

## Historical and literary representations of Brian Boru's burial in Armagh, 1014AD

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The historical and literary sources for the funeral of Brian Boru are discussed. The choice of Armagh as his final resting place is shown to have had potential advantages both for the church there and for Dál Cais. The various accounts of his burial, with their inconsistencies and omissions, are analysed. Brian's reputed twelve-night wake is regarded as a possible literary device, intended to link him with St Patrick and thereby enhance his reputation for sanctity.

The name Brian Bóroma (Brian Boru) instantly conjures up images of the kingship of Ireland. In the popular imagination Brian is chiefly associated with a supposed Irish national struggle against the Vikings and (with the possible exception of St Patrick) no other medieval Irish figure has been so consistently celebrated and discussed. He has been the subject of a medieval Irish biography, numerous poems, a putative Norse saga (termed *Brján's saga*), much scholarly discussion and the inspiration for a brand of vodka and an opera.<sup>1</sup> The historical and literary Brian is inexorably linked with his pyrrhic victory over a Laigin and Hiberno-Norse force at the Battle of Clontarf on Good Friday 1014, an event that even came to be known in later Norse sources as *Brjánsorrosta* ('Brian's Battle').<sup>2</sup> As the historical and literary accounts of that battle have recently been analysed in detail, I propose instead to examine the records and circumstances surrounding Brian's burial in Armagh in the immediate aftermath of the battle, in order to assess the significance of his funeral and the way in which it was recorded in various sources.<sup>3</sup>

### Brian's Burial: the Sources

Descriptions of individual funerals are rare in the Irish annals.<sup>4</sup> Among Brian's contemporaries only his sometime rival and ally, Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, king of

<sup>1</sup> The opera is by Stanislaus Strange (words) and Julian Edwards (music), *Brian Boru: Romantic Opera in Three Acts* (Cincinnati, 1896).

<sup>2</sup> Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru: Ireland's Greatest King?* (Stroud, 2007) p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> For the most recent and detailed discussion of Brian, see Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru*.

<sup>4</sup> A number of annals will be cited in this discussion. Annals will be cited by siglum, year and entry number (for example, AI 1014.5), except where the chronological apparatus is uncertain, in which case entries will be cited by siglum and *sub anno* (for example, AFM s. a. 1022). The following sigla and editions will be used. AI: Seán Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), *The Annals of Inisfallen (MS. Rawlinson B. 503)* (Dublin, 1951). AU: Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (eds and trans.), *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131). Part 1 Text and Translation* (Dublin, 1983). ALC: William Hennessy (ed. and trans.), *The Annals of Loch Cé* (2 vols, London, 1871). AFM: John O'Donovan (ed. and trans.), *Annala Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1616* (2nd ed., 7 vols, Dublin, 1856). AClon: Denis Murphy (ed.), *The Annals of Clonmacnoise being Annals of Ireland from the Earliest Period to A.D. 1408; translated into English A.D. 1627 by Conell Mageoghagan* (Dublin, 1896). ATig: Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'Annals of Tigernach', in *Revue Celtique*, xvi (1895) pp 374–419; xvii (1896), pp 6–33, 119–263 and 337–420 and xviii (1897), pp 9–59, 150–97 and 267–303. CS: Gearóid Mac Niocaill (ed. and trans.), 'Chronicon Scotorum' (<http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/G100016/index.html>) (edition);

(<http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/T100016/index.html>) (translation) (17 Feb. 2010). ABoyle: Alexander Freeman (ed. and trans.), 'The annals in Cotton MS Titus A. XXV' in *Revue Celtique* xli (1924) pp 301–30; xlii (1925) pp 283–305; xliii (1926) pp 358–384 and xliv (1927) pp 336–61.



Tara, was afforded a comparable funeral record in the annals. Unlike Brian's death, Máel Sechnaill's end was apparently peaceful and expected and the *comarbai* (spiritual and temporal heirs) of Saints Patrick, Colum Cille (Columba) and Ciarán were present when he died at his home in Cró Inis on Loch Ennell.<sup>5</sup> The seventeenth-century Annals of the Four Masters claim that Máel Sechnaill received the Eucharist and unction from *comarba Pátraic* and afterwards 'They sung masses, hymns, psalms, and canticles, for the welfare of his soul'.<sup>6</sup> In the case of Brian we are fortunate that a larger number of records of his funeral exist, although they are terse, open to multiple interpretations and also appear to have been written later than the events they purport to describe. The descriptions of his funeral form the conclusion to a number of accounts of the battle of Clontarf. With regard to that battle, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh has demonstrated that accretions to those reports (for example, additions to the roll call of Brian's enemies) are quite pronounced.<sup>7</sup> The descriptions of Brian's burial in Armagh (an incident which is absent from a number of accounts of the battle) may also have been part of the general trend of expanding Brian's story and add a fitting coda to the career of a friend of that important church.

The succinct, possibly near-contemporary description of the events surrounding Brian's death found in the Munster Annals of Inisfallen contains no reference to Brian's posthumous fate, despite the preoccupation of these annals with Brian's activities during the previous thirty years, though this is in keeping with their laconic style.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in another important annalistic source, the midlands orientated *Chronicon Scotorum* (which survives as a seventeenth-century abbreviation of an earlier original), there is no mention of Brian's burial.<sup>9</sup> Information concerning Brian's burial is contained in a series of interrelated annals, namely the Annals of Ulster, Annals of Loch Cé, Annals of Boyle (or Cottonian Annals) and Annals of the Four Masters. To these may be added the twelfth-century tale *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh* ('The War of the Irish with the Foreigners'), a work of propaganda produced by Brian's descendants, Uí Briain.<sup>10</sup>

In the seventeenth century Seathrún Céitinn (Geoffrey Keating) did not mention Brian's burial in *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (although he cites *Cogadh* as one of his sources for Viking activity in Ireland)<sup>11</sup> and neither did Conall Mag Eochagáin in his Annals of

<sup>5</sup> CS, AFM, AClon s. a. 1022. Eoin O'Flynn has suggested that 'whether these men were actually in attendance is less important than the image produced of the high-king's final moments. This tranquil scene of an aged king, surrounded by the greatest churchmen in the country, resting at his crannóg on Loch Ennell, certainly does not reflect the tempestuous nature of Máelsechnaill's relationship with the church': 'The Career of Máelsechnaill II' in *Ríocht na Midhe: Records of the Meath Archaeological and Historical Society*, xx (2009) pp 29–68:51.

<sup>6</sup> AFM s. a. 1022.

<sup>7</sup> Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru*, pp 54–70 and 171–3. The accretion of tradition surrounding the Battle of Clontarf is significant. For example, Colm O Lochlainn demonstrated that much of the poetry associated with the battle was written at a much later period: 'Poets on the Battle of Clontarf' in *Éigse*, iii (1941–2) pp 208–18 and iv (1943–44) pp 33–47.

<sup>8</sup> John Ryan suggested that the Clontarf entry in the Annals of Inisfallen was written by 1032: 'The Battle of Clontarf' in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, lxxviii (1938) pp 1–50:3. He based this opinion on R. I. Best's and E. Mac Néill's suggestion that the original compilation finished at 1032: *The Annals of Inisfallen: Reproduced in Facsimile from the Original Manuscript (Rawlinson B 503) in the Bodleian Library* (Dublin, 1933), p. 9. The Annals of Inisfallen only survive in Rawlinson B 503, a composite manuscript dating from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries. The text of the Annals of Inisfallen down to 1092 is written by one hand and Best and Mac Néill suggested that a change in the chronological apparatus s. a. 1032 (the first occasion in which the year was written out in Irish 'ó inchollugud Crist' ('from the incarnation of Christ')), indicated a change in authorship. However, although Best and Mac Néill claim that 'this style constantly recurs down to 1092, where this first and main scribe suddenly stops', this formula does not actually reappear until 1054 and does not become a regular feature until 1068.

<sup>9</sup> As the closely related Annals of Tigernach are lacunose for the period between 1004 and 1016 inclusive, it is uncertain whether an account of Brian's burial was included in the original text(s) upon which these two sets of annals are based.

<sup>10</sup> James Todd (ed. and trans.), *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: the War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* (London, 1867): hereafter *Cogadh*.



