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The Leinster Tribute Feud

By LIAM Ó BUACHALLA

Perhaps the most interesting episode of early Irish history is the long drawn out feud resulting from the imposition on the Leinstermen, of the tribute known as the *bórama* by the high kings of Tara. In contrast with those episodes of our history which are fully within the documentary period, as for instance the Norse raids and settlements (795-1014), the Leinster tribute vendetta, while it extends into the historical period for a space of about 250 years (*c.* 430-*c.* 680), it also extends back into the hazy period of legendary history. But how far? This is one of the most intriguing questions of our early history.

We can trace the story of this bloody feud in minute detail through the early centuries of the historical period, but although what appears to be a reliable account of the beginnings of this feud has been preserved in texts of our legendary history, there is very much disagreement as to the *approximate date* of the event that led to the imposition of the tribute which was the cause of so many of the battles between the Uí Néill and the Leinstermen recorded in the section of our Irish annals relating to the opening centuries of the historical period. While it is hoped to make some comments on this latter problem in future articles, the present paper deals with historical fact—a review of the progress of this *bórama* feud from the time of the earliest documentary records *c.* 430 to the final remission of the tribute in the time of Bran mac Conaill, king of Leinster (680-692).

It will at first be necessary to give an outline of the legendary account of the beginning of this Tara-Leinster quarrel and to set out the sources available for a documentary record of the battles fought during the historical portion of this episode of our history.

A king of the Goidel—the dominating people of Ireland—named Fiachu Fiondolaid ruled at Tara and was overthrown by some enemy peoples led by an Ulster king named Élim mac Connrach.¹ Tara was conquered and its king Fiachu slain, but his queen Éithne, then pregnant, escaped across the sea; it is usually said to Cruithentuath, that is Pictland in the north of Britain. A son, who was named Tuathal Techtmar, was born to her and when he grew to manhood he went with an army to Ireland. There he was joined by some friendly contingents; he attacked and slew the usurping king Élim and regained the old seat of the Goidel, Tara. The usurping peoples, which in the old texts are named as the Gaileoin, Fir Bolg, Domnainn (Fir Domnann) and Ligmaine—all or nearly all belonging to the group called Laigin or Leinstermen were reduced to vassalage. The king of Leinster, Eochu son of Eochu Ánchenn of the Domnainn, later came to Tuathal seeking the hand of the eldest of his two daughters, Fithir. When he returned with her to his seat at Raith Immil (in the south of the present county Kildare), his people said that he had left the better girl behind. He returned to Tara and said that Fithir was dead and asked for the other daughter,

¹ For the Tuathal story, see the *Bórama* text *Silva Gadelica*, I, 350-368. *Early Irish History and Mythology* (O'Rahilly) pp. 154ff.

Dáirine. When Fithir saw Dáirine arrive as a second wife, she died of shame and Dáirine died of grief at her sister's death. When Tuathal heard the truth he sent word to the king of Connacht who was foster father of Fithir and to the king of Ulster who was Dáirine's foster father and they came with their armies to assist him. These with Tuathal's army of the men of Tara went to give battle to the Leinstermen; the battle of Raith Immil (also called Garbthanach) was fought and Eochu the king of Leinster was slain and his men routed. A heavy *éric* (reparations payment) called the *bórama* was then imposed on the Leinstermen. There are some variants in the account of the amount of this imposition but it is generally stated that it amounted to fifteen thousand cows, fifteen thousand swine, fifteen thousand wethers; also fifteen thousand each of mantles, silver chains and cauldrons—a great cauldron for the house of Tara and twelve white cows with red ears—all these to be given to the king of Tara each year.²

While this story in general outline is genuine historical fact, there is much which must be regarded as fanciful embellishment. The incident of the king's two daughters which is introduced to explain the origin of this tribute is almost certainly a piece of folk-lore introduced to calumniate the Leinstermen and give a good appearance to the imposition of such an unjust tribute. There would have been a much simpler explanation for the imposition of the tribute.

Tuathal and his followers, it is generally admitted, came to Ireland as conquerors—the last wave of invaders before the opening of the historical period. When Tuathal set up an overlordship of the whole country at Tara and demanded the homage of the various provincial kings he would have found in the Leinstermen his chief obstacle. Located in the southeast, nearest to Britain and the continent, they had been the latest invaders before Tuathal and his followers and were superiors in armament and culture to the rest of the country. Judging from the references to the Leinstermen in the legendary tales and materials, they seem to have been regarded as a people apart—their relations with the main body of the Irish people seem to have been somewhat akin to those between the Anglo-Normans and the main body of the Irish population in the 13th and 14th centuries. A heavy tax would have been the most practical method of keeping such a dangerous element of the population in subjection and this was undoubtedly the real reason for the *bórama* tribute imposed by Tuathal and his successors on the Leinstermen.

