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

By LIAM Ó BUACHALLA

Earlier articles of the present series were devoted to a study of the succession to the kingship of Munster and to the overlordship of west Munster by the Loch Léin kings during the early centuries of the historical period ; other articles dealt with the septs and septlands of east and west Munster, special attention being given to those peoples who were regarded as free, that is, exempt from paying tribute to the king of Munster. In the present article we turn to a review of the general history of the province (that is, wars, migrations, etc.) during the period (450-800) which is being dealt with here.

In the internal history of Munster of that period two main series of events stand out prominently : firstly, the conflicts between the Eoganachta (who by the middle of the 5th century had attained to the exclusive control of the provincial kingship) and their old rivals, the Érainn—that is the Dáirine (Corca Laigde and Uí Fidgeinte) and the Osraige—who, it would seem were overlords of Munster up to the beginning of the historical period ; and secondly, a series of conflicts between the rival septs of the Eoganachta themselves, particularly between the section of that people settled at Cashel (with branches at Glennamhain and Áine) and the Loch Léin house in west Munster.

Records of the strife between the Eoganachta and the Érainn (called Iverni by Ptolemy, the second century geographer) will be dealt with first. Which Munster septs of the early historical period were the historical representatives of the Érainn ? This matter has been dealt with in earlier articles of the present series¹ but it is advisable to review the subject briefly here. One great division of the Érainn was called Dáirine, that is, those peoples who had Dáire (Dáire Cerba, Dáire Doimthech, Dáire Síchréchtach) as divine ancestor. These included the Corca Laigde septs of east Munster, located in the northern half of county Kilkenny and extending into Tipperary, Leix and Offaly ; the eighth century Laud Histories and Genealogies say that at the time of the expulsion of the Osraige from the district south of Cashel (in the reign of Oengus mac Nadfraich who died 490) the Corca Laigde-Osraige group held all the country from Birr to Comur Trí nUisce (the Suir-Barrow confluence above Waterford). The Corca Laigde septs here in east Munster—Uí Duach, Uí Cremthainn, Uí Dedaid, etc.—had Dáire Cerba as ancestor.² Further west a powerful branch of the Dáirine, the Uí Fidgeinte—Uí Liatháin group, held extensive territories across Munster from the Shannon

¹ See *J.C.H.A.S.*, LVII (1952), pp. 69, 70, 83 and notes 78, 79 and 91.

² See *J.C.H.A.S.*, LVII (1952) 69 ff.

estuary to Cork Harbour and the east Cork coastline. These also had *Dáire Cerba* as common divine ancestor. The *Corca Laigde* of the south-west Cork coastline had as ancestor *Dáire Doimthech* and *Dáire Síchréchtach* but it is unlikely that this branch of the *Dáirine* played any important part in the early struggles with the *Eoganachta*.

Apart from those *Dáirine* peoples there were quite a number of other septs in Munster who belonged to the *Érainn*—the *Muscraighe*, *Corca Baiscind* and *Corca Duibne*. As common divine ancestors these had *Iar*, *Ailill*, *Oengus mac Echach* and the great mythical hero, *Conaire Mór mac Etarscéoil*. A powerful sept of the *Érainn* which is to be identified with this latter group was the *Osraige* or *Dál Birn*; their territory in early times extended across the southern parts of *Kilkenny* and *Tipperary*. By the 12th century the genealogies of the *Osraige* had for political reasons been joined up with those of the *Leinstermen* and their early origins had been carefully concealed, but right up to the early 11th century the *Osraige* belonged to Munster, a fact which in itself would lead us to suspect that they were of old Munster stock, probably *Érainn*. A number of references to this sept in earlier materials confirm this assumption.

An anecdote in MS H.2.7. (T.C.D.) col. 158 tells how *Loegaire Bern Buadach* (ancestor of the *Dál Birn* or *Osraige*) and *Imcath mac Cuir* (ancestor of the *Corca Baiscind* of the *Érainn* mentioned in the preceding paragraph) were the two sons of *Clethcar*. As the result of a conflict, with a mythical *Loegaire mac Néill* (of the *Fir Cúl* in *Meath*), *Imcath* of the *Corca Baiscind* was slain and his son, *Déce*, fled to *Irros* (the west *Clare* peninsula and the territory of the *Corca Baiscind* in historical times) and the *Dál Birn* (that is, the *Osraige*) also migrated. This anecdote shows that *Loegaire Bern Buadach* and his descendants, the *Osraige*, were in early times genealogically linked up with the *Corca Baiscind*, a leading branch of the *Érainn*. In the genealogies the leading *Osraige* septs are descended from three brothers: *Niacorb*, *Druid*, and *Cailte*, sons of *Buan*, son of *Loegaire Bern Buadach*. In the *Book of Lecan* 269b it is stated that some of the *Mairtine* (an old name for one of the chief branches of the *Érainn*) were settled with the *Fir Muighe* (of the *Fermoy* district) because their ancestors 'Niacorb, *Druid* and *Cailte*, sons of *Buan*, son of *Loegaire Bern* were sister's sons and fosterlings of *Mogh Ruith*'—the druid who was mythical ancestor of this *Fermoy* (*Fir Muighe*) sept. This statement indicates that the *Osraige* ancestors were identical with those of the *Mairtine* of the *Érainn*.³

In the light of these early pieces of evidence the *Ernean* origin of the *Osraige* is abundantly clear.

Our chief source for early Munster history, the *Laud 610 Histories and Genealogies* contains some texts mainly historical in character which tell how during the fifth and early sixth centuries the *Eoganachta* by the aid of certain allies—the *Corca Ché* (or *Corca Oiche*) and the *Déssi*—fought a number of battles against the *Uí Fidgeinte* who were located in the present county *Limerick* and the *Osraige*—*Corca Laigde* group in east

³ The *Mairtine*, that is, the race of *Oengus mac Each* were the representatives of the *Dál Bárdine*, a chief branch of the *Érainn*, LL 324.

Munster; those opponents of the Eoganachta and their allies being the only sections of the Érainn possessed of any considerable power in the early centuries of the historical period.

