leinster king, Domnall Claen (of Nth Leinster) by Mael-Sechnaill and his half-brother, the leader of Viking Dublin. Domnall Claen was then killed by the Uí Chennselaig who had thus become the main power in Leinster immediately before they were attacked by the Waterford men and Brian in a pincer movement by sea and land.

## Annals of Inisfallen 988:

The major political divisions of Ireland  
c. 1100



# Mael Sechnaill and Brian continue to fight each other in the 990s

- Munster, Connacht north and south and Leinster are all battlegrounds between the two with Mael Sechnaill invading Munster and killing the king of Múscraige (Muskerry) on one occasion and burning Nenagh on another.
- The events of this era are recorded differently by the regional annalists. The Annals of Inisfallen provide the most detail on Brian's triumphs while the annals of Tigernach and of Ulster give much greater role to Mael Sechnaill.
- In 997 royal meeting is held near Clonfert, immediately west of the Shannon where Máel Sechnaill recognised as king of northern half of Ireland and Brian is ruler of the southern half.

## Annals of Inisfallen 997

Brian, son of Cennétig, with the princes of Mumu, and Mael Sechnaill son of Domnall, king of Temuir, went to Port dá Chaineóc (on the Shannon), and they divided Ireland between them into two, viz. Leth Cuinn to Mael Sechnaill and Leth Moga to Brian; and the hostages of the Laigin and of the foreigners which Mael Sechnaill had, were given to Brian.

Donnchadh Ó Corráin has suggested this was a “makeshift arrangement”; Aubrey Gwynn, in contrast, believed that it shaped many of Brian's subsequent actions.

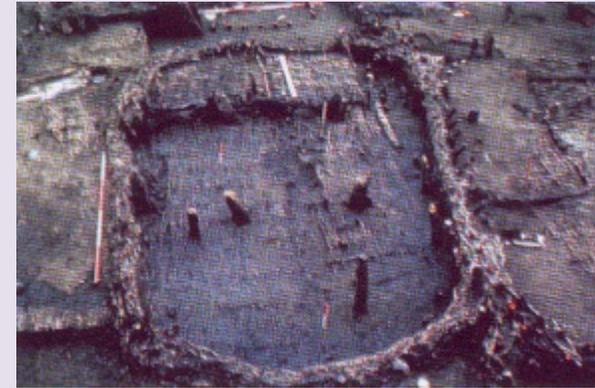
Worth noting also that an attack by Dubliners on Brian's forces in 1000 is specifically identified as a *crech marcach* – a raid by horse-riders. This appears to represent the development of mounted cavalry and parallels finds of the most up-to-date weaponry of the day in excavations of tenth-century Dublin.