We now come to review briefly the sources at our disposal for a history of the *bórama* feud during the documentary period which is the subject of this article as already stated. It is now generally accepted that the Irish annals are the most reliable source of information concerning political events of the early centuries of the historical period. There survive six collections of annals which have entries covering the first few centuries of the historical period with which we are concerned here. The earliest text is that preserved in the Annals of Ulster which is written in Latin except that place names and personal names are in an archaic form of Irish assignable to the early eighth century. The late Dr. T. F. O'Rahilly, after an exhaustive study of this early text, considered it to have been originally compiled from earlier contemporary chronicles about 740 A.D. The Annals of Ulster text commences at the year 431. The period covered by this early text of the annals (431-740) corresponds approximately with the period of the *bórama* feud which lies within the historical era. When, however, we

² *Silva Gadelica*, I, 361. *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, p. 53.

compare the early text of the Annals of Ulster with that section of the other collections of annals relating to the first two centuries of the historical period we find that with a few exceptions all have the same entries as found in the Annals of Ulster—that is, in their earlier part all the annals are based on a single text. When we have to depend on the annals entirely for information on some early event this presents a serious drawback—it would be much more satisfactory if we had two or more independent texts of the early annals as then there would be a likelihood of being presented with different facets of the events recorded.

It is for that reason that, where the *bórama* feud is concerned, we are fortunate in having an early independent source of information though it may not be altogether as satisfactory as that which the annals provide for us. This independent source lies in the Leinster battle poems. From the beginning of the documentary period in the fifth century the Leinster poets were very fond of celebrating the victories of their fighting men in their contests with the men of Tara and the other provinces. (It may be said that they were also equally careful in omitting any mention of their defeats).³ Already in the fifth century there flourished some leading Leinster poets—the best known being Dubthach mocu Lugáir who is mentioned by Muirchú in his life of St. Patrick (written c. 670) as a contemporary of that saint.⁴ Dubthach wrote on the feats of his contemporary, Crimthann king of Leinster (+483) and of Crimthann's father Énna Cennselach. Another fifth century poet Laidchenn mac Baircedo⁵ lived somewhat earlier than Dubthach. He was royal poet to Niall Noigiallach king of Tara and wrote of Énna Cennselach and of his father Bresal Belach, first historical king of Leinster (+435). It must be stated here that none of the poems attributed to these early poets in their present form as found in the Book of Leinster or elsewhere date from the fifth century—they are recensions of early materials made by later Leinster and Munster poets, chiefly it would seem in the late seventh and eighth centuries.⁶ There is nothing anachronistic about these poems however—the works attributed to Dubthach who would have died about 500 do not contain any matter relating to persons or events later than that date; the same applies to the poems attributed to Laidchenn. There is no good reason then to question the genuineness of the records of Leinster events from the early fifth century onwards as it is obvious that there was a substantial amount of documentary material available from that point onwards. In the Book of Leinster and MS Rawlinson B. 502 (written c. 1100) genealogies of the Leinstermen there are numerous fragments of poems in the most archaic form of Irish verse surviving—they deal mostly with 5th century kings and events and were written at latest in seventh and eighth centuries. Where the *bórama* feud is concerned, the most important battle poem is that commencing *A chóiced chóem Chairpri chruaid*, compiled by a ninth century Leinster poet, Orthánach Hua Caellama. It contains twenty-nine stanzas the greater number of which deal with the battles of the Leinstermen in the early historical period, from the Battle of Cnamross fought by Bresal Belach (who died 435) to the Battle of Belach Éile 735, where it ends. It covers the whole period in

³ They do not mention for instance the battle of Uchbad A.D. 738 in which nine thousand of the Leinstermen are said to have been killed.

⁴ *Book of Armagh* fo. 4b2, 18a2.

⁵ See *Early Irish History and Mythology* p. 37.

⁶ Thus the genealogical poem on the Leinster kings attributed to Laidcenn and published in Meyer's *Über die Älteste Irische Dichtung* I, 27, is for the most part identical with the poem on Cú-cen-mathair king of Cashel (+665) by his poet Lucreth mocu Ciara found in the same volume at p. 53.

which the *bórama* struggle was in progress and refers to all the more important battles of that period. Some stanzas have been added by a later writer bringing the list of battles down to that of Mag Ailbe (Belach Mugna) fought in 908. There are many other long poems by later writers : *Do Comramaib Laigen* (Contests of the Leinstermen) by Flann mac Maelmaedóc (+c. 980), *Echta Lagen* (Exploits of the Laigin) and *Lecht Cormaic mac Cuilennáin* by Broccán Craibdeach, but they add very little to the *bórama* story. Finally about the late eleventh century some Leinster historian compiled a prose list of the battles of the Leinstermen based it would seem on the earlier battle poems, but chiefly on the poem of Orthánach's mentioned above. It extends from the Battle of Cnamross (c. 430) to the Battle of Crinnach 1086. The entries, 42 in all, are set out in annalistic form but there is no system of dating. There is a complete copy of this battle list in MS (TCD) H. 2.17 folio 468, dating from the 16th century but the earlier part of the list (containing about one half of the total entries) was used by the compiler of the *Bórama* text in the Book of Leinster (LL 299-300)⁷ so that here we have a late 12th century copy of that part of the text.

