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Journal of the Cork Historical and Archæological Society

(Sixtieth year of Issue)

Contributions Towards the Political History of Munster, 450-800 A.D.

(Continued)

By LIAM Ó BUACHALLA

Ruling Dynasties of Munster, 450-800

When with the aid of the genealogies we trace the identity of the various persons who in the authentic annals are styled king of Cashel or of Munster (they both mean the same thing) we find that in the period under review (i.e. 450-800) the kingship was almost exclusively in the hands of a group of septs called Eoganachta. As already stated, most of these kings were descended from Oengus Mac Nadfraich (slain 490) who is represented by the genealogists as sixth in descent from Eoghan Mór, eponymous ancestor of the Eoganachta. The descendants of Oengus are in the genealogies called Eoganacht Chaisil (that is, Eoganacht of the Cashel district). The descendants of a grandson of Oengus, viz., Cremthann Srem son of Eochu son of Oengus (see Table 1) held a prominent position then, and from an early period were associated with the royal estate of Glennamhain¹ (Glanworth) from which they became known as the Eoganacht Glennamnach, though they are still called Eoganacht Chaisil in the 10th century *Saltair* of Cashel.² The descendants of Cremthann mac Dercon, brother of Cremthann Srem, are called Eoganacht Airthir Cliach and were located about Tipperary town.

The Eoganacht Chaisil were also called Uí MaicLáire.³ Most of the Eoganachta septs have names of the 'Uí' type incorporating the names of apparently historical ancestors of the fifth or sixth centuries. MacLáire was father of Nadfraich, father of Oengus (+490) but the genealogists have as father of Nadfraich a person named Corc, obviously a mythological character judging by the legends connected with him. MacLáire they state was a by-name of Corc's but it is evident from the ancient sept-name Uí MaicLáire that MacLáire was the name which originally appeared at this point of the genealogy and it may possibly have been the real name of Oengus' grandfather. Corc^{3a} son of Luigthech was introduced by the genealogists at this point simply with the object of providing a common

¹ Annals of Innisfallen, 646, 831, 891.² Lecan 407b 'Genealogy of Eoganacht Caisil as found in *Saltair* of Cashel.'³ *Eoganacht Caisil aliter Uí MaicLáire*, Lec. 406b. See also LBL, col. 339, 'The king of Cashel has a distraints officer for East Munster excepting (the states of) Uí MaicLáire, the Déssi and Múscraige.' Also MS Laud, 610, 94b.^{3a} Sometimes called Conall Corc., vide *Anecdota from Irish MSS*, iii, 57 and Lecan 407.

ancestor for all the Eoganacht septs of both east and west Munster (see Table 1). The Eoganacht septs of west Munster probably branched off from the main line at an earlier period. From Ailill, brother of Oengus mac Nadfraich, were sprung the Eoganacht Áine also called Uí Énna Áine.⁴ This sept was located at Knockainey, Co. Limerick.

Further afield we find the Eoganacht Raithlinn located in the country between Cork city and Mizzen Head (Carn Uí Néit). According to the genealogies this sept was descended from MacCass son of Core MacLuighthigh and in the annals and other historical literature are usually known as Uí Eachach⁵ from Eochu son of MacCass. One person only of their number occupied the kingship of Munster during the period which is being dealt with here.

Westwards about Loch Léin (Killarney) there was settled still another important branch of the Eoganachta known in early times as Eoganacht Irluachra. In the annals up to the year 834 the kings of this sept are always styled *rí Irluachra* or *rí Iarmuman* ('king of west Munster') but from that point onwards they are titled *rí Locha Léin*. If our knowledge of events of the earlier period were confined to the evidence of the annals alone we might conclude that the title 'king of west Munster' was simply a synonym for 'king of Irluachair,' that is the country behind Sliab Luachra, the mountains on and near the border of the present county of Kerry. Certainly after the ninth century Iarmuma (west Munster) consisted only of the territory west of these mountains; we are told in the Tripartite Life⁶ that St. Patrick 'did not go over Luachair into Iarmuma.' There is evidence, however, in the tract concerning a sixth century convention which is found in MS Laud 610 (referred to above) that the king of west Munster ruled all the province west of a line extending from the present Cork city to Limerick. It is not to be understood that the western half of the province was completely independent—the kings of west Munster were overlords of all the states in the area mentioned but were themselves subject to the kings of all Munster at Cashel. One person only of the Irluachair (Loch Léin) sept—Maeldúin who died 786—attained to the kingship of the whole province. This division of the Eoganachta are descended from Coirpre Luachra son of Core according to the genealogies.

To return to the enumeration of Eoganacht septs, the genealogists deal with a number of lesser groups who play no part in the affairs of the kingship—the Uí MaicIair⁷ descended from MaccIair son of Core, the Uí MaicBrocc⁸ from MaccBrocc son of Core, and the Uí Muiredaigh from Daigh son of Core. The Eoganacht of Magh Geirginn from Coirpre Cruithnecáin son of Core and the Lemhnaigh from Maine Lemhna son of

⁴ AI 968, 999, *Onomasticon* 669b. Their kings later lived at Inse Cúile (AI 1012.) which seems to be identical with Inch St Laurence near Limerick.

⁵ Also Eoganacht Ua Néit, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, 19.

⁶ Compiled shortly before 900.

⁷ The lands of this sept 'all Umacciair' are mentioned in the Decretal of 1199 as belonging to the see of Cork.

⁸ Suibhne mac Maeleumai, abbot of Cork (+681) and Rosseni, abbot of Cork (+686) both belonged to this sept; see Lecan, 411 and AU.

Corc were located in Scotland. The Cuirene who were settled in the barony of Kilkenny West, Co. Westmeath, are in some genealogies derived from Crónán son of Corc.⁹

The minor east Munster septs—Uí Luighdhech Éle (at Borrisoleigh) and the Uí Cathbad are by the genealogists derived from Corc's brothers, Lugaid son of Luightech and Cathub son of Luightech respectively. According to the Tripartite Life, St Patrick met Ailill son of this Cathub 'of the Eoganacht Airthir Cliach' at Óchtar Cuillend in Uí Cuanach.¹⁰ The sept which was later called Eoganacht Airthir Cliach and which was descended from Cremthann grandson of Oengus mac Nadfraich was not in existence at that time.¹¹

Following immediately on the genealogies of the above mentioned Eoganacht septs in the Book of Leinster and elsewhere we find the genealogies of a number of other septs which are traced to the Eoganacht ancestor, Eoghan Mór, but not through Corc mac Luightigh. Those include the Uí Liatháin (located in east Cork), the Uí Fidgeinte (in diocese of Limerick), the Uí Duach Airgetrois (in northern half of county Kilkenny), the Uí Dedaid (in the country between Cashel and the Kilkenny border), the Uí Cremthainn and the Uí Derduib (in east Munster).¹² By what seems to have been the original genealogical scheme the ancestors of these septs are sons of a person called Dáire Cerba who is third in descent from Eogan Mór (D.C. son of Ailill Flann Bec son of Fiacha Mulleathan son of Eogan Mór).¹³ Some variations have been introduced into the later versions of the genealogies of these septs; for instance, the genealogy of the Uí Duach is joined on to that of the Eoganacht of Loch Léin at Duach Iarlaithe¹⁴ an early historical personage of that west Munster sept. The Uí Duach of Airgetros, as will presently be shown, had no connection with the Loch Léin people. Again, a personage named Máine Munchain represented as brother or father of Dáire Cerba sometimes appears as ancestor of the Uí Fidgeinte¹⁵ but in reality both of these divine ancestors are identical.¹⁶ It is notable that none of this Dáire Cerba group of septs has a title incorporating the term—Eoganacht—such as we find in the case of the Eoganacht Chaisil, Eoganacht Áine, etc. There is a good reason for this; this important group were not of the Eoganachta at all but of the Dáirine or Corca Laighde, one of the main branches of the Érainn or Érna of Munster, who shared the kingship of the province with the Eoganacht in early times. There is clear evidence of this in the Book of Leinster and elsewhere where the chiefs of the Uí Duach Airgetrois, who from about 500 to 620 ruled

⁹ *Genealogical Tracts*, I, 163–164 and *Leabhar Muimhneach*, 140.

¹⁰ This is probably Cullen on the Limerick-Tipperary border.

¹¹ The Eoganacht na n-Árand also called E. n-Inussa, who were located on the Aran Islands, and the Eoganacht Ruis Airgid in the Toomyvarra district, also belonged to the Eoganacht. Vide *Onomasticon*, 399. Still another section of the Eoganachta was settled in Luigne Connacht, now the barony of Leyney, Co. Sligo—Vide *Genealogical Tracts*, I, 195.

¹² *Genealogical Tracts*, I, 147.

¹³ LL 321d. R 149a. BB 173c.

¹⁴ LL 321a, c.

¹⁵ Laud, 610, 98a; R 149a.