Clonmacnoise (*s. a.* 1007), which also seems to contain material derived from *Cogadh*.<sup>12</sup> Two further, later works, which are largely based on *Cogadh, Cath Cluana Tairbh* ('The Battle of Clontarf')<sup>13</sup> and *Leabhar Oiris* ('The Book of Chronicles')<sup>14</sup> do mention Brian's burial. As the account of the Battle of Clontarf in the latter two sources is largely derivative, they will not be treated in detail here, but some points arising from them will be incorporated in the subsequent discussion. In the early nineteenth century George Petrie recorded that tradition at Kilmainham held that Brian or Murchad was buried there. Part of this tradition seems to have come from 'the Munster book of battles, by Mac Liag'.<sup>15</sup> This text appears to have been correctly identified by Edward O'Reilly as *Leabhar Oiris* and thus it is unlikely to contain any unique and genuine information.<sup>16</sup>

### Accounts of the Burial

The following account of Brian's burial is found at the end of the description of the battle of Clontarf in the Annals of Ulster:

Mael Muire son of Eochaid, successor of Patrick, with his venerable clerics and relics, came moreover to Sord Coluim Chille, and brought away the body of Brian, king of Ireland, and the body of his son Murchad, and the head of Conaing and the head of Mothla, and buried them in Ard Macha in a new tomb (*i n-ailaidh nui*). For twelve nights the community of Patrick waked the bodies in honour of the dead king (*Di aidhci dhec immorro do samhadh Patraicc ic are na corp propter honorem regis possiti*).<sup>17</sup>

The description of the battle of Clontarf in the Annals of Loch Cé is clearly not contemporary (as additions to the list of obituaries and its saga like material indicate) and its tone and description of supernatural incidents are comparable to the twelfth-century *Cogadh*.<sup>18</sup> The Annals of Loch Cé's description of the battle of Clontarf ends with an account of Brian's burial, which is remarkably similar to that found in the closely related Annals of Ulster:

Maelmuire, son of Eochaidh, i.e. the comarb of Patrick, came, truly, with seniors and relics, to Sord-Choluim-Chille, and bore from thence the bodies of Brian and his son Murchadh, and the head of Conaing, and the head of Mothla, which he

<sup>11</sup> For Céitinn's account of the battle see *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn le Seathrún Céitinn, D. D.*, eds and trans. Pádraig Dinneen and David Comyn (4 vols, London, 1901–13) iii, pp 266–77. For his explicit naming of *Cogadh* as one of his sources, see *ibid.*, iii, pp 156–7.

<sup>12</sup> Compare, for example, Mag Eochagáin's account of the drowning of Murchad's son, Tairdelbach/Terence, in the weir at Clontarf, with that of *Cogadh*, pp 192–3.

<sup>13</sup> Eóin Mac Néill (ed.), 'Cath Chluana Tairbh' in *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge: The Gaelic Journal*, vii (1896) pp 8–11, 41–4 and 55–7.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Best (ed.), 'The Leabhar Oiris' in *Ériu*, i (1904) pp 74–112.

<sup>15</sup> George Petrie, 'Ancient Monument in the Hospital Fields, Dublin' in *The Dublin Penny Journal*, i (1832), pp 68–9:69.

<sup>16</sup> Edward O'Reilly, 'A chronological account of nearly four hundred Irish writers, commencing with the earliest account of Irish history, and carried down to the year of our lord 1750...' in *Transactions of the Ibero-Celtic Society*, i (1820) p. lxx (*s. a.* 1015). In *Cogadh* (pp 150–1) Kilmainham is identified with the green of Áth Cliath and was burned by Dál Cais prior to the Battle of Clontarf (pp 154–5). As the army was said to have encamped on the green of Áth Cliath immediately after the battle, according to *Cogadh* (pp 210–11), it may be possible that this was the reason that *Cath Chluana Tairbh* and *Leabhar Oiris* contain an expanded account of the army's activities at Kilmainham.

<sup>17</sup> AU 1014.2.

<sup>18</sup> Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru*, p. 60.



buried at Ard-Macha, in a new grave (*a nioluid nui*). Two nights, moreover, was he, with the congregation of Patrick, waking the bodies, *propter honorem regis positi* (*Dí aidhche, umorro, dhósum ocus do thsamad Padraig ag aire na gcorp propter honorem regis positi*).<sup>19</sup>

The Annals of Boyle (a text very closely related to the Annal of Loch Cé)<sup>20</sup> claim:

Brian son of Cennétig son of Lorcán, high-king of Ireland and the foreigners, fell in the battle of Cluain Da Tarb, together with Conaing son of Donn Cuan, Murchad son of Brian, and Toirdelbach son of Murchad son of Brian. And the guardians of the Staff of Jesus (*mair na Bachla Ísu*) immediately carried their bodies to Armagh, where they were buried honourably, with much dignity and reverence.<sup>21</sup>

This account makes no mention of Mothla, king of Déisi Muman, and may imply that Tairdelbach's body was also taken to Armagh. The Annals of Boyle also differ from the other accounts with regard to the progression of the corpses and possibly the identity of their bearers (see below).

The account of the battle found in the great seventeenth-century Franciscan compilation known as the Annals of the Four Masters contains the following description of the funeral:

Maelmuire, son of Eochaidh, successor of Patrick, proceeded with the seniors and relics to Sord-Choluim-Chille; and they carried from thence the body of Brian, King of Ireland, and the body of Murchadh, his son, and the head of Conaing, and the head of Mothla. Maelmuire and his clergy waked the bodies with great honour and veneration; and they were interred at Ard-Macha in a new tomb (*in alaidh nui*).<sup>22</sup>

It is noticeable that although Míchél Ó Cléirigh (one of the Four Masters) had transcribed *Cogadh* in 1628 and again in 1635, this account of Brian's burial does not parallel that found in *Cogadh*.<sup>23</sup> Rather the account in the Annals of the Four Masters (which was written between 1632 and 1636) bears a closer resemblance to that of the Annals of Ulster and the Annals of Loch Cé and may well have drawn on sources similar to those texts. There is, however, one noticeable difference; unlike the latter two sources it does not specify the duration of Brian's wake.

Moving to the non-annalistic accounts, the most important is *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh*, which, in the words of John Ryan, 'is not a simple record of events, but a romantic tale, in which heroes shine and villains play their sinister parts and dramatic incidents are invented or exaggerated for the benefit of the reading public, all the while the interests of the Dál Chais are kept well before the writer's mind'.<sup>24</sup> The description of

<sup>19</sup> ALC s. a. 1014. For 'regis positi' the manuscript on which Hennessy based his edition has 'reigis possiti': ALC, i, 13, n. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals* (Dublin, 1975) p. 30.

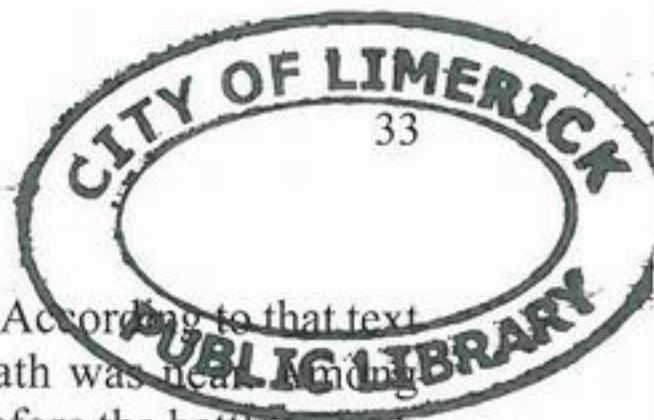
<sup>21</sup> ABoyle s. a. 1014.

<sup>22</sup> AFM s. a. 1013.

<sup>23</sup> These dates are found in the colophon to the B manuscript (1635) of *Cogadh*, which is the only one of the three manuscripts to contain the account of Brian's burial: *Cogadh*, p. xiv.

<sup>24</sup> Ryan, 'The Battle of Clontarf', p. 3. Despite these perceptive comments, Ryan proceeded to take much of *Cogadh*'s testimony at face value.