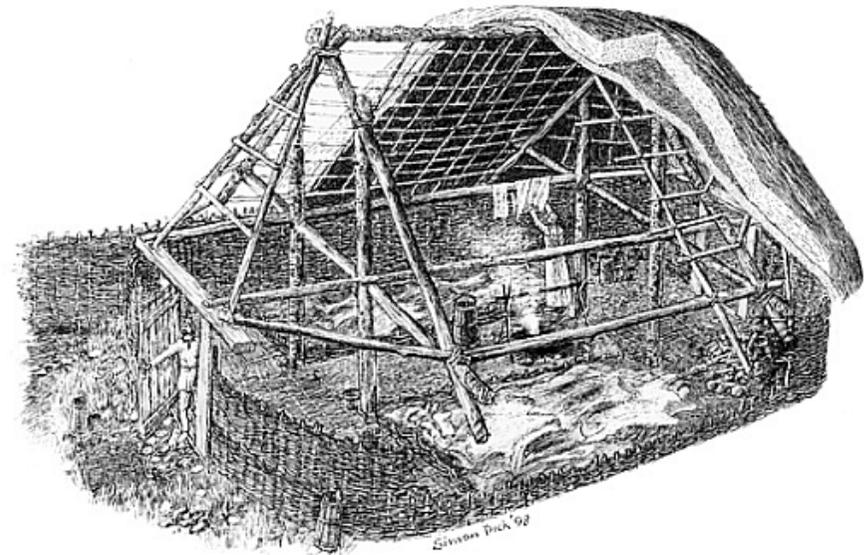
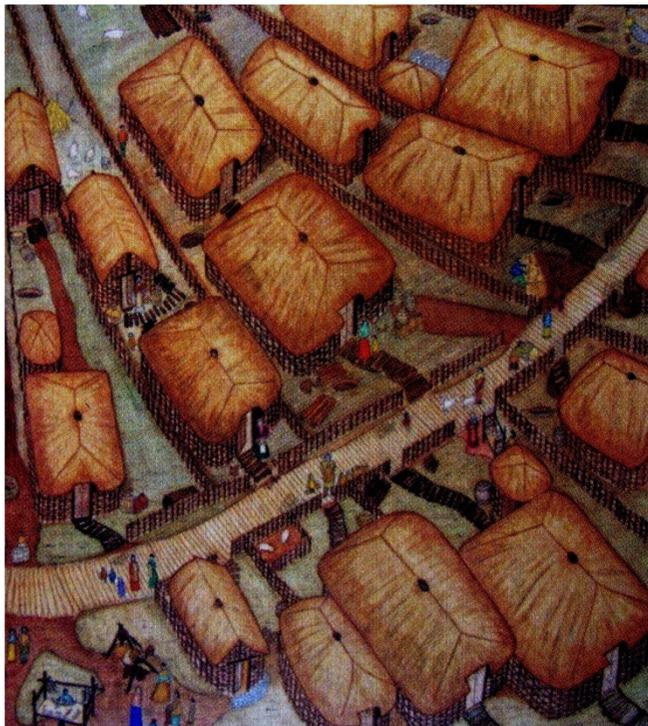
Brian sent forth after that a naval expedition upon the sea, viz the Gaill of Dublin and of the Uí Eachach Mumain and of almost all the men of Ireland such of them as were fit to go to sea and they levied royal tribute from the Saxons and Welsh and the *Lemhnaigh* of Scotland and the eastern Gael and their pledges and hostages along with the chief tribute. Brian distributed all the tribute according to rights: e.g. 1/3 to the king of Áth Cliath; 1/3 to the warriors of Laigin and the Uí Eachach Mumain and another 1/3 to the professors of sciences and arts and everyone who was most in need of it.

*Cogadh Gaedhil re Gallaib 137*

This twelfth-century account of Brian's relationship with hired fleets may well be an accurate reflection of the methods used to persuade the Vikings of Waterford (and possibly those of Limerick) to join his armies.



**11<sup>th</sup> C Dyflin**  
(=*Dub Linn* – Black Pool)  
- richest Viking settlement



# Battle of Glen Mama

- The Leinstermen and Norse of Dublin fight against Brian outside Lyons Hill/Newcastle Lyons (c. Saggart?) in west county Dublin.
- Mael Morda mac Murchada of north Leinster is taken prisoner and Dublin is subsequently attacked. Brian stays in Dublin from January to beginning of February; he plunders the city, burns the fortress and expels the Viking leader, Sitric mac Amlaíb (known in Norse as Sigtryggr Silkiskegg or Sitric “Silkbeard”) for a short while before he is allowed back to rule Dublin as Brian’s client king.

# Annalist's accounts

## **Annals of Tigernach 998:**

A hosting by Mael Sechnaill and by Brian son of Cennétig to Glenn Mama and the Foreigners of Dublin gave them battle and the Foreigners were routed and a slaughter was inflicted upon them, including Artalach son of Sitric and Harald son of Olaf and Cuilen son of Etigen and nobles of Dublin; and Mael Sechnaill and Brian with the men of Munster and Meath entered Connacht and carried off its hostages and the best of its treasures.

## **Annals of Tigernach 999:**

Brian son of Cennétig went to Dublin and remained there a whole week and carried off its gold and its silver and many captives and many captives and burnt the fortress and banished the king Sitric son of Olaf.

## **Annals of Ulster 999**

Brian, king of Cashel, led an army to Glenn Máma and the foreigners of Áth Cliath accompanied by the Laigin, came to attack him. And they were defeated and a slaughter was inflicted on them including Aralt son of Amlaíb and Cuilén son of Eitigén and other nobles of the foreigners. Brian afterwards entered Áth Cliath and Áth Cliath was plundered by him.

# Munster annalist's account

## Annals of Inisfallen 999

A slaughter of the foreigners of Áth Cliath by Brian son of Cennétig, together with the choice troops of Mumu (Munster) and the best part of the foreigners fell therein, i.e. The battle of Glenn Máma.

## Annals of Inisfallen 1000

The men of Mumu invaded Áth Cliath set fire to it and burned it and the burned the wood of Tomar as firewood and the king of the foreigners of Áth Cliath escaped from the battle to the Ulaid (N-E Ireland) but found no protection for himself in Ireland until he handed over his hostages to Brian son of Cennétig and Brian gave the fort to the foreigners.