¹⁶ Vide Lec. 414 where a variant—Máine Cerba—appears.

over the east Munster territory which later became the kingdom of Ossory, are stated to be of the Corca Laighde.¹⁷ Another sept of the Dáire Cerba group—the Uí Cremthainn—are derived by the genealogists from the warrior (whether real or legendary is not certain) Cremthann Mór mac Fidaig, who in a poem in the Book of Leinster is styled ‘the fiery king of the Dáirine’ (*rí daigrech Dáirine*).¹⁸ In a brief summary of an ancient collection of genealogies which appears at *Genealogical Tracts* 172 and MS H.3.17 (T.C.D.) 753, the reference to the Dáire Cerba peoples appears amongst the extracts relating to the Érainn septs of Munster—the Múscraige and Dáirine.¹⁹

It is sufficiently clear from the above evidence that Dáire Cerba is identical with Dáire Doimthech or Dáire Sírcrechtach, the divine ancestor of the Dáirine or Corca Laighde of the south-west coast of Cork and allied septs, and that the Dáire Cerba septs are really Dáirine although their genealogies have been joined by the official historians to the Eoganacht stem.

The right of the Dáirine to the kingship of Munster is admitted in quite a number of places in our ancient writings. The compiler of the introduction to the Eoganacht genealogies, while admitting the fact that both Eoganacht and Dáirine had an equal right to the provincial kingship, would have us believe that the right of the Dáirine had lapsed²⁰ in prehistoric times. The real facts are that the right had never lapsed, but by the simple expedient of hitching the genealogies of the more influential Dáirine septs—the Uí Fidgeinte, Uí Duach, Uí Liathain, etc.—to the Eoganacht stem it was extinguished, at least in theory, though in practice the right remained until the power of these septs finally declined. One of this group of septs—the Uí Fidgeinte—whose territory extended over three-fourths of the present county of Limerick, held a most prominent position amongst the Munster septs until about 900, when apparently as a result of internal dissention this great sept separated into two independent parts and their power consequently declined.²¹ The right of the Uí

¹⁷ In LL 40 the names of seven kings of Corca Laighe who ruled over Ossory are given as follows: Cúchraide mac Duach (of the Uí Duach Argetrois according to the genealogies LL 321, etc.); Feradach mac Duach (who died 582, AU) apparently brother of Cúraidhe; Colman son of Feradach; Cennfaeladh; Aedh Osraighe; Nuata, and Scannlan son of Cennfaeladh. *Three Fragments of Irish Annals* (edited O'Donovan) in recording death of Feradach at 582 also mention that he was of the Corca Laighe. In LL 303 he is further mentioned as being of that sept. There is a chapter on these Corca Laighe kings in Carrigan's *History and Antiquities of Diocese of Ossory*, pp. 30–35.

¹⁸ LL 150b, *Silva Gadelica*, 335.

¹⁹ All the ruling peoples of Ireland are in this summary derived from Nuada Aircedclain. The entries relating to the Érainn septs appear in the following order: ‘The genealogy of the Érainn joins [the main stem] at Aengus Tuirmech; the genealogy of the Múscraige joins at Roigni, son of Nuada; the genealogy of the Uí Fidgeinte, Uí Liathain, Uí Cremthainn, Uí Duach and Uí Derduibh joins at Dáire Cerba; the genealogy of the Dáirine joins at Dáire Doimtheach.’ *Genealogical Tracts*, 172. For H.3.17 version see *Celtic Ireland* (MacNeill) 52ff.

²⁰ LL 319b, R 147b, say that the kingship was held by Érainn and Dergthene (i.e. Eoganachta) alternately ‘down to time of Conaire mac Moga Lama.’ Vide also *Eriu*, iii, 140; Keatings *Forus Feasa*, ii, 276; *Miscellany of Celtic Society*, 6, which say that Dáirine right lapsed in time of Ailill Ólum.

²¹ These were Uí Chonaill Gabhra and Uí Coirpre Ebha. Judging by the entries in AI these states were independent of one another from about 950 onwards.

Fidgeinte to the kingship of Cashel is implied in the early (8th or 9th century) statement of reciprocal services between the kings of Cashel and the Munster states. Dealing with the rights of the Múscraige sept this document states: 'Their kings (sit) in session with the king of Cashel unless it is the king of Uí Fidgeinte or the king of Irluachair or the king of Raithlend who is there (that is, who is king of Cashel).'²² Like the Eoganacht Raithlind and the Eoganacht Irluachra, one person of the Uí Fidgeinte sept held the provincial kingship in the period with which we are dealing. He was the cleric Olcobhar mac Flainn who died 795 (AU).

The impression which the Eoganacht genealogists leave—that the Dáirine, though sharing in the kingship of Munster in early times, had lost that right in the pre-Christian period—is therefore a misleading one. Considering that a section of the Érainn had a right to the kingship of Munster even in historical times we are tempted to enquire a little more closely into the origin of the Eoganachta. Were they a new and distinct people or were they simply another branch of the Érainn akin to the Dáirine? Owing to the pre-eminence of the Eoganacht septs in Munster right from the start of the historical period their historians would have us believe that they were a people distinct and superior to the Érainn with whom they at one time shared the provincial kingship. In the official genealogical scheme in which the leading peoples of Ireland are derived from the sons of Míl son of Bile son of Breogan, Eoghan Mór and his descendants, the Eoganachta are represented as being descended from Éber son of Míl. The leading Gaelic septs of the northern half of Ireland along with the Leinstermen and a number of the Érainn peoples—the Múscraige, Corca Duibne, etc.—are represented as being descended from Eremón, son of Míl, while the Dáirine—the Corca Laighde of the south-west coast of Cork and their co-relatives—are not from the sons of Míl at all but from Ith mac Breogaind, an uncle of Míl's. Thus the official genealogists while exalting the position of the Eoganachta in Munster very ingeniously make the Érainn appear in a less favourable light: some of them—the Múscraige, etc.—are immigrants from the northern half of Ireland, while the Dáirine, being descendants of an uncle of Míl's, would be of inferior status to the direct descendants of the sons of Míl who in the historical period occupied all the kingships of importance throughout the country. In dealing with the Dáire Cerba peoples above we have seen how very artificial and misleading the official doctrine concerning sept affiliations can be. When we leave aside the late official histories of the Eoganachta as found in the *Leabhar Gabhala* and the *Cath Maige Léna* text and examine the older traditional historical and genealogical lore of that sept and of the peoples with whom they came in contact we are led to suspect that their true early history was very different to that presented by the official historians of later times. The earlier history of the Eoganachta is much more closely linked with

²² *Irish Texts* (Grosjean and O'Keeffe) i, 20. From other sources it is clear that the Uí Fidgeinte were recognised as enjoying equal status with the Eoganacht septs of west Munster. In *Eriu*, iii, 138, it is said that the king of the Déssi was guaranteed the same free status as the 'kings of the three Eoganachta, namely the kings of Raithlend, Luachair (Loch Léin), and Uí Fidgeinte along with Uí Liathain.' See also *Irish Texts*, i, 21.

that of the Érainn than official historians care to admit. In quite a number of scraps of early genealogical lore, Eogan or Eogan Mór, their divine ancestor, is given a pedigree linking him with leading ancestor-deities of the Érainn. In a list of ancestors of the Érainn in LL 324e the name Eogan Mór appears, while in the genealogies of the Érainn septs namely, the Múscraige, Dál Riata, etc., in Lec. 229 and elsewhere, their ancestor Conaire Mór is son of Eterscél son of Eogan son of Ailill son of Iar son of Ded²³ (from whom the Érainn are sometimes called Clann Dedad). In a tale in LL 292a Eogan Mór of Munster is son of Eterscél son of Eogan and brother of Conaireson of Eterscél. In the introduction to the Eoganachta genealogies in the LL 319b and elsewhere²⁴ we are told that Eogan son of Iar son of Ded, king of Munster (of the Érainn) was slain by Énna Muncháin who is ancestor of (Lugaid) MacCon and the Dáirine in the *Leabhar Gabála* poem commencing *Conaire caem cliamain Cuinn*.²⁵ But the official account of the death of Eogan Mór (ancestor of the Eoganachta) tells that he was slain by Lugaid MacCon at the battle of Magh Muccrama,²⁶ so that it is quite obvious that the Eoghan king of Munster of the Érainn mentioned above is identical with Eoghan Mór, the Eoganacht ancestor. It is also evident from the early traditional materials that the Eoganachta were latecomers to the Suir valley and the Cashel district—it is probable that they did not arrive here until a century or so before the opening of the historical period—and that before their arrival there they had little or no influence in Munster affairs. Much more could be written concerning the earlier history of the Eoganachta but as we are now dealing with events of the opening centuries of the true historical period it is not intended to pursue this matter further here.

Kings of Munster and of West Munster, 450–800

In compiling a trustworthy list of the kings of Munster in the period being dealt with here we have to rely on the evidence of the early annals; in being based on contemporary records they are our only true guide. However, owing to the scant notice accorded to Munster events in the earlier stages, these annals, as already stated, are of little help until we reach the closing decades of the sixth century—they leave us with a blank from the death of Oengus mac Nadfraich in 490 to the reign of Coirpre Crom who died 580. Apart from the annals there are to be found in our ancient historical literature king-lists (*réim rioghraidhe*) for the various provincial kingships which purport to give in chronological order the succession of kings along with certain other details such as the length of each reign and the circumstances of the death of each ruler.