In presenting an account of the battles fought during the historical period between the Leinstermen and Uí Néill over the *bórama* tribute it is proposed to arrange these records under the reigns of the various kings of Leinster. This means has been employed as the Leinster battle poems and battle lists have no dating system ; as most of the records of the battles mentioned also name the king of Leinster concerned and as the period of reign of each king is known in most cases from the annals and elsewhere, the approximate date of any battle can be gauged by this means. In some cases the battles mentioned in the poems appear also in the annals and thus their exact dates are known.

References to battles found both in the Leinster records and the annals are given below under the reign of each king. The Leinster records are given first and abbreviations used are as follows :

- | | | |
|--------------------------|----|---|
| Dubthach II ⁸ | == | Poem ascribed to Dubthach moccu Lugáir in LL 45a, printed with translation in O'Curry's <i>Manuscript Materials</i> 489-491. |
| Dubthach III | == | Another poem ascribed to Dubthach LL 45b printed with translation O'Curry's <i>Manuscript Material</i> 492-494. |
| Orthánach | == | Poem of Orthánach Hua Caellama (9th century) <i>A choiced choem Chairpri chruaid</i> from LL 43a (printed in BL I 202) ⁹ . |

⁷The usual contractions in general use are employed here :

LL = Book of Leinster (facimile) ; R = MS Rawl. B. 502 (facsimile) Lec = Book of Lecan (RIA). BL is used for the diplomatic edition of the Book of Leinster in six volumes ; only three of those have so far been issued.

⁸Dubthach's first poem, also at LL 45a does not contain anything of importance concerning our present study.

⁹The first twelve and a half stanzas are missing from the LL copy through loss of a leaf, but they appear in the copy in B. IV.2 (R.I.A.) 79v, 132.

Battle List = Leinster Battle List MS (TCD) H.2.17 fo. 468 (unpublished); LL 299-300, published *Silva Gadelica* (O Grady) Vol. I 369-370.

The entries from this battle list (in English translation)¹⁰ are given first in each case and their source traced back to the earlier poems when possible.

Records from the annals are likewise given under each reign when such are available. Abbreviations used are AU = Annals of Ulster; AI = Annals of Inisfallen; Tig = Annals ascribed to Tigernach.

The genealogy of the kings of Leinster concerned in the *bórama* quarrel from Bresal Bélach (+435) down to Bran mac Conaill (+692) in whose time the tribute was remitted, is shown in Table I. It will be seen that there were two main branches. the descendants of Éna Nia son of Bresal who held Laigin Tuathgabair (North Leinster—the county of Kildare and portions of Dublin, Wicklow, Offaly and Leix) and the descendants of Labraid son of Bresal, rulers of Laigin Desgabair (South Leinster, also called Uí Cennselaigh; the present counties of Carlow and Wexford and portion of Wicklow). The provincial kings of Leinster, it will be seen were drawn chiefly from the northern branch. The contemporary high kings of Ireland are given in the right hand margin (Table I.)

Bresal Belach, king of Leinster, died 435 (AU); first king of Leinster mentioned in regnal lists.¹¹ Leinster records: “Battle of Cnamros by Bresal Belach in which the three sons of Cairpre .i. Eochaid, Eochu Domlén and Fiachu Sraptime were slain” (Leinster Battle List). This is the subject of stanza 14 of Orthánach’s 9th century poem, but names of three kings slain do not appear. Some lines in the most archaic form of Irish verse surviving in R. 124a and 124b, however, give the names of these kings as above.¹² Fiachu Sraptime appears as high king of Ireland in regnal lists. “Battle of Magh Nuadat by this Bresal” (Leinster Battle List). This is recorded in stanza 12 of Orthánach’s poem.

Annals: No records.

Éna Cennselach, (c. 436—c.465), second king of Leinster in regnal lists. He is in genealogies son of Labraid son of Bresal Bélach. There is a possibility that Labraid and Éna are identical, but this matter would need further investigation.

Leinster records: “The battle of Cruachan Claenta against Eochaid Mugmedhon by Labraid” (Leinster Battle List). This record is not in Orthánach’s poem, but is probably based on an anecdote in the *senchus* or origin story of the Uí Cennselaigh in LL 316¹³, explaining the origin of the name Cennselach. Here it is stated that Éna Cennselach defeated Eochaid Mugmedón, king of Ireland, in the battle of Cruachan Cloenta. “Twelve battles Éna won over Niall” (Leinster Battle List). This record appears in poem Dubthach II. In Dubthach’s other poem (Dubthach III) it is recorded

¹⁰ The original Irish text is quoted only when necessary.

¹¹ Regnal lists of Leinster kings used: LL 39b, metrical versions LL 32a, R 84b.

¹² See Meyer *Über die Älteste Irische Dichtung* II, pp. 16, 17, 18.

¹³ These origin stories are early; in their present form they date from the seventh and eighth centuries.

T A B L E I

Bresal Béalach + 435 (I).