Brian's burial in *Cogadh* is cast in the form of a prophecy by Brian. According to that text various omens and visions combined to indicate that Brian's death was near, and among these was the appearance of an otherworldly woman on the night before the battle, which Brian described to his servant, Laidean:

'For, Aibhell, of Craig Liath, came to me last night', said he, 'and she told me that I should be killed this day; and she said to me that the first of my sons I should see this day would be he who should succeed me in the sovereignty; and that is Donnchadh; and go thou, Laidean,' said he, 'and take these steeds with thee and receive my blessing; and carry out my will after me, viz., my body and my soul to God and to Saint Patrick, and that I am to be carried to Ard-macha; and my blessing to Donnchadh, for discharging my last bequests (*mo cheinnaiti*) after me, viz., twelve score cows to be given to the Comharba of Patrick, and the Society of Ard-macha; and its own proper dues (*a dhuthracht féin*) to Cill da Lua, and the churches of Mumhain; and he knows that I have not wealth of gold or silver, but he is to pay them in return for my blessing and for his succeeding me. Go this night to Sord, and desire them to come to-morrow, early, for my body, and to convey it from thence to Damhliag, of Cianan; and then let them carry it to Lughmhigh; and let Maelmuire Mac Eochadha, the Comharba of Patrick, and the Society of Ard-macha come to meet me at Lughmhigh'.<sup>25</sup>

The description of the subsequent fulfillment of Brian's prophecy is succinct: 'Brian was met, as he had directed; and he was taken to Ard-Macha, and Murchadh along with him; and Donnchadh paid in full their bequests (*a ccendaite*), and fulfilled Brian's will after him as he had himself directed'.<sup>26</sup>

The narration of this incident in *Cogadh* reflects another great contemporary Middle Irish tale on the death of a king, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* ('The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel').<sup>27</sup> In both these tales the king accurately prophesies concerning his impending death. This does not necessarily 'spoil the ending' but rather personalises the narrative, enabling the audience to empathise with the predicament of the protagonists. The author of *Cogadh*, through casting the description of the funeral as a prophecy by Brian, was able to portray Brian as a pious figure concerned for his soul, the correct treatment of various churches and the welfare of his kingdom.

### Reasons for Brian's Burial in Armagh

From Armagh's point of view it may have been deemed important to secure Brian's remains and those of his principal followers, for a number of reasons. Firstly, there may have been an element of gratitude involved, as Brian had been a notable friend of Armagh. He had overseen the confirmation of Patrician claims to certain ecclesiastical dues,<sup>28</sup> presented twenty ounces of gold to Armagh in 1005,<sup>29</sup> granted other unnamed demands to *comarba Pátraic* (Máel Muire) while on circuit in 1006,<sup>30</sup> gave Patrician

<sup>25</sup> *Cogadh*, pp 200–03. A fourteenth-century poem by Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh also recounts this vision: *Ní Mhaonaigh, Brian Boru*, p. 151, n. 62.

<sup>26</sup> *Cogadh*, pp 210–11.

<sup>27</sup> Eleanor Knott (ed.), *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (Dublin, 1936).

<sup>28</sup> John Gwynn (ed.), *Liber Ardmachanus: The Book of Armagh* (Dublin, 1913), p. ciii.

<sup>29</sup> AU 1005.7, CS, AFM s. a. 1005.

<sup>30</sup> AU 1006.4. This circuit is also reported, without mention of Máel Muire's demands, in AI 1006.2, CS s. a. 1006 and AFM s. a. 1005.

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churches immunity on subsequent hostings<sup>31</sup> and arranged for a raid to avenge the violation of Patrician relics.<sup>32</sup> Máel Muire was *comarba Pátraic* during all these events and it is quite possible that he may have formed a friendship (or at least a close working relationship) with this generous and powerful benefactor and may have felt obliged to provide Brian with an honourable burial.

Secondly, financial considerations may have dictated Armagh's desire to secure Brian's body. They may have hoped that by according Brian an honourable burial they would secure death dues. According to *Cogadh*, Brian promised twelve score (240) cows to Armagh, though it was up to Donnchad to arrange the payment. In earlier Irish law texts the value of a milch cow was generally equated with one ounce of silver.<sup>33</sup> If the general early medieval ratio for the value of gold to silver (1:12)<sup>34</sup> is adopted, Brian's gift of 240 cows was equivalent in value to the twenty ounces of gold he had previously granted to Armagh in 1005.<sup>35</sup> The precise natures of Brian's payments, in both instances, are unclear. According to *Cogadh* Brian called his final payment *mo cheinnaiti*.<sup>36</sup> Colmán Etchingham has demonstrated that *cennaithe* may loosely refer to the effects of the dead, to a bequest or even ecclesiastical dues in general.<sup>37</sup> In several contexts, *cennaithe* is expressed in cattle, namely *bó chennaithe* ('cow of last payment'), which appears to be part of a death due or burial charge.<sup>38</sup> Although *cennaithe* is used in *Cogadh*, the amount is far in excess of the single cow prescribed in other sources.<sup>39</sup> Alternatively, even though *cennaithe* is the word used in *Cogadh*, the payment may have been envisaged as a lump sum given to a church (or possibly churches) on the death of an individual. According to *Córus Béscnai* ('Regulation of Proper Behaviour'), an Old Irish law text written well before *Cogadh* and before Brian's lifetime, the sum which members of each rank in society are normally expected to bequeath to the Church on their death corresponds to their honour price.<sup>40</sup> 240 cows, however, far exceeds the honour price of twenty-eight *cumala* (eighty-four cows) accorded to the highest rank of king recognised in Middle Irish legal commentaries, *rí Érenn cen fressarba* ('king of Ireland without opposition').<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, since Brian supposedly stipulated that other dues were to be paid to Cell da Lua (Killaloe) and other unnamed churches in Munster, the author of *Cogadh* appears to have portrayed Brian ultimately disposing of an even greater sum. A different word, *dúthracht*, is used for these other dues, which may suggest that two different types of payment were envisaged.<sup>42</sup> According to *Cogadh*, Donnchad paid *cennaithe* for both

<sup>31</sup> AU 1012.3.

<sup>32</sup> AU 1013.1.

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of values and measures, see Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish Farming* (Dublin, 1997) pp 560–99.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford, 1993) p. 482. In the middle of the ninth century the Carolingian emperor Charles the Bald fixed the ratio of gold to silver at 1:12, see Peter Spufford, *Money and its Uses in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1988) p. 51.

<sup>35</sup> 240 cows = 240 ounces of silver = 20 ounces of gold.

<sup>36</sup> For the word *cennaithe*, see Ernest Quin (ed.), *Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language based mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials* (Dublin, 1913–76) s. v. *cennaithe*.

<sup>37</sup> Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland A.D. 650 to 1000* (Maynooth, 1999) p. 441.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 441.

<sup>39</sup> For a list of these sources, see *ibid.*, p. 441, n. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988) p. 123.

<sup>41</sup> There are six later status texts related to the commentary on *Uraicecht Becc*: Liam Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin, 2005) p. 317. Of these, four assign an honour price of twenty-eight 'cumala' to the 'rí Érenn cen fressarba': Daniel Binchy (ed.), *Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (6 vols, Dublin, 1978) ii, 685.33–4; *ibid.*, 705.6–8; *ibid.*, iii, 1056.16–17; *ibid.*, iv, 1231.40.

<sup>42</sup> *Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language*, ed. Quin, s. v. *dúthracht*.