Besides the Corca Ché and the Déssi, the Eoganachta earlier employed quite a number of other septs (including some sections of the Érainn themselves) as allies in conquering the ruling powers of the Érainn and in consolidating their own position in Munster. These they planted on territories at various strategic points in the province to provide protection for themselves (the Eoghanachta) from the defeated peoples of the Érainn and with a view to keeping the various sections of the latter in subjection. These included the Muscraige, Corca Baiscind and Fir Muighe and though the accounts of their conflicts with the Érainn as allies of the Eoganachta belong to the realm of legendary history a brief review of their doings will be given here. The best known text concerning the defeat of the Érainn is that known as *Cath Cind Abrat*.⁴ This tells of the defeat of Lugaid Mac Con, mythical ancestor of the Dáirine, and of Nemed mac Sroibeind, king of the Érainn, at the hands of Eogan Mór (divine ancestor of the Eoganachta) and the three Cairbres—Cairbre Músc, Cairbre Baiscind and Cairbre Righfoda (Riata), mythical ancestors respectively of the Muscraige, Corca Baiscind and Dal Riata, collectively known by the genealogists as Síl Conaire Móir of the Érainn. These latter are represented as supporters of the Eoganachta.

In the Book of Leinster (292a)⁵ there is an account of a battle at Belach Feda Máir (or Belach Slige) in which the same three Cairbres along with Dergthene, ancestor of the Eoganachta, defeat the above-mentioned Nemed mac Sroibeind, king of the Érainn (Lugaid MacCon is not mentioned here). It is probable that this account of the battle of Belach Feda Máir is a variant of the battle of Cenn Abrat referred to above.

The account of the battle of Belach Feda Máir further says that, following the defeat of Nemed and the Érainn, Cairbre Músc and the Muscraige obtained territories extending from the Brosna River in the extreme north of the county Tipperary to Loch Léin (Killarney). 'so that each ridge occupied by the Múscraige runs side by side with a ridge belonging to the Eoghanachta for sake of mutual assistance and friendliness with them forever.'

It is further stated that the Corca Baiscind then received the territory which they afterwards held (in south-west Clare) and that Cairbre Riata and his people got lands in Ciarraige Luachra and adjoining territories.

Another sept employed by the Eoganachta in subjugating the Érainn was that known as Fir Muige Féne or Dál Mogha Ruith (from their mythical ancestor Mogh Ruith the druid). For the tactical purpose of keeping the two sections of the Dáirine of central Munster—the Uí Fidgente and the Uí Liatháin—apart, this sept was settled in the territory of Fermoy in north-east Cork. In the Laud Genealogies (*Z.C.P.*, viii, 314-315) it is stated that Dáire Cerba ancestor of the Uí Liatháin and his brother Máine

⁴ Published in *Anecdota from Irish MSS*, II, 76-80.

⁵ See *Eriu*, vi, 147 ff.

Munchain,⁶ ancestor of Uí Fidgeinte, were twins and that before their birth their mother beheld them in a vision 'having their backs to one another and a chafer (*doel*) between them, the chafer being the people of Mogh Ruith the druid (that is, the Fir Muige), so that neither of them could come to the assistance of the other.' The Fir Muige Féne were undoubtedly planted here following the defeat of the Dáirine septs and the confiscation of portion of their territory, but the tale which tells of these happenings, 'Forbais Dromma Damgaire',⁷ has been very much altered by the story tellers. This relates how Cormac mac Airt, the legendary king of Tara, marched southwards against Fiachu Mullethan, son of Eogan Mór, ancestor of the Eoganachta and king of Munster, but Fiachu defeated him at Drom Damgaire (Knocklong) by the aid of the magical powers of Mogh Ruith, the druid. As a reward Mogh Ruith obtained this territory of Mag Féne (the Fermoy lands) which according to the same story was up to then the hereditary property of the Dáirine and was called Corchaill Meic Con (from Lugaid MacCon, a mythical ancestor of the Dáirine). The late Dr T. F. O'Rahilly points out (*Early Irish History and Mythology*, pp. 490ff) that underlying this tale we have a legend of a defeat of the Érainn (Dáirine) at Knocklong and that the introduction of Cormac mac Airt, king of Tara (in place of a king of the Érainn) is obviously a storyteller's invention, with the intention of investing the story with something more than local interest. Likewise from the legend of the chafer mentioned above we can glean another historical fact: that the Fir Muige Féne sept was planted in this north-east Cork territory for the special purpose of keeping apart the Uí Fidgeinte and Uí Liatháin, who were the most powerful sections of the Dáirine in that part of Munster at that particular period.

Other accounts which belong to the realm of legendary history tell how the Eoganachta bestowed territories in various parts of Munster on the Ciarraige, Corcamruadh, Araid and Dál Cairpre Arad.

The settlements enumerated so far were, however, all made before the opening of the true historical period and are here set out to provide a background to accounts of some similar settlements made in the fifth century which are mainly historical in character. One of these is the history of the Corca Ché or Corca Oiche sept which appears in the *Laud Histories and Genealogies*; ⁸ it consists of an historical poem composed by Luccreth moccu Ciara who belonged to the late seventh century and an accompanying prose version assignable to the following century. The *Laud Histories* also contain other eighth century materials which tell of the expulsion of the Osraige and Corca Laigde from the south Tipperary plain in the late fifth century.

The opening paragraphs of the history of the Corca Ché which tell of the submerging of their lands by Lough Neagh and of their flight to Munster are purely mythical in character. What follows, however, has a more historical flavour. The Corca Ché were fosterers of the great Eoganacht ancestor, Corc mac Luigthig, and were settled somewhere in east Munster.

⁶ See *J.C.H.A.S.*, LVII (1952) p. 69 and note 16.

⁷ *Revue Celt.* xlv, xlv.

⁸ *Z.C.P.*, viii, 307, 308.