LXVII Now after the death of Domnall Claen, son of Lorcan, king of the Laigin (Leinster), the Laigin and the foreigners became disobedient to Brian and were menacing war against Brian and against the people of Munster also. Brian, therefore, marched with a great muster of the men of Munster against the Laigin and against the foreigners, intending to lay siege to Áth Cliath until the foreigners should submit to him. But now the cattle and the families of Laigin were sent into the corner of land possessed by the foreigners and into Uí Briuin Cualann (around Bray head) and into Ui Gabhra and into the Ui Donnchadha. And the Laigin and the Foreigners came beyond their families to meet Brian and into his presence viz. to Glenn Mama.

They met there: Brian with the Munstermen and the Foreigners accompanied by the Laigin and there was fought between them a battle, bloody, furious, red, valiant, heroic, manly; rough, cruel, heartless and men of intelligence and learning say that since the battle of Mag Rath [in the 650s i.e. 350 years earlier] to that time there had not taken place a greater slaughter. There fell there multitudes of the Dál Cais and of the Munstermen in general; there fell there the greater part of the foreigners of Áth Cliath and of the Foreigners of all Ireland and there was also a slaughter of the Laigin for, in short, the Foreigners and the Laighin were utterly defeated. And there was killed there **Harold (Aralt) the crown prince of the Foreigners of Ireland** and Cuileann the son of Echthigern and 4000 along with them of the best of the foreigners of Ireland. And Brian followed them till they reached the *dún* (Dublin) whereupon was said..: “Long was the route by which Brian came from Glenn Mama to Áth Cliath..”

LXVII The fortress then was plundered by them and ransacked and Brian at that time remained encamped in the town from great Christmas to little Christmas. He came then into the market and the whole fortress was burned by them and they left not a treasure under ground that they did not discover. As the poet said in relating the story of it...”The battle of Glen Mama was great and rapid....”

**Account of battle of Glen Máma in 12<sup>th</sup> C propaganda text, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh***

LXIX It was in that one place were found the **greatest quantities of gold and silver and bronze and precious stones and carbuncle-gems and buffalo horns and beautiful goblets. All these valuables were collected by them to one place.** Much also of various clothes of all colours were found there likewise. For never was there a fortress or a fastness or a mound or a church or a sacred place or a sanctuary when it was taken by that howling, furious, loathsome crew which was not plundered by the collectors and accumulators of that wealth. Neither was there in concealment under ground in Ireland nor in the various solitudes belonging to the Fianna bands of Ireland or to the people of the Síd any thing that was not discovered by these foreign, wonderful men of Denmark through paganism and idol worship. Many women also and boys and girls were brought to bondage and ruin by them and the Foreigners had deserved that treatment because by them the provocation had been given and they had been the aggressors to contest with them [i.e. with Brian and his followers] their own country and their lawful inheritance. However their good luck and fortune then turned against the Foreigners and all the evils they had hitherto inflicted were now fully avenged on them. For the respect which they had offered to the men of Ireland was by the same standard now offered to themselves

### ***Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh***

Sacking cities gives Brian money to hire soldiers for pay to add to men who fight as part of his conscription of men from his own lands.

As a result of Glen Máma – the Norse leader of Dublin (and Brian's one-time son-in-law) Sitric mac Amlaíb – submits to Brian. At what point Sitric marries Brian's daughter is unknown (see further discussion in powerpoint on Gormlaith.)

# Mael-Sechnaill continues to resist

## **Annals of Inisfallen 1001**

A great obstruction (hedge/fence) against the men of Mumu was placed on the Sinann at Áth Luain (Athlone) by Mael Sechnaill and by the king of Connachta and by all the northern half of Ireland.

## **Annals of Inisfallen 1002**

A hosting of the men of Mumu into Connachta and they took the hostages of Connachta at Áth Luain and the hostages of Mael Sechnaill.

A muster of the men of Mumu, the Connachta, the men of Mide and Port Láirge by Brian son of Cennétig against the Ulaid to take their hostages.

Aubrey Gwynn found in a 'puzzle' that Mael Sechnaill's barrier at Athlone should be a cause of war. However, if one looks at Brian's ability to use (Limerick?) ships to transport armies up and down the Shannon as one of his key assets, this seems perfectly understandable.