Brian and Murchad (*a ccendaite*) when their bodies were taken to Armagh. It is conceivable that *cennaithe* was understood as a burial due (rather than a bequest), but it is impossible to be certain, as no details of Murchad's will (*timna*) are given.<sup>43</sup>

Armagh may also have been looking towards the long term and the honours accorded to Brian may have been a means of flattering Brian's descendents, in the hope of a continued alliance with Dál Cais. In a study of burial in medieval Ireland, Susan Leigh Fry has stated that 'Even if we had no other record regarding Brian's life and exploits, the accounts of his burial alone are enough to clearly indicate his pre-eminent status and unique position in Irish history'.<sup>44</sup> The status of the subject of the obsequies, however, is only one aspect of the social pressures that dictate the scale of human funerary rites. In opposition to Fry's claims, socio-anthropological interpretations of funerals should be considered, such as those of Edmund Leach, who argued that 'if graves are in any way an index of social status it is the social status of the funeral organisers as much as the social status of the deceased that is involved ... [and it is] a rather naive assumption that the scale and quality of a funeral is an expression of the status of the deceased rather than a complex reflection of the circumstances in which the survivors find themselves as the result of a death'.<sup>45</sup> The scale of the funeral may have reflected Armagh's desire to further ingratiate themselves with Dál Cais, with whom they appear to have been building links for a number of decades. Brian's brother and predecessor, Mathgamain, had helped settle a dispute between the *comarbai* of Ailbe (of Emly) and Patrick (Dub dá Leithe), in favour of the latter while he was visiting Munster.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Armagh appears to have had a representative in Munster during Brian's career, Tuathal ua Maíl Macha (*ob.* 1007) and Brian was very favourable to Armagh during his own lifetime, as noted above.

Dál Cais may also have had reasons to desire Brian's burial in Armagh. His burial there would have facilitated a continued alliance with the Patrician community, which might have appeared useful for counteracting similar alliances between various branches of the Eóganachta and important Munster churches (who may have previously proved hostile to Dál Cais interests).<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the network of Patrician churches stretched throughout Ireland and Dál Cais may have thought it expedient to maintain links with an organisation that had influence in the territories of both potential allies and enemies alike. From a propagandistic point of view, the burial of the man who aspired to the title *Imperator Scotorum* ('Emperor of the Irish'), by the premier church of Ireland, was certainly an event that Dál Cais could promote in their favour (as indeed they subsequently did, in *Cogadh*). Finally, the perceived spiritual benefits of being buried in Patrick's chief church cannot be ignored.

It is difficult to assess whether the funeral may be classified as an Armagh-controlled affair, a Dál Cais political showpiece or the result of a convergence of their respective interests. The most detailed discussion of the funeral is in a Dál Cais document (*Cogadh*), yet there is no evidence to suggest that any living person from Brian's army accompanied the bodies and heads of the slain to Sord Choluim Cille (Swords, Co. Dublin), Damliag Cianáin (Duleek, Co. Meath), Lugmad (Louth) or Armagh (though the possibility that

<sup>43</sup> Murchad is said to have made a will as he lay dying after the battle: *Cogadh*, pp 196–7.

<sup>44</sup> Susan Fry, *Burial in Medieval Ireland, 900–1500* (Dublin, 1999) p. 89.

<sup>45</sup> Edmund Leach, 'Discussion' in Barry Burnham and John Kingsbury (eds), *Space, Hierarchy and Society: Interdisciplinary Studies in Social Area Analysis* (Oxford, 1979) pp 119–24:122.

<sup>46</sup> AI 973.3.

<sup>47</sup> Brian appears to have previously found it necessary to coerce some churches that were connected with the Eóganachta, namely Cork and Emly. See the discussion of the burial of Mothla, son of Domnall, below.



some may have done so cannot be ruled out). Indeed, *Cogadh* implies that the Dál Cais army had their hands full simply trying to get back to their own territory.<sup>48</sup> An attempted revolt by the Eóganacht contingent of their army and constant harrying by Osraige troops placed the Dál Cais army in peril on the long march home. Of course that narrative was most likely constructed to demonstrate the bravery of the Dál Cais troops – mortally injured men who stuffed their wounds with moss and returned to the fray to assist their endangered comrades – rather than furnish the itinerary of their post-battle journey. Nonetheless, the annals make it clear that Dál Cais were subsequently placed under considerable pressure over the course of 1014. Donnchad and Tadc, Brian's most prominent surviving sons, fought against each other in a battle in which Tadc was victorious.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Donnchad killed Cathal mac Domnaill, *rigdamna* of Uí Echach Muman<sup>50</sup> and fought a battle against Domnall son of Dub dá Bairenn, which suggests that Dál Cais had to contend with substantial Eóganacht opposition within Munster.<sup>51</sup>

Regardless of whether the initiative for the funeral came from Armagh or Dál Cais, the community of Armagh was careful to record the obsequies. It is clear from the surviving annals that the funeral is only mentioned in those collections which incorporate an Armagh based annalistic text for this period of their record (Annals of Ulster, Annals of Loch Cé, Annals of Boyle and Annals of the Four Masters).<sup>52</sup> In contrast, those annalistic texts which are not dependent upon an Armagh text during this period (Annals of Inisfallen, *Chronicon Scotorum* and Annals of Clonmacnoise) do not contain accounts of the funeral, even though they do record the battle. The relationship between the account of the funeral found in *Cogadh* and that found in the Armagh-based annals is unclear and there are actually few parallels between the two sources.<sup>53</sup>

### The Removal of the Bodies

According to all the texts quoted above (except the Annals of Boyle), the bodies were initially taken to Sord Choluim Cille and subsequently to Armagh. It is possible that the bodies may even have been interned in Sord first before Máel Muire obtained them and that the accounts of their postmortem movements represent attempts by the various churches to secure the right to bury them, though this cannot now be proven. Sord Choluim Cille's name implies that it was a church dedicated to Colm Cille (Columba), but the translation of the bodies from a Columban church to a Patrician church need not

<sup>48</sup> *Cogadh*, pp 212–17.

<sup>49</sup> AU 1014.6, CS, ALC *s. a.* 1014, AFM *s. a.* 1013.

<sup>50</sup> AU 1014.5, AI 1014.5, CS, ALC *s. a.* 1014, AFM *s. a.* 1013. AU and ALC claim that Cathal was king of Uí Echach. *Chronicon Scotorum*, however, notes that Donnchad took hostages from Domnall (Cathal's father) which supports the Annals of Inisfallen's claim that Cathal was *rigdamna* and not king (though AI simply claims Cathal died).

<sup>51</sup> AU 1015.1, AI 1015.2, CS, ALC, *s. a.* 1015, AFM *s. a.* 1014. AU and ALC claim that Donnchad was the sole victor. *Chronicon Scotorum* and AFM claim that Donnchad and Tadc were joint victors. AI state that Domnall fell in battle against 'the son of Bran' ('macc mBrain'), which is undoubtedly a scribal error for 'the son of Brian', the sobriquet by which Donnchad subsequently became known in the annals.

<sup>52</sup> Gwynn, followed by Mac Niocaill, suggested that the Armagh annalistic text that informed the content of the Annals of Ulster and the Annals of Loch Cé extended down to 1189: Mac Niocaill, *Medieval Irish Annals*, p. 29. The relationship between the Annals of Loch Cé and the Annals of Boyle, while close, is not entirely clear. Daniel Mc Carthy has suggested that the primary source for the Annals of Boyle was an Armagh-Derry chronicle that was collated with a Clonmacnoise chronicle in the early thirteenth century: Daniel Mc Carthy, *The Irish Annals: their Genesis, Evolution and History* (Dublin, 2008), pp 223–44 (summary on pp 243–4).