As regards the succession to the kingship of Munster quite a number

²³ See also Rawl. B. 502, 162d.

²⁴ Rawl. B. 502, 147a, *Leabhar Muimhnech*, 50. See also *Silva Gadelica*, 359, which mentions Eogan mac Ailella Érainn and Eogan mac Dáire as kings of the two Munsters.

²⁵ Vide *Forus Feasa ar Éirinn*, ii, 284.

²⁶ Laud 610, 96a1; *Revue Celtique*, xiii, 434ff. *Silva Gadelica*, 310.

of lists are available.²⁷ While it must be admitted that these agree on most points with a list based on the evidence of the annals, most of them contain names which are not supported by annalistic evidence, or omit names of persons who according to the annals held the office of kingship. Moreover, the chronological order of the succession of kings as indicated by the annals is not followed in any of these regnal lists. The lists as they have come down to us must therefore be regarded as of late date—probably tenth or eleventh century at earliest.

Somewhat similar to the king-lists are the synchronisms (*comaimserdha*),²⁸ compilations in which lists of the provincial kings are synchronised with a list of the kings of Ireland. These, however, are not more reliable than the regnal lists, and consequently none of them can be relied on to provide us with a trustworthy list of the kings of Munster during the first three-quarters of the sixth century, that is for the period in which the annals fail to throw any light on the succession to the southern kingship.

It must be pointed out here that the compiler of the so-called Annals of Tigernach, on noticing the absence of *obit* notices of a number of the Munster kings, supplied the want by entering at what he considered the proper points the death-notices of kings whose names he extracted from a version of the Munster regnal lists. Such interpolated entries are of course of no value as compared with genuine contemporary annalistic records.

The first king of Cashel mentioned in the annals is Oengus mac Nadfraich who was slain according to AU in 489 (=490).²⁹ Next mentioned in the annals is Coirpre Crom, great-grandson (see Table 1) of the abovementioned Oengus. In AI 573³⁰ he is mentioned in connection with the battle of Femen and the same annals record his death at 580. In the regnal lists he is allotted a reign of thirty years; this means that he succeeded to the kingship in 550. For the sixty or so years between the death of Oengus and the accession of Coirpre we have, as already stated, no reliable record of the succession of kings; we give here the names appearing in the various versions of the king-lists for what they are worth. In the most common version of the Munster regnal list which appears in BB 59b and in the *Leabhar Muimneach*, Oengus is succeeded by his son Eochaidh, ancestor of the Eoganacht of Glennamhain (Glanworth) and he in turn is succeeded by his son Cremthann Srem. Cremthann is succeeded

²⁷ What is probably the oldest extant list of the kings of Cashel is embodied in the story of the finding of Cashel by the swineherds in the time of Core mac Luigthigh which appears in MS H.3. 17, col. 769 (unpublished). According to this tale an angel appeared to the swineherds of the kings of Éile and Múscraige and names Core's successors. The list ends with the name of Dublactna who reigned 885-891 and undoubtedly was compiled at that time. It is in complete agreement with the annals except that a few of the names are misplaced. Yet, for the all important period preceding 579, the list is obviously incomplete. When the compiler comes to Cathal mac Finguine (+742) he says that the number of kings up to that point was twenty-two, but his list contains nineteen names only.

²⁸ Synchronisms from Laud 610 and Book of Lecan, published in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, ix, 471ff; xix, 87 ff. Another version in which the Munster list is incomplete is to be found in *Annals of Clonmacnoise* 71, 72, 80, 97, 115.

²⁹ See note 7, *J.C.H.A.S.*, LVI, (1951), 88.

³⁰ Dating as in McAirt's recently published edition of this book of Annals.

by his son, the abovementioned Coirpre Crom, who died in 580. While there can be little doubt that Eochaidh and Cremthann held the office of kingship it is unlikely that the office passed direct from father to son for a period of three generations; this was not the general rule of succession to Irish kingships. In this period it is probable that the kingship was held by others belonging to collateral lines: a number of lists³¹ include the name of Oengus's son—Feidlimid (ancestor of the Eoganacht Caisil), while Crimthann (see Table 1) son of this Feidlimid appears as king of Munster in an ancient (probably ninth century) account of a west Munster synod in Laud 610, fo. 103b.³²

Returning to the annals, the *Chronicon Scotorum*, which is free from interpolations of the sort found in the closely related *Annals of Tigernach*, has at 583 the entry: *Iugulatio Fergusae Sgandail, righ Mumhan* (slaying of F.S. king of Munster). In a number of texts³³ we are told that certain lands in Éile were given as *éric* (compensation for homicide) of Fergus Scandal but we know nothing further about this event. An interpolated entry in A.Tig. and all the king-lists say he died a natural death. He was of the Eoganacht of Airthir Cliach who were located about Tipperary town. His name, however, does not appear in the H.3.17 list and possibly the words *righ Mumhan* in CS may have been interpolated. The death of Feidlimid mac Tigernaig, king of Munster in 590 (AU 589) is entered in all the books of annals. He was of the Eoganacht Raithlind (of the Bandon district) and was the only person of that sept to hold office in the period being dealt with here.³⁴ The death of Fingin mac Aed, king of Munster of the Eoganacht Caisil line, is entered in AI 619.³⁵ His immediate successors were Cathal mac Aeda of the Eoghanacht of Glennamhain who died 628 (AI, AC 627) and Failbe Flann of the Eoghanacht Caisil who died in 637³⁶ (AU 636, etc). Although this Failbe was a king of some note the compiler of AI 639 simply records '*Mors Failbe Fland*' without giving any intimation that he was king of Munster. At 641 the same annals record the death of Cuán mac Amalgaid without giving any further particulars. The Munster regnal lists, without exception, include the name of this Cuán; it is probable that he was king but for a very short time only.³⁷ Cuán was of the Eoganacht of Áine (Knockainey).

³¹ LL 150b. LL 320. AC 72.

³² This text is quoted further on. The important list in H.3.17 769 gives the names of two kings only—Eochu and Feidlimid—in the period between death of Oengus and accession of Coirpre, but see note 27.

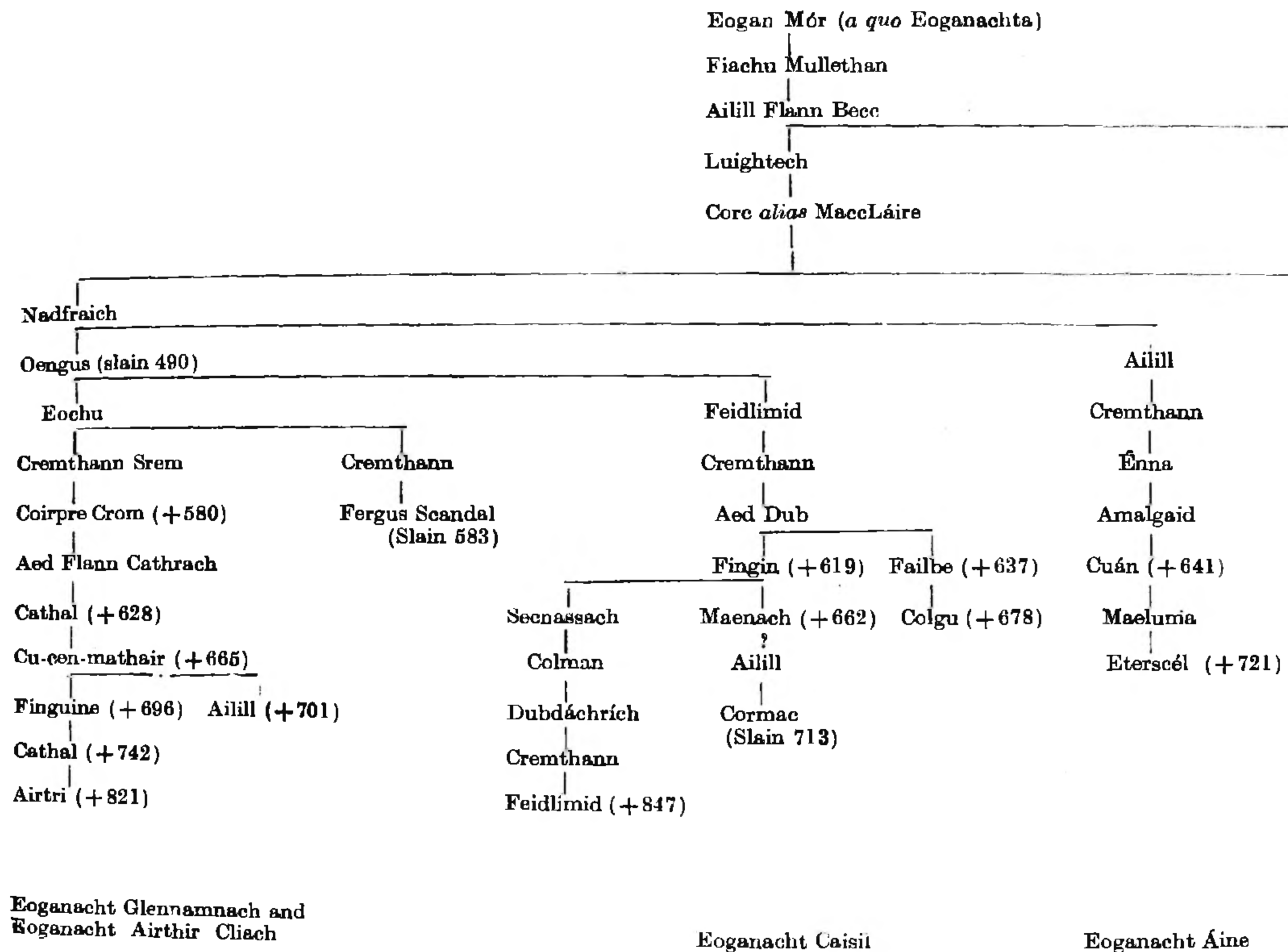
³³ *Genealogical Tracts*, 138; *Leabhar na gCeart*, 86; cf. *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, iv, 7.