Acting apparently as allies of the Eoganachta this sept formed the mainstay of the army which defeated the Osraige at the battle of Drochat Ménne. On that account they were being persecuted and Corc sent them to his son Cairpre Luachra (ancestor of the Eoganacht of Loch Léin at Killarney). Here the king of Cashel gave them lands called Aurchind or Cluain Báird Meic Ugaine, evidently the Killeady district of south-west Limerick which this Corca Ché sept occupied in historical times. This was probably then as it was afterwards, portion of the Uí Fidgeinte territory and like the Fermoy lands was confiscated by the Eoganacht king to provide a settlement for a friendly sept, the Corca Ché in this case. The text next states that the Clann Máine Munchain, that is the Uí Fidgeinte, persecuted the Corca Ché 'because of the desire of the former to injure the race of Corc,' that is the Eoganachta. The Uí Fidgeinte place the maintenance of their swine and swineherds as an imposition on the Corca Ché and the text concludes by stating that it was on account of that oppression that the battle of Cuille (or Cuilne) was successfully fought by the Corca Ché through the prayers of St Ita of Cluain (who was their patron). This latter battle is recorded in the annals at the year 552 or 553. This shows that the strife between the Eoganacht allies and the Uí Fidgeinte (of the Dáirine) still persisted in the mid-sixth century. In A1 553 we find: 'The battle of Cuilne (won) by the Corca Ché through the prayers of Ita.' The Annals of Ulster at 551 on the other hand say that they were defeated: 'The battle of Cuilne in which the Corca Oche were slaughtered through the prayers of Ita of Cluain,' but St Ita was patron of that sept.

As regards the text summarized above, there seems to be no other reference anywhere to the battle of Drochat Ménne (Bridge of Mén River) against the Osraige. The place in question is undoubtedly Méndrochat in the north of Osraige, now Mundrohid, near Borris-in-Ossory, Co. Leix. In the poem incorporated in this text, which was composed by Lucrèth moccu Ciara who flourished in the late seventh century, it is stated that the Corca Ché first settled at Mag Taline and went to Irluachair (west Munster) after the battle of Cennibrae.

This is apparently identical with the battle of Drochat Ménne of the prose text above. Elsewhere we find reference to the battle of Cenn Abrat fought between the Eoganachta and Érainn led by Lugaid Mac Con. This is probably the same as the battle of Cennibrae⁹ mentioned by Lucrèth moccu Ciara in the poem quoted above. It is generally understood that Lugaid Mac Con's battle was fought at Cenn Abrat, a place on the Ballyhoura hills north of Doneraile, but in the old tale—*Cath Cinn Abrat*¹⁰—it is stated that that conflict was fought beside a place called Mag Locha and that after the battle the contestants went southwards to Mag Femin, that is, the south Tipperary plain. Evidently the Mag Locha in question was the place of that name in the north of Osraige, now the barony of Clarmallagh (Clár Maige Locha) in the south-east corner of Co. Leix and beside

⁹ With Cennibrae compare Cenindas, an old Irish form of Cenandus (Kells) found in AU, i, 292 and LL 60.

¹⁰ See note 4.

Méndrochat (Mundrohid) probable site of the battle of Drochat Ménne mentioned above.

This battle of Drochat Ménne between Corca Ché and Osraige, we are told, was fought in the time of Corc, king of Munster, who is represented as grandfather of Oengus mac Nadfraich, slain in 490. Corc as already pointed out was evidently a mythical personage—the real name of Oengus's grandfather was probably MacLáire which is sometimes given as an *alias* for Corc. Oengus's grandfather would have flourished in the early fifth century. Again Cairpre Luachra the king of Loch Léin to whom the Corca Ché were sent appears to be an historical personage and as the brothers Aed Bennan who died 619 and Aed Dammán who died 633 are fifth in descent from him, Cairpre would have flourished 430-460 allowing the usual three generations to the century. Thus the battle of Drochat Ménne and the migration of the Corca Ché would have occurred in the first half of the fifth century.

Yet another ancient text dealing with the fifth century history of Munster is the story of the expulsion of the Déssi (*De Causis Torche na nDéssi*)¹¹ and it again deals with the war against the Osraige. Like the text on the Corca Ché the story of the settlement of the Déssi first tells of their coming to Munster from another part of Ireland (Déssi Breg, near Tara in this case) and concludes with an account of their doings as allies of Oengus mac Nadfraich, king of Cashel. It is highly probable that the latter part contains much genuine history. The Déssi, according to this text, were expelled from the Tara district in the time of the legendary Cormac mac Airt. They first settled in Uí Bairrche in Leinster. Cremthann, son of Énna Cennselach (slain 483 AU) king of Leinster, married Annu or Cinnu, daughter of Ernbrann, chief of the Déssi and by her had a daughter, Ethne Uatach. The Déssi migrated to Osraige and then to Ard Cuilind which was probably in the present county Waterford, bringing with them Ethne as fosterling. The second portion of this story tells how Oengus mac Nadfraich, king of Cashel (slain 490) wedded Ethne Uatach. The territory of the Osraige at that time extended westwards to include Mag Femin, that is the portion of the present diocese of Waterford and Lismore which lies north of the Suir in county Tipperary and close to the Eoganacht seat at Cashel. Oengus promised this territory to his wife, Ethne, and to the Déssi if they would expel the Osraige therefrom. Ethne brought fifty lesser septs to her aid and together they drove the Osraige from Inneoin (Mullaghony, 5 miles NW of Clonmel) which seems to have been the chief Osraige stronghold in Mag Femin. The Déssi pursued them eastwards until they had crossed the Linnén (Lingaun) river which became thenceforward the frontier between the Osraige and Déssi.¹²

An important fact not mentioned in this story of the expulsion of the Osraige from Mag Femin by the Déssi is that a portion of the Corca Laigde were with the Osraige pressed back eastwards into what is now the county of

¹¹ Printed in *Eriu*, III, 135-142, from Laud Genealogies. A different and later version of this tale has been printed in *Anecdota from Irish MSS*, I, pp. 15 ff.

¹² The Lingaun river which flows into the Suir, near Carrick-on-Suir, still marks the boundary between the diocese of Ossory and the diocese of Lismore and Waterford (Déssi).