<sup>53</sup> Ní Mhaonaigh has demonstrated that the author(s) of *Cogadh* do not appear to have had access to the surviving version of the Annals of Ulster when they compiled their catalogue of Viking activity: 'Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib and the annals: a comparison' in *Ériu*, xlvii (1996) pp 101–26:107–10 and 116.



be interpreted as a hostile act on the part of the clergy of Armagh.<sup>54</sup> It is reasonable to suggest that the communities of Patrick and Columba in Ireland were on good terms and relatively closely linked during the late tenth and early eleventh century. Máel Muire's uncle, Dub dá Leithe (*ob.* 998), was both *Comarba Pátraic* and *Comarba Coluim Chille*, while a contemporary, Muiredach mac Crícháin, was both *comarba Coluim Cille* and *fer léigind* (head of the monastic school) of Armagh only three years before Brian's death.<sup>55</sup>

Regardless of whether Dál Cais decided to deposit the bodies there or whether the community of Sord actively sought them out, Sord, at first glance, appears to have been an unlikely location for Brian's first or final resting place. Sord, the site of a bishopric, was located in the territory of Fine Gall and may have been associated with the ruling dynasty of Dublin, against whom Brian had fallen in battle.<sup>56</sup> In 994 Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, king of Tara, had burned Sord<sup>57</sup> and the Annals of Ulster explicitly state that Máel Sechnaill's grandson, Conchobor, plundered and burned Sord, in revenge for an attack on Ard Brecáin (Ardraccan, Co. Meath) by Sitric mac Amlaíb, king of Dublin.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, Edel Bhreathnach suggests, 'It was no coincidence, however, that one of Brian's wives and mother of Tadc mac Briain, Echraid daughter of Carrlus mac Ailella, belonged to Uí Áeda Odba, an important local family'.<sup>59</sup> Máire Ní Mhaonaigh has suggested that this marriage alliance probably dated from the 990s, as by this period Brian was actively involved in the affairs of the midlands and Tadc, the product of this alliance must have been born prior to the turn of the millennium if he was old enough to fight in 1014.<sup>60</sup> The initial transfer of the bodies to Sord, a church that may have been friendly with Tadc's maternal kin, may suggest that Tadc initially directed the funeral arrangements. Unfortunately this is impossible to ascertain, for as ambiguous as Donnchad's activities around Easter 1014 were, Tadc is wholly absent from the record, as are Uí Áeda Odba. The most detailed account (that found in Míchél Ó Cléirigh's seventeenth-century copy of *Cogadh*) technically does not claim that Donnchad was responsible for the funeral, as Brian entrusted Laidean (a figure of questionable historicity) with the funeral arrangements and simply declared that Donnchad was to discharge the subsequent payments. Indeed, if Brian's will was carried out as he directed, then his body would have been sent on its way the morning after the battle (Saturday morning), before Donnchad returned on Sunday evening.

As noted above, *Cogadh* claims that the bodies were taken to Sord, Damliag Cianáin, Lugmad and finally to Armagh. Both Damliag Cianáin and Lugmad also appear to have been notable churches.<sup>61</sup> Damliag Cianáin was said to have been founded by Cianán, a

<sup>54</sup> The earliest reference to Sord in the annals is to a raid on it, by Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, in 994, see below. It is possible that a reference to 'Cill Suird i ndesciurt Breghe' ('The Church of Sord in Southern Brega') in a ninth-century *Life of Brigit* refers to the same church, which may then have been associated with that saint: Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry* (Oxford, 1988) p. 281, n. 357.

<sup>55</sup> AU 1011.1. Arguments could and did erupt over burials. The Columban church of Derry and the Patrician church of Armagh disagreed over the burial of a subsequent king of Ireland, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, but in that case it was because the Columban community felt Mac Lochlainn did not deserve a Christian burial (AU 1166.10).

<sup>56</sup> For the bishopric, see CS, AFM s. a. 1023.

<sup>57</sup> AU 994.3.

<sup>58</sup> AU 1035.6, ALC, AFM, s. a. 1035.

<sup>59</sup> Edel Bhreathnach, 'Columban Churches in Brega and Leinster: relations with the Norse and Anglo-Normans' in *JRSAL*, cxxix (1999) pp 5–18:11. Bhreathnach (p. 15, n. 51) attributes this information to F. J. Byrne.

<sup>60</sup> Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru*, p. 32. Brian appears to have had a subsequent wife, Dub Choblaig, daughter of Cathal mac Conchobair, king of Connacht: *ibid.*, pp 32–3.

<sup>61</sup> In both *Cath Cluana Tairbh* (ed. Mac Néill, p. 43) and *Leabhar Oiris* (ed. Best, p. 90) it is incorrectly called Damliag Ciaráin, in their descriptions of the removal of the bodies, although it is correctly called Damliag Cianáin, in Brian's direct speech in *Leabhar Oiris* (*ibid.*, p. 88). This may have been the result of a simple scribal slip of 'r' for 'n' in the source behind these two related texts.



supposed associate of St Patrick and in the first half of the tenth century its bishop and scribe, Tuathal mac Aenacáin, was also 'Steward of Patrick's community south of the mountain'.<sup>62</sup> It was clearly an important church, as the obits of *comarbai Cianáin* are recorded between the late eighth and late eleventh centuries and it was later chosen as the site of a bishopric, at the reforming synod of Ráith Bressail (1111). In contrast to Sord, it does not appear to have been within Fine Gall, as the Gall (presumably of Dublin) raided it within a decade of the Battle of Clontarf.<sup>63</sup> Lugmad was also associated with a disciple of St Patrick (Mochta) and its abbots were occasionally associated with other monasteries, including Damliag Cianáin. In common with Damliag, it also had a bishop and scribe (Fínnachta mac Echtigern) who was 'Steward of Patrick's community south of the mountain' in the first half of the tenth century.<sup>64</sup>

The Annals of Boyle, however, differ from all the above texts concerning the passage of the bodies and their conveyors. As quoted above, they claim: 'The stewards of the Staff of Jesus (*mair na Bachla Ísu*) immediately carried their bodies with them to Armagh and they buried them honourably and with noble veneration there'.<sup>65</sup> The existence or identities of stewards of *Bachall Isu* at the beginning of the eleventh century are unknown.<sup>66</sup> According to the seventeenth-century Annals of the Four Masters, a *maor Bachla Iosa* ('Steward of the Staff of Jesus'), named Flann ua Sínaig, died in 1135, and he may well have been a hereditary keeper of that relic. If such hereditary keepers did exist at the time of Brian's death, they may have been related to the *comarba Pátraic*, Máel Muire, as both Máel Muire and Flann ua Sínaig (the later *máer*) were members of Clann Sínaig, the ecclesiastical dynasty that controlled Armagh. Alternatively, they may have been connected with the *mair muintere Pátraic* ('Stewards of the Community of Patrick'). It is possible that these stewards (and the Staff of Jesus) may have been among the 'seniors and relics', which accompanied Máel Muire, according to the Annals of Ulster, Annals of Loch Cé and Annals of the Four Masters.

### Brian's wake: twelve nights or two?

The correspondence between the entries for Brian's burial in the Annals of Ulster and Annals of Loch Cé is considerable. The similarity between the Annals of Ulster and Annals of Loch Cé entries is unsurprising, for as Gearóid Mac Niocaill pointed out 'It has long been known that from the starting point of *Ll* [Annals of Loch Cé 1014–1316] in 1014 down to the first years of the thirteenth century, *U* [Annals of Ulster] and *Ll* have a common core of material'.<sup>67</sup> This observation certainly holds true for the entries in both texts under the year in which Brian's death was recorded. Such is the close concordance

<sup>62</sup> AU 929.1.

<sup>63</sup> ATig, AFM *s. a.* 1023. For a recent discussion of the extent of the Scandinavian settlement known as Fine Gall/Crích Gall/Dyflinarskirí, see John Bradley, 'Some Reflections on the Problem of Scandinavian Settlement in the Hinterland of Dublin during the Ninth Century', in John Bradley, Alan Fletcher and Anngret Simms (eds), *Dublin in the Medieval World: Studies in Honour of Howard B. Clarke*, (Dublin, 2009), pp 39–62.

<sup>64</sup> AFM *s. a.* 948. A previous such steward was located at Treóit (Trevit) (AU 888.3). It may be possible that this position was rotated among important Patrician churches in the midlands.

<sup>65</sup> ABoyle *s. a.* 1014.

<sup>66</sup> AFM *s. a.* 1135. The earliest record of *Bachall Isu* concerns its violation by Donnchad mac Domnaill, Clann Cholmáin king of Tara, at an *óenach* at Ráith Airthir (AU 789.7). According to the possibly tenth-century Tripartite Life of Patrick (*Vita Tripartita*), which postdates that event, Patrick received the staff while sojourning in the Mediterranean, prior to his mission in Ireland: Kathleen Mulchrone (ed.), *Bethu Phátraic: the Tripartite Life of Patrick* (Dublin, 1939) pp 18–19.