# Circuit of Ireland by Brian – the amassing of alliances and troops across the island

**1003** – Brian deposed the king of Laigin..”and the hostages were given by Brian to Máel Morda son of Murchad.”

**1005** – “A muster by Brian son of Cennétig of the men of Ireland both foreigners and Gael south of Sliabh Fuait (Fews) to Ard Macha (Armagh) and to Ráith Mór of Mag Line in Ulaid to obtain the hostages of Cenél Conaill and Cenél Eógain”.

**1006** – “Brian, together with the men of Mumu, the Laigin, the men of Mide, Mael Sechnaill, the Connachta, the foreigners of Áth Cliath and the men of the whole of Ireland south of Sliab Fuait, came to Áth Luain, went to Es Ruaid (Assaroe) proceeded across it northwards and made a circuit of the north of Ireland including Cenél Conaill, Cenél Eógain, Ulaid and Airgialla”.

# Brian's wives and sons: Banshenchus

- **Mór, daughter of Éidegéan of Uí Fhiachrach Aidne** (located in diocese of Kilmacduagh)  
She has 3 sons including Murchad (main son for Brian's career – dies at Clontarf), Conchobor and Flann
- **Eachraidh, daughter of Cearbhall son of Ailill Fionn, of Uí Aedha Odbha** (in south Meath – an area under Mael Sechnaill's control but east of the heartland of his kingdom)  
She has at least two sons Tadhg (Brian's heir) and Domnall (dies before Brian) and one daughter
- **Gormlaith, daughter of Murchad mac Finn of Uí Fáeláin** (northern Leinster – see powerpoint on Gormlaith)  
She has at least one son Donnchad who rules the Dál Cais for forty odd years after Clontarf.

# The marriages of Brian's daughters – keeping the allies in the families

- ❖ **Sadb** – died in 1048 – married to Cian son of Máel Morda, king of Eóganacht Raithlenn (= *Des-Mumhan* – south Munster).
- ❖ **Bé Binn** – married to Flaithbertach ua Néill - king of northern Uí Néill (Cenél nÉogain – described as “over-king of Ailech” when he died in 1036.)
- ❖ **Sláine** – married to Sitric mac Amlaíb, Scandinavian king of Dublin (prominent non-participant (?) at Clontarf where the *Cogadh* depicts him sitting on Dublin battlements and watching others fight.)

NB! The suggestion by Roger Chatterton-Newman in *Brian Boru, king of Ireland* (Dublin 1983) that Brian had another daughter who married Malcolm II of Scotland (Mael Coluim mac Cinaéda) is un-sourced and enquiries amongst both Scottish and Irish historians of this period indicate that the idea is not based on any contemporary source. The same suggestion does, however, underlie the depiction of Malcolm's wife Blanaid in the historical novel *Pride of Lions* (1996) by Morgan Llywelyn and is found in Wikipedia under “Cultural depictions of Malcolm II.”

# Strategy of Brian's family - Shannon estuary associations with Patrick Armagh

## Bethu Phátraic - c. 910?

The men of *Tuath Muman* – Thomond – to the north of Limerick went in sea-fleets (*murcoblai*) to meet Patrick southward to Domnach Mór Maige Aine... And Patrick bestowed a blessing on the people of Thomond for the willingness with which they had come with abundance of their gifts to meet Patrick.

Cairthenn son of Blatt, senior of the children of Toirdelbach, believed in the Lord and Patrick baptised him at Sangal [Singland]..No children save mis-births used to be born to Carthenn. Then Eochu Ball-derg was brought forth. Patrick had formed him of the clot of gore and that spot was in his body as a sign of the miracle.

Clear associations in this text also between Patrick and Arada Cliach, the Uí Fidgente (with chief church of Mungret) and ArdPatrick in the territory of the southern Déise. All of these accounts show the important links between Patrick of Armagh and Limerick in a text compiled in the era of Brian's predecessors. These links with Patrick are also with territories which are identified as being within the overlordship of Dál Cais kings in the genealogical material although outside the east Clare heartland which seems to have been the patrimony of Brian's immediate family.

# Strategy of Brian – visit to Armagh

## Annals of Ulster 1005

Brian, accompanied by the royalty of Ireland brought an army to Armagh and left twenty ounces of gold on Patrick's altar. He went back bringing the pledges of the men of Ireland

## Book of Armagh (9thC copy of New Testament owned by Armagh abbot)

Saint Patrick, when going to heaven, decreed that the entire fruit of his labour as well as baptism and of causes as of alms, should be rendered to the apostolic city which in the Irish tongue is called Ardd Macha. This I have found in the records of the Irish. This I have written, namely Caluus Perennis (Máel Suthain) in the presence of Brian, *imperator Scottorum* (Emperor of the Irish) and what I have written, he has determined on behalf of all the kings of Cashel.