Kilkenny where they became overlords of the Osraige. Immediately preceding the tract on the Déssi in the Laud Histories we find some notes on Nadfraich and his son Oengus mac Nadfraich (the king who employed the Déssi to expel the Osraige), which are followed by a paragraph which translated reads as follows: 'The Osraige and Corca Laigde were together driven out; they it was who held the entire country from Birr to Comur Trí n-Uisci (the confluence of the Suir and Barrow near Waterford). The Corca Laigde took possession of these territories. There were also Leinstermen in Osraige; Fothart and Daire Laigen in Fothart in Osraige are named from them.'¹³ The Corca Laigde ruled this great territory comprising nearly all of the county of Kilkenny and parts of Leix and Offaly for about a century and a half, dominating the Osraige sept which was now compressed into the southern half of Kilkenny. The Osraige resented this supremacy of the Corca Laigde; there was constant strife between these two peoples until about 650 when the Osraige secured the upper hand and the Corca Laigde gradually fade into obscurity.¹⁴ Due to the defeat of these peoples by the Déssi and the subsequent internal strife here, the security of the Eoganachta was no longer threatened from this quarter.

The old animosity between the Osraige and the Eoganachta seems to have died out in the meantime; following their defeat of the Corca Laigde about 650 we find the Osraige frequently engaged in battles against the Leinstermen and occasionally helping the Eoganachta in their struggles with the Leinstermen—the latter being the neighbours of the Osraige on their eastern borders. The Leinstermen slew kings of Osraige in 656, 678 and 688. In the battle of Belach Éile between the Eoganachta and Leinstermen in 734 (AU) Cellach mac Foelchair, king of Osraige was amongst the Munstermen slain. Cellach mac Cerbaill, king of Osraige fought with the Munstermen in the great battle of Belach Mugna against the Leinstermen in 908, and was himself slain therein.¹⁵ It was later that Osraige became

¹³ *Anecdota*, iii, 63. There is a rather confused reference to this settlement in Mac Fírbeis's Book of Genealogies, p. 627: 'It was that Conraid, son of Duach Cliach (first king of the Corca Laigde over the Osraige) who occupied that country (Argatros in Osraige) in spite of the Clann Condla (the Osraige) and it was he that killed the chief of Uí Duach, i.e. O Berga.' But the O Berga family did not come into existence until surnames were introduced many centuries later.

¹⁴ The first king of the Corca Laigde, over Osraige, named in the regnal list (LL 40) was Cúraide mac Duach of the Uí Duach Argetruis; his daughter, Mugain, was wife of Diarmait mac Fergusa Cerbeoil, high-king of Ireland, who was slain in 565 (H. 2. 7, T.C.D. 159). The next king of Osraige was Feradach mac Duach, who, according to *Three fragments of Irish Annals* (ed. O'Donovan) A.D. 582 'was of the Corca Laigde, for seven kings of the Corca Laigde assumed the kingship of Osraige and (later) seven kings of Osraige took the kingship of Corca Laigde.' This entry says that the Osraige came and slew Feradach on his sick bed. He was succeeded by his son, Colmán, who on one occasion when beleagured by the Osraige was saved from death by his bosom friend St Canice (Vita St Kannechi, c. xliii). The last king of the Corca Laigde who ruled Osraige was Scandlán mac Cindfaeladh (died 646 AI). His namesake Scandlán Mór mac Colmáin of the Osraige 'expelled the Corca Laigde completely from Osraige' in the reign of Diarmait and Blathmac (654-665). Vide *Silva Gadelica*, 394. There is an account of the slaying of Illand mac Scandláin of the Corca Laigde in the ancient tale 'Scéla Cano Meic Gartnáin' (*Anecdota*, i, 13-15). Illand's death is entered in AI at 656; with it the history of the Corca Laigde of east Munster comes to a close. For a further account of the above-mentioned kings see *History of the Diocese of Ossory* (Carrigan) i, 32 ff.

¹⁵ *Forus Feasa*, iii, 204. AI 908.

incorporated in Leinster, probably after its king, Donnchad mac Gillapatric had seized the kingship of Leinster in 1033. In the earliest genealogies of the Osraige which have come down to us—those in Rawl. B 502 (c.1100) and the Book of Leinster (c. 1160)—the genealogists have hitched the Osraige pedigrees to the Leinster stem, thus concealing the fact that the Osraige were in reality one of the most important septs of the Érainn of Munster.

The texts here dealt with which tell of the campaigns of the Eoganacht allies—Corca Ché and Déssi—against the Osraige, Corca Laigde and Uí Fidgeinte are of much value, then, in that they furnish us with considerable details of what appears to be the concluding chapter of the Eoganacht struggle for supremacy over the older rulers of Munster, the Iverni or Érainn, in the fifth and sixth centuries—the opening centuries of the historical period.

Moreover, they give us an interesting insight into the Eoganacht policy of employing vassal peoples to aid in accomplishing the work of conquest and the settlement of these allies at strategic points in the conquered territories.

The strife between the rival east and west divisions of the Eoganachta which went on from the mid-fifth century right up to the early ninth century is the second main feature of internal Munster politics in the early historical period. Although the Eoganacht septs who were located at Cashel and adjoining territories were sufficiently powerful to maintain a near monopoly of the kingship of Munster, the sections of that people who were settled in west Munster, particularly the Eoganacht sept of Loch Léin, wielded considerable power over the western portion of the province and occasionally challenged the supremacy of the eastern septs. Much has already been said about this matter in the above sections dealing with the kings of west Munster and 'Macc Ardae's Synod.'¹⁶

We give here further details of the strife between the rival Eoganacht septs, based mainly on the annals and on a text on this subject which is included in the Laud 610 Histories and Genealogies. This latter old Irish text (which is printed in *Anecdota from Irish MSS*, iii, 57–62) belongs to the eighth or ninth century and was obviously written by a supporter of the east Munster houses of the Eoganachta. Though it contains much which is pure invention, put in merely to belittle the origins and history of the western septs of the Eoganachta, it still contains a great deal of real history not now to be found elsewhere.