<sup>67</sup> Mac Niocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals*, p. 29.



of the Annals of Ulster and Annals of Loch Cé under 1014 that ten of the eleven entries in the Annals of Loch Cé are shared with the Annals of Ulster (though the description of the battle of Clontarf is much longer in the former). These ten entries occur in the same order in both texts; the probability of the same order occurring independently is negligible. Furthermore, the close lexical and syntactical parallels for a number of these entries, including the section on Brian's burial, confirm that they drew on a common source.<sup>68</sup> In light of these close parallels between the Annals of Ulster and Annals of Loch Cé it is necessary to seek an explanation for the discrepancy in length between the twelve-night wake described in the Annals of Ulster and the two-night wake described in the Annals of Loch Cé.<sup>69</sup> A clue to the origin of this discrepancy may be found in Trinity College Dublin MS 1282 (formally H. 1. 8), the primary manuscript of the Annals of Ulster.

MS 1282 (siglum *H*), was written by Ruaidhrí Ó Luínín (whose hand has also been assigned the siglum *H*) for Cathal Mac Maghnusa, as far as 1489 and continued by subsequent scribes as far as 1510.<sup>70</sup> The other manuscript of the Annals of Ulster is Rawlinson B 489 (siglum *R*), a copy of *H*, of which the entries between 952 and 1506 were also written by Ó Luínín.<sup>71</sup> Manuscript *H* has *Di aidhcei dhec immorro* ('twelve nights, moreover') as the length of the wake. The *dhec* in Manuscript *H* was an interlinear addition, in a hand given the siglum *H'*. Daniel Mc Carthy, the only scholar to posit an identity for *H'*, has suggested that *H'* was also Ó Luínín, subsequently correcting his text.<sup>72</sup> Whether or not this identification is correct, Ó Luínín did write *Di aidhcei dhec immorro* ('twelve nights, moreover') in Manuscript *R*.<sup>73</sup>

The Annals of Loch Cé, however, have *Dí aidhche, umorro* ('two nights, moreover'), the same as Ó Luínín originally wrote in Manuscript *H*, before he (or someone else) altered it to 'twelve nights'. This leads to the question of whether the Armagh parent text behind both the Annals of Ulster and Annals of Loch Cé recorded a two-night or a twelve-night wake. In the later texts *Cath Cluana Tairbh* and *Leabhar Oiris* it is also claimed that Brian had a twelve-night wake, which suggests that the authors of these sources not only drew on *Cogadh*, but possibly also on a version of the Armagh annalistic text.<sup>74</sup> Fry has suggested that the Annals of Loch Cé's record of a two-night wake may be a scribal error, as 'twelve-day wakes seem to be connected with people of high status, and thus appear to have specific social connotations',<sup>75</sup> but her reasoning is flawed and it is by no means

<sup>68</sup> The Latin phrase *propter honorem regis possiti* at the end of the Irish entry in both the Annals of Ulster and Annals of Loch Cé may be a common formula or may suggest that their parent text was itself a composite document, which drew on sources written in both Irish and Latin.

<sup>69</sup> Almost all scholars who have mentioned the funeral follow the twelve-night wake of the Annals of Ulster. The notable exception is Ní Mhaonaigh, who has followed the Annals of Loch Cé's reading: *Brian Boru*, pp 59–60.

<sup>70</sup> AU, pp viii–ix.

<sup>71</sup> Brian Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish language Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and Oxford College Libraries* (2 vols, Dublin 2001–03) i, 157–8 and 161.

<sup>72</sup> Mc Carthy, *The Irish Annals*, p. 37.

<sup>73</sup> This may be seen in the online image of Rawlinson B 489 f. 37r at *Early Manuscripts at Oxford University* (<http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msrawlb489>) (17 Feb. 2010).

<sup>74</sup> *Cath Cluana Tairbh*, ed. Mac Néill, p. 43 and *Leabhar Oiris*, ed. Best, p. 90.

<sup>75</sup> Fry, *Burial in Medieval Ireland*, p. 83. Fry cites Plummer's *Vitae Sanctorum* i, cxlix–cxlx (*recte* cl) as proof that 'Other Irish sources also mention 'wakes' which continued for seven and eight days, with twelve-day wakes recorded for men of especially high status': op. cit., p. 81, Charles Plummer (ed.), *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (2 vols, Oxford, 1910), i, pp cxlix–cxlx (*recte* cl)). The reference is erroneous. Plummer does not mention wakes at this point: his only reference to them is a comment that, in the Lives, 'The burial customs of the Irish are vividly portrayed; unrestrained lamentation for the dead, the keening, which is regarded as somewhat heathenish, as is also the prolonged wake': *ibid.*, p. cix. Of the six people that Fry claims had twelve-night wakes (excluding Brian), three did not (see n. 78, below).



clear why the Annals of Ulster should be given priority over the Annals of Loch Cé in this instance, especially considering the annotations to Manuscript *H* discussed above.<sup>76</sup>

From a practical point of view a two-night wake appears to be a more likely occurrence than a twelve-night wake, given the inevitable post-mortem decomposition of the bodies/decapitated heads, which would have been further exacerbated by the extra amount of time necessary to transfer them from Clontarf to Armagh. It is not impossible, however, that the Armagh parent text may have originally contained a record of a twelve-night wake, regardless of whether one actually occurred (it need not be expected that the earliest source was necessarily truthful). Twelve-night wakes appear in earlier literature and it is noticeable that in *Vita Tripartita* (an earlier Life of Armagh's patron saint), Patrick also had a twelve-night wake: 'And for the duration of twelve nights (*fri ré dá aidchi deacc*), i.e. the time during which the elders of Ireland were waking him with hymns and psalms and canticles, there was no night in Mag nInis, but angelic light there'.<sup>77</sup>

Similarly, in a later Life, a late-twelfth-/early-thirteenth-century Life of Barra, it is claimed that God did not let the sun set for twelve days after Barra's death, while the clergy of Desmumu were performing their ceremonies.<sup>78</sup> It is quite possible that the descriptions of these twelve-night wakes are imitations of *Vita Tripartita* and, in the case of Brian, part of the process by which he was attributed saintly characteristics.<sup>79</sup>

### Brian's fellow Internees and Tomb

Brian was not the only internee in Armagh after the battle of Clontarf. A number of the sources claim that one of his sons, Murchad, was buried with him, along with the heads

<sup>76</sup> For a variety of reasons medieval scholars generally treat the text of the Annals of Ulster as the most reliable annalistic record of medieval Irish history. These reasons include its preservation of early linguistic forms, the comprehensiveness of its record, its outwardly uncomplicated chronological apparatus and more recently the quality of Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill's edition (to 1131). Unfortunately, this occasionally leads scholars to forget that the Annals of Ulster is sometimes inaccurate and has its biases, like every other annalistic compilation.

<sup>77</sup> *Bethu Phátraic*, ed. Mulchrone, p. 149. My translation. This was ultimately based on Muirchú: Ludwig Bieler (ed. and trans.), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin, 1979) pp 118–19. In a Middle Irish homily on Patrick, that saint was said to have been waked for a night by angels before being waked for twelve nights by men: Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Three Middle-Irish Homilies on the Lives of Saints Patrick, Brigit and Columba* (Calcutta, 1877), pp 44–5. In the Life of Patrick in the Book of Lismore he is said to have been given a twelve-night wake by men but not by angels: Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford, 1890), pp 19 and 167. Many saints' Lives contain heavenly phenomena that supposedly occurred at the time of the saints' deaths. For a list of these Lives, see Dorothy Bray, *A List of Motifs in the Lives of the Early Irish Saints* (Helsinki, 1992), p. 119.