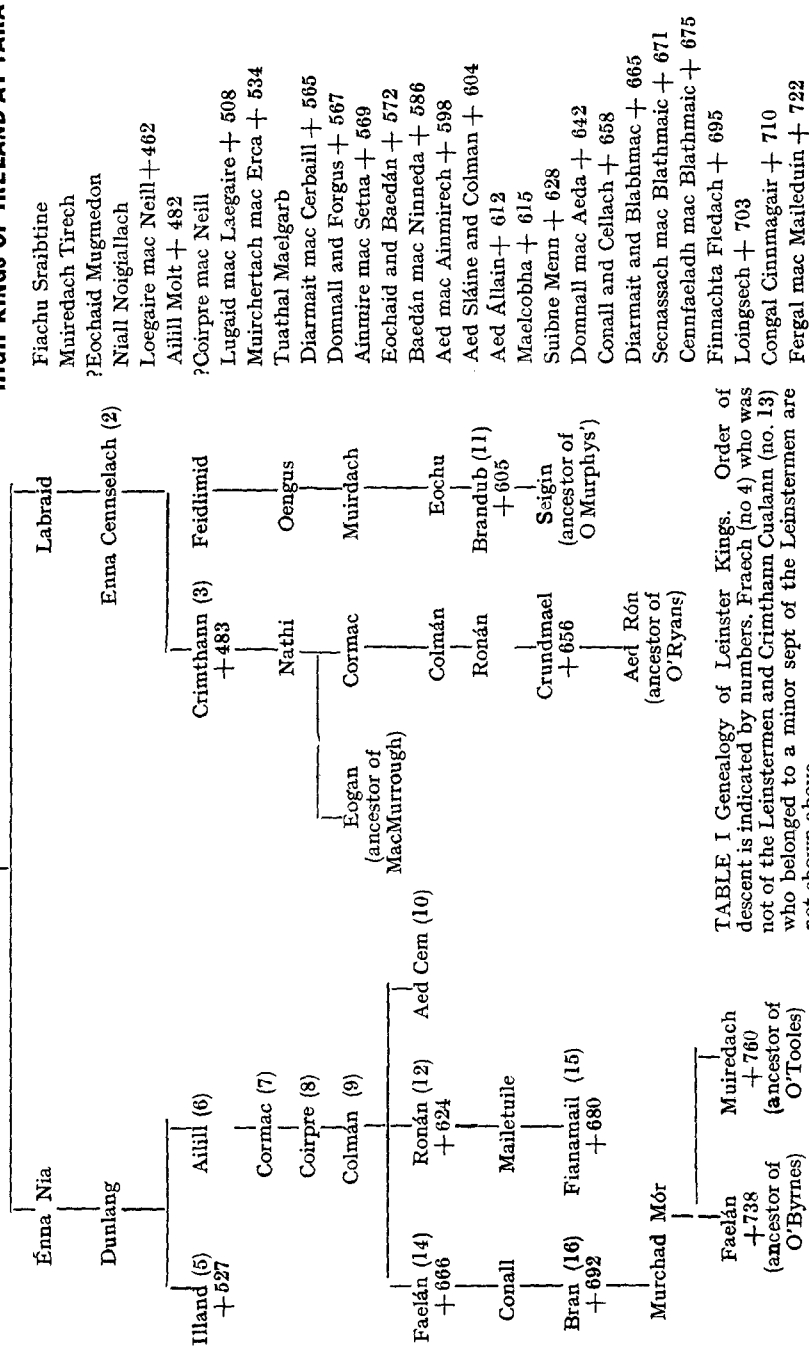


TABLE I Genealogy of Leinster Kings. Order of descent is indicated by numbers. Fraech (no 4) who was not of the Leinstermen and Crimthann Cualann (no. 13) who belonged to a minor sept of the Leinstermen are not shown above.

HIGH KINGS OF IRELAND AT TARA

- Fiachu Sraibhtine
- Muiredach Tírech
- ?Eochaid Mugmedon
- Niall Noigiallach
- Loegaire mac Neill + 462
- Ailill Molt + 482
- ?Coirpre mac Neill
- Lugaid mac Laegaire + 508
- Muirchertach mac Erca + 534
- Tuathal Maelgarb
- Diarmait mac Cerbaill + 565
- Donnall and Forgus + 567
- Ainmire mac Setna + 569
- Eochaid and Baedán + 572
- Baedán mac Ninneda + 586
- Aed mac Ainmirech + 598
- Aed Sláine and Colman + 604
- Aed Allain + 612
- Maelcobha + 615
- Suibne Menn + 628
- Donnall mac Aeda + 642
- Conall and Cellach + 658
- Diarmait and Blabhmach + 665
- Secnassach mac Blathmaic + 671
- Cennfaeladh mac Blathmaic + 675
- Finnachta Fíedach + 695
- Loingsech + 703
- Congal Cinnmagair + 710
- Fergal mac Maileduin + 722

that twelve battles were fought by Énna Ailend i.e., Énna Cennselach against the people of Tara (Tuath Temra) in which ten kings were slain, viz., Aed Emna, Niall Ailig, Fland Temra mac Concobair, Lugaid, Lorc Luimnig, Oengus mac Dunlaing, Maelduin, Ailill and Coirpri Caba. Énna mac Neill (Noigiallaig) was slain in Battle of Liamain.

“ Battle of Ath Dara by Énna against Laegaire (high king), in which he (Laegaire) was captured and then swearing by sun and moon that he would not again demand the *bórama* (he was released) ” (Leinster Battle List). This record is partly in Latin and is practically identical with the entry in AU 458 which see below. It is not in Orthánach’s poem.