The Laud text commences with an account of the early adventures of Corc mac Luigthig, legendary ancestor of the Eoganachta. Corc went to Alba and married the daughter of Feradach Findfechnach, king of the Cruithentuath (Picts), by whom he had a son Cairpre Luachra, ancestor of the Eoganacht Locha Léin (settled at Killarney). He returned to Ireland and succeeded the legendary Crimthann Már mac Fidaig as king of Munster.

¹⁶ See *J.C.H.A.S.* LVII (1952) 77–81.

Here he wedded Áimend, daughter of Oengus Bolg, of the Dáirine or Corca Laigde and by her had five sons. Then follows the story of the dream of Corc's wife, Áimend, and of its interpretation by her druid. Áimend dreamt that she was a bird and her fledglings flew from the nest at Cashel as follows: three flew into south Munster (Macc Caiss, Macc Brocc and Macc Iair, ancestors respectively of the Uí Eacach Muman, Uí Maicc Brocc and Uí Maicc Iair who were settled in what is now the diocese of Cork), a fourth (Muiredaig) flew to mid-Munster while the remaining bird (Nadfraich, ancestor of the Eoganachta of Cashel) remained in the nest at Cashel. Still another bird came after them and alighted in the far west; this was Cairpre Luachra who had come from Alba and settled at Loch Léin. Although Corc is in reality one of the names for the ancestor-deity of the Eoganachta, the persons here named as sons of Corc's appear to be historical personages, ancestors of the various Eoganacht septs.¹⁷ The segregating of Cairpre Luachra from the rest in this legend by representing him as a native of Pictland is a deliberate attempt on the part of the writer to belittle the origin of the Eoganachta of Loch Léin and probably has no basis in fact. Likewise the term *Mac na Cruithnige* 'son of the Pictish woman' applied to Cairpre in one place here is meant to be derogatory. Continuing in the same vein this text states that it was when Corc's power was at its height that Cairpre came to Ireland. He and his thirty horsemen camped in a cornfield of Corc's at Cashel; Corc's steward drove them out, was slain in the affray which followed and thereupon Cairpre was banished to west Munster. He died at Fert Cairpri at Loch Cend near Cashel. Oengus mac Nadfraich, king of Munster (who was slain 490 AD) then gave the stewardship (of Munster apparently) to Cairpre's son, Máine, and Máine's son, Duach Iarlaithe, took that office after him.

The real history of the strife between the Eoganachta begins with this Duach who was the first powerful king of west Munster. Duach, this tract continues, refused to give allegiance to the king of Cashel, so that Oengus led an army against him and Duach fled to Scellecc (Skellig off the west coast). Later a peace which lasted during Oengus's lifetime was made between them but on Oengus's death (at the battle of Cenn Losnada in 490) 'Duach would not submit but seized by force, without law or adjudication all the territories of the kingship of Cashel.' This means that Duach seized the kingship of Munster, and coming from a hostile source it can be taken as an historical fact. Apparently the Eoganacht septs of Loch Léin and Raithlend (in the Bandon district) had the same right to the kingship as the east Munster Eoganacht septs had but the latter were seeking to exclude them. This tract then tells of a number of battles fought by Duach against east Munster septs, allies apparently of the eastern branches of the Eoganachta. To avenge the 'Battle of the Four Cairpres' he fought the battle of Findais against Fí mac Laisri of the Uí Sencandaig, a branch of the Fir Muige who belonged to the territory of Fermoy in north-east Cork. In this battle, Fiachra, son of Mac Caille was slain. This Mac Caille was ancestor of the Uí Mac Caille (in Imokilly) and his son, Fiachra, is mentioned in the genealogies of that sept in LL 321 and

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 67, 68.

elsewhere. Duach Iarlaithe was finally slain by the Uaithne (a sept who were settled about the Limerick-Tipperary border west of Cashel) in the battle of Cluicher, a place near Knockainey.¹⁸

The Laud tract has a further reference to the feud between east and west Munster which tells how Cairpre Crom, king of Munster (died 580 AI) and great-grandson of Oengus mac Nadfraich ceded three places in west Munster called Cúl Cruithnechta, Cúl Boendraigi and Cúl mBrocholl, as *éric* or compensation for the killing of the three sons of Fiachra Gáirine in the battle of Cluais Óla. The genealogies show that this Fiachra was son of Duach Iarlaithe. Cairpre Crom belonged to the branch of the Eoganachta later associated with Glennamain (Glanworth). The present tract says that it was he 'who gave Cluain Uama (Cloyne) to Colmán mac Colcen who is called Lenine,' (that is, to St Colman).

The last king dealt with in this tract is Feidlimid mac Tigernaich who died 590 and who was the only chief of the Uí Eacach Muman (located in the diocese of Cork) to hold the kingship of Munster in the early centuries. The author of this tract writes of Feidlimid and the Uí Eacach in the same disparaging vein as he does earlier when dealing with the Eoganachta of Loch Léin. The Uí Eachach, he says, did not at the beginning take a share of the inheritance land of the Eoganachta; their ancestor Macc Caiss, son of Core, did not claim it during the lifetime of Core, but Core reared Macc Caiss's son, Eochu (ancestor of the Uí Eacach) on his own lands and on account of this fosterage he gave him the lands which the Uí Eacach later occupied. Hence the saying: 'Though each man of the Uí Eacach was king of Munster, none of them would rule from Cashel.' Feidlimid mac Tigernaich of this sept was king of Munster, he says, and he did not go to Cashel but erected the fortress of Bodumbir. This place, also called Badamair seems to have been near Cahir, Co. Tipperary.

The annals (AU 639, AI 645) record a battle at Cathair Cinnchón (Rockbarton, near Bruff) between east and west Munster. Oengus Liath Ó Áine¹⁹ who was brother of Cathal mac Aeda, king of Munster (+628) of the Glennamhain line of the Eoganachta was victorious while Maeldúin mac Aeda Bennáin, king of Loch Léin, was defeated.