<sup>78</sup> Pádraig Ó Riain (ed. and trans.), *Beatha Bharra: Saint Finbarr of Cork, the Complete Life* (London, 1994), pp 88–91. Fry claims that a twelve-night wake was also held for Ethne and Fedelm, the two daughters of Lóegaire supposedly baptised by Patrick: *Burial in Medieval Ireland*, p. 82. The reference she provided, 'ibid., p. 254', may refer either to Colgan's *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae* or Kenny's *Sources for the Early History of Ireland*. Ethne and Fedelm are treated of twice in the former work: Brendan Jennings (ed.), *The Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae of John Colgan* (Dublin, 1948), pp 54–6 and 415–16 (not p. 254). Their story is essentially that episode concerning them found in Tírechán's narrative: *Patrician Texts*, ed. Bieler, pp 142–5. Page 254 of Kenny's work is part of a discussion on verse and hymns: James Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland 1: Ecclesiastical* (New York, 1929), p. 254. Neither Colgan nor Kenny mention a twelve-night wake in connection with Ethne and Fedelm. Fry later claims, correctly, that there were three days of mourning for Ethne and Fedelm prior to their burial: *Burial in Medieval Ireland*, p. 86. This particular version of Ethne's and Fedelm's story was taken 'ex cod. Ingolstadien', that is from the manuscript that contains the *Vita Tertia* of Patrick: Ludwig Bieler (ed.), *Four Latin Lives of St. Patrick* (Dublin, 1971), pp 14–15. Fry is further mistaken to claim that Domnall mac Amalgada, *comarba Pátraic*, was waked for twelve nights in 1105, like Brian: *Burial in Medieval Ireland*, pp 82–3. Domnall died on the 12 August and the annals claim that his successor, Cellach, received orders on the 23 September (though possibly chosen before then). Fry appears to have misread August for September and assumed that Domnall was waked for the duration of the period between the two events. Martin Holland has suggested that the six-week interval between the death and ordination may have been inspired by canonical considerations: 'The Ordination of Cellach, *comarbae* of Patrick, in 1105', *Seanchas Ardnhacha*, xx (2005) p. 22.

<sup>79</sup> For this process (in both Irish and Norse texts), see Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru*, pp 81–3.



of two other Munster notables, Conaing mac Duinn Cuain and Mothla mac Fáeláin. With regard to some of the nobility slaughtered at Clontarf, it is claimed in *Cogadh* that it was not until Easter Monday that 'They carried thirty of the nobles who were killed there to their territorial churches, wherever they were situated all over Erin'.<sup>80</sup> No account is given of the treatment of the remainder of the dead, apart from a brief statement in which it was claimed that they subsequently buried on the field of battle every one of their slain that they could recognise.<sup>81</sup>

The first of Brian's fellow internees, Murchad, was Brian's son by Mór, daughter of Eiden mac Cléirig of Uí Fhíachrach Aidne (Uí Fhíachrach Aidne, located in south Connacht, were one of the few kingdoms to remain loyal to Brian and accompany him to Clontarf).<sup>82</sup> Murchad appears to have had a position of prominence among Dál Cais. For example, the Annals of Inisfallen record that he was joint leader of one half of Brian's army (along with another of Brian's sons, Domnall) that attacked Cenél Conaill in 1011 and he is associated with Brian in every annalistic text that recounts the battle of Clontarf.<sup>83</sup> In *Cogadh* Murchad was portrayed as the supreme Munster warrior – 'The matchless, ever victorious, Hector, of the many-nationed heroic children of Adam' – who died alongside his own son, Tairdelbach.<sup>84</sup> Murchad's line appears to have terminated at Clontarf, and so the author of *Cogadh* probably felt safe to wax lyrical regarding Murchad's role, knowing he would not appear to have favoured any one branch of Brian's descendants over another.

Conaing, son of Donn Cuan, son of Cennétig (*rigdamna* of Munster, according to the Annals of Ulster and the Annals of Loch Cé), was Brian's nephew. His title and familial connections suggest that he was extremely close to the heart of Munster power, as were a number of his descendants. Conaing's father, Donn Cuan, had been killed by Congalach mac Maíl Mithig (Congalach Cnogba), the last Síl nÁeda Sláine king of Tara, almost sixty-five years prior to Conaing's own death.<sup>85</sup> Conaing's brother, Céilechair (*ob.* 1008), died as abbot of Tír dá Glas (Terryglass, Co. Tipperary), an important monastery on the border of Munster and the territory of the Southern Uí Néill, and was succeeded by Brian's brother, Marcán (*ob.* 1010). Conaing was the eponymous ancestor of Uí Chonaing and his son (Mathgamain) and grandson (Étrú) were both entitled *rigdamna Muman* on their deaths,<sup>86</sup> while a further descendant, Domnall Ua Conaing (*ob.* 1137), was archbishop of Cashel.<sup>87</sup>

Conaing's closeness to Brian is emphasised in *Cogadh*, in which it is stated that Conaing was one of the three men that Brian most valued.<sup>88</sup> Like Brian and Murchad, Conaing was said to have been foredoomed and he subsequently died bravely in battle, at

<sup>80</sup> *Cogadh*, pp 212–13.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 210–11.

<sup>82</sup> Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru*, p. 31.

<sup>83</sup> AI 1011.2.

<sup>84</sup> *Cogadh*, pp 166–7. Tairdelbach is generally listed alongside his father in the obits, but no mention is made of his burial (with the possible exception of the account in the Annals of Boyle).

<sup>85</sup> *CS s. a.* 950, *AFM s. a.* 948. According to Dál Cais genealogies in the twelfth-century manuscript Rawlinson B. 502, Donn Cuan was the progenitor of Muintir Duind Chuain, which included Uí Chonaing, Uí Riacháin, Uí Lonngargáin, Uí Cheinnétich and Uí Chélechair: Michael O'Brien (ed.), *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1962), p. 238.

<sup>86</sup> AU 1019.6, ATig *s. a.* 1019; AI 1032.9.

<sup>87</sup> He was entitled *aird-espoc Muman* ('Chief bishop of Munster') (ATig *s. a.* 1137) and *aird-espucc Leithe Mogha* ('Chief bishop of Leth Moga') (AFM *s. a.* 1137).

<sup>88</sup> *Cogadh*, pp 166–7.



the hands of Máel Mórda, the king of Laigin, whom he also killed.<sup>89</sup> According to the Annals of Loch Cé and Annals of Boyle, however, Conaing did not take part in the battle but remained with Brian, behind the lines, praying for success. He was killed by a Norse chief, Brodar, who was also said to have killed Brian on the same occasion. Despite the discrepancies in accounts of Conaing's actions during his and Brian's final hours (a servant, Laidean, occupies the role of Brian's companion according to *Cogadh*), he is nonetheless depicted as a close comrade of Brian in all sources. The author of *Cogadh* may have intended to flatter the descendants of Conaing by portraying their ancestor as both a close companion of Brian and an able fighter, even though he was at least in his mid-sixties when the battle took place. The clerics of Armagh may have sought to likewise seek favour with Conaing's offspring, by burying Conaing with Brian, though it should be noted that there is no record of Conaing's burial in *Cogadh*. All the evidence appears to point to a close relationship between Brian and Conaing and it is likely that this was indeed so, though the role ascribed to him in the battle of Clontarf, according to *Cogadh*, is dubious.

The final named internee, Mothla, son of Domnall son of Fáelán, was not a member of Dál Cais but rather king of the Déisi Muman (located mainly in Co. Waterford) and his choice as an internee is the most puzzling. Murchad and Conaing were close kin of and certainly closely associated with Brian but, although this king of Déisi Muman fought alongside the nobles of Dál Cais, easy relations did not always exist between their two kingdoms. Mothla's grandfather, Fáelán (eponymous ancestor of Uí Fháeláin of Déisi Muman), was treated favourably in *Cogadh* and said to have supported Mathgamain (Brian's elder brother) in his struggle against the Norse.<sup>90</sup> But the Annals of Inisfallen claim that Mathgamain had killed Fáelán's son (and Mothla's paternal uncle), Cormac.<sup>91</sup> Brian, in turn, faced opposition from Mothla's father, Domnall. According to the Annals of Inisfallen, Brian severely punished Domnall for a raid by the Déisi in 985: 'The Déisi raided Brian's mercenaries and took three hundred cows. And Brian harried the Déisi to avenge that, and chased Domnall, son of Faelán, as far as Port Láirge, and the whole of the Déisi was devastated'.<sup>92</sup>

This incident is also found in *Cogadh* where the blame is also placed upon Domnall; he is said to have been banished by Brian for having forced the Dál Cais king into battle: 'He banished him who had forced the war upon him, to wit, Domhnall, the son of Faelán'.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, two years later he took hostages from Lismore, the chief church of Déisi Muman, along with hostages from the churches of Emly and Cork, which suggests that Brian had to coerce those churches, in order to enforce their compliance with his wishes.<sup>94</sup> Domnall died in 996,<sup>95</sup> but Mothla did not immediately succeed him and presumably only succeeded to the kingship of Déisi Muman in 1009, on the death of the incumbent, Áed.<sup>96</sup> Mothla, however, is neither expressly praised nor condemned in *Cogadh*. He is said to have led a battalion of Munstermen, along with Magnus son of Anmchad, king of Uí Liatháin, which was stationed to the rear of the battalion led by

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., pp 172-3 and 184-5.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp 71-2.