³⁴ Dubdaboirind mac Domnaill of this sept was king of Munster 957–959.

³⁵ He was ancestor of the Cenél Fingin to which belonged the families of Ó Suilleabháin, Ó Donnchadha, Ó Cuill, Ó Deorain and Ó Duineachaidh. The king-lists in *Leabhar Muimneach* and LL 320 have three other names before that of Fingin but none of these appear in the annals or in the H.3.17 list. These were Amalgaid and Garban, sons of Éuna of the Eoganacht Áine and Aedh Bennán of the Eoganacht Irluachra.

³⁶ Failbe was ancestor of Cenél Failbe to which belonged the families of MacCarthaigh, Ó Ceallacáin, Ó Riordáin, Ó Coileachair, Ó Cearbaill, Ó hÉgertaigh and Ó Cuirc.

³⁷ A.Tig also record Cuán's death at 639. No notice can be taken of the entry in this annals and in AC which state that Cuán mac Amalgada was slain in the battle of Carn Conaill 649.



Eoganacht Glennamnach and
Eoganacht Airthir Cliach

Eoganacht Caisil

Eoganacht Áine

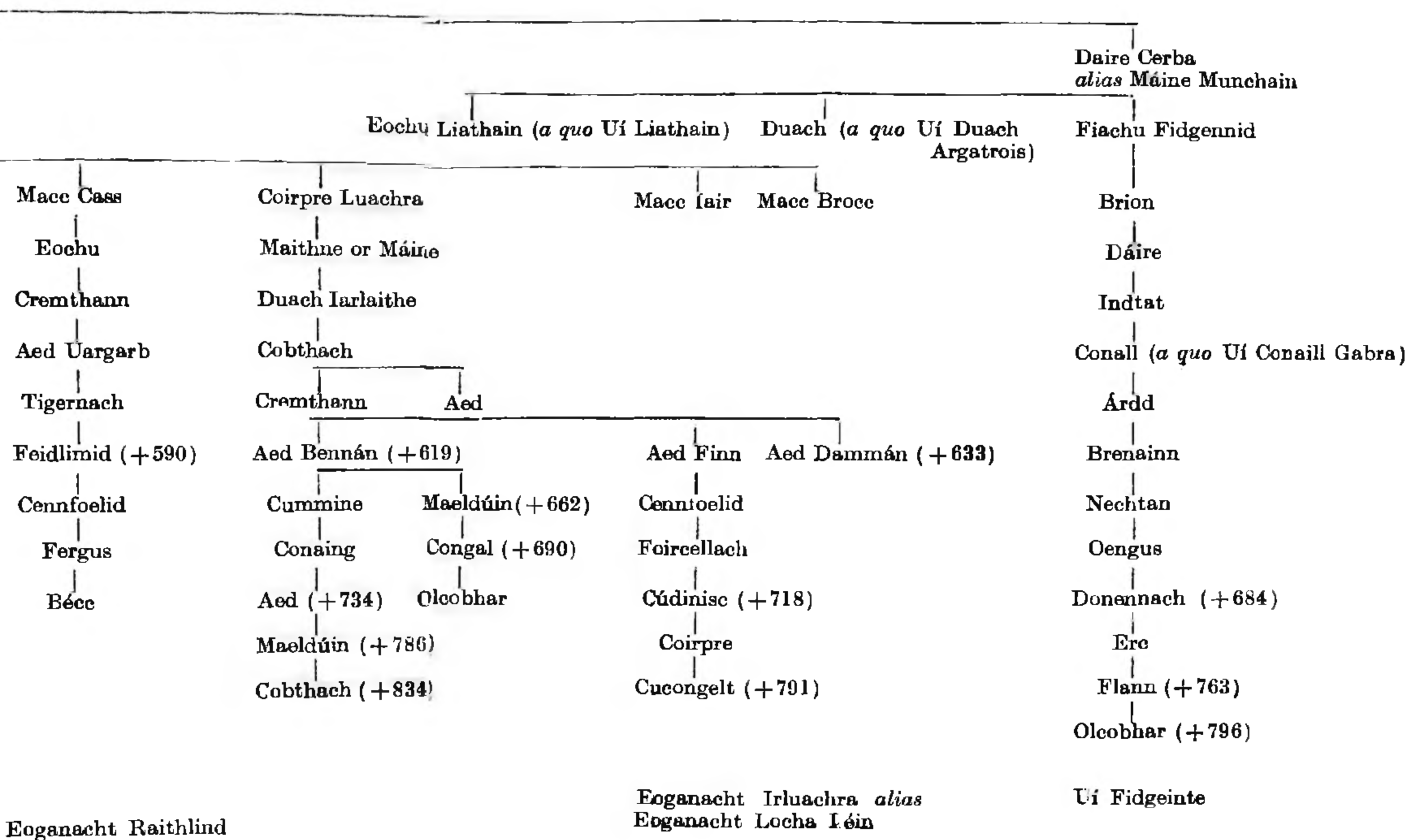


TABLE I

Details of the succession to the kingship during the next seventy years present little difficulty; in general, the death-notice of each king appears in all the books of annals. Maenach son of Fingin of the Eoganacht Caisil died in 662 (AU 661, etc.); Cú-cen-mathair of the Glennamhain branch died 665; Colgu son of Failbe Flann of Eoganacht Caisil died 678 (AU 677, he is not mentioned in AI); Finguine son of Cú-cen-mathair of the Eoganacht Glennamhnach died 696, while his brother Ailill died 700 or 701. The next king mentioned in the annals—Cormac, son of Ailill son of Maenach—was slain by the Déis Tuaiscert in the battle of Carn Feradaig in 713. He was undoubtedly a grandson of the Maenach of the Eoganacht Caisil, the king who died in 662, but the genealogies fail to enlighten us on this point. Possibly this Cormac left no descendants and the genealogists consequently did not trouble to mention him. Maenach who died 662 had a son Tipraide who was ancestor of the Ó Duineachaid (O Dennehy) family. No notice can be taken of the very artificial genealogy provided for Cormac in the king-lists which represent him as belonging to the Uí Fidgeinte. The next king of Munster, Eterscé, is mentioned in AI only. These annals at the year 721 record: ‘*Eterscé mac Mailduin* [leg. Mailumha] *rí Cassil, moritur.*’ He was of the Eoganacht of Áine. The king-lists without exception put this Eterscé before Cormac mac Ailella (slain 713)³⁸ and with one exception³⁹ all omit the Ailill who died 700. Eterscé was succeeded by the powerful chief of the Eoganacht of Glennamhain—Cathal mac Finguine—who attempted unsuccessfully it would seem, to secure for himself the office of high-kingship of Ireland. AI in recording his death at 742 gives him the title *rí hÉrend*, but in AU (741) he is simply *regis Caisil*. In some of the king-lists it is stated that Cathassach son or nephew of the Eterscé who died 721, succeeded Cathal mac Finguine in the kingship but he is not mentioned in the annals and his name is absent from a number of the regnal lists.⁴⁰

For a century and a half the occupants of the kingship had been drawn exclusively from the Eoganacht septs of east Munster—mainly from the houses of Glennamhain and Caisil, but now in the mid-eighth century a break occurs. The power of those two great houses, especially that of Glennamhain, had, it would seem, already begun to decline and at this time there appeared on the scene the most powerful chief of the Eoganacht Irluachra (at Loch Léin)—Maeldúin son of Aedh Bennán. There appears to have been much contention between the septs of east and west Munster at that time, and Maeldúin’s name is omitted deliberately, apparently, from many of the regnal lists. Yet the annals do not name any of the chiefs of east Munster as claiming the kingship of Cashel during his lifetime—they mention no other king of Munster from the death of Cathal mac Aeda in 742 to the decease of this Maeldúin in 786, a period of 44 years. The annals of Clonmacnoise at 753 (recte 757) state that ‘Cumascach prince of Offaly

³⁸ LL 320 says that he died in orders (*i clérchecht*) so it is possible that his reign did precede that of Cormac, although his death did not occur until 721.