The death of the Loch Léin chieftain, Cairpre mac Condinise, at the hands of the Munstermen (evidently the Eoganachta of east Munster) at Carn Ailche is recorded at AU 746. AI 747 refers to this conflict as the battle of Cúil Gése. Maeldúin mac Aeda of the Eoganacht Locha Léin was king of all Munster from about 742 to 786 but the revolt against the west Munster

¹⁸ The death of Duach was avenged by his warlike daughter—Cróinsech, who slaughtered the Uaithne, as related in this text. This is further referred to in another eighth century text in H. 2.7 (T.C.D.) col. 160. This latter text throws further light on the Eoganacht feud. The Eoganachta of east Munster were aspiring to the high kingship and were consequently often at war with the Uí Néill, but according to this text Fall, daughter of Diarmuid mac Fergusa Cerbeoil of the Uí Néill of the Tara district, was wife of Duach Iarlaithe and mother of Cróinsech, and the latter avenged her father, Duach, when fleeing to her relatives, the Uí Néill. The Laud text says that it was at Taulach Crónsige in Fernuch that Cróinsech slaughtered the Uaithne. This latter place is probably identical with Farneigh some miles south-east of Killaloe and in one of the baronies of Owney (Uaithne).

¹⁹ The death of Oengus Liath Ó Áine at Glennamhain is recorded at AI 646.

kings led by the Ciarraige and other west Munster vassal septs as reflected in the tract on the west Munster Synod²⁰ seems to have come to a head after the death of this Maildúin. A battle between the Ciarraige and Eoganachta (evidently of Loch Léin) in which Aed Allán, son of Cairpre (who seems to be the Cairpre mac Condinisc slain 747 mentioned above) is recorded in AI 803; thenceforward the power of the west Munster kings rapidly declined and they disappear entirely from the pages of Munster history.

The Munstermen's battles with the Uí Néill and Leinstermen

During the period with which we are dealing (450–800 A.D.) we find the Eoganachta of Munster often in conflict with the Leinstermen and with the occupants of the high-kingship—the Uí Néill of the midlands and of north-west Ulster. The more powerful of the Munster kings strove, though with little success, to annex the high-kingship, apparently claiming to have an equal right to it with the Uí Néill. But to reach the high-kingship it was first necessary to hold sway over a majority of the provinces. As a first step towards this objective the Munstermen sought to bring Leinster under their rule. Indeed, apart from their claims to the high-kingship the Munster kings claimed to be, of right, overlords of all the southern half of Ireland—Leth Mogha.²¹ This claim was, it would seem, officially based on the division of Ireland between Conn Cétcathach (ancestor of the Dál Cuinn, that is the Uí Néill and their co-relatives) and Mogh Nuadat *alias* Eoghan Taidlech (ancestor of the Eoganachta) at an early period. The whole story of this division is, however, pure invention; the enmity between the Eoganachta and Leinstermen and the claims of the former to the overlordship of Leinster would appear to have a very different origin.

Although there was considerable enmity between the Uí Néill and Leinstermen at that period on account of the *borumha* tribute levied by the Uí Néill, it is noteworthy that the Uí Néill occasionally combined forces with the Leinstermen to oppose the inroads of the Eoganachta and their allies, apparently with the object of stemming at the outset any Munster attempt at securing the high-kingship. The claims of the Munstermen as regards their struggle for the high-kingship is reflected in an entry in the *Annals of Innisfallen*, s.a. 721—‘for it is five kings of Munster who obtained the kingship of Ireland after the Faith, i.e., Oengus mac Nadfrúich and his son, Eochaidh, who ruled Ireland for seventeen years, and Cathal mac Finguine and Feidlimid mac Crimthain and Brian mac Cennetich.’ In reality none of these excepting the last named (Brian Boruma) ever succeeded in practice in annexing that office.

As regards the first-named—Oengus mac Nadfrúich—we know little of his struggle against the Leinstermen and Uí Néill beyond what is contained in the brief annalistic entry concerning the battle of Cenn Losnada (or Cill Osnada), in which encounter he was killed. AU 489 (recte 490) simply

²⁰ See *J.C.H.A.S.* LVII (1952) 78, 79.

²¹ See *J.C.H.A.S.* LVII (1952) 83, 84; *Cath Maige Léna* (ed Jackson), introduction xxx; *Fianaigeacht* (ed. Meyer) p. 28.

records 'Battle of Cenn Losnado in which Oengus mac Nadfraich king of Munster was slain.' A. Tig (490) CS (487) and A. Clon. (490) add that Oengus' wife, Eithne Uatach, daughter of Crimthann, son of Énna Cennselach (a former king of Leinster) was also slain in that battle and that the victors were Illann mac Dunlaing (king of Leinster), his brother Ailill, Eochaidh Guinech (king of the Uí Bairrche, a Leinster sept) and Muirchertach mac Erca, king of Ailech (leader of the Uí Néill forces and high king from 507 to 534). An eulogy on Oengus in the Book of Munster regnal lists credits him with thirty battles against the men of Leinster, Meath and Ulster. The thirty battles fought by Oengus are referred to in the early (eighth century) text on the Eoganachta in the Laud 610 MS (*Anecdota*, iii, 60). This tells how Oengus was defeated in thirty encounters until he allied himself with Boinda the Druid who fought thirty battles with him. 'He (Oengus apparently) campaigned successfully, and never turned his face southwards until he was slain; it was thus facing northwards that he was buried under the king's seat at Cashel.' The tenth century list of ancient Irish tales mentions a story entitled *Cath Cille Osnaidhe* which is now lost.²² Far less is known of Oengus' son, Eochaidh, who in the excerpt from the entry for 721 in the Annals of Innisfallen is said to have been king of Ireland for seventeen years. In the regnal lists in BB 59b he is said to have been slain at the battle of Sliab Éblinne (Slieve Pheilm, Co. Tipperary) by the high king, Muircertach mac Erca. In AU 532 (533) also 534, 536, the battle of Éblinn gained by Muircertach mac Erca is mentioned but no further details are given either here or in the other collections of annals.

At 572 AU records a battle at Femin (the south Tipperary plain) in which Colmán Becc, son of a former high-king—Diarmait mac Cerbaill (+565) was vanquished, but escaped. The annals of Tigernach (573) say that the victorious king was Cairpre Crom mac Crimthainn, king of Munster, and AI 573 further record that this battle was fought at Loch Cend otherwise Loch Silend, the present Lough Kent near New Inn, but like the other battles of this early period we have no information as to its immediate cause.