Annals : AU 458 *Cath Atha Dara for Laigaire re Laignib in quo est ipse captus est, sed tunc dimissus est iurans per solem et ventum se boves eis dimissurum* (Battle of Ath Dara against Laigaire by the Leinstermen in which he was captured but was liberated on swearing by the sun and the wind that he would remit the *bórama* tribute). This record like most of the entries in this early part of the annals (431-470) hardly goes back to a contemporary annalistic record. It is more probable that this and the entry in the Leinster Battle List above were taken from the ancient tale concerning the death of Laegaire as found in *Lebar na Huidre* 117 and LL 299. Laegaire mac Néill is said to have met his death two and a half years later when in violation of his pledges he again attempted to enforce the *bórama*. His death is recorded at AU 461 and 462. Orthánach in stanza 19 of his poem mentions his death by the elements in violation of his oath.

Crimthann son of Énna Cennselach, king of Leinster, (of the southern branch), died AU 483. *Eochu* son of Énna Cennselach brother of *Crimthann*.

In the Leinster Battle List it is said that *Crimthann mac Énna* slew *Ailill Molt Mac Nathi* (high king of Ireland) at the Battle of Ocha. In the annals and elsewhere *Ailill Molt* is stated to have been slain by *Lugaid mac Laegaire* and *Muirchertach mac Erca*, both of the *Uí Néill* at the Battle of Ocha. This battle was, it would seem, connected with the dynastic struggle for the high kingship at Tara and the *Uí Néill* here in slaying *Ailill Molt* (of the *Ui Fiachrach* of Connacht) excluded the Connacht ruling lines from the kingship. This battle had nothing to do with the *bórama* feud although *Crimthann* king of Leinster may have fought therein.

According to the first poem of *Dubthach moccu Lugáir* (LL 45a) and *Orthánach*, (stanza 18), *Eochu* son of Énna Cennselach and brother of *Crimthann* slew *Niall Noigiallach* high king of Ireland, ancestor of *Uí Néill*. The 10th century poem *Do Chomramaib Lagen* says that this *Eochu* also slew *Laidcenn mac Baircedo* who was court poet of *Niall Noigiallach*.

Dunlang mac Énna Nía of the northern branch of *Laigin*. He was not king of Leinster but was ancestor of most of the later kings. Was contemporary of *Crimthann mac Énna Cennselach* above. Flourished c. 450-c. 480.

Leinster Records : “ Battle of Duma Aichir by *Dunlang* ” (Leinster Battle List). This information is given in stanza 16 of *Orthánach*’s poem.¹⁴ It is also mentioned in annals, which see.

¹⁴ Misspelt *Dubach Achaid* in BL, I, 202, but correctly given in B.IV. 2, 80r.

Annals : AU 468 *Bellum Dumai Achir .i. for Oilill Molt, sicut inveni in Libro Cuanach.* (Battle of Duma Aichir i.e. against Oilill Molt, so I find in Book of Cuann). The reference to Oilill Molt (king of Tara) is a late gloss interpolated in early entry.

Annals of Inisfallen AD 470 attribute this victory to Illand son of Dunlang. (*Illand victor fuit.*)

AU 475 *Bellum Breg hEile re n-Ailill Molt for Laigniu. Sic in Libro Cuanach inuenit.* (Battle of Bri Ele by Ailill Molt against the Leinstermen). This is probably identical with *Cath Bri Eile* given later in Leinster Battle List.

Fraech mac Finchada king of Leinster : An usurper—he belonged to the Uí Garrchon sept, one of the older peoples of Leinster. His father who usurped kingship of south Leinster was slain 485. Fraech was slain 494 (or 495).

Leinster records : “ Battle of Grainne, Battle of Tortan, Battle of Drom Laidgcind, Battle of Bri Eile ” (Leinster Battle List). Not in Orthánach’s poem. These and other brief entries probably from some poem not now available. For Battle of Grainne see Battles of Granairt below in annals. Battle of Tortan may be Cath Tallten of AU 493 ; battle of Drom Laidgcenn not mentioned elsewhere. Battle of Bri Eile is probably that mentioned above under Dunlang mac Enna Nia section (AU 475, 478). Annals : AU 485 (486) “ The first battle of Granairt, in which Fincadh (father of Fraech) was slain. Coirpre son of Niall Noigiallach was victor. Or Mac Erca (of northern Uí Néill) was victor as others say.” AU 493=(494) Battle of Tailten against the Leinstermen by Coirpre son of Niall.

AU 494 (495). The second battle of Granairt in which Fraech son of Finchad was slain. Eochu son of Coirpre was victor.

This Coirpre son of Niall appears as king of Tara in the earliest regnal list : *Baile Cuinn* (Eriu, XVI, 146) but is not in the later regnal lists.

Illand mac Dunlaing : king of Leinster 496-527.

Leinster records : “ Battle of Fremann Mide by Failge Rot mac Cathair ” (Leinster Battle List. LL 300a copy). Not in Orthánach’s poem but in annals (509) which see below. “ Twenty eight battles by Ailill mac Dunlaing ” (Leinster Battle List). This corresponds to Orthánach, stanza 17, which says that Illand fought thirty battles. As Illand had no descendants and most of the later kings of Leinster were descended from his brother and successor, Ailill, there is a tendency in the late Leinster records to attribute all the battles of the period to Ailill.