³⁹ This is the list which is included in the tale of the ‘Svineherds Vision’ in H.3.17, 769.

⁴⁰ It is absent from the H.3.17 list, also from the metrical list in LL 150a.

was killed by Moyledwyn Mc Hugh Beannan, king of Mounster '—A.Tig. have same entry at 757.⁴¹ AI at 764 record a defeat of Maeldúin in Breg at the hands of the Uí Fidgeinte and Araid Cliach. The same annals recording his death at 786 give him the title *rí Mumhan*—in AU 785 he is simply *regis Irlóchre*.⁴² Maeldúin was the only chief of the Eoganacht Irluachra who occupied the kingship of Munster.

The next reference to a king of Munster occurs at AU 792 (793) '*Ordinatio Artroigh mic Cathail in regem Mumen.*' This also appears in AC (English translation) as: 'Artry McCahall was ordained king of Mounster.' This Artri was the son of Cathal mac Finguine of the Eoganacht of Glennamhain, the king who died 742.

The question arises: who was king of Munster during the seven years which intervened between the death of Maeldúin 786 and the accession of Artri in 793? The answer to this question is undoubtedly supplied by the entry in AU 795 which translated reads as follows: 'Dubhlittir of Finglas and Colgu Ua Duinechda, Olcobhur, son of Flann, son of Ere, king of Munster, scribes and bishops and anchorites, died.' AC have the same entry at 793.

Apparently Olcobhur occupied the office of kingship until 793 when he retired in favour of Artri. It would seem that Olcobhur, like his predecessor Maeldúin, was not universally recognised as king; his name does not appear in any of the regnal lists,⁴³ and AI (797) in recording his death refers to him simply as 'abbot of Inis Cathaigh,'⁴⁴

Olcobhar's tenure of the kingship of Munster is not only of unusual interest because he was the first of a number of distinguished clerics⁴⁵ to hold that office during the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries but also because he was of the Uí Fidgeinte sept which, as has already been pointed out, was not of the Eoganachta group of septs at all but of the Dáirine branch of the Érainn of Munster. He was brother of the Scandlán mac Flainn mic Eirc, king of Uí Fidgeinte who died 786 (AI) and was the only person of that sept who was king of Munster in historical times.

Artri mac Cathail who was ordained king in 793 died 821 (AI). He must have retired in the previous year, as AI 820 records the accession of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn. Artri was the last of the Glannamhain (Glanworth) line to hold office; during his reign the Norse marauders appeared on the Irish coast and a new phase of the history of Ireland and of Munster may be said to have begun. Up to the time of the seizure of the kingship of Munster by Mathgamain mac Cennéidigh of the Dál Chais

⁴¹ It is also in Annals of the Four Masters, 753.

⁴² A.Tig and CS are blank at this point.

⁴³ This may in some cases be due to the fact that another Olcobhar who also was a cleric was king of Munster about half-a-century later (847–850). The two Olcobhars could easily have been fused into one by the compilers of the late regnal lists. The H.3.17 list breaks off at Cathal mac Finguine (+742) and resumes with Artri (792).

⁴⁴ He is styled *airchinnech Inse Cathaigh* by the Four Masters, anno 792.

⁴⁵ The others were Feidlimid mac Crimthann (820–847) Olcobhar mac Cinaeda (847–851) Cendfaeladh Ua Muchthaigirnd (861–872); Cormac mac Cuilennáin (901–908) and Flaithbertach mac Inmaineain (914–940). The latter was of the Múscraige (Leabhar Muimhneach 405) and the others were of various Eoganacht septs.

in 964 the occupants of that office were drawn mainly from the Eoganacht Caisil line.

The chiefs who in these early centuries ruled over the western half of Munster (subordinate to the kings of all Munster at Cashel) next claim our attention. There is reason to believe, as will presently be shown, that the area under their jurisdiction extended eastwards to Cork city. The identity of one of these kings of west Munster cannot be determined but all the remaining occupants of that office were of the Eoganacht Irluachra, seated at Loch Léin. This sept, as already stated, was descended from Coirpre Luachra son of Core (see Table 1) this Core being common ancestor of all the Eoganacht septs according to the genealogies. From Coirpre Luachra the main line of descent is traced as follows: Maithne (or Máine), Duach Iarlaithe, Cobthach, Cremthann. This Cremthann had four sons: Aed Bennán, who is the first person of this sept mentioned in the annals, Aed Dammán, Aed Finn and Failbe. Before going into the annalistic records of the kings of west Munster it must be mentioned that the early tract concerning west Munster affairs in the Laud 610 MS, which will presently be discussed, mentions a Cremthann Odor as *ri Iarmuman*. This is undoubtedly the Cremthann abovementioned, father of Aed Bennán, etc. According to the genealogies this Cremthann had a brother Aed who may be identical with the Aed Balg, *ri Iarmuman* who is said to have been present at the convention of Druim Cett in 575.⁴⁶

AU 619 and AI 621 record the death of Aed Bennán but do not give him any title. AI at 633 refers to his brother as follows: '*Mors Aedha Damain, ri Iarmuman.*' The same annals records the death of Maeldúin son of Aed Bennán in 662 but gives no further particulars. Maeldúin's son, Congal, is mentioned in AU 689 as follows: 'Congal, son of M. son of Aed Bennán king of west Munster [*rex Iarmuman*] was slain.' This is the only instance in which AU uses this title; *rex Irlóchre* is the usual title which it gives to these kings. Congal is mentioned also by AI but no particulars are given. The next reference to a king of west Munster is at AI 701: '*Mors Muilbracha, ri Iarmuman.*' There is no person of this name in the genealogy of the Eoghanacht Iarluachra but this genealogy is not very detailed.⁴⁷

AI at 718 records death of Cúdinisc mac Foircellaich, *ri Iarmuman*. He was a great-grandson of Aed Finn brother of Aed Bennán (+619) and Aed Damain (+633) and was first person of this line to hold the kingship. The succession then reverts to the descendants of Aed Bennán. AI 734 records death of Aed ⁴⁸ mac Conaing (son of Cummine son of Aedh Bennán) *ri Iarmuman*. AU 732 styles him *regis Irlóchrae*. Maeldúin, son of this Aed, was king of all Munster 742-786 and has already been dealt with above. AI at the year 791 records the killing of Cúcongelt son of Coirpre, king of west Munster. This king was undoubtedly son of Coirpre who was

⁴⁶ *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, xiii, 8.

⁴⁷ The genealogies mention a Maelbracha mac Domnaill of the Corea Duibhne who flourished about this time but as the annals does not give the name of the father of the Maelbracha mentioned above it is useless to speculate as to his identity.

⁴⁸ He is called Aed Bennán in AU 785.

son of Cúdinisc, the king who died 718. Finally, AI at year 834 records the death of Cobhtach son of Maeldúin *rí Locha Léin*, who in AU is styled *rí Iarmuman*. With him the history of the kings of west Munster comes to a close. The titles *rí Iarmuman* and *rí Irluachra* are no longer used by the annalists; the power of this sept declined to such a degree that only a few of their chiefs are mentioned by the annalists during the next two centuries and these are described simply as *rí Locha Léin*. The decline of the west Munster dynasty will presently be dealt with more fully.

‘The West Munster Synod’

Some further interesting information regarding the political set up in west Munster in the centuries with which we are dealing, can be gleaned from the brief tract in MS Laud, 610 (fo. 102a)⁴⁹ already referred to above, which gives a report of a synod alleged to have been held about the mid-sixth century. It is indeed questionable if any convention⁵⁰ such as described, did take place; the persons stated to have been present were not all contemporaries. However, as this tract was written at latest in the ninth century (probably in the early part of that century) we may feel sure that the author was presenting a true picture of the political state of west Munster as it was in his time and in the centuries immediately preceding. Omitting the less important details, the substance of this tract is as follows:

Macc Ardae, son of Fidach ‘king of Ciarraige Luachra’⁵¹ has a conference with his step-brother—St. Ciarán mac an tSaoir (of Clonmacnoise)—and other eminent churchmen belonging to the west Munster tributary septs. Their object was to promote a pact of friendship between the Ciarraige and the other tributary states of west Munster in order that they could all better resist the oppression of the king of west Munster, that is the king of Loch Léin, and to seek to limit the power of that king. Solemn guarantees towards the observance of this pact were given on behalf of the various septs by the following: Brendán mac huí Altae (St Brendan the Navigator) and Mochuta Rathin on behalf of the Ciarraige;⁵² Finán Cam and Monessóc (St Nessen) on behalf of the Corco Duibne;⁵³ Molua on behalf of the Corco Ché (or Corco Oiche);⁵⁴ Molachtóc or Lachtíne and

⁴⁹ Published in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, viii, 315.

⁵⁰ Conventions of this sort are among the common stock-in-trade of the compilers of ‘lives’ of the early Irish saints and are undoubtedly modelled on the great convention of Druim Cett held in 575.