Failbe Flann, king of Munster 628–637 (ancestor of the McCarthy branch of the Eoganachta) is notable from the fact that he seems to have pursued a policy of friendship with the Leinstermen. In the battle of the Ath Goan (AU 632, AI 637) between the Leinstermen themselves this Failbe helped Foclan mac Colmain of the leading Leinster sept—the Uí Dunlaing—to overthrow the reigning king of Leinster—Crimthann mac Aeda of the Uí Máil. Further, it is recorded in the tract *Frithfolaithe Caisil* that Failbe Fland paid the *borumha* tribute to the Uí Néill on behalf of the Leinstermen,²³ perhaps with the expectation of receiving from the Leinstermen voluntary recognition of his overlordship of the entire southern half of Ireland (Leth Moga), which status was then claimed as a right by the Munster kings. Records of warfare with the Uí Néill and Leinstermen are again few until we reach the reign of Cathal mac Finguine (c. 721–742) another of the Munster

²² *Anecdota from Irish MSS*, ii, 45.

²³ *J.C.H.A.S.*, LVII (1952) p. 83.

kings who aspired to the high kingship. AI at 721 records an invasion of Breg (the district around Tara) by Cathal mac Finguine at which time he made peace with Fergal mac Maíldúin the high-king 'and Fergal submitted to him.' There is no independent evidence, however, to support this claim of the Munster annals and further records indicate that Cathal was not even successful in subduing the Leinstermen.

The Four Masters at 726 record a battle between the men of south Leinster (*Laigin Desgabair*) and the Munstermen, which was won by Aedh mac Colgan, king of Uí Cennselaig (South Leinster). According to AU 734 (735) a battle was fought between Munster and Leinster in which Cellach mac Faelchair, king of Osraige, was slain but Cathal mac Finguine king of Munster escaped. AI 736 refers to this as the battle of Ele against Foelan, king of Leinster, and claim a victory for Cathal.²⁴ In Four Masters 730 it was styled the battle of Belach Ele and it is added that two sons of Cormac mac Rossa, chief of the Déssi, were slain. The Four Masters at 733 record another inroad by Cathal into Leinster when he brought hostages and spoils from Bran Becc mac Murchada. Cathal is styled *rí hÉrend* in his *obit* in AI 742 but in the other annals he is styled simply *rí Muman*.

The west Munster chief, Maíldúin mac Aedha, who was king of Cashel 742-786, is said in A. Tig. 757 to have slain Cumuscach, king of the Uí Failghe, a Leinster sept. According to the Four Masters 770, Donnchadh mac Domnaill, king of Ireland, laid Munster waste and killed many Munstermen. The same annals at the year 789 (recte 794) record that Donnchadh, the high king, went into Leinster to protect it from the Munstermen. The ecclesiastic, Feidlimid mac Crimthainn (+847), king of Cashel, also aspired to the high-kingship. AI 838 says that a convention of the men of Ireland was held in Clonfert and Niall mac Aedha, king of Tara submitted to Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, so that he became 'full monarch of Ireland on that day.' Yet despite this and other inroads into Meath and the midlands his supremacy was never admitted by the other provinces and in recording his death at 847 the various annals refer to him simply as king of Munster. When the many attempts by Eoganacht kings to reach the high-kingship are taken into consideration, it is a curious commentary that the Munsterman, Brian Boruma, who succeeded in annexing the high-kingship (1002-1014) belonged not to the once powerful Eoganachta but to the Dál Cais or Déis Tuaiscert, a sept which was of little importance in the earlier centuries.

Battles with the Connachta

Legendary history tells how a section of the Munster sept known as In Déis or Dál Chais, at a time not very long before the opening of the historical period it would seem, crossed over the Shannon at Limerick and conquered the most southerly portion of Connacht; an area corresponding to the present county of Clare.²⁵ The name of the leader of this expedition is given as Lugaid Menn, son of Oengus Tírech. We are further

²⁴ See *F.F.*, iii, 146.

²⁵ *Silva Gadelica*, 335. *Forus Feasa*, i, 126.

told that the strife between the Connachtmen and the Munstermen in the early centuries of the historical period was due to this conquest of Connacht territory. One of the texts which professes to relate the events leading up to this conquest is the 'Aided Cremthainn' (*Silva Gadalyca*, 327–336). Eochu Mugmedon (father of Niall Nai nGiallach) high king of Ireland had as wife Mongfind, sister of Cremthann Mór mac Fidaig of the Dáirine of Munster. By her he had four sons, Fiachra, Brion, Ailill and Fergus from whom are descended the ruling families of Connacht. When Eochu died Cremthann succeeded to the high kingship. He made a royal visitation of the provinces and went thence to Alba. While absent from Ireland Mongfind's sons (Fiachra, etc.) took possession of his estates and he returned and went to Connacht with a great host with the intention of expelling the usurpers. His sister, Mongfind, invited him to a feast, but his drink being poisoned by her, he died at Sliab Aideda, in Ríg—the Cratloe Hills—while on his way to Munster. Mongfind had intended that the kingship should go to her son Brion, but it was taken by her stepson, the great Niall Nai nGiallach. Brion became king of Connacht and Fiachra became overlord of the territory between Mag Mucrama near Galway and Carn Feradaig near Limerick city—the present county Clare. Fiachra made a raid into Munster to levy tribute, he defeated the Munstermen under Eochaid, son of Cremthann Mór at Curadh Caennraige but was himself mortally wounded. His brother, Ailill, was captured by the Munstermen but was put to death on account of the poisoning of their king, Crimthann, by Ailill's mother, Mongfind. Lugaid Menn, son of Oengus Tirech, ancestor of the Dál Chais, then conquered the territory between Limerick and Slieve Aughty, which territory the Munstermen claimed as *éric* in reparation for the poisoning of Cremthann Mór. There is little that is historical in this story. Fiachra (father of Nathi, who died 445 AU) and his brothers are the only historical persons mentioned. Cremthann Mór mac Fidaig and his sister, Mongfind, are almost certainly mythical figures. In this tale Cremthann Mór is 'fiery king of the Dáirine' and 'grandson of Dáire' (*Silva Gadelica*, 335). In the genealogies he is son of Fidach, son of Dáire Cerba; he is undoubtedly identical with the mythical Lugaid MacCon of the Dáirine and Corca Laigde who in the genealogies is grandson of Dáire Doimthech. The story told about Cremthann, likewise, very much resembles the tale of Lugaid MacCon and the battle of Mag Mucrimne.²⁶ This tale, 'Aided Cremthainn,' then, cannot be regarded as an historical account of the conquest of southern Connacht by the Dál Chais.