“ Battle of Mag Óchtair against Lugaid mac Laegaire (king of Tara) (Leinster Battle List). ” Orthánach stanza 21 records battle of Mag Uachtair against the son of Laegaire Mac Néill. The Leabar Gabala version (Leabar Gabala Part V, 360) says that Lugaid, king of Tara (+507 AU) came with Cairbri Mór mac Néill (his uncle) and Muirchertach mac Erca (of northern Uí Néill) to Magh Ailbe and fought battle with Leinstermen. Lugaid and his allies were defeated and kept out of Leinster as long as they were alive. It adds that Lugaid only once exacted the *bórama* and then only imperfectly.

“ Battle of Luachair Breg ” (Leinster Battle List). Orthánach stanza 22 mentions the battle of Luachair won through the intercession of St. Brigit. This battle may be identical with that recorded in Tig. 527 “ Battle of Luachair won by Cairpre against the Uí Néill.” I do not know who this Cairpre is.

Annals (496-527) Tig. 497 “ Battle of Sleamain Mide against the Leinstermen by Cairpre mac Néill (of Tara) ”

Tig. 499 “ Battle of Cind Ailbe against the Leinstermen by Cairpre mac Néill.”

Tig. 501 “ Battle of Drom Lochmuighe by the Leinstermen against the Uí Néill.”

AU 497 “ Battle of Inne Mór in the territory of Uí Gabla against the Leinstermen. Muirchertach mac Erca (or northern Uí Néill)¹⁵ was victor.” Tig. in recording this battle at 502 says it was against Illand mac Dunlaing of the Leinstermen.

AU 509 “ The Battle of Fremonn against Fiachu mac Néill. Failge Berraide was victor.” This Failge was ancestor of sept called Ua bhFailge—anglicised Offaly. Fiachu mac Néill was settled in Uisneach region of Westmeath. This battle had a sequel in 516 (517) recorded as follows :

AU 515 (516) : “ Battle of Drom Derge against Failge. Then the plain of Meath was taken from the Leinstermen.” The territory extending from Uisneach in Westmeath southwards to Birr was then taken from the Offaly sept and joined to Meath.

Ailill mac Dunlaing king of Leinster 528—c. 547.

Leinster records : “ Battle of Drom Damaige, Another battle of Ocha, Battle of Slaibre, Battle of Sraithe ”¹⁶ (Leinster Battle List). None of these are in Orthánach’s poem, and they are nor recorded elsewhere unless the last item (Battle of Sraithe) is the Bellum Srotha of AU 492. Bellum Sratha Conaill AI 493. “ Battle of Finnabair by Ailill mac Dunlaing : a battle by the corpse of Illann (or Illand) mac Dunlaing “ (Leinster Battle List).¹⁷ This entry is of much interest as it throws light on an entry in AI 535 which is not in the other annals. These entries both in AI and Leinster Battle List are obviously based on the last two lines of stanza 22 of Orthánach’s ninth century poem :

“ Flanncath Finnabrach, ba huais
Im corp Illadan iar mbáis.

Illadan is glossed Illand mac Dunlaing (BL, I, 203). These lines simply mean that the bloody battle of Finnabair was fought around the body of Illand after his death (he had died 527 AU). That is, that the body of Illann was carried before the Leinstermen in this battle (see AI 535). What is more interesting is that the compiler of the Annals of Innisfallen (c. 1092) interpolated an entry into the text of the annals (it is not in the other chronicles) as follows : (535) *Cath Finnabrach for hU Neill re curp Illainn*. (“ Battle of Finnabrach against the Uí Néill by the corpse of Illann.”). The annalist must have taken this entry from some Leinster Source, probably the Leinster Battle List considering that the wording in the Battle List and AI is almost identical. As there is no dating system employed in Orthánach’s poem or in the Battle List the author of AI must have arbitrarily inserted the entry at 535, that is, about the middle year of the reign of Ailill in whose time the battle was fought.

“ Battle of Druim Laegaire against Diarmuit mac Carbaill by Aengus and Fergus the two sons of Crimthann mac Ennae.” (Leinster Battle List). Diarmait mac Cerbaill was king of Tara 544-565 and Crimthann was king of Leinster who was slain 483. This record is from Orthánach’s poem stanza 24 but the reference to Aengus and Fergus is

¹⁵ Muirchartach mac Erca became king of Tara in 509.

¹⁶ It is Cinn Sraithe in LL 300a.

¹⁷ These entries seem to refer to the one battle. In the H.2.17 version of the Leinster Battle List, the item relating to Battle of Druim Laegaire is inserted between the two.

not there and must be taken from an independent source. A Fergus appears amongst sons of Crimthann in the genealogies (LL 316) but Aengus is not mentioned. This battle is not recorded in the annals.

Annals : AU 527 " Battle of Cinnech and battle of Ath Sighe against the Leinstermen. Muirchertach Mac Erca (king of Tara) was victor."