<sup>91</sup> AI 975.1

<sup>92</sup> AI 985.2.

<sup>93</sup> *Cogadh*, pp 106-7.

<sup>94</sup> AI 987.2.

<sup>95</sup> ATig, CS s. a. 996, AFM s. a. 995.

<sup>96</sup> AI 1009.2.



Murchad and Conaing.<sup>97</sup> Nothing further is known of Mothla and he does not even feature in the Déisi genealogies, nor does his brother Diarmait (*ob.* 1031).<sup>98</sup>

Among the texts that contain accounts of the burial, the Annals of Ulster, Annals of Loch Cé and Annals of the Four Masters all note that Mothla's head was buried in Armagh, while the Annals of Boyle and *Cogadh* omit his internment. Mothla's probable inclusion in the Armagh parent text behind most of the annalistic accounts (and exclusion in *Cogadh*) suggests that his burial was of concern to Armagh and not Dál Cais.<sup>99</sup> It is possible that Mothla's head was buried honourably by the Armagh clergy because they wished to ingratiate themselves with the rulers of Déisi Muman or its chief churches. A strong connection between Armagh and the churches of Déisi Muman does not appear to have existed in the tenth century; the possibly tenth-century *Vita Tripartita* of St Patrick is surprisingly silent with regard to Déisi Muman. Nonetheless, two important Armagh ecclesiastics appear to have died or been buried in Lismore, the chief church of Déisi Muman, during the latter part of the eleventh century and in the first half of the following century. Firstly, 'Mael Ísu Ua Broilcháin of the community of Ard Macha, the venerable senior and eminent sage of Ireland, rested in Les Mór Mo-Chutu'.<sup>100</sup> Cellach, the reforming *comarba Pátraic*, was also buried in Lismore, according to his own wishes, after falling ill and dying in Ard Pátraic (Ardpatrick, Co. Limerick).<sup>101</sup> A later Life of a Déisi saint, Declan of Ardmore, depicts extremely close links between Declan and Patrick and casts Declan as a 'Patrick of the Déisi'.<sup>102</sup> This Life, based on a twelfth-century Latin original, appears to have been intended to promote Ardmore's claims to episcopal status and the depiction of Declan's friendship with (and subservience to) Patrick may have simply been a means of flattering Armagh, in the hope that the latter would support Ardmore's claims. While this later evidence may suggest that the Déisi churches of Lismore and Ardmore may have been on friendly terms with Armagh during the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, it cannot be ascertained that this was necessarily so when Mothla was killed. Indeed, since the accounts of Mothla's burial are later than 1014, they may not actually represent an attempt by Armagh to win favour with Déisi Muman at the time of Mothla's death, but may have been composed during the later period of increased Armagh-Déisi Muman contact.

Finally, in considering the significance of the physical location of Brian's burial within the precincts of Armagh, it may be speculated that the placing of Brian's body in a new tomb (*i n-ailaidh nui*) is reminiscent of the burial of Jesus in a freshly carved tomb.<sup>103</sup> Following this analogy, Mael Muire is cast in the role of Joseph of Arimathea, the disciple who actively sought out Christ's body, possibly at some risk to himself, in order to give it an honourable burial. In practical terms, the provision of a new tomb for Brian and the other slain Munstermen may have been intended to set them apart from other kings buried in Armagh. During the tenth and eleventh centuries Cenél nEógain

<sup>97</sup> *Cogadh*, pp 166–7.

<sup>98</sup> Séamus Pender (ed.), *Déisi Genealogies with an Appendix of Historical References* (Dublin, 1937).

<sup>99</sup> He is not even mentioned as a participant in the battle in the account found in the Annals of Inisfallen.

<sup>100</sup> AI 1086.2.

<sup>101</sup> AU 1129.3, AI 1129.6. Further links between Lismore and the north of Ireland are suggested by the death of an Ulaid bishop ('In epscup Ultac') in Lismore, who appears to have been Aengus ua Gormáin, *comarba* of Comgall of Bennacor (Bangor) (AI 1123.4, AU 1123.3).

<sup>102</sup> Patrick Power (ed.), *Life of St. Declan of Ardmore and Life of St. Mochuda of Lismore* (London, 1914) pp 35–41.

<sup>103</sup> Matt 27:57–60; Luke 23: 50–53; John 19:38–41. Mark 15:42–6 also has the story of the burial but does not specify a new tomb. Fry has suggested that the 'ailid' was a stone tomb but does not offer any convincing evidence: *Burial in Medieval Ireland*, pp 131–2.



kings (and potential kings) had been buried in Armagh, in a cemetery that appears to have been set aside for royalty. For example, Conchobar mac Domnaill<sup>104</sup> and Ardgar mac Lochlainn<sup>105</sup> were buried 'in the cemetery/mausoleum of the kings in Armagh' (*in cimiterio regum i nArd Macha/i nArd Macha in mausolio regum*).

### Conclusion

If the burial of Brian and his associates was a move by Armagh to consolidate its links with Brian's successors, then it may have proved a shrewd one, as the events of the 1020s suggest. In late May 1020 fire swept through Armagh, causing enormous damage<sup>106</sup> and Máel Muire died within a week of the event.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, in a seemingly separate calamity, they were robbed of relics and seven hundred cows that year.<sup>108</sup> Máel Muire was succeeded by his son, Amalgaid, who made a great visitation of Munster the following year,<sup>109</sup> presumably as a means of financing the rebuilding of Armagh, and who spent Easter of 1026 in Donnchad mac Briain's residence at Cenn Corad (Kincora, Co. Clare).<sup>110</sup>

In a possibly retrospective judgement, the records for the year 1014 in the Annals of Ulster and the Annals of Loch Cé close with the words 'Numerous indeed are the events of this year'.<sup>111</sup> Like the accounts of Brian's battle itself, the details of his burial have survived in various versions that do not fully agree on the nature and sequence of the events involved. Even the sources that rely on records written by the churchmen who buried him in Armagh do not offer a uniform picture. It is a tribute to Brian's newsworthiness and the importance attached to him by the survivors of Clontarf (ecclesiastical and lay) that his postmortem fate, like his life, was the subject of so many tellings and retellings.

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<sup>104</sup> AU 935.7 and AFM *s. a.* 933. Contrary to Fry's claims, Conchobar was not a member of the O'Donnells (a later branch of Cenél Conaill) but a son of Domnall, son of Áed Findlaith, of Cenél nEógain: *Burial in Medieval Ireland*, p. 131. Similarly, her claim that Malachy (Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill) was buried in Armagh also seems erroneous, as it relies on the testimony of Archdall's eighteenth-century *Monasticon Hibernicum* (which in turn relied on the late, so-called 'Dublin Annals of Inisfallen').

<sup>105</sup> AU 1064.7, AI 1064.4, ATig, AFM, ALC *s. a.* 1064. AI and ATig record his death, but not his burial.

<sup>106</sup> AU 1020.4, AI 1020.4, CS, ATig, ALC *s. a.* 1020, AClon *s. a.* 1013 (the 'Danes' are blamed for the fire, in the latter source).

<sup>107</sup> AU 1020.5, AI 1020.3, ATig, ALC, CS, AFM *s. a.* 1020. Only the closely related Annals of Ulster and Annals of Loch Cé specify the dates of both these events.

<sup>108</sup> ATig, AFM *s. a.* 1020. It is conceivable that the fire and plundering occurred at the same time. However, since they were recorded separately in the Annals of Tigernach, it is possible that they were two separate events (the record of the plundering in the Annals of the Four Masters is similar to that found in the Annals of Tigernach and may have derived from the latter or a similar source).

<sup>109</sup> AU 1021.5, AFM *s. a.* 1021.

<sup>110</sup> AI 1026.3.

<sup>111</sup> AU 1014.10, ALC *s. a.* 1014.