The alleged leader of this expedition—Lugaid Menn, son of Oengus

²⁶ See *Fianaígeacht* (ed. Meyer) 28 ff.; *Silva Gadelica*, 310–318. Lugaid Mac Con, the Dáirine deity-ancestor, was step-son (or foster-son according to some accounts) of Ailill Ólum, king of Munster and was step-brother or foster-brother of Eogan Mór the Eoganacht deity. Lugaid quarrelled with Ailill and Eogan and like Cremthann Mór went to Alba; he later returned with an army and fought battle of Mag Mucrimne (in the southern part of Galway) in which Eogan Mór and his ally, Art mac Cuinn, high-king of Ireland, were slain. Lugaid later went south to his stepfather Ailill Ólum; the latter when embracing Lugaid, drove a poisonous tooth through his cheek, so that contortions seized him and he lost his strength (compare the poisoning of Cremthann Mór). A warrior of Ailill's, Ferchess mac Commáin then slew Lugaid with his spear, the *rindene*.

Tírech, is likewise a mythical figure. The mythical part of the Dál Chais pedigree reads: Cas son of Conall Ecluath son of Lugaid Menn son of Oengus Tírech son of Fer Corb son of Mag Corb son of Cormac Cas from whom are the Dál Chais; Cian, ancestor of Ciannachta and Luigne (who occupied the country north and north-east of Tara) and Eogan, ancestor of the Eoganachta are by the genealogists represented as brothers of this Cormac Cas. It is interesting to note that Lugaid Menn son of Oengus, again turns up in the traditions of the Luigne and Ciannachta peoples of the district north of Tara. In the *Agallam na Senórach* (*Silva Gadelica*, 102) Lugaid Menn was a king who lived at Fert na nDruad, north-west of Tara. In the stories of the wars between the Ulstermen and Cormac mac Airt, legendary king of Tara, the Ulster king Eochaid Gunnat is slain by Lugaid Menn mac Oengusa, one of Cormac's followers.²⁷ Elsewhere, Eochaid is said to have been slain by Lugaid mac Lugna Firtri, ancestor of the Corca Firtri²⁸ a sept akin to the Luigne who originally were located in the Tara district, but who in historical times are associated with the Luigne in county Sligo. Again, in the story of the migration of the Cálraige from the Tara district²⁹ the sons of Loegaire of Fir Cúl—a territory of the Luigne around Kells, Co. Meath—are descendants of Lugaid *Mennruad* son of Scál Balb—Scál Balb (Blind Phantom) being a common appellation of Cian, ancestor of the Ciannachta and Luigne. In Irish mythology the son of Cian is Lug Lamfota, the boy hero of ancient Irish myths. With him Lugaid Menn of the Dál Chais and Luigne, and Lugaid MacCon of the Corca Laigde are identical.

We have, therefore, no account of the Dalcassian conquest of southern Connacht which can be regarded as historical, but considering the position of the Dál Chais, who in historical times were settled in the choicest portion of this territory along the west bank of the Shannon, we can conclude that it was they who played the leading part in that conquest. As to the other great septs who occupied the western portions of this territory—the Corca Baiscind in south-west Clare, who are linked with the Múscraige and Corcu Duibne of the Érainn in the genealogies) and the Corcamruadh of north-west Clare, we have no evidence on which to decide whether they obtained their lands as the result of this conquest or whether they were relics of the more ancient inhabitants of that district.

As already stated, the annals record very little about Munster until the seventh century is reached. The first record of a conflict between Munster and Connacht appears in AU 626 (AI 629) at which year a battle at Carn Feradaig (Cahernarry, a few miles south-east of Limerick city) between the forces of the two provinces is recorded. The Munstermen led by their king Failbe Flann were victors. Guaire (‘the hospitable’) king of Connacht and Conall mac Maelduib fled, while the king of Uí Máine (in south of Connacht) was slain. Keating (*Forus Feasa*, iii, 70) says that six Connacht

²⁷ In *Four Masters*, A.D. 267, Lugaid Menn mac Oengusa who slew the Ulster king Eochaid Gunnat is said to be of the Ulstermen (*do Ulltarib*). This should probably read ‘do Luignib’ (of the Luigne.)

²⁸ H. 2. 7 T.C.D. p. 264 printed *Eigse*, October 1940.

²⁹ See The Ó Clery Book of Genealogies (ed. Pender, *Analecta Hibernica*, No. 18, p. 159.)

chieftains were slain in that battle and adds that the reason why Guaire came into Munster was 'to claim the territory between Slieve Aughty and Limerick which was part of Connacht until conquered by Lugaid Menn.'

It is probable that it was with this same end in view that the Connachtmen fought a number of other battles in this and the following centuries, yet they never succeeded in reconquering this piece of territory. A battle at Loch Fén between Connacht and Munster in which Talmanach mac Laidhind was slain is recorded in AI 665. This Talmanach was of the Corca Baiscind of south-west Clare. The Four Masters at 717 record a battle between the Connachtmen and Corca Baiscind in which a son of Talamnach's was slain. This is probably the person referred to at AI 723 where the death of Aithechda mac Talmnaich, king of Corca Baiscind is recorded. The Four Masters at 780 (recte 785) record 'another defeat' of the Munstermen by Tipraite (king of Connacht), while the same annals at 836 record still another defeat of the Munstermen by the Connacht king, Cathal mac Muirghiusa.