Tig. 533 : " The battle of Mag Ailbe against the Laigin . . . and the battle of Almain and battle of Cinneich against the Laigin and the massacre of Cliu (Carlow district) in one year."

AU 542 (543) " Battle of Torten by the Leinstermen in which Mac Erce son of Ailill Molt was slain."

Cormac, (son of Ailill mac Dunlaing), king of Leinster *c.*546-*c.*555.

Leinster records : " Battle of Dun Másc " (Leinster Battle List). The only other independent reference to this battle is in the Leabar Gabala version of the *Bórama* text (Leabar Gabala, Part V, 386). It says that Diarmait mac Cerbaill (king of Tara 534-565) fought many battles for the *bórama* until Ailill mac Dunlaing king of Leinster fell at his hands. Cormac son of Ailill who succeeded as king of Leinster refused to render the tribute. Diarmait collected his forces against the Leinstermen and the battle of Dun Másc was fought " and it was empty of its people after the rout." Cormac escaped from the slaughter. So Diarmait exacted the *bórama* as long as he lived.

Annals : No records.

Corpre mac Cormaic, *Colman Mór mac Coirpre*, *Aed Cerr mac Colmain* : kings of Leinster whose reigns covered the period *c.* 555-595. They are not mentioned in the annals and little is known about them. For the first time since the beginning of the historical period there seems to have been a lull in the strife between the Leinstermen and the kings of Tara. This was probably due to the fact that during that period, the occupants of the high kingship were all " weak " kings. When Diarmait mac Cerbaill died 565, two sons of Muirchertach mac Erca, Domnall and Fergus, of the Northern Uí Néill held the kingship jointly for one year. They were succeeded by Ainmire also of the northern Uí Néill who reigned 3 years until his death in 569. The kingship of Tara was then again held jointly for 3 years by Baetan mac Muirchertaig and his cousin Eochaid mac Domnaill of the northern Uí Néill until they were slain in 572. Their successor was Baetan mac Ninnedo of the northern Uí Néill whose death is recorded in the annals at 586. The only battle recorded during these reigns is the Battle of Gabair Life (AU 565, Tig. 566) in which the joint kings Fergus and Domnall were victorious over the Leinstermen.

Brandub mac Echach, king of Leinster *c.* 595-605. He was one of the few chieftains of the southern branch of the Leinstermen (Uí Chennselaig) to hold office. The king of Tara then was Aed mac Ainmirech who succeeded in 586.

Leinster records : " The slaying of Cumuscach mac Aeda mic Ainmirech (son of the king of Tara) in Dun Buchet by Brandub, by the hand of Lochine mac Róin Chirr of the Uí Máil " (Leinster Battle List). This is not in Orthánach's poem but a long tale.

included in the *Bórama* text (LL 300-305a) deals with this incident.

“The battle of Dun Bolg against Aed mac Ainmirech by Brandub.” (Leinster Battle List). This is the subject of stanza 26 Orthánach’s poem. The high king was slain in this battle—see annals below. “The battle of Dun Buichet (leg. *Dun Bolg*) by Brandub in which Becc mac Cuanach was slain” (Leinster Battle List). This is the same as the above battle of Dun Bolg; See annals below.

“The raids of Brandub into Breg” (*Béimind Brandub i mBreagha*) (Leinster Battle List.) This entry is of some interest as it is obviously derived from the title of a poem *Béimend Branduib for Breg in uno anno* “Raids of Brandub in Breg (the Tara district) in one year” found in Book of Leinster I, 236. It describes the seven battles (*secht mbéimend*) fought by Brandub against chieftains of the Tara district. The entry in the Battle List has been taken into the Annals of Tigernach: AD 600 *Béimenda Branduib i Muig Brega*. The entry in Battle List is not dated and the interpolater in Tigernach has inserted it in the middle year of the reign of Brandub (595-605). Annals: AU 589 (=590) “The battle of Mag Ochtair by Brandub against the Uí Néill.”

AU 596 (597) “The slaying of Cumuscach son of Aedh mac Ainmirech by Brandub in Dún Buchat.”

AU 597 (598) The battle of Dun Bolg in which Aed mac Ainmirech was slain by Brandub mac Echach and Becc mac Cuanach, king of Uí Maicc Uais (was also slain).”

Rónán mac Colmáin, king of Leinster 605—624; *Crimhann Cualann*, king of Leinster 624-633. After the death of Brandub in 605 there was another lull in the *bórama* strife which lasted for nearly half a century. No battles are recorded during the reigns of these two kings.

Faelán mac Colmáin, king of Leinster 633-666.

That the *bórama* was still paid under duress in the first half of this century is evidenced by an independant source—an Old Irish tract on the rights of the king of Cashel, dating from the 9th century (see *J.C.H.A.S.*, LVII, (1952), 83). Here it is stated that Failbe Flann (ancestor of the McCarthys) king of Munster 628-637 “paid the *bórama* tribute to the Uí Néill on behalf of the Leinstermen. There is further evidence that this Munster king Failbe was a friendly ally of the Leinstermen and their king Faelán in AI 637.