⁵¹ In an anecdote concerning birth of Brendan (the Navigator) in LL 371a MacArdae is again styled king of Ciarraige Luachra. In *Lives of the Saints from Book of Lismore*, 100, he is ‘a wealthy man’ and a ‘hosteller’ (*brugaid*).

⁵² The Ciarraige and their subsidiary sept—the Altraige—occupied the present baronies of Trughanacmy, Clanmaurice, and Iraghticonnor in the northern half of Co. Kerry. Alta was divine ancestor of the Altraige and St Brendan is here referred to as *mac hui Altae* (leg. *moccu A.*) ‘descendant of Alta’ which means that he was of the Altraige sept. St Mochuta was of the Ciarraige.

⁵³ They inhabited the territory included in the present baronies of Corcaguiney, Iveragh and the north-western corner of Magunihy in the west of Co. Kerry.

⁵⁴ Corco Oiche consisted of parishes of Abbeyfeale, Monegay and part of Killeedy, Co. Limerick

his comarb on behalf of the Múscraige; ⁵⁵ Brendán of Birr on behalf of the Cuirige, ⁵⁶ and Comgán airchindech of Emly on behalf of the Fortuatha. ⁵⁷

Cremthann Odhar, ⁵⁸ king of west Munster, came and asked if it were true that they were intervening in his kingship. Brendan of Birr said that there would be no king in that synod but the king of Heaven and that the only king whom the states represented would recognise as overlord was the king of Cashel. The two Brendans said that there would not be a king of your (Cremthann's) race from that day until doomsday. Brendan of the Altraige (the Navigator) said that no king of Iarmume (west Munster) would rule over the Ciarraige from the days of a king named Maeldúin, ⁵⁹ but by choice they would be free to recognise whatever king would be ruling in Cashel of the family of Oengus mac Nadfraich. Macc Ardae (king of Ciarraige Luachra) and Furudran ⁶⁰ then give their hostages to Cremthann mac Feidlim the king of Cashel who remarks: you will be free with me and there will not be taken from you (in imposts) only as you yourselves shall choose. The tract concludes with an enumeration of the services and dues which were to be exchanged between the Ciarraige and the Eoganacht of Loch Léin when the Ciarraige were willing to recognise the king of Loch Léin as overlord of west Munster. Amongst other things it lays down that the impositions which the king of Loch Léin is entitled to from the Corco Trí, ⁶¹ the Orbrige ⁶² and the under-septs of west Munster in general are to be shared equally between the king of Loch Léin and the king of Ciarraige; that when hostages are exchanged between them, the king of Loch Léin shall give three hostages to the king of Ciarraige and the latter shall give two to the king of Loch Léin but these hostages are not given until the king of Loch Léin 'has established his rule over all the surrounding states, to wit, Corco Bascind, ⁶³ Corcomruad, ⁶⁴ Uí Fidgeinte, Corco Luigde both land and sea, and Uí Eeach.' Moreover, the Ciarraige were not bound to go into an assembly (summoned by the king of west Munster) until all the other west Munster peoples have gone before them and they were not to be required to go on a military expedition against any of the states above-mentioned with whom they have concluded the pact of friendship.

⁵⁵ The baronies of Muskerry in Cork (Múscraige Mittine), the Rathmore district (M. Luachra) and the half-barony of Kilmore (Múscraige Uí Donnagain). There were other Múscraige septs in east Munster.

⁵⁶ Not located

⁵⁷ The Fortuatha were the Araid (who belonged to east Munster) and the Caenraige in the barony of Kenry around Pallaskenry, Co. Limerick, which was in west Munster. Vide Mac Fírbis's *Book of Genealogies*, 503

⁵⁸ He seems to be identical with Cremthann, father of Aed Bennán (+619).

⁵⁹ Apparently Maeldúin, king of Munster, 742-786.

⁶⁰ Not identified

⁶¹ Not located. A branch of this sept—Corco Fírtí or Corco Trí was located in Co. Sligo.

⁶² The name survives as Orrery, the name of a half-barony which extends from Buttevant to Liscarrol but it would appear that the original territory of the Orbraige included also the greater part of the adjoining barony of Duhallow. The Orbraige Droma Imnocht, also called Corca Luachra, lived about Sliabh Luachra on Cork-Kerry border. Vide *Onomasticon* 365, 561; also LL 292a. Some of the Orbraige were settled in the Cashel district

⁶³ They occupied the baronies of Moyarta, Clonderlaw and part of Islands, Co. Clare.

⁶⁴ The baronies of Corcomroe and Burren in north-west Clare.

It is highly probable that this tract in reality deals with the west Munster of the late eighth and early ninth century when the contention between the Eoganacht of Loch Léin and the Ciarraige along with the other west Munster tributary septs had come to a head. It cannot have been written before 786 when Maeldúin, the powerful king of Loch Léin, mentioned by St Brendan in his 'prophecy' above, died. As already stated the power of the Loch Léin people sharply declined after Maeldúin's death; Cúcongelt son of Coirpre, king of west Munster, was slain 791 (AI); the annals records further strife two years later: 'The battle of Conchenn (Magunihy, that is the Killarney district) in which the king of Corca Duibne was slain' (AI 793), while at AI 803 we find the very interesting entry 'A battle between the Ciarraige and the Eoganacht in which Aed Allán son of Coirpre was slain.' This Aed was undoubtedly brother of Cúcongelt son of Coirpre, king of west Munster, slain in 791. While, as already stated, the Annals of Innisfallen does not contain any reference to a king of Loch Léin for the two centuries 834–1038 the same compilation records the deaths of no fewer than sixteen kings of the Ciarraige for the same period.

It is also probable that the story of the synod was invented by the compiler of this tract and that the array of west Munster saints was introduced to strengthen the extravagant claims of the Ciarraige as set out in this document. It is of course possible that contention between the Ciarraige and the Eoganacht of west Munster already existed in the mid-sixth century and undoubtedly Macc Ardae⁶⁵ is an historical figure. His name does not appear in the genealogies but then the names of comparatively few persons belonging to the sixth century are recorded in these compilations.

This tract is of further interest in that it furnishes us with particulars of the extent of the kingdom of west Munster. It is laid down in the closing paragraph that the Ciarraige were not to give hostages to the king of Loch Léin until the latter had extended his rule (*co nderna ri Loch Léin cáin*) to the states of Corco Bascind, Corcomruad, Uí Fidgeinte, Corco Laigde and Uí Each. Apparently, these peoples voluntarily accepted the overlordship of the king of Loch Léin. The latter three at least were free states: the Uí Fidgeinte and Uí Each or Eoganacht Raithlind have already been dealt with above and the Corco Laigde being Dáirine were free from tribute in these earlier centuries. The early statement of the services of the king of Cashel says 'None of these (tributes) are due from the Corco Laigde as they are free from paying taxes to the rulers of Munster, because they have an equal right with the Eoganacht to the kingship.'⁶⁶ The status of the Corco Bascind and Corcomruad at this period is doubtful. With the Deis Tuaiscert (that is, the Dál Cais) they were located north of the Shannon in territory which had been wrested from Connacht by the Dál Cais, who consequently claimed exemption from paying tribute to the king of Munster. According to the tract *Frithfolaithe Chaisil* the Corcomruad had to perform

⁶⁵ See note 51

⁶⁶ 'Frithfolaithe Chaisil', in *Irish Texts* (Grosjean and O'Keeffe) i, 19–21

certain inferior services for the king of Cashel and both the Corco Bascind and Corcomruad are mentioned as tributary septs in the later *Leabhar na gCeart* (Book of Rights). The states who, according to the above tract, were in revolt against the king of west Munster—the Ciarraige, Corco Duibne, Múscraige, Corco Ché (Corco Oiche), Cuirige and the Fortuatha—were evidently all tributary septs. The Corco Ché and Cuirige are not mentioned as separate states in the *Leabhar na gCeart* but all the other septs then paid tribute to the king of Cashel.

The combined territories of all these peoples, both free and tributary, covered the entire province west of a line drawn between the present cities of Cork and Limerick along with the western half of the county of Clare.

An Early Record of the Reciprocal Services Rendered by the King of Munster and his Vassal States

The brief but interesting tract entitled *Frithfolaiith Caisil fri Tuatha Muman*⁶⁷ (Reciprocal services between Cashel and the Munster states), which has been frequently quoted above, consists for the most part of an enumeration of the dues and services exchangeable between the king of Munster and the septs who were located east of a line drawn northwards from Cork city. The western half of the province is allotted only one short paragraph and this sets out the services of the kings of Irluachair, Raithlend and Uí Fidgeinte to the king of Cashel. It is evident from this arrangement that the ancient political division of Munster into eastern and western kingdoms survived at the time that this tract was compiled. This arrangement also substantiates the evidence of the tract on Macc Ardae's synod as to the extent of the west Munster kingdom.