John Gwynn claimed that the formulae used above were based on *Liber Angeli* – the earliest text claiming Armagh's primacy over Ireland. His grandson, Aubrey Gwynn, suggested that the phrase *imperator scotorum* was a reflex of the title *imperator romanorum* used by Otto III in 996. A Mael Suthain's death is recorded in AFM1031: "Maelsuthain, *anmchara* of Brian, son of Cennedig" (and it is this man whom Aubrey Gwynn thinks wrote the above entry). Perhaps it is also worth noting that, in AFM 1009, another Mael Suthain is identified as a member of the Éóganacht of Killarney with links to Inisfallen: "Maelsuthain Ua Cearbhaill, *one* of the family of Inis-Faithleann, chief doctor of the western world in his time, and lord of Eoghanacht of Loch-Lein, died after a good life." It is possible that it was this man, rather than the younger Mael Suthain who died in 1031, who wrote the Book of Armagh entry.

## AFM 1006 - Tuathal h Mailmacha comarba Pádraig i Mumhain (Tuathal of the Ua Mael-Macha, heir of Patrick in Munster (died)).

Aubrey Gwynn suggests the existence of this man represents the practical steps that Brian took to implement the 1005 agreement signed in Armagh. An alternative possibility is that it was Tuathal's existence as Armagh cleric with responsibility for mid-Western sites owing allegiance to Patrick, which prompted Brian's visit to Armagh in 1005.

# Armagh provided political as well as religious back-up

## Annals of Ulster 1006

Brian brought an army on a circuit of Ireland into Connacht, over Es Ruaid (Assaroe) into Tír Conaill, through Cenél Eógain, over Fertas Camsa, into Ulaid into the assembly of the Conaille and at *Lugnasa* they came to Belach Dúin, and the full demand of the community of Patrick and of his successor i.e. Mael Muire son of Eochaid was granted.

# Assessment of Brian in this period

## – if we can trust the sources...

“An outsider even in Munster [Brian] overthrew the hegemony of the Uí Néill which had lasted for centuries. He was not a usurper; he offended prejudice and broke with tradition, but he did not break the law. He shattered the Uí Néill primacy of honour, and made the kingship of Ireland a prize worth the struggle. In this way, he shaped the course of Irish history in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the kings of the greater dynasties contended for the overlordship of the whole country. He did not create a national monarchy or the institution of such a monarchy; but he did contribute greatly to advancing the idea of a kingship of the whole island.”

Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin 1972), 125

“Written from different vantage points, therefore, the individual chronicles provide varying perspectives on Brian’s career. Nevertheless, balancing the positive noises of the Munster annalist with the more muted tones of his Clonmacnoise and northern counterparts, the main events of Brian’s reign come into view. The ultimate hero in the southern source, his activities form the main focus of the annalist in the period between Mathgamain’s murder in 976 and Brian’s own death in 1014. By contrast, his early career is all but unrecorded in the Annals of Ulster.... Almost from the beginning, therefore, Munster annalists were keen to give their highly polished monarch an extra sheen. When exactly they first took to their cleaning cloths is impossible to ascertain but they were certainly hard at work in the mid eleventh century when various sets of Munster and Clonmacnoise annals were assembled and conflated, most probably in the monastery of Killaloe, to produce what we now know as the very much Uí Briain-orientated Annals of Inisfallen.... Ultimately, however, the precise degree of concoction must remain unclear.”

# Conclusions

- There are clear indications that Brian's achievement in becoming high-king of Ireland was based on long-term family strategies.
- As the leaders of Dál Cais, his family marry strategically
- Male family members are put in charge of sub-kingdoms where possible.
- Male family members are also put in charge of strategically important churches especially on Lough Derg.
- Vikings from west and south Ireland are hired as mercenaries
- Shipping technology is used to ferry armies and take part in naval warfare
- Viking settlements are sacked to provide wealth with which to hire mercenaries and pay for hired shipping.
- Female family members are married off to strategic allies
- Long-term strategic alliance with Armagh – perhaps because of long-standing links between mid Western churches and Patrick. They may also have wanted to support an alternative church to the church of Emly, long patronised by the Eóganacht kings of Connacht.

# Bibliography

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