There was some strife over the *bórama* during the reign of this king (Faelán) according to the *Leabar Gabala* account of this tribute (*Leabar Gabala*, Part V, 378). Conaill and Cellach joint high kings (642-658), it says, exacted the tribute without battle for the first six years. They then fought the battles of Carn Ucha and Dún Másc in Laigis against the Leinstermen and exacted it without battle afterwards. This version of the *Bórama* tract (*Leabar Gabala*, V, 380) and the Book of Leinster version (*Silva Gadélica*, I, 381) further say that when Sechnessach became king of Tara (665) he was refused the tribute and led his forces to Lerg Mná Finne where he was met by the Leinster forces under Faelán mac Colmáin. The high kings forces were defeated with heavy loss of life and the tribute retained by the Leinstermen. This is the last battle recorded concerning the *bórama*, before its official remission some years later.

None of the above three battles are recorded either in the Leinster Battle List or in the annals.

Fiannamail mac Maeltuile, king of Leinster 666-680. There are no records of strife during his reign.

Bran mac Conaill, king of Leinster 680-692.

In his reign the sanguinary feud came to an end. The king of Tara at that time was Finnachta Fledach (675-695) of the southern Uí Néill. According to the Book of Leinster version of the *Bórama* tract (*Silva Gadelica*, I, 381) he exacted the *bórama* twice without opposition after his accession to the high kingship. On the next occasion the Leinstermen refused to render the tribute. Finnachta with his forces came to Lathrach Muiredaig on the Meath-Leinster border while the Leinstermen mustered at their capital, Ailenn (Knockaulin, near Newbridge). It seems as if the old quarrel was going to flare up once more. However, the bishops and chief clerics of Leinster intervened. Led by St. Moling of Tech Moling they came to Ailenn and Bran mac Conaill the Leinster king agreed to let St. Moling go to Finnachta and ask that the *bórama* be remitted. Moling went to the Uí Néill king carrying with him (according to the story) a poem in which he sang the praises of the king. Finnachta agreed to remit the tribute; this king embraced the religious life in 687 (AU), but resumed the kingship in the following year. Apparently, he did not wish to refuse the appeal of the bishops of Leinster and neither did he wish to renew this bloody feud. As is usual with the old Irish tales, a mythological motif is introduced into the story. St. Moling is in this *bórama* tract said to have obtained the remission by means of a verbal trick. He beseeched Finnachta to forego the tribute until *Luan* (Monday); when the king agrees Moling points out that the *Luan* to which the tribute was remitted was not the *Luan* of time but the *Luan* of eternity (Doomsday). This motif of obtaining a boon by means of a verbal trick is found in the mythological tale *Gabail in t-Sidhe* in which Oengus in Brug obtains possession of Brug na Bóinne from his father, the Dagda by means of a similar trick.

The remission of the *bórama* is not recorded in the Leinster battle records nor in the ordinary annals, but is recorded in the Book of Leinster Chronicle (LL 25a—*Tripartite Life*, Stokes, 518) and *Three Fragments of Irish Annals*, 92.

Apparently some of the succeeding high-kings of the northern branch of the Uí Néill felt frustrated at being denied the Leinster tribute. The second next king after Finnachta—Congal Cinnmagair (died 710) is said to have “destroyed many throughout Leinster as he could not exact the *bórama* against the opposition of the saints (bishops) and the fulfilment of the prophecy” (*Leabar Gabala V*, 384). His successor Fergal Mac Maileduin, also of the northern Uí Néill re-imposed the tribute in 721 (AU), but the Leinstermen had their revenge in the following year when they defeated and slew Fergal in the Battle of Almain. After this we hear no more of the *bórama*.

Ignoring such general statements such as “Twelve battles fought by Enna against Niall,” which are of no value, and reckoning only those battles which are specifically mentioned by name (as “Battle of Duma Aichir by Dunlang”) we find that in the period under review (c.430-c.680) the Leinster records and annals between them record thirty five conflicts between the Leinstermen and the kings of Tara. We could not expect complete records for the earlier decades of the historical period (c.430-450): the Leinster records mention three battles at that period, but the annals as yet have no entries concerning this warfare. Records, however, from 450 onwards are more detailed. In the half century 450-500 there are ten battles mentioned in the combined records while in the following half century (500-550) eighteen others are recorded.

This century, 450-550, then saw that conflict at a most intense stage, an average of one battle every three or four years. It then became intermittent—there were three or four battles about half a century later (about 600), then another few about 660; the feud finally came to an end a few decades later.

As this conflict was at an intense stage during the opening century of the historical period there is good reason to believe that it had its origin in the not long distant past. Being at an intense phase in the middle of the fifth century it is hardly likely that it had its origin earlier than the proceeding (fourth) century.

We incidentally learn from this study of the combined sources: the Leinster battle poems and battle list on the one hand and the annals on the other, that the annals are by no means a complete record of early events. During the period under review the Leinster records specifically mention twenty one battles, the annals record twenty two, yet only eight or nine of these are common to both lists.

Again we find that the annalists sometimes took over material which did not properly belong to the earlier dated chronicles: the battle of Finnabair AI 535, the *béimenna* or raids of Brandub at Tig. 600, and possibly the record of the battle of Luachair at Tig. 527.