Another indication of the early date of this tract is the exclusive use of the title *rí Irluachra* for the king of the Loch Léin district. The Annals of Ulster, which is our surest guide to the contemporary usage of such titles, has *rex Irlóchrae* at 732 and 785, but uses the title *rex Locha Léin* exclusively from that onwards (812, 838, 1033). The name Irluachair does not appear in AI at all and seems to have gone out of use after 800. Likewise, the Dál Cais are referred to in this text by their older sept-name—*In Déis Tuaiscert* 'the northern Déis.' This older name is used in A.Tig., 712 and AU 743, 835. The name Dál Cais first appears in the annals at AI 934 and CS 950. It does not appear in AU until 1053. The use of the name Uí Macc Láire for the Eoganachta of east Munster is still another indication of the antiquity of this tract.⁶⁸

In this text a paragraph beginning with the term *frithfolaiith*, 'reciprocal services,' is allotted to each sept with the exception of the more important free peoples—the Eoganachta, Déis Tuaiscert, Éile, and Corco Laigde—who are referred to only incidentally in some miscellaneous notes interspersed here and there throughout the tract. The king of Cashel bestowed once every seven years on each state both free and unfree a royal gift called

⁶⁷ See note 66

⁶⁸ See note 3

rath.⁶⁹ The unfree states in return rendered tribute or services to the king. In some cases a further royal gift called *cumtach* (protection payment) was bestowed by the provincial king. The tract commences with the *frithfolaiith* of the Uí Liathain⁷⁰ who received *rath* from the king of Cashel but did not pay tribute in return, which indicates that they enjoyed free status. This sept is represented as of the Eoganachta in the genealogies, but as already shown it really belonged to the Dáirine group of peoples. Next dealt with are the Fir Muige⁷¹ who were required to furnish a druid (*druí*) to the king. According to the law-tract—*Uraicecht Becc*⁷²—druids were persons of inferior status so that it is evident that this sept was of unfree status. The Múscraige⁷³ were an important group and are allotted a lengthy paragraph, but were nevertheless of inferior status as they were required to exchange hostages with the provincial king.⁷⁴ The *ollamh* of the king of Cashel was always of that sept and the kings of Múscraige sat in session with the provincial king ‘unless it was the king of Uí Fidgeinte, the king of Raithlend or the king of Irluachair who was there.’ Both the Fir Muighe and Múscraige were tributary states according to the later *Leabhar na gCeart*.

The paragraph dealing with the Déssi⁷⁵ is unfortunately corrupt in places and it is now impossible to determine with any certainty the original reading of the text. According to the ancient tract on the settlement of the Déssi (Dál Fiacach Suigde) in Munster (*Ériu*, iii, 138), this sept was employed by Oengus mac Nadfraich (+490) to drive the Osraige from Magh Femin, that is, the plain south of Cashel. In return the Déssi were given extensive lands here and were guaranteed the same free status as that enjoyed by the Eoganacht septs of west Munster. According to the late *Leabhar na gCeart* the Déssi were still officially recognised as of free status; they paid a tribute of two thousand hogs and a thousand cows to the king of Cashel ‘but it is not because of unfree status they pay this tax but for their lands.’⁷⁶ According to the *Frithfolaiith* text the Déssi were required to furnish a *fer breithemh* or jurist to the king of Cashel.

⁶⁹ In the later *Leabhar na gCeart* this is called *tuarastal* but in the present text the technical terms used are those found in the early texts of the Irish law tracts.

⁷⁰ Located in the present baronies of Barrymore, Imokilly, Kinnatalloun and North Liberties of Cork.

⁷¹ Their territory consisted of baronies of Fermoy and Condons and Clangibbon.

⁷² *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, v, 90.

⁷³ The territory of the Múscraige Breogain (the Ó Cuirc sept) lay about the Suir west of Cashel in the barony of Clanwilliam; a small sept—the Múscraige Airthir Femin—were settled in the parish of Tullamain south of Cashel and the Múscraige Tíre occupied the present baronies of Upper and Lower Ormond which lie around Nenagh, Co. Tipperary.

⁷⁴ Free septs were subject only to *sluaiged* (accompanying the king on a military expedition) and *coimdech* (accompanying him to an assembly). See CI 2 (RIA) folio 40v. According to the present tract the Eoganacht septs of west Munster were subject only to *sluaiged*.

⁷⁵ The territory of the Déssi consisted of the present county of Waterford plus the baronies of Iffa and Offa in Co. Tipperary.

⁷⁶ *Leabhar na gCeart* (first edition) 42, 50

According to this tract (*Frithfolaithe Caisil*) the Osraige⁷⁷ sept (also called Dál Birn) did not give any tribute to the king of Cashel—it likewise enjoyed free status at the time the later *Leabhar na gCeart* was compiled. As regards the Osraige the present text contains an interesting piece of information not recorded elsewhere. It records that ‘the Osraige sept is not entitled to *cumtack* (that is, the gift or subsidy bestowed by the king of Cashel on kings of vassal states) as there were kings of their seed.’ As it is provincial affairs which are being dealt with in this document, this can only mean that persons of the Osraige sept had held the kingship of Munster. The genealogies of this great Osraige sept have from at least the tenth or eleventh century been joined on to those of the Laigin (Leinstermen) but they were really a branch of the Érainn,⁷⁸ the dominant people of Munster in early times. The territory of the Osraige belonged to Munster until the tenth or eleventh century.⁷⁹

The tribute payable by the Araid⁸⁰ sept to the king of Cashel was three steeds in a yoke; a charioteer and a horseman every three years; also a vessel of milk. It was therefore of unfree status as also was the group of minor septs—Uaithne, Orbraige and Corco Athrach whose territory⁸¹ lay about the present Limerick-Tipperary border and who were obliged to furnish deer-stalkers to the king. The Corcomruadh⁸² were required to furnish a druid and a doorkeeper.

Having enumerated the services of the states of east Munster which were directly under the king of Cashel this present tract proceeds to deal with the provincial king's claims on Leinster and west Munster. Regarding the former it says that ‘the Laigin (Leinstermen) are not entitled to *cumtack* (protection payment) from the king of Cashel as Failbe Fland,⁸³ on their behalf, paid the *bóromha* tribute to the Uí Néill.’ The audacious claim of the kings of Cashel to the overlordship of Leinster was never admitted by the Leinstermen and the attempts of the Munstermen to enforce

⁷⁷ The present diocese of Ossory which includes the greater part of county Kilkenny and the baronies of Upperwoods, Clarmallagh and Clandonagh in Leix represented the territory of the Osraighe from about the ninth century onwards. In the earlier centuries the northern portion of Kilkenny and it would seem the adjoining portion of Leix were occupied by the Uí Duach and allied septs belonging to the Corca Laigde, while on the other hand the territory of the Osraighe extended into the present Co. Tipperary as far as Inneoin, south of Cashel, until the late fifth century when they were expelled from these lands by the Déssi.

⁷⁸ Some of the prominent ancestors of the Osraige are described as belonging to the Mairtine in Lecan 269. The Mairtine were a branch of the Érainn.

⁷⁹ See *Early Irish History and Mythology* (O’Rahilly), p. 18.

⁸⁰ Their lands included the baronies of Coonagh and portion of Coshlea in Limerick and the half-barony of Arra and portion of Clanwilliam in Tipperary.

⁸¹ The baronies of Ownay on the Limerick-Tipperary border near the Shannon represent the ancient territory of the Uaithne. Cashel and the surrounding territory belonged in early times to the Corco Athrach (see *Genealogical Tracts* 171, 182) but at the time this tract was compiled their territory would have been much restricted in area. The fortress called Ord which lay west or south-west of Cashel was in Orbraige. See *Onomasticon*, sub. Ord.

⁸² Perhaps the sept of this name who were settled in north-west Clare and whom we have met already in dealing with west Munster, but there was another portion of this sept in the parish of Roscomroe (*Ros Corcomruadh*), barony of Ballybritt, Offaly, which formed part of the east Munster territory of Éle.

⁸³ Reigned 628-637

that claim were singularly unsuccessful. The kings of Cashel claimed overlordship over the southern half of Ireland (*Leth Mhogha*) 'from Tech Duind in the west to Ath Cliath in Leinster,'⁸⁴ such claim being based apparently on the legend of the ancient division of Ireland into two halves by Conn, ancestor of the ruling peoples of the northern half of Ireland, and Mogh Nuadhat, ancestor of the ruling peoples of Munster. It seems, however, that there was a very different reason for the animosity between the Munstermen and Leinstermen and for the Munstermen's claim to the overlordship of Leinster. It is hoped to deal with this matter later.

As regards the western half of Munster, the tract says, simply, that the kings of the three free septs, namely, the king of Uí Fidgeinte, the king of Irluachair and the king of Raithlind were bound to go with their forces on military expeditions (*sluaiged*) against the Síl Cuind (that is the Uí Neill and their kin) and the Leinstermen 'for to uphold the honour of Munster.' Accompanying the provincial king on a military expedition was the only obligation imposed on free septs.

In the tract four of the more important free septs of east Munster are referred to only incidentally in some miscellaneous items of information interspersed here and there throughout the text. The Uí Macc Láire (that is, the Eoganacht septs of east Munster) are referred to in a short note which says that the king of Cashel has a distrains officer for east Munster (*Aurmuma*) excepting the Uí Maic Láire, the Déssi and the Múscraige. The Déis Tuaiscert (that is, the Dál Cais) are mentioned in another such note which says that 'the three *ócthigeirm*'⁸⁵ of the king of Munster are: the Déssi, the Déis Tuaiscert and the Corco Laigde.' It is not, by the way, anywhere implied in the tract that this sept (Dál Cais) had a right to the kingship of Munster. As regards the reason for the free status of the Dál Cais the generally accepted version found in ancient Irish historical writings⁸⁶ is that they themselves conquered from the Connachta the territory which they occupied north of the Shannon (corresponding to the present county of Clare) and that consequently they were free from all tribute to any Irish king.

The Éle were also a free sept and are in the present tract referred to in a note which says that the *cumtach* payable to them by the king of Cashel amounted to seven *cumhals* 'and as it was Durtrend (a chief of the Éle) who first occupied Cashel,⁸⁷ the Uí Durtrend get one-third of this payment, the king (of Éle) receives one-third and the nobility the remaining third.' It is difficult to account for the free status of the Éle, but they seem to have

⁸⁴ *Leabhar na gCeart* (1st edition) p. 50. Tech Duind was a small island west of Dursey Island in west Munster.

⁸⁵ 'Junior lords'—the exact significance of this term as used here is uncertain. It may be that the kings of these three septs were the marshals or lieutenants of the king of Munster on military expeditions. See *Leabhar na gCeart*, 68 where it is stipulated that the king of the Dál Cais goes in advance of the Munster forces into an external territory and follows in the rear in returning.

⁸⁶ BB 174; Lec. 409; *Forus Feasa ar Éirinn*, i, 126; *Silva Gadelica*, 335.

⁸⁷ See the story concerning the occupation of Cashel by Corc, ancestor of Eoganachta in H.3.17, 768–772. There is a version of this tale in *Leabhar na gCeart* (1st edition) 28–30.

been of the Érainn, the dominating people of Munster in early times.⁸⁸

Finally it is recorded in the document that ‘the Corco Laigde do not pay any imposts, as they are free from rendering tribute to the rulers of Munster, as they have an equal right to the kingship with the Eoganachta.’ Sufficient has already been said about the free status of the Dáirine or Corco Laigde. It is probable that it is the Corco Laigde septs of east Munster—the Uí Duach Argetrois and their co-relatives who were seated in the northern part of the present county Kilkenny—who are particularly referred to here. As already stated, they were very powerful and ruled over the Osraige septs up to about 600 when the latter regained their independence. The Uí Duach may have maintained their status as an independent state for some centuries after this time, though an entry dated 643 in the short collection of annals in *Silva Gadelica* (p. 394) states that the Osraige expelled the Corco Laigde completely from the ‘territory of Osraige’ at that time. We do not know, however, what the exact extent of the Osraige territory was in the early seventh century⁸⁹—it probably was confined to the central and southern parts of the present county of Kilkenny. A Cathal mac Dubhain, king of Uí Duach, is mentioned in AU and FM at 851, but we do not know if he belonged to the Corco Laigde sept of Uí Duach as the pedigree of the latter is brought down only to 743.⁹⁰ The later ruling families of Uí Duach—the Ua Bearghda (AU 1026) and the Ua Braenain (O Heerin, *Top. Poems*) were certainly of Osraige stock.

Quite a number of interesting facts concerning the political state of affairs in Munster during the period 450–800 can be gleaned from the materials so far discussed, and a summary of these may be given here.

Munster in the early Christian period and up to about 800 was divided

⁸⁸ The Éile consisted of two septs—the Éile Deiscert and the Éile Tuaiscert and apparently were branches of the two great septs who were located on the east coast—the Dál Fiatach of Down and Louth to whom the name Ulaid (Ulstermen) properly belonged and the Ciannachta who occupied the coastal district extending from Annagassan, Co. Louth to the mouth of the Liffey. The Éile Deiscert are called Dál Fiatach Éile in *Genealogical Tracts*, 172, MacFirbis’s Book of Genealogies, 106, BB68a, 53 and in H.3.17, 755, 790. The form—Dál Fiacach Éile—in the Déssi genealogies is undoubtedly erroneous. The name Dál Fiatach itself identifies them with the Ulster sept of that name although in the genealogies the Éile Deiscert are descended from Feidlimid Rechtmar son of Conn Cétchathach. In the genealogies the Dál Fiatach of Ulster are represented as a branch of the Érainn. The Éile Deiscert occupied the barony of Eliogarty about Thurles and Templemore in Tipperary. The territory of the Éile Tuaiscert (the Ó Cearbhaill sept) lay to the north of the latter in the barony of Ikerrin, Co. Tipperary and the baronies of Clonlisk and Ballybritt in Offaly. In the genealogies this sept is derived from Cian ancestor of the Ciannachta and brother of Eogan Mór, ancestor of the Eoganachta and of Cas ancestor of the Dál Cais. Cian and his son Tadg mac Céin however belong to the traditions of the east coast territory delineated above and in an entry in H.3.17, 766, Cian, Connla and Da Derga are said to be sons of Eramon son of Eochu son of Deitsenson of Dedadh (ancestor of the Érainn) son of Sencath. This genealogy is a simple variant of that of the Dál Fiatach who, as already pointed out, were of the Érainn. It is probable then that both sections of the Éile were remnants of the Érainn.

⁸⁹ In an entry in *Three Fragments of Irish Annals* at 678 it is stated that Osraige extended from Buana to Cumar. The latter is undoubtedly Cumer Trí nUisce, the confluence of the rivers Barrow, Nore and Suir, but Buana has not been identified. The Four Masters at 956 say that Osraige extended from Ath Buana to Comur.

⁹⁰ AU 743 records the killing of Laidgnén mac Doinennaig, bishop and abbot of Saigher. The Uí Duach genealogy in LL 321 is brought down to this Laidgnén.

into two separate kingdoms: Iarmuma (west Munster) and Aurmuma (east Munster), but the king of Cashel was overlord of the entire province. Iarmuma extended eastwards to the neighbourhood of the present cities of Cork and Limerick and it also included the western part of the present county of Clare. Aurmuma consisted of the remainder of the present province of Munster along with the greater part of county Kilkenny, the western part of the county of Leix and the baronies of Clonlisk and Ballybritt in the county of Offaly.

In that period six Munster septs or groups of septs enjoyed free status viz., the Eoganachta, the Corco Laigde or Dáirine (the Uí Fidgeinte and Uí Liathain who were of free status are represented as Eoganachta in the later official genealogies, but, as shown above, they in reality belonged to the Dáirine group), the Éle, the Osraige, the Déis Tuaiscert (Dál Cais) and the Déssi (Dál Fiacach Suigde) who, at least, were free in theory.⁹¹

In these centuries the provincial kingship was almost exclusively in the hands of the Eoganachta. The majority of the occupants of that office belonged to the sections of that people who were located in east Munster but a few belonged to branches of that sept which were settled in west Munster. It is implied in the *Frithfolaithe Caisil* tract that the Uí Fidgeinte (who were Dáirine) had a right to the provincial kingship and one of their number (Olcobhar mac Flainn who died 796) held the kingship for some time. It is also stated in this tract that the Corco Laigde (who also were Dáirine) had an equal right to the kingship with the Eoganachta but no person of that sept held the kingship during the period which is dealt with here. A further statement in the *Frithfolaithe Caisil* text seems to mean that some persons of the Osraige sept had held the provincial kingship at some period but there is no record of a person of that sept holding the office in historical times.

⁹¹ A very interesting and evidently earlier list of the six-free peoples of Munster is included in the brief account of the Irish septs of free status in H.3.17, 790. It translates as follows 'The Goidil have twelve peoples of noble race. Six of them in Leth Cuind, namely Dál Cuind, Dál Céin, Dál nAraide who are the Cruithnig ('Picts'), Dál Fiatach who are the Ulaid, Dál Riata and Dál Nat Corp who are the Laigin. Six others in Leth Moga: Dál n(E)ogain, Dál Fiacach, Dál Fiatach, Dál Céide, Dál mBardine and Dál Cais. These are the free peoples of Ireland.' Dál nEogain here stands for Eoganachta, Dál Fiacach (Suigde) was the sept-name of the Déssi, Dál Fiatach the sept name of the Éle (see note 88), while the Dál Cais are identical with the Déis Tuaiscert of the *Frithfolaithe* text. The two remaining names—Dál Céide (Cete) and Dál mBardine would, I think, represent respectively the Dáirine (Corca Laigde) and Osraige. In a very ancient genealogy in LL 324 these (Dál Céide and Dál mBardine) are said to be the two chief branches of the Érainn. We can connect the Osraige with the Dál mBardine easily enough as in this early version of the Érainn genealogy (LL 324) the Mairtime are said to be derived from the Dál mBardine and as already stated in note 78, the sons of Loegaire Birn Buadach, ancestors of the Osraige, are said to be of the Mairtime (Lec. 269). It should follow then that the group called Dál Céide in this list was identical with the Dáirine or Corca Laigde and the few references to the Dál Céide which occur in our early historical literature point in that direction.